

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE OF VIOLENT CARTOONS ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

Children have very sensitive minds that are shaped mostly by the environment where they grow up. These include their day by day experiences of which their parents play a significant role. It has been found globally that cartoons affect children's behavior. However, in Nigerian context, the nature of cartoon influence on children is not known, and also it has not been determined if parents are aware of this influence. This study examined the influence of cartoons on Nigerian children's social behavior from the perspective of parents. A survey research design was adopted for the study and data were collected from 100 parents through questionnaire. Frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. The findings showed that most children watched cartoons on daily and weekly basis; most of the children watched violent cartoons where there were lots of fights, hero was violent, characters shouted and abused one another. Parents perceptions on influence of violent cartoon on children behavior was found to be neutral. It is recommended that training programs should be organized for parents and guardians by the government and organizations on the influence of media on children social behavior and development. Parents should examine the contents of cartoons they provide for their children to ensure that they do not have elements of violence that can affect the children negatively. Parents should intentionally censor the cartoons that their children are exposed to, in terms of age appropriateness and portrayal of violent behavior to be able to prevent the negative influences such cartoons might have on children. Parents and guardians should educate their children on acceptable family and societal values. Entertainment industries should provide policies that will educate parents on what to look out for in violent cartoons.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting children is an honor that comes with a challenge. In the development of children, parents play a very crucial role. They guide the children into the world, lead and show them how to grow up and to be good adults. Parents teach children family and societal values as well. Values are the 'rules' we live by, for example, treating objects and people with respect and care of one another (Department of Social Development and UNICEF, 2008). Parents' responsibility also includes the provision of all that is needed for children's optimal development. French (2007), recognized play as one of the major contexts whereby children's early learning and development take place. Therefore, it is the duty of parents to provide play materials or context that will support children's learning and development. Many television programs for children are presented in cartoon forms which is a form of play, an avenue by which children learn.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cartoons and Children Learning at Home

Cartoons became part of the cinema history in the late 1800s, the time the first motion pictures were made. A cartoon is a motion picture, mainly a humorous film intended for children, made by using animation instead of live actors (Thompson, 2010). We can also describe cartoons as movies that are made by filming a sequence of slightly varying drawings or models so that they appear to move and change when the sequence is shown. These are the things that keep viewers (mostly children) fastened to their seats. Initially cartoons were very short because people would be watching these shots in the movie theatres before their feature film. As time went on cartoonists were able to put their shows on TV with extended time, creating the half hour block films that are on Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and the Disney Channels today. Also, for more people to watch the show, the cartoons were made to be more “family friendly” (Kapelian, 2009)

It has been discovered worldwide that children are using many hours to watch cartoons. According to a survey in the United States, children watched up to six hours of television in a day. A high percentage of the television time was not regulated and was meant for adult viewers (Muss, 1999). In Nigeria, cartoon has become a primary source of learning and entertainment and children are engrossed in it. However, the way children understand what they watch on television may affect how they are influenced by cartoon violence. There is a form of learning process that takes place while children are watching cartoons. They tend to act whatever they learn, thereby influencing their mode of relating with other children and the world in general. Children focus more on actions they see than internal causes, and this applies to parents too. Significantly, the media has become a prime means by which many people experience or learn about different aspects of the world (Baran & Davis, 2003; Baran & Davis, 2009). Similarly, people who do not learn from the media directly, learn from other people who got their idea from the media. Buonanno (2008) reported that television escorted children across the globe before they had the permission to cross the street.

Cartoons and Children Social Behaviors

The sum of all the interactions that a child is involved in is known as social behavior, this ranges from his/her conduct to diction, dress sense and even inclinations. Social behavior also refers to the way in which a person responds to a set of conditions. Hartup (as cited in Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014) gave a more technical definition of social behavior as activity provoked by stimuli arising from people or activity which in itself possesses stimulus value for people. Good or normal social behavior is not something that children naturally possess. They build it up by watching others. Exposure to media violence is positively related to subsequent aggressive behaviors, aggressive ideas, arousal and anger (Bushman & Cantor, as cited in Aisha, Bala, & Ismaila, 2016).

Children’s cognitive behavior according to studies is being influenced by what they view on television; the kind of content they are exposed to. When children watch educational programs, they are more likely to have higher grades, read more books, place greater value on achievement, and show more creativity. While children who watch more violent or purely ‘entertainment’ television perform less (Diehl & Toelle, 2011). A major cause of aggressive behavior in children has been attributed to watching violent television programs. From the time children learn to talk, they are fascinated by the sounds and moving images (Baran & Davis, 2003; 2009). Violence and bad language from the media have a negative influence on a child’s developing mind because a child’s mind is like a mop that absorbs everything that he/she sees and hears. Being constantly exposed to cartoons with violence and fighting, children’s behavior could result in teenage violence in the future (Garden, 2008).

Parental Awareness of Cartoons' Effect on Children

Another factor that also determines how television affects a child is the age of the child. The elementary school age (ages 6 to 12) is deemed a critical period for understanding the effects of television on children. At this stage, children develop the attention span and cognitive ability to follow continuous plots and recognize motivation and consequences to character actions. Children's learning ability grows faster than adults, during this age (Wartella & Robb, 2007). Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a study in 2003 and the findings showed that almost half (47 per cent) of the parents with children between the ages 4 and 6 reported that their children had copied aggressive behaviors from TV (Ride, Vandewater & Wartella, 2003). The situation is similar to what has been found among children in Nigeria. There is an increase in violent behavior among children and the society in general (Ukaoha, 2013). One wonders at what is happening to children in their homes that are supposed to be the cradles of their character formation. Are they exposed to things that teach them violence? The child completely depends on the parents for care and support. The child is only able to make progress through the assistance of the parents (Osanyin, 2004). It is the duty of the parent to protect the child from anything that will hinder his/her development.

In Nigeria today, watching diverse kinds of cartoons by children have received great approval in many homes and parents keep on buying new cartoons for their children as they are released into the market. This is because most parents are working round the clock to be able to meet the family's needs and have little or no time to spend with their children. A good number of them therefore resort to providing their children with cartoon network and other TV cartoon programs as sources of entertainment and learning to keep the children busy without minding the contents of such cartoons. The question is, do parents know the contents of the cartoons their children watch and the influence of the violent cartoons on their children's social behavior?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Violence is widespread across different regions of the world and Nigeria is a good example. It is also increasingly cutting across different ages and genders. Children are affected by the media contents they take in. They learn faster than adults, and their portrayal of media messages is incomparable. There is generally an increasing trend of violent behavior among primary school pupils in Nigeria today which needs urgent attention else the children will grow up to be violent adults hindering peace and development of the society. Since most children TV programs are presented in entertainment form especially in the form of cartoons, and many parents are comfortable with it. It is important to examine the perceptions of parents on the influence these cartoons especially, those by which the characters exhibit violent behavior on children.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed at finding out the perceptions of parents on the influence of violent cartoons on children's social behavior. Specifically, the study sought to

1. investigate the frequency by which children watch cartoon programs,
2. explore the extent to which children watch violent cartoons, and
3. examine the perception of parents on the influence of violent cartoon on children's social behavior.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are developed in support of the study:

1. How often do children watch cartoon programs?

2. To what extent do children watch violent cartoons?
3. What are the perceptions of parents on the influence of violent cartoons on children's social behavior?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study includes parents of 150 middle basic pupils in the University of Lagos (UNILAG) Staff School. A sample size of 100 respondents selected through convenience sampling technique participated in the study. The respondents were selected during the school's Inter-House Sport Activities. UNILAG Staff School was used for the study because it has a good representation of children from different parts of Nigeria, and a major percentage of the pupils come from middle class backgrounds, where they can afford cable television which gives them unlimited access to a number of television cartoon stations.

A self-constructed questionnaire with reliability value of 0.88 was used for the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A comprised respondent's background information while section B was used to collect information based on the research questions raised. One hundred copies of the questionnaires were administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of three assistants. All the questionnaires were properly filled and returned on schedule with 100% response rate. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages.

FINDINGS

The demographic distribution of the respondents is displayed in Table 1. Of the 100 parents that participated in the study, 18 (18%) of them were males and 82 (82%) females. Considering their age, 31 (31%) were between ages 21 and 30years; 44 (44%) of them fell between age 31 and 40years; the other 25 (25%) were between 41 and 50years. In terms of marital status, 13 (13%) were single parents and 87 (87%) married. Respondents' data distribution by levels of education shows that 2 (2%) had primary education; 10 (10%) had secondary education while 88 (88%) of them received tertiary education.

Table 1:
Background Information of the Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	18	18.0
Female	82	82.0
Age		
21- 30yrs	31	31.0
31-40yrs	44	44.0
41-50yrs	25	25.0
Marital Status		
Single Parent	13	13.0
Married	87	87.0

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Level of Education		
Primary	2	2.0
Secondary	10	10.0
Tertiary	88	88.0

Research Question 1: How often do children watch cartoon programs?

Table 2 shows the frequencies by which children watch cartoon programs as follows: 42 (42%) daily; 45 (45%) weekly; 1(1%) monthly; and 12 (12%) of the respondents indicated others.

Table 2:
How often Children Watch Cartoon Programs?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	42	42.0
Weekly	45	45.0
Monthly	1	1.0
Others	12	12.0

Research Question 2: To what extent do children watch violent cartoons?

According to the findings as shown in Table 3, respondents indicated the extent to which children watch violent cartoons as follows: cartoons that have lots of fights in it -12 (12%) to a very large extent, 22 (22%) to a large extent, 38 (38%) to some extent and 28 (28%) of the respondents indicated that their children did not watch cartoon programs with lots of fight in it. On children watching cartoons that the hero is violent, parents' responses were as follows: 34 (34%) to a very large extent; 37 (37%) to a large extent, 10 (10%) to some extent and 19 (19%) of the respondents indicated that their children did not watch cartoons that the hero is violent. For watching cartoons where the characters shout at each other, 44 (44%) of the respondents indicated to a very large extent, 32 (32%) to a large extent, 11 (11%) to some extent and 13 (13%) not at all. In the area of children watching cartoons where the characters abuse one another, 33 (33%) of the respondents indicated to a very large extent; 42 (42%) to a large; 18 (18%) to some extent and 7 (7%) of the respondents indicated that their children did not watch at all cartoons where the characters abuse at each other.

Table 3:
The Extent to which children watch violent cartoons

	Very Large Extent	Large Extent	Some Extent	Not at all
My children watch cartoons that have lots of fighting	12 (12.0%)	22 (22.0%)	38 (38.0%)	28 (28.0%)
My children watch cartoons that the hero is violent	34 (34.0%)	37 (37.0%)	10 (10.0%)	19 (19.0%)
My children watch cartoons where the characters shout at each other	44 (44.0%)	32 (32.0%)	11 (11%)	13 (13%)
My children watch cartoons where the characters abuse each other	33 (33.0%)	42 (42.0%)	18 (18.0%)	7 (7.0%)

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of parents on the influence of the violent cartoon on children's social behavior?

Table 4 shows the respondents' perceptions on the influence of violent cartoons on children's social behavior as follows:

* Children behave violently because of what they watch in the cartoon: 14 (14%) strongly agree; 34 (34%) agree; 2 (2%) neutral; 28 (28%) disagree and 22 (22%) strongly disagree ($X = 2.90$, $SD = 1.43$).

* Being aggressive is a habit my children learn from cartoon: 17 (17%) of the respondents indicated strongly agree; 25 (25%) agree; 2 (2%) neutral, 32 (32%) disagree and 24 (24%) strongly disagree ($X = 2.79$, $SD = 1.48$).

* My children practice the fight they learn from watching cartoon with their peers: 11 (11%) strongly agree; 42 (42%) agree; 8 (8%) neutral; 25 (25%) disagree and 14 (14%) of the respondents strongly disagree that their children practice the fight they learn from watching cartoon with their peers ($X = 3.11$, $SD = 1.29$).

* My children threaten other children and I feel they watch it from cartoon: 6 (6%) of the respondents strongly agree that their children threaten other children and they feel they watch it from cartoon; 32 (32%) indicated agree; 5 (5%) neutral; 34 (34%) disagree and 23 (23%) strongly disagree ($X = 2.64$, $SD = 1.31$).

* My children behave like the characters in the cartoons they watch: the respondents 11 (11%) strongly agree; 64 (64%) agree; 7 (7%) neutral; 9 (9%) disagree and 9 (9%) strongly disagree ($X = 3.59$, $SD = 1.09$).

* Watching too much cartoon of a particular role model can make a child behave aggressively: 26 (26%) strongly agree; 35 (35%) agree; 10 (10%) neutral; 17 (17%) disagree and 12 (12%) of the respondents strongly disagree that watching too much cartoon of a particular role model can make a child behave aggressively ($X = 3.46$, $SD = 1.35$).

* My children drive their toy cars and ride their bicycles in risky manner after watching cartoon: 10 (10%) of the respondents indicated strongly agree, 28 (28%) agree; 7 (7%) neutral; 35 (35%) disagree and 20 (20%) of the respondents strongly disagree that their children drive their toy cars and ride their bicycle in risky manner after watching cartoon ($X = 2.79$, $SD = 1.33$).

The weighted average mean of all the means of the seven items is 3.04. which on the neutral area of the five-point weighing scale.

Table 4:
Influence of Violent Cartoons on Children Behavior

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
My children behave violently because of what they watch in the cartoon	14 (14.0%)	34 (34.0%)	2 (2.0%)	28.0 (28.0%)	22 (22.0%)	2.90	1.43
Being aggressive is a habit my children learn from cartoon	17 (17.0%)	25 (25.0%)	2 (2.0%)	32 (32.0%)	24 (24.0%)	2.79	1.48
My children practice the fight they learn from watching cartoon with their peers	11 (11.0%)	42 (42.0%)	8 (8.0%)	25 (25.0%)	14 (14.0%)	3.11	1.29
My children threaten other children and I feel they watch it from cartoon	6 (6.0%)	32 (32.0%)	5 (5.0%)	34.0 (34.0%)	23 (23.0%)	2.64	1.31
My children behave like the characters in the cartoons they watch	11 (11.0%)	64 (64.0%)	7 (7.0%)	9 (9.0%)	9 (9.0%)	3.59	1.09
Watching too much cartoon of a particular role model can make a child behave aggressively	26 (26.0%)	35 (35.0%)	10 (10.0%)	17 (17.0%)	12 (12.0%)	3.46	1.35
My children drive their toy cars and ride their bicycle in risky manner after watching cartoon	10 (10.0%)	28 (28.0%)	7 (7.0%)	35 (35.0%)	20 (20.0%)	2.79	1.33
Weighted Average						3.04	1.33

Decisions:1.00 – 1.99 (Strongly disagreed), 2.00-2.99 (Disagreed), 3.00 – 3.99 (Neutral), 4.00 – 4.99 (Agreed), 5.00 – 5.99 (Strongly Agreed)

DISCUSSION

Analysis of data revealed that majority (82%) of the respondents were females (mothers), married and between the ages of 31 and 40years. Most of them are educated and their educational attainment was up to the tertiary level.

On how often children watch cartoon programs, the findings revealed that a good number of children watch cartoon programs on daily and weekly basis. This agrees with the assertion that children like watching cartoons (Kapelian, 2009). According to Baran and Davis (2003; 2009), the media is one of the major ways by which people experience or learn about different aspects of the world. Even when these ideas are not directly learnt from the media, we learn from others who got their idea from media. It is therefore necessary to use the media as an avenue to teach children acceptable behaviors that will aid their development since they like watching cartoons, instead of using it to teach them what will destroy their lives and that of the society in general.

Considering the extent to which children watch violent cartoons, the result showed that most of the children watched violent cartoons where there are lots of fights, hero is violent, characters shout and abuse one another. Diehl and Toelle (2011) opined that it is the kind of television

content the children are exposed to that has influence on them. Children exposed to educational television programs are prone to having higher grades, reading more books, placing greater value on achievement, and showing more creativity than those who watch more violent or only 'entertainment' television.

Analysis of data on the perception of parents on the influence of violent cartoon on children's behavior revealed that from parents' perspective, watching violent cartoons makes children to be aggressive, fight with peers, and threaten other children. Although 55% of the parents perceived that violent cartoons do not make their children drive their toy cars and ride their bicycles in risky manner. Close to fifty percent (48%) of the parents perceived that their children behave violently as a result of what they watch in the cartoon. 42% of them perceived that aggressive habit is what their children learn from cartoon. This buttresses the finding of an earlier research that children imitate aggressive behaviors from TV (Ride, Vandewater & Wartella, 2003,). According to Piaget (1952), children learn through imitation particularly, from age 0 – 12 years. However, the weighted average was 3.04 which shows that parents' perception on the influence of the violent cartoon on children's behavior was neutral. This should not be the case, good parenting entails knowing what is right for children development and well-being and guiding them (children) to do such.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Findings from this study have the following implications for educational planning regarding the education of the children:

- i. School administrators need to ensure adequate training of teachers in proper handling and monitoring of children while watching the cartoons.
- ii. School administrators should plan for effective guidance and counseling services in schools to address problems associated with the negative effects of cartoons watching.
- iii. School administrators should ensure that there is a common room that acts as a playing ground for children in addition to a TV watching room.

CONCLUSION

Children enjoy watching cartoon and parents can use it as an avenue to aid children's learning and development. Parents' understanding of the contents and influence of cartoon will determine the kind of cartoon they provide and allow their children to watch. The results of the study have established that children like watching cartoons and most of them watch it on daily and weekly basis. The findings also indicated that most children like to watch violent cartoons. Additionally, this study has shown that parents' perceptions on the influence of violent cartoon on children behavior is neutral. The significance of this finding has shed light on an alarm to parents to closely supervise the contents of the cartoon programs their children watch.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce the influence of cartoon violence on children behavior, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Training programs need to be organized for parents and guardians by the government and professional organizations on the influence of media on children social behavior and development.
2. Parents should scrutinize the contents of cartoon they provide for their children to ensure that they do not have elements of violence that can affect the children negatively.

3. Parents should make conscious efforts to monitor the cartoons that their children are exposed to, in terms age appropriateness and portrayal of violent behavior in order to combat the negative influences such cartoons might have on their viewers.
4. Parents and guardians should educate their children on acceptable family and societal values. Teach them the right things to do and what they should not do. This instruction should also be given to anyone that takes care of the children when the parents are not around.
5. Government, private organizations as well as non-governmental organizations should also play a vital role in monitoring and controlling children programs and cartoons in the media and the market. They should sponsor young and upcoming animators to encourage them to develop indigenous cartoons that will help promote healthy citizenship in society.
6. Entertainment industries should provide policies that will educate parents on what to look out for violent cartoons.

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