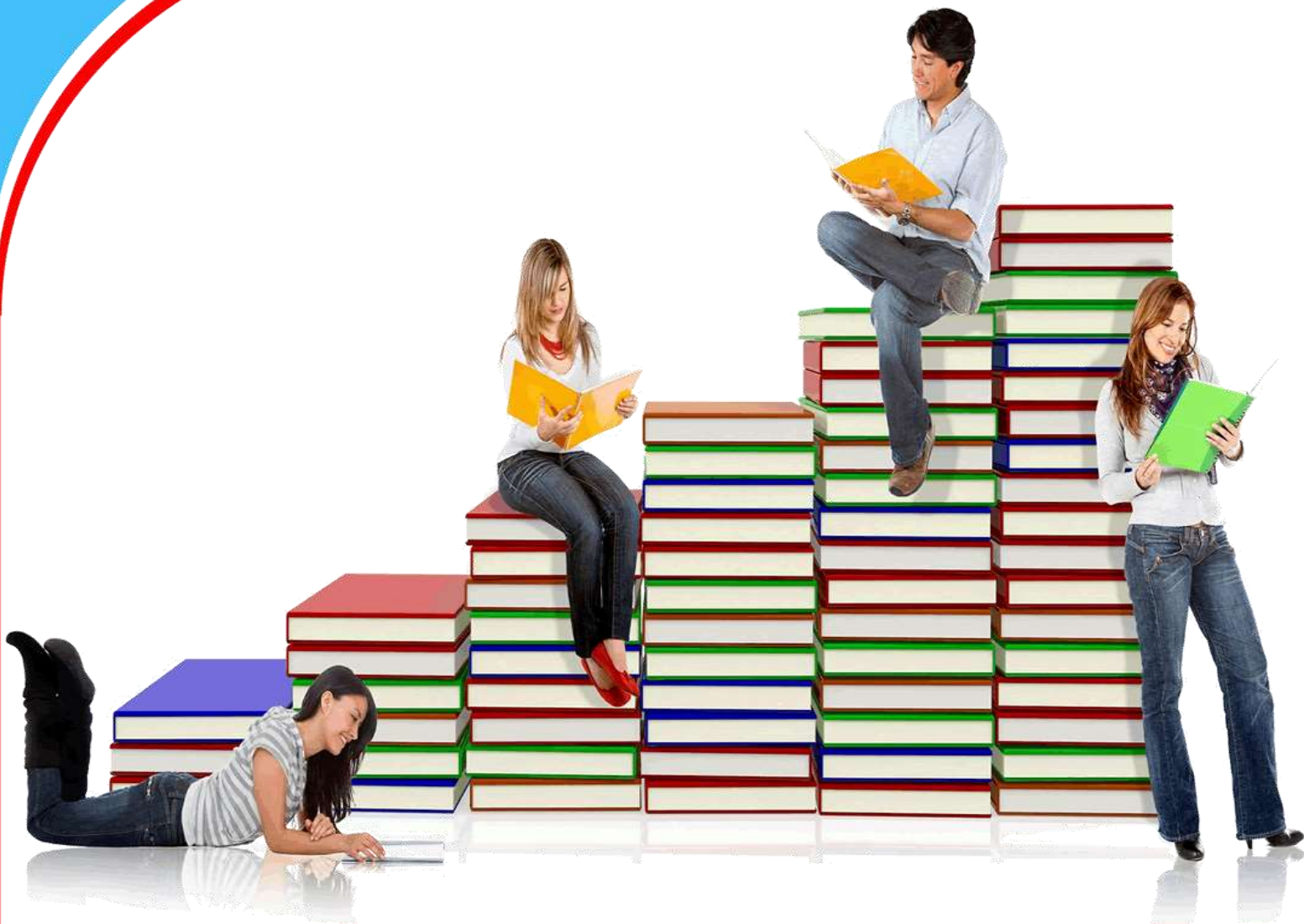


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**NATURE OF TELEVISED ANIMATED CARTOONS
WATCHED BY CHILDREN AGED SEVEN TO
ELEVEN YEARS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to establish the nature of televised animated cartoons watched by children aged seven and eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya. It is about cartoon-consumer relationship in an effort to discover the impacts of animated cartoons on children in Nairobi. It also raises awareness on the implications of raising children in Nairobi on an animated cartoon content that is designed mainly from Euro-American and not local values, attitudes and sensibilities. It is hoped that the findings and conclusions herein will help generate cartoons that can educate Kenyan children to live in ways that are socially and culturally desirable.

Methodology: The study used descriptive survey method to collect information through casual interviews and self-administered questionnaires.

Findings: This study suggests that animated cartoons have discernible impacts on children in Nairobi in that they influence the children to construct their worldview and create perceptions that are alien to Kenya.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: Between the ages of seven to eleven years children are excellent imitators but poor evaluators, therefore, the non-African ideals and values portrayed in the animated cartoons are increasingly defining the perception and attitudes towards gender roles, sexuality, body images and role modelling of children who consume animated cartoons in Nairobi. This is because these children are in that stage where images and impressions from diverse environments play a big part in how they construct their world.

Keywords: *Nature, Televised animated cartoon, Children aged seven to eleven years.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The last part of the twentieth century was characterized by a process of commercialization, deregulation and privatization through a thoroughgoing restructuring of markets and market places as a result of the ‘globalization’ process (Kotz, 2015). Globalization has come to mean and imply a small shrunken world in which people gain access to cultures and knowledge that were once beyond their reach, a transcending of cultural boundaries that enables multitudes from all social strata to participate in the global arena. This has stoked fears that globalization contains within it a homogenizing effect where local cultures may soon find themselves subsumed by the more dominant cultural patterns. All of these fears have impacted on Nairobi in one way or another causing apprehension in kind of animated cartoon children watch. What raises this fear within mass media is the fact that the institutions and enterprises that control the process of globalisation of mass media have an inherent standardising effect that sets “global standards and tastes” at the expense of local, cultures and regional aesthetics. Nairobi and its environs have not escaped this process. The fear and apprehension are real when one realizes that globalization expanded consumption of television programs including animated cartoons, films, news, games and advertising. This particular development in mass media portends influence on cultures of people worldwide, especially children who inform their perception of culture and trends through the electronic media (Glik, (2014). Children in Nairobi seem to consume a significant amount of animated cartoon programs from television. The bulk of these programs are produced by Euro-American media companies, chief among them Walt Disney and Time Warner (Napoli & Caplan, 2017). Because they are produced in foreign cultures, it can be assumed that these animated cartoon programs do not entirely reflect to children in Nairobi the realities and sensibilities of the environment in which the children live. Instead, animated cartoons present Euro-American and Japanese perceptions and social constructions that are neither entirely relevant to nor desirable in Nairobi. Studies conducted in other parts of world show that perceptions transmitted via television profoundly influenced the ways children construct their world and form views (Arias, 2016). Given the level of influence, one cannot avoid seeing social dilemmas associated with the content of television programs and their animated cartoons.

It is considered in this research that there is a discernable relationship between the imported animated cartoon programs that children in Kenya watch and how these children construct their worldview and create perceptions. Within animated cartoons there are perceptions and attitudes that leave an impression on Nairobi children particularly in the realms of sexuality, gender roles and image models. This is because these children are in that stage of development where images and impressions from diverse environments play a big part in how they construct their worldview. Pursuant to this understanding, the present research aims to find out how these constructions are created and reflected by conducting a survey of animated cartoon programs popular with children in Nairobi, why they are popular and the values, worldviews and perceptions contained within them.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Critical Theory

The effects of media in a free enterprise society have been a preoccupation to critical theorists. According to the Frankfurt School, leisure as a product of culture has been industrialized and become standardized and dominated by the profit motive as in other industries (Okore, 2014). The Frankfurt School also generated one of the first models of a critical cultural study that analyzes the processes of cultural production and political economy, the politics of cultural texts, and audience reception and use of cultural artefacts. The critical theorists analyzed all mass-mediated cultural artefacts within the context of industrial production, in which the commodities of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: commodification, standardization, and massification. The culture industries had the specific function, however, of providing ideological legitimization of the existing capitalist societies and of integrating individuals into its way of life (Sakamoto, *et. al.*, 2014).

The process of media consolidation and globalization has led media corporations to create wants in individuals which corporations have thrust upon them, and continue to thrust upon them, through both the advertising in the media (with its continual exhortation to consume) and through the individualist consumption culture it generates. In a mass society, leisure is constantly used to induce the appropriate values and motives in the public, therefore it has ceased to be the opposite of work and become a preparation for it (Artz, 2016). Critical theory believes that modern media train the young for consumption. In their theories of the culture, industries and critiques of mass culture, the Frankfurt School was among the first social theorists to see its importance in the reproduction of contemporary societies. In their view, mass culture and communications stand in the centre of leisure activity, are important agents of socialization, mediators of political reality, and should thus be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects (Schoenmakers, 2012).

Although a sizeable portion of what the mass media offers, particularly in news, commentaries, documentaries, and other informational programs deal with highly controversial subjects, the major portion of mass media offerings are designed to serve an entertainment function. These programs tend to avoid controversial issues and reflect beliefs and values sanctified by mass audience. Television networks, whose investment, follow this course and production costs are high. Viewed in this light, animated cartoons for children are not only an entertainment medium but also high money making medium. These corporations not only produce animated cartoons but action figures and associated merchandize for sale in retail outlets patterned on the animated cartoons. Mickey Mouse produces an estimated \$5 billion in merchandise sales for Disney Corporation every year The New York Times; 11 June (Rutovic, 2017).

Warner Brothers hopes to “reinvigorate and re-imagine” Bugs Bunny and Scooby-Doo through a new virtual world on the Internet, where people will be able to dress up the characters pretty much any way they want. American Greetings is dusting off another of its lines, the Care Bears, which will return with a fresh look (less belly fat, longer eyelashes). These questions in the marriage of entertainment for children and commercial merchandizing therefore pose challenges that must be taken into account when considering the implications of television animated cartoons on children (Ekwe, 2018).

2.2 Empirical Framework

Cartoons initially evolved in movie theatres, but their development was slowed down by their prohibitive cost. After all, twenty-four entire pictures had to be drawn for every second of film. When sound and colour film technologies became popularized, studios also found ways to streamline the animation process by using storyboards (small drawings of frames that represented different shots in the cartoon) to plan the cartoon and to departmentalize the steps of the process. Producer Walt Disney was a leader in using these technologies and devising an efficient mode of cartoon production. *Steamboat Willie* (Illustration 1) was the first significant cartoon with synchronized sound. Disney was so protective of these new technologies that he negotiated an exclusive deal with Technicolor; for three years, no other animators could use it (Newcomb, 2014).

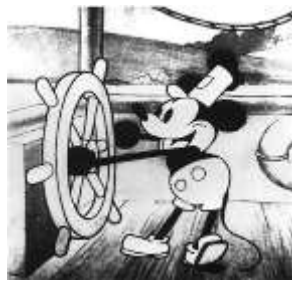


Illustration 1: *Felix the cat is a notable example of the black and white, silent cinema era*

Cartoons started their emigration to television in the late 1940s when one of the smaller studios, Van Beuren began marketing their catalogue to early children's programs such as *Movies for Small Fry*. The Mickey Mouse Club included cartoons among live action and other materials when it premiered in the 1950's (Illustration 2). The other studios soon followed suit and, by 1960, most theatre house films and cartoons were also available on television.



Illustration 2: *Mickey Mouse*

United Productions of America (UPA), a studio which included renegade animators who had left Disney during the 1941 strike, nurtured an aesthetic that emphasized abstract line, shape, and pattern over naturalistic figures. UPA's initial success came in 1949 with the Mr Magoo. Later, Academy Award-winning Gerald McBoing Boing (1951) truly established this new style (Illustration 3).

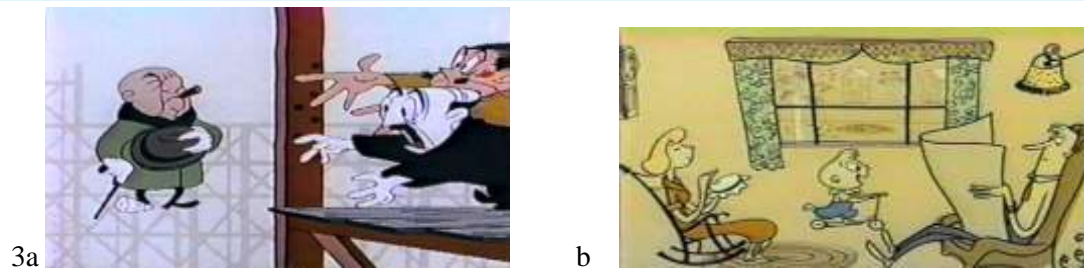


Illustration 3: *Mr. Magoo and Academy Award winning Gerald McBoing Boing*

The UPA style was characterized by flattened perspective, abstract backgrounds, strong primary colours, and "limited" animation. Instead of using perspective to create the illusion of depth in a drawing, these cartoon objects looked flat, like the blobs of colour that they were. Instead of filling in backgrounds with lifelike detail, UPA presented backgrounds that were broad fields of colour, with small squiggles to suggest clouds and trees. Their cartoons also contained bold, bright, saturated colours and varied the shades and hues of colours to imply the colours of the natural world (Fisher, 1980). Though changes in animation were aesthetically inspired, they also made good business sense. They resulted in cartoons that were quicker and cheaper to produce. When animators began creating programs specifically for television, they quickly adopted these economical practices, but jettisoned UPA's aesthetics in the process.

The development in the process of producing television cartoons was of significant importance. First, the amount of movement within the frame was substantially reduced. Rather than have a cartoon character move the entire head in a shot, a UPA cartoon might have the characters just blink the eyes. Second, the animation figure movements were often repeated. A character waving good-bye, for instance, might contain only two distinct movements that were then repeated without change doing away with many unique movements. Third, in limited animation they used fewer individual frames to represent a movement. If, for example Yosemite Sam were to hop off his mule in a movement that takes one second, full animation might have used 24 discrete frames to represent that movement. Limited animation, in contrast, might cut that number in half. The result is a slightly jerkier movement (Deiner, 2012).

In a recent article published in the June 11, 2008 of the New York Times entitled "Beloved characters as re-imagined in the 21st century"; Brooks Barnes illustrated the transformation taking place in the marketing of cartoon characters to children. She says, "Strawberry Shortcake was having an identity crisis. The "it" doll and cartoon star of the 1980s was just not connecting with modern girls. An unusually large number of classic characters for children are being freshened up and reintroduced on store shelves, on the Internet and on television screens as their corporate owners try to cater to parents' nostalgia and children's You Tube-era sensibilities. Adding momentum is a retail sector hoping to find refuge from a rough economy in the tried and true".

The article "Beloved characters as re-imagined in the 21st century", says that re-inventing these beloved characters without inflicting damage is one of the entertainment industry's trickiest manoeuvres. Go too far, as Mattel did in 1993 when it gave Ken a purple mesh T-shirt, a pierced ear and the name "Earring Magic Ken," and it can set off a brand crisis on a global scale and that done correctly, it can be incredibly lucrative. Mickey Mouse produces an estimated \$5 billion in merchandise sales every year. Strawberry Shortcake, even in her diminished state, has generated \$2.5 billion in revenue since 2003 according to American Greetings. It is therefore evident that it

is the forces of the market place that is driving this resurgence and nothing to do with the needs of children. But these marketers are also introducing another equation into the game. These reworked children characters are coming up in ideal body types and modern accessories of contemporary consumption.

Strawberry Shortcake now prefers fresh fruit to gumdrops and appears to wear just a dab of lipstick (but no rouge), and spends her time chatting on a cell phone, an appearance her owner-American Greetings Properties, worked for a year and calls a “fruit-forward” makeover. Warner Brothers hopes to “reinvigorate and re-imagine” Bugs Bunny and Scooby-Doo through a new virtual world on the Internet, where people will be able to dress up the characters pretty much any way they want. American Greetings is dusting off another of its lines, the Care Bears, which will return with a fresh with less belly fat and longer eyelashes. All these will be available to children on store shelves, on the Internet and on television screens as their corporate owners try to cater to parents’ nostalgia and the children’s YouTube-era sensibilities. And if these classic characters look less stodgy, the companies’ hope they will appeal not only to parents who remember them fondly, but also to children who might automatically be suspicious of toys their parents played with. For parents, nostalgia is considered a bigger sales hook than ever because of the increasingly violent and hyper-sexualized media landscape.

The marketing to children of the perceived ideals of popular culture has become the norm, selling youth, beauty, wealth and consumerism. A new book titled the Porning of America by Kevin Scott and Carmine Sarracino (Baryshnikova, 2017). In an article The Pornification of a generation, both professors of American literature in a college in Georgia, USA examines what they see as the migration of pornography culture from adult theatres to the mainstream -and asks what this means for children. Sarracino and Scott define "porning" as the way advertising and society in general have borrowed from the ideas and characteristics central to most American pornography: sex as commodity, sexuality as overt, narrow views of women and male-female relationships, bad girls and dirty boys, domination and submission (Wilson, 2016).

Based on the literature, this study, therefore, aimed at establishing:

- i. Whether or not children aged seven and eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya like watching animated cartoons.
- ii. The television station preferred by children aged seven and eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya for cartoon content.

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 Whether or not Children Like Watching Animated Cartoons

Almost all the children who responded to this question (95.3%) said they liked watching animated cartoons. However, one of the criteria that were used in selecting the sample of study was to pick out the children who watch animated cartoons on television. But it should be noted that not all children who watch animated cartoons like cartoons and they may be watching because of peer pressure or lack of any other activity to engage in. Hence the need to establish whether they actually like watching cartoons.

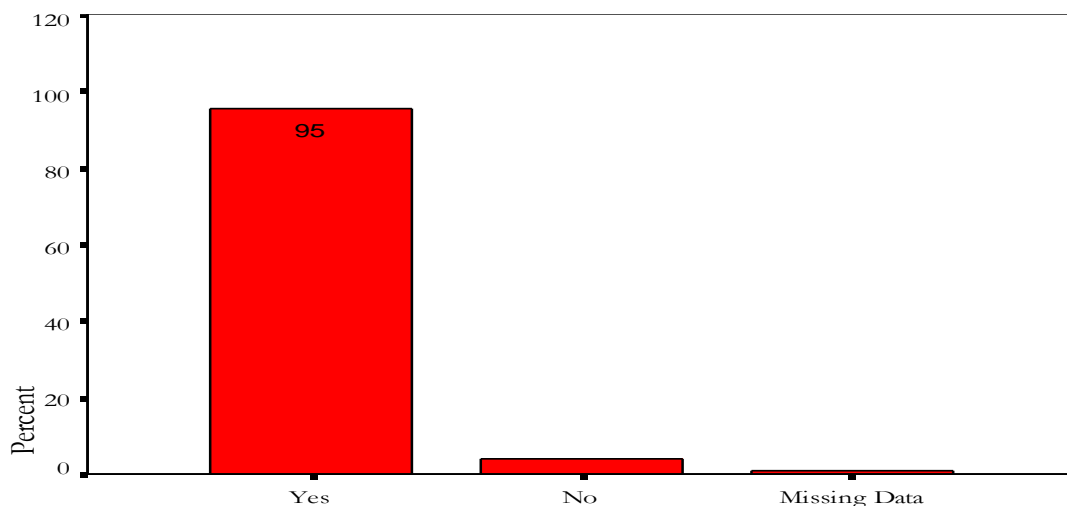


Figure 1: *Whether or not the Children Like Animated Watching Cartoons*

4.2 Television Station Preferred for Cartoon content

KTN proved to be the most preferred television station when it comes to watching animated cartoons closely followed by DSTV among the respondents. NTV was the third preferred followed by Citizen and KBC. It should be noted that NTV and Citizen subscribe to Cartoon Network for cartoons, which is a 24-hour cartoon channel on DSTV. Therefore NTV, Citizen and DSTV in most instances show the same kind of cartoons. Differences only emerge on KTN, which broadcast different cartoons hence its preference by most children.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The research findings indicate the children are not so dependent on television and they can engage in other activities when they cannot get access to television such as: play (36%), go where they can find a TV (16%), read (12%) while 6% would go look for a TV repairman or play computer games. Other activities with insignificant proportions were; go for a walk, help with housework, bike riding, do nothing and sleep. All these were registered by about 3% of the respondents or less. KTN proved to be the most preferred television station when it comes to watching animated

cartoons closely followed by DSTV among the respondents. NTV was the third preferred followed by Citizen and KBC. It should be noted that NTV and Citizen subscribe to Cartoon Network for cartoons, which is a 24-hour cartoon channel on DSTV. Therefore NTV, Citizen and DSTV in most instances show the same kind of cartoons. Differences only emerge on KTN, which broadcast different cartoons hence its preference by most children. Television channels are competing for the attention of children. They show the same animated cartoons but at different times so the children are able to watch them on different channels. That gives the stations an opportunity to advertise products that attract children. Examples are: Johnny Bravo, Ben 10, Megas XLLR and Justice League are shown on KTN, NTV and Citizen TV, Power Puff girls is shown on KTN and NTV, Ben 10 is shown on KTN and Citizen TV, My Gym Partner is a Monkey is shown by NTV and Citizen TV, Pink Panther is shown by KBC and Citizen TV.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the study, the study concluded that media is viewed as having the power to profoundly shape perceptions of the social world and to manipulate actions in subtle but highly effective ways. The debate over media is in many respects been portrayed as a critical battleground of a larger “culture war” in the continuing struggle to define the factors that shape the broad social order of the society. Within the electronic media, animated cartoons have emerged as an especially strong force directed at children and is a strong tool in influencing their perception and cultural orientations.

5.3 Recommendations

Parents are recommended to be good role models. Instead of coming home and flopping in front of the television and making it prime source of recreation, look for other options like going for a walk or ride a bicycle, painting, learn to play musical instruments, talk, play a game and enjoy each other’s company. The media practitioners should air on Kenyan stations animated cartoons that have local animated imagery designed to relate to the child’s world or context. The government should support and facilitate local research initiatives and production, especially on animated cartoons for the African children, with elements that promote our African culture.

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