

# American Journal of Education and Practice (AJEP)



**IMPACT OF ANIMATED CARTOONS ON CHILDREN  
AGED SEVEN TO ELEVEN YEARS IN  
NAIROBI, KENYA**  
Mary Claire Akinyi Kidenda



## IMPACT OF ANIMATED CARTOONS ON CHILDREN AGED SEVEN TO ELEVEN YEARS IN NAIROBI, KENYA

<sup>1</sup>\*Mary Claire Akinyi Kidenda, PhD

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer: Department of Design and Creative Media at the Technical University of Kenya

\*Corresponding Author's Email: [kidendam@gmail.com](mailto:kidendam@gmail.com)

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of animated cartoons on children aged seven to eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya.

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

**Results:** The study found that children watch animated cartoons because they are funny, enjoyable and are interesting i.e. because of entertainment. The study also found out that animated cartoons and TV in general can lead to lack of communication between parents and children in the home. Children are also likely to develop the language and social skills exhibited by the animated cartoon characters. This study also revealed that children watch animated cartoons with minimal parental guidance. The study concluded that media has the power to profoundly shape perceptions of the social world and to manipulate actions in subtle but highly effective ways. 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.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** The study suggests that parents need to develop guidelines for children on how much animated cartoons they can watch. They should develop the proper perspective concerning their children and be good role models. Parents should take interest in combating hyper sexuality in animated cartoon and allow the children to stay young. Media Practitioners should embrace the development of home-grown animated cartoons, air on Kenyan stations animated cartoons that have local animated imagery designed to relate to the child's world or context and provide entertainment programming in which life's problems are not simply and quickly solved with either violent actions or hostile humor. They should air animated cartoons that have no violence or bad morals but are still popular with children. The Government also need to set policies governing the content in animated cartoons aired by the media houses and offer support and facilitate local research initiatives and production, especially on animated cartoons for the African children, with elements that promote our African culture.

**Keywords:** *Impact, Animated cartoons, Children aged seven to eleven years.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Concerns of digital exposure is increasing as are the concerns about how screen time affects children and families. This raises issues about potential benefits and risks of screen exposure and use on children younger than 5 years, and provides evidence-based guidance for health professionals to help families. Potential benefits and risks were categorized into developmental, psychosocial and physical domains. Recommendations on the other hand are based on evidence and expert consensus (Ontario, 2017). Children seem to consume a significant amount of animated cartoon programs from television and this could be attributed to the amount of time spent watching televised cartoons that is, Screen time. Studies conducted in other parts of world show that perceptions transmitted via television profoundly influenced the ways children construct their world and form views. Given the level of influence, one cannot avoid seeing social dilemmas associated with the content of television programs and their animated cartoons (Hassan & Daniyal, 2013).

For instance watching cartoon transmit many bad effects on children. According to children are influenced by violent actions such as the screen kicking, killing each other which is backed up by the screen time spent by the kids. In addition, it has been proved that kids who watch more cartoon are less physically active, easy weight gain leading to obesity while in young ages, children need to play creatively to social development (Klein & Shiffman, 2012).

It is considered in this research that there is a discernible 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 (Vikiru, 2013). 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.

In Kenya, the Commissions Commission of Kenya “facilitates the development of the information and communications sector including broadcasting, multimedia, telecommunications and postal services and electronic commerce. Currently, there are no animated cartoons for children being written and produced in Kenya for television. This means that across the combined total of about thirty hours a week that television channels in Kenya have dedicated to children programs up from five hours a week, thirty years ago, production from Disney and the four media giants dominate. The most common children’s cartoons being aired across these channels are; Ben 10, Fantastic Four, Kim Possible, American Dragon, Johnny Bravo and Power Puff girls. The managers of three television stations in Kenya; Josephine Kanini of Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Wavinya Mwanzia of Nation Television and Jennifer Okungu of Kenya Television Network admitted that the lack of animated cartoons that are tailor made for children in Kenya is a big cultural drawback since they would prefer that much of the content be associated with the children’s familiar environment. Animated cartoons form part of the daily programming for almost all the television channels in the world including Kenya (Kinoti, 2016). This research aims to raise awareness on

the implications of raising children in Kenya on an animated cartoon content that is designed mainly from Euro-American and not local values, attitudes and sensibilities. The research also aims to find out whether unknown to parents and television programmers in Kenya.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Secondary data and casual observations affirm that animated cartoons have impact upon children in Nairobi. Children might end up picking disparaging language as well as styles of dress, hair and walk and eating habits alongside other traits that exhibit explicit display of negative behaviour from animated cartoons. Ergün (2012) and Nyamai (2013) identified that when programs do not show realistic consequences of animated cartoon violence there is an attendant increase in aggressive behaviour among young viewers. This is because violence is always portrayed as humorous. Animated cartoons affect the physical, social, mental development and maturity of children because they do not challenge their minds. While animated cartoons alone cannot be held accountable for inappropriate behaviour, perceptions and attitudes that develop among children in Nairobi, this research assumes that there are messages and attitudes contained within these cartoons that can be a contributory factor. It also believes that these messages form an immense portion of what the children consume from imported animated cartoons and repeated exposure reinforces perceptions. Animated cartoons have always been assumed as safe programming for children in Kenya hence as yet not enough concern has been shown by scholars, parents, teachers and media professionals in the content of the medium (Ng'ethe, 2014).

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The general objective of this research was to investigate the impact of animated cartoons on children in Nairobi between the ages of seven to eleven years.

#### **1.3.1 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives were to:

- i. Identify the animated cartoon programmes available on television to children in Nairobi.
- ii. Assess the viewing patterns of these animated cartoons in relation to time, duration, place, preference and days.
- iii. Assess the perception 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.
- iv. Deduce the impact of consumption of animated cartoons on the social lives of the children.
- v. Explore the gratification factors that children seek from animated cartoons programs on TV
- vi. Find out the impact these animated cartoons have on children in respect to acquired or “borrowed” language and dressing styles and attitudes towards role types.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Several theories were used to inform the study. Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences. Social cognitive theory suggests that children learn and model much from television. Cognitive theory on the other hand acknowledges the four stages in cognitive development; the sensory motor stage, the pre-operational stage, the concrete operational stage and the formal

operational stage, have been identified (Fiske, & Taylor, 2013). This stage is crucial to the research on the impact of animated cartoons on children since the respondents of the study - the 7 to 11 years age bracket targeted by this research falls within the empirical observable phenomena of Piaget's theory.

Moral Development Theory according to Vozzola (2014) refers to an individual's conduct and attitude towards other members of the society. Children also need to develop empathy, the ability to feel what others are feeling. It helps them to connect abstract principles of morality with real life situations and feelings. Green and Piel (2015) in operant conditioning theory, emphasizes the role of repetition and the consequences of behaviour as the key factor in learning. The cultivation theory also argues that television has long-term effects that are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. Thus television is responsible for shaping, or 'cultivating' viewer's conceptions of social reality. Reception analysis theory embodies how consumers interpret, read, decode, produce, perceive and use media materials (Holub, 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.

## **2.2 Empirical Framework**

Many children watch between two and four hours of television per day and this has an effect on their identity. The presence or absence of role models, how women and men, girls and boys are presented, and what activities they participate in on the screen powerfully affect how girls and boys view their role in the world. Studies of cartoons, regular television, and commercials show that although many changes have occurred and girls have a wider range of role models, still for girls "how they look" is more important than "what they do" (Kalayci, 2015).

Research indicates that television has a socializing influence on children regarding their attitudes toward gender roles (Genner & Süss, 2017). Parents, friends, and school, contributing to the child's sense of what it means to be male or female in society, in turn, reinforce gender role stereotypes seen on television. Television sends forceful and compelling messages about society-approved gender roles, which are often stereotyped, biased, and outdated. As children continue to develop and grow, they are exposed to more and more examples of such gender biases and stereotypes. Traditional gender roles, wherein men are encouraged to be decisive and to show leadership qualities while women are encouraged to be deferential and dependent, do not benefit anyone, particularly women. Traditional gender roles discourage the full range of expression and accomplishment (Were, 2015).

The power to shape perceptions and attitudes through the medium of animated cartoons should impose a great ethical obligation on cartoonists, for when used in offensive, sexist or demeaning ways, cartoons, just like other forms of communication, can distract, incite and even perpetuate undesirable and negative behaviour in children and society at large. In a study cited by Hetherington and Parke, weekend cartoons that are typically designed for children had an over 70% rate of violence contained in them. Choma (2005) observes in his article Visual Subliminal Messaging in Children's Cartoons that children's cartoons are packed with many controversial topics such as violence and sexuality.

A British study, found that about half of a group of children between the ages 7 and 15 watched cartoons while doing their homework. Watching television at mealtimes however may prevent



family members from conversing with one another and one may well wonder the quality of homework done while watching cartoons. Children start watching animated cartoons at an early age of six months and by the age of two to three years children are enthusiastic viewers (Habib & Soliman, 2015). Many children learn to watch cartoons while doing other things such as eating or even doing their homework and this affects their behaviour. 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 (Zhu, Z, Ho & Bonanno, 2013).

It is true animated cartoons have positive social impact on children. It serves as an important educational and socialization tool. They have helped children expand understanding of the world they live in; it has provided them opportunities to learn values of the nation they live in and the culture, civilization of other children and countries (Huang, 2016). Africa Animated! Wanted to produce programs that speak children's cultural language, "edutainment" then and addressed issues relevant to their realities; Programs where imagery, dialogue and music draw on the continent's vast oral and pictorial heritage, reclaiming and preserving those tales for the next generation (Ng'ethe, 2014). The development of a cost-effective, quality driven and African "branded" training model lay at the core of this proposition. The African Animated! Series was aired on KTN for only one year (2004). Up to this point we have been concerned with the development of animated cartoons, how they entered television programs and some of their impacts on children elsewhere in the world (Gachuru, 2012).

### **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. There were five focus groups made up of six children each. Interviews were in seeking information from parents and media practitioners. 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.

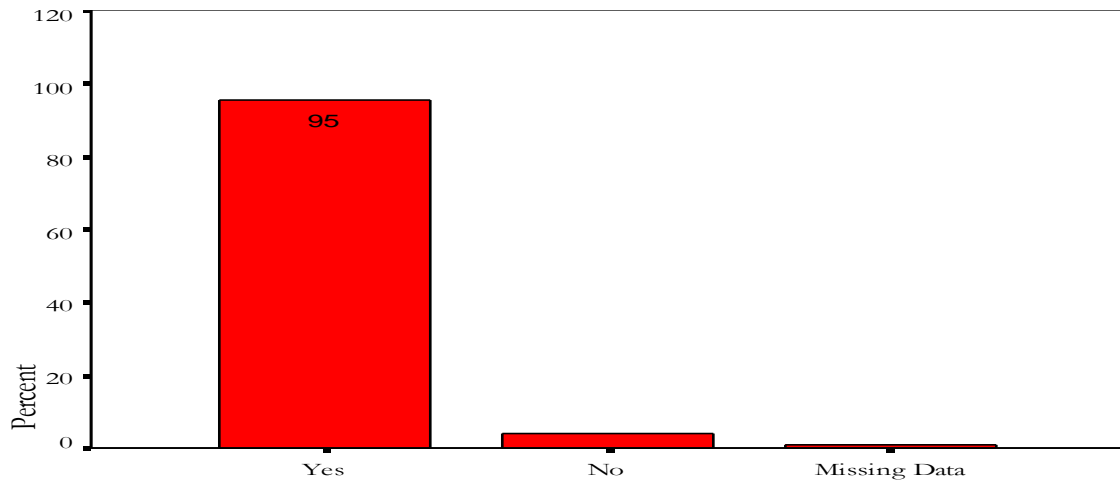


Figure 1: Whether or not the Children Like Animated Watching Cartoons

#### 4.2 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 (Huber, Yeates, Meyer, Fleckhammer & Kaufman, 2018).

#### 4.3 Where Children Watch Cartoons

The findings in figure 4.3 below answer objective number 1:3:3 of the study. This had sought to find out where children watch animated cartoons on television. Ninety six point 2 percent of the respondents watched cartoons at home. Only 3.5% said they did not.

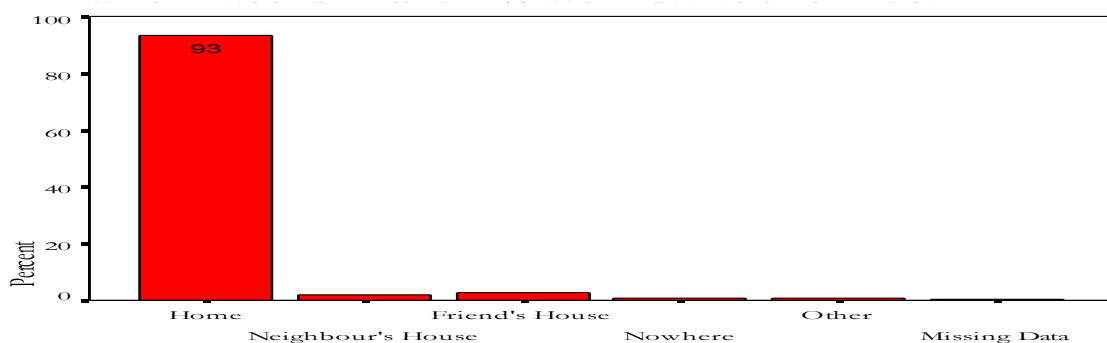


Figure 2: Where Respondents Watch Cartoons

An overwhelming the majority of the respondents, 93.4% said that the home is the place where they watch cartoons the most. It can be deduced that the respondents like watching animated cartoons at home because they spend many hours at home especially during weekends and during school vacation. The remainder of the respondents said that they watch most cartoons at the neighbour's house, or at a friend's house (Figure 4.3). On whether they watched cartoons at school, 95.1 % confirmed that this was not the norm while 19.0% of the total respondents said that they had at some point. This finding depicts that cartoon watching is not considered a learning activity and is therefore not incorporated into the learning curriculum in Kenya. This shows that watching cartoons can be regarded as a peer activity and that some of the respondents could be watching cartoons due to peer pressure.

#### 4.4 Whether or not the Respondents Watch Cartoons at Home

Ninety six percent of the children who responded to the question said they watch cartoons at home while 4% said they did not.

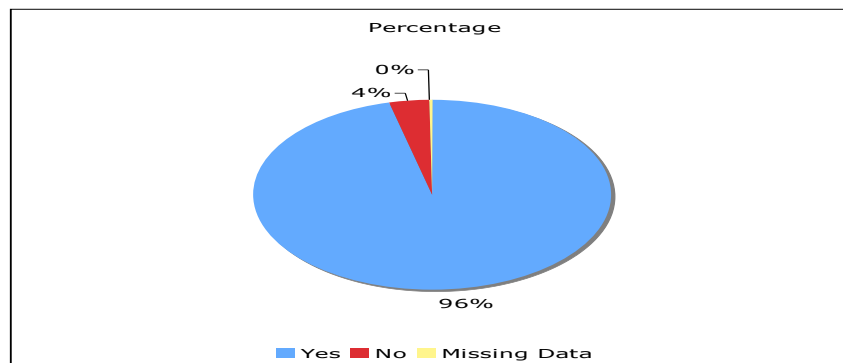


Figure 3: Whether or not the Respondents Watch Cartoons at Home

#### 4.5 When Children Watch Animated Cartoons

Questions were asked to find out from the respondents when they watch cartoons. It was seen that despite the children's busy schedules, they would still find time to watch cartoons on weekdays. A total of 338 children (79%) said that they watched cartoons during weekdays. Seventy-five (18%) did not, while 12 indicated that they rarely watched cartoons during the week.

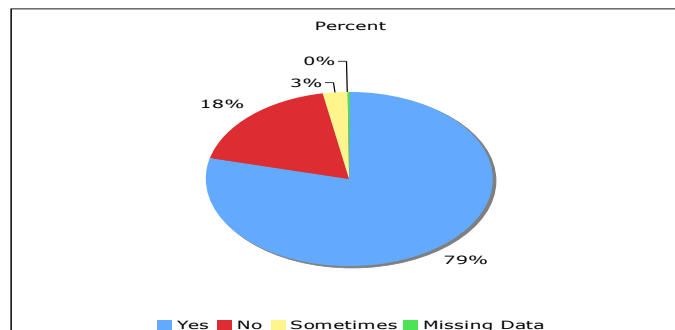


Figure 4: Whether Respondents Watch Animated Cartoons during the Weekdays

During the school term most cartoon programs are scheduled late afternoon from 4 pm when most children are in school, therefore only the children who get back home early or attend school for half-day are likely to watch cartoons during the week. Half of the respondents watch between 2-5



cartoons during the week. 14.3% watch between 6-10 cartoons and 20.9% watch more than ten cartoons during the weekday. As the number of children who watch cartoons during the weekend increases, so does the number of cartoons they watch with most respondents admitting that watching cartoons constitutes a major activity of their weekend. Ninety six point five percent said that they watched cartoons during the weekend and only 3% said that they did not watch cartoons during the weekend (Figure 5).

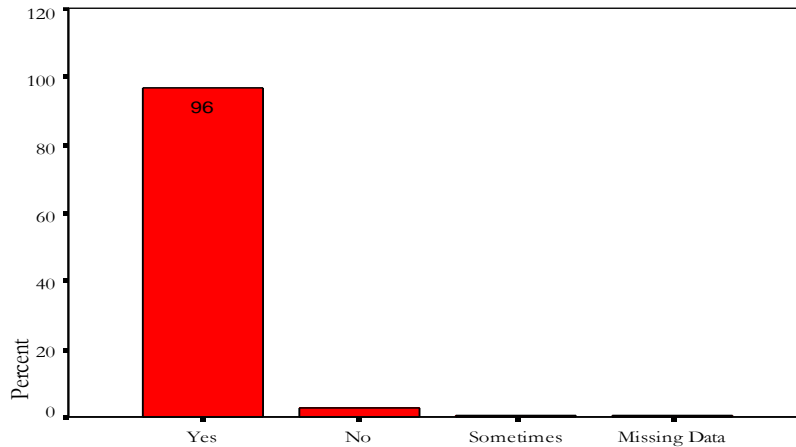


Figure 5: Whether respondents watch cartoons during weekends

Watching television is a key pastime activity for children during the weekends especially in the morning since most outdoor activities do not pick up until later in the day. The number of cartoons watched during the weekends is also high compared to the number of cartoons watched during the weekdays. The study established that close to 47% of the total respondents to this question watched more than 10 cartoons during the weekend, a clear indication that they have more time to watch cartoons during this period. Since most children are at home during the school holidays, the researcher wanted to establish the effect this had on time spent watching cartoons. This question was open-ended and it elicited responses such as “of course”, “definitely” or “obviously” indicating that children watch cartoons during school holidays. Of the 425 respondents who attempted this question, 93.9% said they watched cartoons during the holidays. Just 22% of the total respondents said that this was not the case.

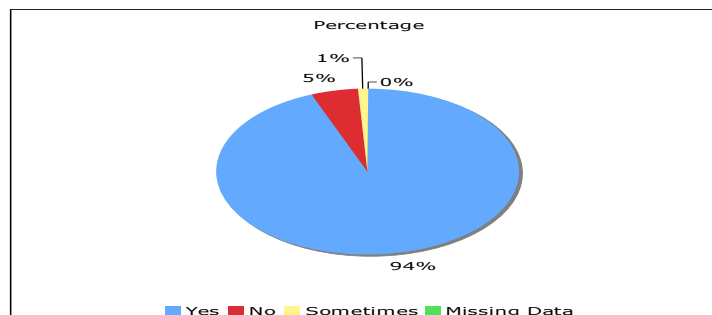


Figure 6: Whether Respondents Watch Cartoons During Holidays

On the specific times when the respondents watch cartoons during the holidays, 43.7% watch during the morning hours, from 8:00 am to 11:00 am. 15% watch cartoons in the afternoon between

1:30pm to 3:30pm while 10.3% watch cartoons in the evening from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. Eighteen point 1 percent watch cartoons all day and this can be attributed to the availability of satellite television providers such as DSTV which has made Cartoon Network and Boomerang channels available 24 hours a day.

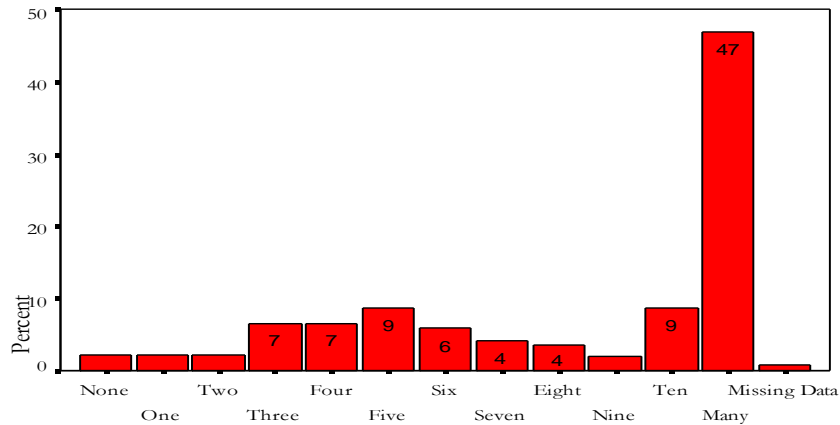


Figure 7: Number of Cartoons Watched During Weekends

It is also worth noting that although none of the children acknowledge the personal identification orientation in responding to this question, it is clear that this is one of the indirect reasons as to why they watch cartoons because 86.4% as shown below agree that they actually discuss cartoons with their friends. Almost all, 96.9% of the respondents lived with their parents who were expected to guide them on what to watch and what not to watch. The other 2.8% also lived with a guardian. The results indicate that adults neither watch nor discuss cartoons with children.

#### 4.6 Parental Involvement with Cartoons Children Watch

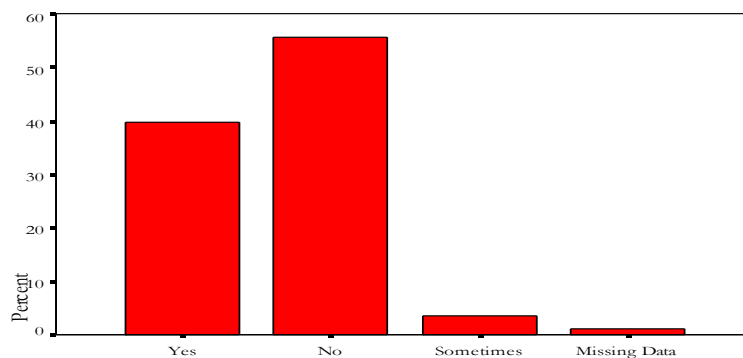


Figure 8: Parental involvement with cartoons children watch

Only 39.7% of the 426 children said that they discuss cartoons with their parents. The remaining 55.6% do not discuss cartoons with their parents. Three point five percent of the children said that they do occasionally discuss cartoons with their parents. Despite the fact that the question was asking for a “Yes or “No” kind of answer, some of the children went ahead and gave elaborate responses as to why they do not discuss cartoons with their parents. They substantiated their “No” with comments such as “cartoons are for kids,” “my parents are too busy to watch cartoons with me,” of course not” and “Never”. Further it must be noted that the children in the focus group

discussions were perplexed that an adult was interested in watching cartoons with them. Some of the children wished that they could watch cartoons together with their parents. These responses are an important indicator of how parents and even children themselves perceive cartoons. To the parents, it is assumed that cartoons are “innocent” and that they are “good for children.” Children were asked whether cartoons contained anything bad, and they were able to state what they thought were good. To others, even some of the things considered bad by adults such as violence were deemed okay. 86.4% of the respondents discuss animated cartoons with their friends.

Table 1: Whether Respondents Discuss Cartoons with their Friends

	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	368	86.4	86.4	86.4
No	49	11.5	11.5	97.9
Sometimes	4	0.9	0.9	98.8
Missing Data	5	1.2	1.2	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

#### 4.7 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.

#### 4.8 The Top Choice Cartoons among the Children

The research sought to find out which animated cartoon series are most preferred by children. The respondents rated “Ben 10” as their most preferred animated cartoon program with 29.8%, while “Kim Possible” was rated second with 18.3%.

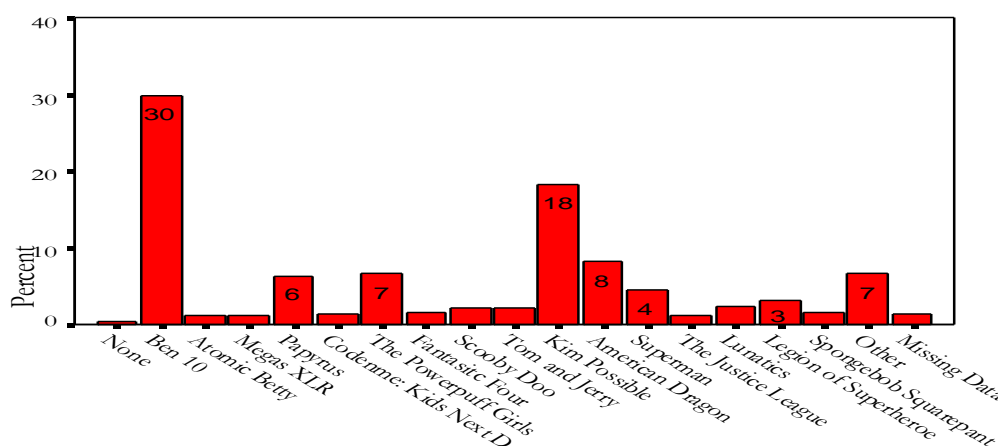


Figure 9: TV Cartoons Most Preferred by Respondents

Further, the respondent’s friends also have “Ben 10” as their favourite cartoon (24.4%) and “Kim Possible” at 17.8% (illustration 1). These two cartoon programs have as their main characters Ben

and Kim who possess “super-powers” that enable them to fight evil and “save the world”. Ben is portrayed to have a magic watch, “Omnitrix” that enables him to change form into any of ten different superheroes each with different abilities according to the villain he is fighting.



Illustration 1a Ben 10 and 1b Kim Possible

Other cartoons that are highly rated in terms of preference are “American Dragon” (8%) and the Power puff girls (7%) illustration 2.

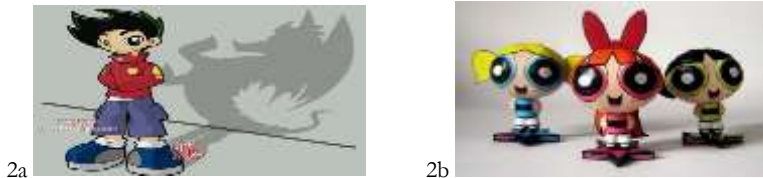


Illustration 2a American Dragon and 2a Power Puff Girls

These cartoons are preferred for various reasons but key among them is that they are action-packed (23.9%), are funny (21.4%), enjoyable/ entertaining (17.4%) and interesting (10.4%), all of which fall under the theme of entertainment and/or amusement. The respondents also said they liked the animated cartoon characters and that cartoons are nice.

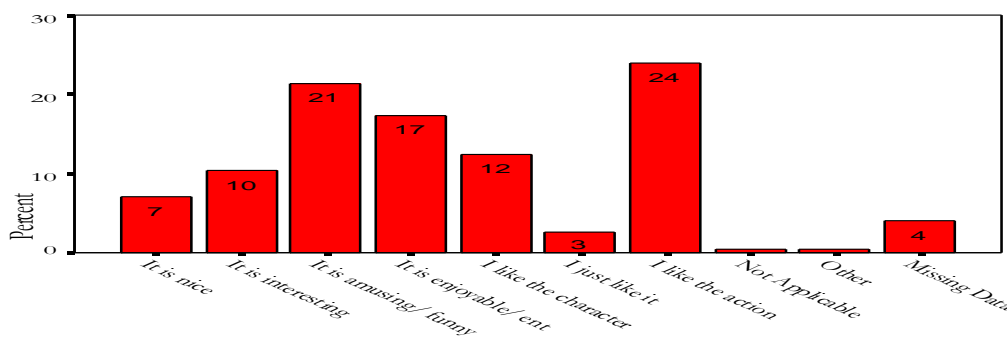


Figure 10: Reasons for Cartoon Preference

#### 4.9 Group- Reason for Liking the Animated Cartoons

The children from the focus groups gave the following reasons why they liked animated cartoon programs: Fighting, saving the world, saving people from danger, caring for others and entertainment. 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: the action from the watch stuck on his wrist that gives him super-powers and the aliens, he cares about the world and shows this by saving people, they like the accompanying actions and violence, they like to sing along with the

music, they identify with his character, his super-human imagination and 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 (See Table 2).

Table 2: 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>426</b>



More boys than girls on the other hand indicated their preference for “Ben 10”, “American Dragon” and “Legion of Superheroes”. 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 3) 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: she is a girl character identification and all the other super powers are men, symbol of identification; she is young and strong and can protect herself, girls feel that if they had those powers they would protect themselves and the people around them, find her interesting because of the actions and fighting, she has strength to save others, they feel it is fun to be strong and be able to fight well, the theme music appeals to them and they like her dress code, shoes and hair style. 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.



Illustration 4a and 4.b: Ben Ten with Different Aliens

Ben Tennyson (illustration 4a) 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 4b). 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.

#### 4.10 Age in Relation to Best Cartoon and best cartoon Character

There was no noteworthy relationship between age and cartoon preference. But more children above 8 years old seemed to like "Ben 10" and "Kim Possible" and stated them as their best cartoon programs. As expected the favourite cartoon characters were found to be Ben from Ben 10 (26.5%) followed by "Kim" from Kim Possible (17.6%), Superman (11.3%), and A Power puff Girl, (8.7%) and Jake Long from American Dragon (7.5%).

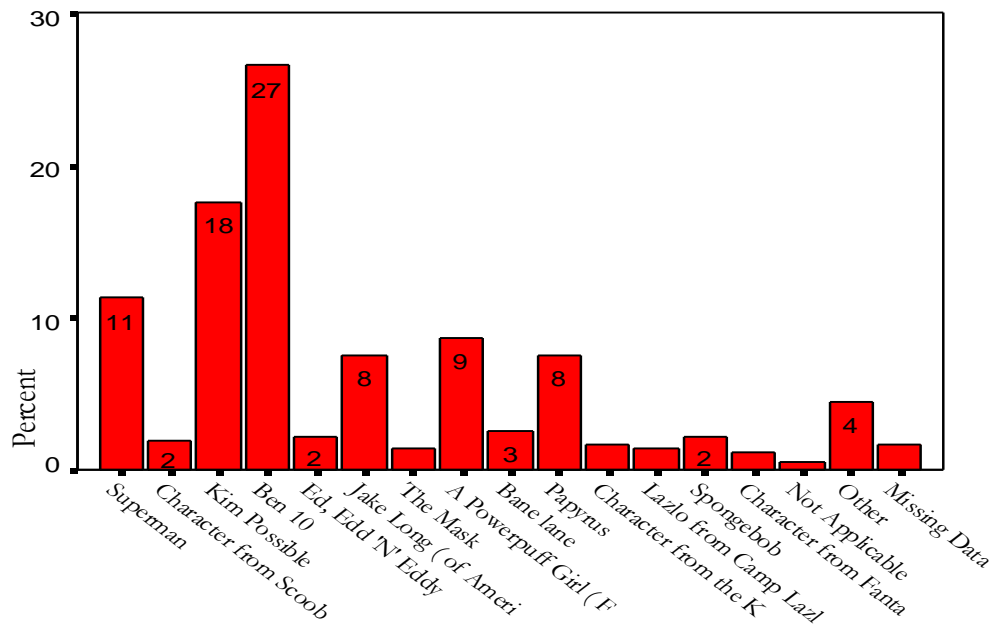


Figure 11: Best Cartoon Character

This is expected since the best cartoons were found to be "Ben 10" and "Kim Possible" and therefore the main characters from these cartoons are also likely to be the most popular.

The reasons the boy respondents gave for liking the character Ben 10 are: he saves people, he cares about the world, he likes changing to aliens because of action hee is brave and Bens' cousin Guen likes fighting Ben.

#### 4.11 Gender in Relation to Best Cartoon Character

The research also wanted to explore the existence of any relationships between gender and the cartoon characters that the respondents preferred. The findings are shown in the cross tabulation below, it can be deduced that as observed previously in the gender-best cartoon cross tabulation; there are instances when gender also dictates the cartoon characters that respondents liked. Almost all girls indicated that "Kim" from "Kim Possible" was their favorite character and a majority of boys said that their best character were "Ben" from "Ben 10", "Superman" from Supermen and "Jake Long" from "American Dragon". This is tabulated below (3).

Table 3: Best Cartoon Character and Gender Cross-tabulation

Best Cartoon Character	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Missing Data	
Superman	39	9		48
	4	4		8
Kim Possible	3	72		75
Ben 10	93	20		113
Ed, Edd 'N' Eddy (all the 3?)	5	4		9
Jake Long (of American Dragon)	25	7		32
The Mask	6			6
A Power puff Girl (From the Power puff Girls)	2	35		37
Bane lane	3	8		11
Papyrus	14	18		32
Character from the Kids Next Door (name?)	5	2		7
Lazlo from Camp Lazlo	2	4		6
SpongeBob	5	4		9
Character from Fantastic Four (Name?)	1	4		5
Not Applicable		2		2
Other	15	4		19
Missing Data	2	4	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>426</b>

#### 4.12 Age in Relation to Best Cartoon Character

There was no noteworthy relationship between age and favorite cartoon character. However mostly 9-11 year olds said that their best characters were “Ben” from “Ben 10” and “Kim” from “Kim Possible” while mainly 7-8 year olds said that their best character was a “Power puff Girl”. This is probably because “Ben 10” and “Kim Possible” are cartoons designed for a more mature audience as compared to “The Power puff Girls” which is a bit childish.

#### 4.13 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

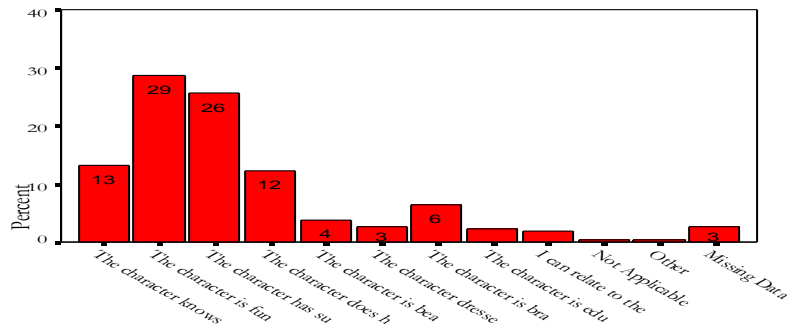


Figure 12: Reasons for Liking the Best Cartoon Character

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.

#### 4.14 Worst Cartoon Character

The worst cartoon character according to the 17.6% of the respondents of the study is “Johnny Bravo” from a program of the same title.



Illustration 5: Johnny Bravo, the Self-absorbed character

“Johnny Bravo is a character, who is self-absorbed and thinks of himself as very pretty. Johnny always goes after girls but always end up rejected because he is portrayed as self-centered and stupid. Many of the children cited “Johnny Bravo” as their worst character because they say that he has “bad manners” like “kissing” and that he is “boring”. He likes women and believes in them. The respondents say that he acts “stupid” and his language is boring. His hairstyle looks “dam”. He always loses. Johnny Bravo sometimes uses “good” language like excuse me and thank you. They say this is the worst cartoon yet they paid most attention while watching it.

The second most unpopular cartoon characters were “Ed, Edd and Eddy” (illustration 6) (12.4%) from a cartoon with the same name.

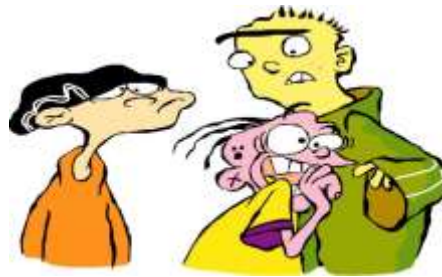


Illustration 6: Ed, Edd and Eddy, the Boring characters

The characters Ed, Edd and Eddy were also viewed as “boring” Ed, Edd and Eddy is a cartoon about three pre-adolescent boys who are misfits and therefore don’t get along with other children of their age. They are always out to swindle the other children of their neighbourhood “the cul-de-sac” of money so that they can buy themselves sweets called “jawbreakers” (illustration 6). They do this through a variety of schemes, which don’t usually work, and they rarely get the money to buy the coveted “jawbreakers”. They always have good ideas that are never successful. Ed is always inventing things. He has one eyebrow that makes him look “dumb”. Eddy is portrayed as selfish and a liar. The respondents characterize the show as “windy”, boring and not funny and that it has little action.

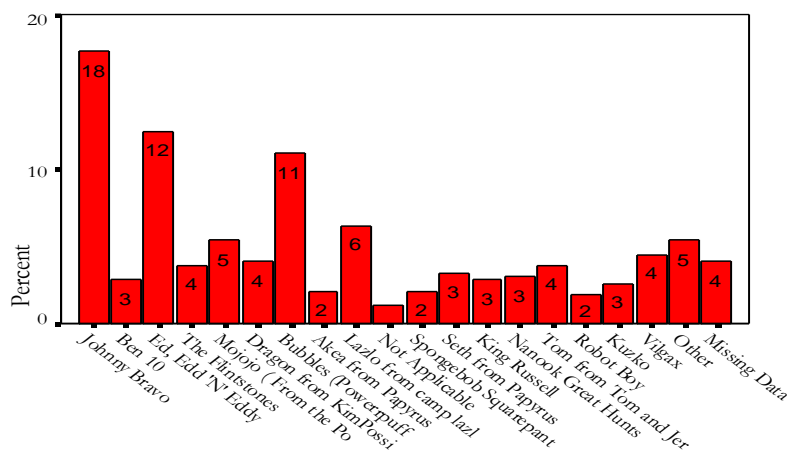


Figure 14: The Worst Cartoon Characters

Other worst cartoon characters worth mentioning are: “Bubbles” from the cartoon “The Power puff Girls” (11%) as most of the respondents found her to be very “babyish”. “Lazlo” from the cartoon “Camp Lazlo” (illustration 4.12b) is also unpopular at (6%); the respondents say that “Lazlo” is a boring character. The respondents put down the reasons behind their dislike for these characters. The major reason that respondents gave for not liking a cartoon character is “boring” (58%), and since the respondents mainly watch cartoons for entertainment purposes, characters who do not entertain, or are not amusing are considered boring. Other reasons are that the cartoon character is evil (18%) and stupid (9%). Most of the cartoon characters associated with evil are normally the antagonists or the “bad guys” in the cartoon program. Some cartoon characters that act stupid were also seen to be highly unpopular.



#### 4.15 Relationship between Gender, Age and Worst Cartoon Character

There was no noteworthy relationship between age and worst cartoon characters. The characters that are deemed unpopular are unpopular across the board. However, the cartoon characters Ed, Edd and Eddy were seen to be more unpopular among the 11 year olds, and it can be concluded that most of the older viewers especially dislike the cartoon characters Ed, Edd and Eddy. There was no noteworthy relationship between gender and worst cartoon character. However, a slightly larger number of male respondents said that their worst character was “Bubbles” from the Power Puff Girls. This is due to the fact that the character Bubbles even though she is childish is still a superhero and boys are uncomfortable with this and with girl superheroes in general.

#### 4.16 Discussion of Cartoons with Friends

Since children spend lots of time watching cartoons, the researcher wanted to find out whether cartoons form part of the daily conversations among children.

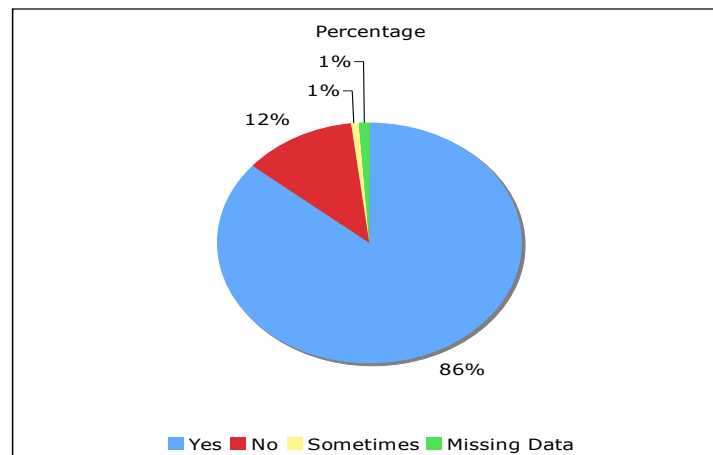


Figure 15: Whether Respondents Discuss TV Cartoons with Friends

Eighty six percent (86%) of the respondents who answered this question agreed that they talked about cartoons with their friends. This formed the basis of finding out which cartoons their friends watched and what cartoon characters their friends preferred to check for consistency in terms of the popular cartoons and cartoon characters. “Ben 10” was again found to be the most preferred cartoon (24.4%), followed by “Kim Possible” (17.8%). Other popular cartoons amongst the respondent’s friends included: “The Power puff Girls” (7.7%), “American Dragon” (6.3%) and “Superman” (6.1%). In terms of preferred cartoon characters, the most popular cartoon character was “Ben” from “Ben 10” with (25.4%); the second most preferred cartoon character was still “Kim” from “Kim Possible” with (18.8%). Other preferred cartoon characters include: “Superman” (10.6%) and “Jake Long” from “American Dragon (8.2%). This shows that in essence there is some consistency in terms of cartoon preference amongst the children. Also since children watch cartoons to conform to their peer groups, chances are that they are likely to watch what their friends are watching so that they maintain their status quo amongst their peers and ensure that they have something to talk about when they meet their friends.

#### 4.17 Discussion of Cartoons with Parents and Teachers

Children watch cartoons at home most of the time as found out by this research. Again, most consumption or viewership takes place during the weekends or holidays, when some parents are likely to be at home with their children. It is therefore expected that most parents would talk to their children about the programmes that they watch of which cartoons are a major constituent. This study reveals otherwise with only 39.7% of the 426 respondents saying that they talk about cartoons with their parents. Fifty five point six percent do not talk about cartoons with their parents as revealed earlier in this report. On whether they discuss cartoons with their teachers almost all of the respondents, 92% said they did not while 6.6% said they did talk about cartoons with their teachers (figure 16).

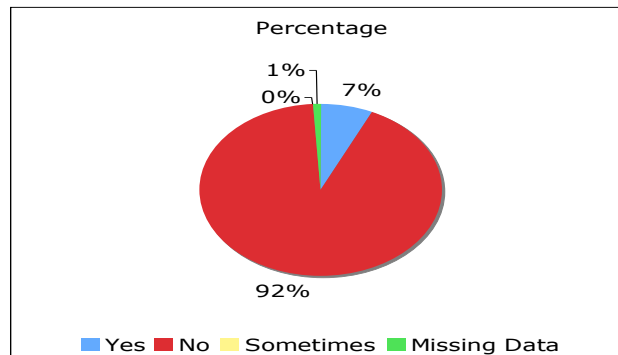


Figure 16: Whether children discuss TV cartoons with their teachers

For those children who talk about cartoons with their teacher, it is indeed a good sign since teachers can guide them on some of the things that they see in cartoons. It should however be noted that this guidance is from the fact that the teachers are older and wiser and not because they are more media literate.

#### 4.18 Whether What Happens in Cartoons Happens in Real Life

In asking this question, the researcher wanted to find out if the children could distinguish reality from what they see in cartoons. The research confirms that 56% of the respondents to this question do not think so. Twelve percent of the respondents said that what happens in cartoons sometimes happens for real, these respondents are still able to know that not all that happens in cartoons happens in real life. However 21% of the respondents think that what happens in cartoons happens for real. (See Figure 17). In general, children are able to differentiate between what happens in cartoons and in reality.

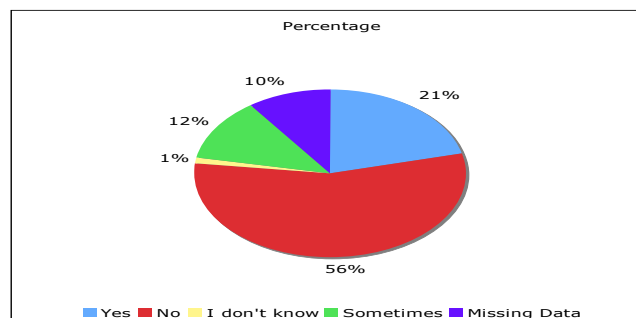


Figure 17: Whether what happens in cartoons happens in real life

#### 4.19 Whether Children do Their Homework While Watching Cartoons

Only 22.1% of the respondents said that they watch cartoons while doing their homework and 76.5% said that they don't watch cartoon while doing their homework as shown in Figure 4.20.0 below.

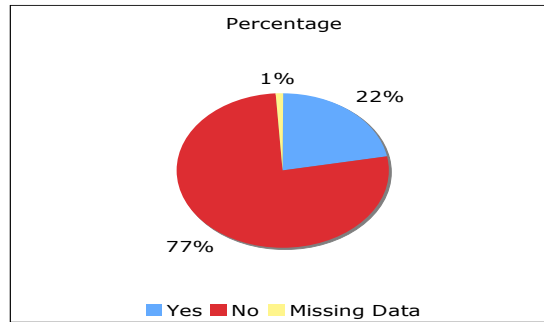


Figure 4.18: Whether children watch cartoons while doing their homework

#### 4.20 Whether Children Watch Cartoons While Eating

The researcher sought to establish whether children watch cartoons while eating. Sixty five percent of the respondents said that they do watch cartoons while eating while 34% said that they don't watch cartoons while eating. This question's purpose was to establish whether the respondents watch cartoons during times when they are meant to be talking to their parents for example during meals on the dining table. Unfortunately a majority of the respondents (65%) said that they watch cartoons while eating. This leads to the conclusion that cartoons and TV in general can be a source of lack of communication between parents and children in the home. Some children say that the parents watch TV with them while they are eating.

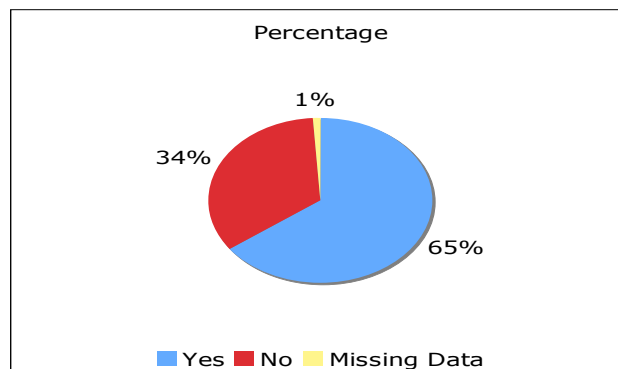


Figure 19: Whether Children Watch Cartoons While Eating

#### 4.21 Are Children Addicted to Animated Cartoons?

A question was put forth in the questionnaire to gauge children's dependence on television in general and cartoon in particular, so as to indirectly decipher the dependence of children on the activity of watching cartoons on television. For instance what would the respondents do if the television set got damaged? 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. 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 XLR 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.

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Summary**

From the data analyzed, animated cartoons comprise at least 30 hours of a television network's weekly programming. 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 respondents rated "Ben 10" as their most preferred animated cartoon program, with "Kim Possible" rated second, followed by "American Dragon" in third place and the Power puff girls coming in fourth. Respondents also watch cartoons during times when they could be talking to their parents for example during meal times. Some children say that parents watch TV with them while they are eating. This leads to the conclusion that animated cartoons and TV in general can lead to lack of communication between parents and children in the home. The majority of the respondents indicated that adults neither watched nor discussed cartoons with them. Children are also likely to develop the language and social skills exhibited by the animated cartoon characters.

### **5.2 Conclusions**

This study reveals that children watch animated cartoons with minimal parental guidance. This raises questions as to some of the interpretations and lifestyles that emerge when children watch cartoon in isolation and with no proper guiding principles. The study concluded that media has the power to profoundly shape perceptions of the social world and to manipulate actions in subtle but highly effective ways. Children were able to identify the key messages that emanated from the animated cartoons that they watched and they were able to further rate the cartoons in order of preference, giving reasons for their choices. 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 need to develop guidelines for children on how much animated cartoons he/she can watch; the less the better. They should develop the proper perspective concerning their children and be good role models. They should further, advocate for high quality programmes for children and removal inappropriate animated cartoons from the local TV stations. Parents should take interest

in combating hyper sexuality in animated cartoon and allow the children to stay young. Media Practitioners should embrace the development of home-grown animated cartoons, air on Kenyan stations animated cartoons that have local animated imagery designed to relate to the child's world or context and provide entertainment programming in which life's problems are not simply and quickly solved with either violent actions or hostile humour. They should air animated cartoons that have no violence or bad morals but are still popular with children. The Government need to set policies governing the content in animated cartoons aired by the media houses and offer support and facilitate local research initiatives and production, especially on animated cartoons for the African children, with elements that promote our African culture.

## REFERENCES

- Ergün, S. (2012). The influence of violent TV cartoons watched by school children in Turkey. *Acta Paulista de Enfermagem*, 25(SPE2), 134-139.
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (2013). *Social cognition: From brains to culture*. Sage.
- Gachuru, F. W. (2012). Kikuyu Library A 0. Bov 3019.
- Green, M. G., & Piel, J. A. (2015). *Theories of human development: A comparative approach*. Psychology Press.
- Habib, K., & Soliman, T. (2015). Cartoons' effect in changing children mental response and behavior. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(09), 248.
- Hassan, A., & Daniyal, M. (2013). Cartoon network and its impact on behavior of school going children: a case study of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.
- Holub, R. C. (2013). *Reception theory*. Routledge.
- Huang, J. (2016). The Effects of Animation on the Socialization of 5-6 Years Old Chinese Children—Finding Dory. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(10), 1945-1950.
- Huber, B., Yeates, M., Meyer, D., Fleckhammer, L., & Kaufman, J. (2018). The effects of screen media content on young children's executive functioning. *Journal of experimental child psychology*, 170, 72-85.
- Kinoti, K. M. (2016). Influence of Television Watching On the Moral Development of Preschool Children in Lari Division, Kiambu County, Kenya.
- Klein, H., & Shiffman, K. S. (2012). Verbal aggression in animated cartoons. *International journal of child and adolescent health*, 5(1), 7.
- Ng'ethe, R. W. (2014). *Influence of Television Viewing on Children's Social Development among Preschoolers in Thogoto Zone, Kikuyu District, Kiambu County, Kenya* (Doctoral Dissertation, University Of Nairobi).
- Nyamai, L. N. (2013). *The Impact of Television Viewing on Children's English Language Development* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Educational Communication and Technology, University of Nairobi).
- Vikiru, G. (2013). 2-D Animation for Effective Communication with Children in Kenya: A Case Study of Githurai Location, Kiambu County.
- Vozzola, E. C. (2014). *Moral development: Theory and applications*. Routledge.



- Wells, P. (2013). *Understanding animation*. Routledge.
- Were, J. (2015). *The Impact of Locally Generated Television Programmes on the Kenyan Television Viewers in Dagoretti Sub-Location of Nairobi* (Doctoral Dissertation, School Of Journalism and Mass Communication, University Of Nairobi).
- Zhu, Z., Ho, S. M., & Bonanno, G. A. (2013). Cultural similarities and differences in the perception of emotional valence and intensity: A comparison of Americans and Hong Kong Chinese. *The American journal of psychology*, *126*(3), 261-273.