

CARTOONS AS A TOOL OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION FOR SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY OF SHEIKHUPURA CITY

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Abstract

This research elaborates on utilization of cartoons as a tool of religious instruction for children. Cartoons can be used as an instrument for children's mental development because a child's mind is like a plain slate, what you write leaves a long-lasting impact. Cartoons have become a favorite activity of children and they spend most of their leisure time on watching cartoons. Children's interest in cartoons also impacts their mind according to the content and concept of cartoons. For this aim, cartoons with religious instructions were shown to children and interview of some children's parents and teachers were done in Sheikhpura. The data collected from the observations and interviews done qualitatively for this research shows that cartoons are a very effective source of religious instruction for children. Children not only understand these instructions easily but also try to follow them.

Keywords: children, cartoons, religious instructions, positive behavior, social representations

Introduction

Christopher Dodd said that children are like the most precious treasure for every nation and their minds can be molded according to your will and desire. Watson (1930) wrote, "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-informed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist—regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors" (p. 104). It shows how environment can change the

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mentality and behavior of children. 5-10-year-old children are under the process of development trying to imitate everything they see, unafraid. They absorb everything quickly and their absorption capacity is very high. They want to know their role in the house or society as they consider themselves responsible.

Emergence and Popularity of Cartoon Industry

In the contemporary era, technology has taken a crucial place in every field of life. People are using many different things to relax their minds and for entertainment. Media is also the miracle of this technology and cartoons are linked to it. Watching cartoon is a favorite activity of children. Children are good imitators. They are always trying to imitate everything they watch regardless of its moral nature. The cartoons may encourage positivity and negativity in children. Sharmin Sultana (2014) asserts in her article about cartoons that they have both positive and negative sides and are most popular entertainment for people of all ages.

The problems related to negative impacts of cartoons are commonly expressed by many researchers. It is generally observed that parents are not conscious of the possible psychological impact of the content of cartoons; the characters, story and ideas being propagated. As a form of entertainment, they just consider it a time passing activity for their children ignoring the subliminal messages embedded in the apparently innocuous engagement and how these cartoons might shape the children's minds. In Pakistan, this approach is more common as Dr. Zahid Yousuf said that in present day the family gives less times to kids subsequently allowing or even deliberately engaging children to pass time by watching cartoons. There are mostly foreign cartoons at every channel but foreign cartoons influence children negatively.

Significance of the Present Research

The paper includes research questions, research tools and limitation and delimitation of the research. It aims to find out the perception of teachers and parents about cartoons' effects, cartoons as a source of religious instructions and the interest of children in them. It investigates the effect of cartoons on children. The methodology of any research plays vital role to fulfill the objectives of the study.

The interest of children in cartoons and their strong psychological impact have invited various companies and groups to ground these cartoons in moral and religious messages. This research is very significant as it provides people awareness about the impact of cartoons on the children's minds and how a judicious selection of a particular type of cartoons might prove beneficial for children. The study highlights how cartoons serve as an effective source of religious instruction for children teaching them religious beliefs, noble values, optimism and morality. So, every person who wants to bring up his child according to their religious ideology, can use cartoons as an effective source of religious instruction for children.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to shed light on the impact of cartoons on children's psyche. There are positive and negative effects of cartoons on children. Cartoons affect children psychologically if children are watching such cartoons as are full of violence, aggression and negativity, it will create a negative impact in their mind and they will mimic the same actions in their life. On the contrary, if they are watching good ones with a lot of lessons, they will react accordingly.

Khalid Habib and Tarek Soliman (2015) conducted a research on cartoons' effect in changing children mental response and behavior. They examined, "Cartoon TV series has great influence on the children. Cartoon has the major portion of the children attention and time more than any Activity the children perform. Cartoons have great effect on children behavior. As well as cartoons change the children behavior, it also changes their spoken language, as they intend to imitate cartoons character." (p. 252)

Shazia Akbar Gizali, Rabia Alam, Zubair Ahmad, Amina Shaukat and Syeda Shahum Noor (2017) analyzed the effect of cartoons on children's behaviour and language. They concluded that the cartoons have an everlasting impact on children. The children who watch cartoons display great level of acquisition and intellectual development.

Malhotra, Gouri, Junjua, Dr. Mehak & Rana and Dr. Rajesh's (2018) research on animated cartoons' uses and relevance for youth. They observed that cartoons improve slow learners learning ability due to visual impact which is instant. A

positive feedback is given by the learners using animated cartoons as a teaching approach.

Dr. Zakia Lamraoui (2016) conducted research about the negative effect of cartoons on children. He appealed that watching cartoons have prodigious effect on children's minds, morals and manners. Children were affected adversely by foreign cartoons. Children should watch cartoon under their parents' observation. Scrutinizing cartoons is necessary before sharing them with children.

Priyambada Tripathi and Anita Singh (2016) in a study about the effect of cartoons on children, concludes, "Children are highly influenced by the cartoons. Because they favor and pay attention to cartoons instead of other games and activities. They try to imitate the cartoons' characters including the violence which they observed. Parents are not satisfied by positive effects of cartoons on their children." (p. 402)

Richmond Acheampong (2017) conducted research on the behavior of children in which he found out that cartoons affect both positively as well as negatively. He said that it depends on the type of cartoons as well as observation of parents. According to him, negative cartoons take children towards negativity and positive cartoons takes children towards positivity.

"We usually use our perceptual system to interpret representations of worlds we can never see. In the man-made world we live in, the perception of representations is as important as a perception of real object. By a representation I mean a man-made stimulus array intended to serve as a substitute for a sight or sound that could occur naturally. Some representations are meant to be stimulus surrogates; to produce the same experience as the natural world would have done". (Bower, 1997, p.58)

The theory of social representation was developed at first by Serge Moscovici. The theory is one of the key theories usually known as European social psychology or sociological social psychology. The theory has a social constructionist direction and proposes a cultural way to deal with the development of social information, wandering from the more individual-level investigations of social insights and speculations.

In his original book, *La Psychoanalyse, Son Image et Son Public*, (1961) Moscovici investigated the manners by which psychoanalysis, as a type of logical information, became appropriated by general society; he contemplated, as such, how logical information becomes 'socialized' into regular presence of mind. Social representations have been defined as:

...systems of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history. (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii)

According to this theory, we can say that cartoons can affect children psychologically as we can infer how children relate themselves with the things they watch e.g. cartoons and try to follow those too. Regardless of their age, kids who saw the hilarious subplot would in general limit the earnestness of the negative feeling. It might be, at that point, that the humor in circumstance comedies weakens youngsters' capacity to find out about negative intense subject matters from such substance. The amusing subplot additionally influenced the youngsters' impression of feeling.

The basic point of social representations is to 'make the unfamiliar familiar' (Moscovici, 1984, p 24). This is accomplished through two socio-cognitive mechanisms: anchoring and objectification. Through anchoring, novel thoughts are ordered into pre-built up classes such that gives them a character and lessens their newness. For instance, Jodelet (1991) in her investigation of social representations of franticness in a rustic French people group found that the intellectually sick who lived as tenants in the network were delegated 'tramps' or 'idiots'. This permitted the network to ascribe natural qualities to the new classification of dysfunctional behavior. Objectification, then again, transforms abstract ideas into solid articles. For instance, the psychoanalytic terms 'neurotic' and 'complex' have been typified, practically speaking, in sense thinking, which implies that they are treated as though they were genuine elements. Through typification, a portrayal is transformed into a reality. Such shared real factors empower gatherings to explore their general surroundings.

Objectifying is, according to Moscovici (2000) a much more active process than anchoring which occurs almost automatically each time we are confronted with a new phenomenon. Objectifying, that is turning an unfamiliar idea into concrete reality requires more effort.

Every researcher emphasizes that cartoons have their own importance due to their attraction. They are affecting child differently according to their material, story and concepts. Everyone has talked about the effect of cartoons on children's behavior, language, mind and intellectual perception. The current study is about religion and cartoons, due to their importance in children's universe, exploring how they can be a productive source of religious instruction.

Methodology

According to Mackey and Gass (2005, P.44), findings in second language research highly depend on Data collection tools used and the usage of the one data collection instrument over another depends on the research questions. The population of the study consists of the teachers and parents of school-going children. In this study, the interviews with open-ended questions were designed to gather information from teachers and parents of school going children of the age group of 5 to 10 years old children were selected because this is the tender age for children with impressionable minds, the city selected is Sheikhpura because of its easy access for the study. Two schools were selected for the interview, government school and private school so that we can gather the ideas of both sectors. The questionnaire was filled by 10 teachers and 10 parents of younger children qualitatively in order to avoid any ambiguity and confusion. Parents were selected randomly. The number of students was 60. Cartoons (like Kids Madani Channel and Abdul Bari cartoons) with religious instructions were shown to children for two days to study their interest and understanding towards religious instruction.

The aims of questionnaire were:

- ❖ To gain a better understanding of teachers and parents' awareness and perceptions about the use of cartoons as a source of learning and understanding religious instructions
- ❖ To determine how teachers and parents use cartoons to enhance children's learning skills

First, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and its significance to conduct the cartoon-watching activity on a certain topic. Interviews were taken after the completion of cartoon shown task. Interviews were taken individually and separately so that there was no chance of effect of a person's views on other.

Qualitative data was analyzed by using coding as technique. Coding was the most appropriate analysis technique for investigation of this topic according to the nature of research study. In qualitative study, coding was most used for analysis of data. Qualitative data was coded and then themes emerged from codes. Many researchers (Khan Malik & Dar, 2018, Ahmad, Mehmood & Dar, 2019) used qualitative analysis techniques and confirm that qualitative analysis shed light on the major patterns in the data to be observed.

Ethical considerations were kept in mind while conducting this social research. Proper permissions from school's chairs were sought. Teachers and parents were not forced to become participants but were left upon their volition. Complete confidentiality was ensured as parents and teachers were chosen conveniently. The identity of the participants in the interviews was also kept confidential. The research goals were informed to the participants only to the context that they may not distort the results. In survey, the participant's identity was kept anonymous. The data was not fabricated, and the researcher remained unbiased and objective in drawing conclusions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Simple random method is used in this research because it is easy to apply when small population is required. It is the basic selection process of sampling. The researcher informs the teachers about the research project. With the help of simple random sampling each population has an equal chance to participate in research. The selection of sample is three schools of Sheikhpura. The selection of parents and teachers is based on 5-10 years old children's classroom and there is no preference for background, history, family and experiences of the participants.

The researcher asked open-ended questions for interviews (See appendix A for details).

Data Interpretations

In response to the first question, all parents stated that they were well aware of their children's leisure time activities. Parents say that their children like to watch cartoons. Teacher's response about it was different. Two teachers said that these children start talking in the class and others responded that they start to tell stories which they listen from others or watch on television.

While answering the second question, teachers and parents said that children prefer to watch cartoons over any other activity.

In reply to the third question, the participants opined that cartoons characters effect children psychologically.

Responding to the fourth question, teachers and parents maintained that children like positive characters. Every character that is shown as a hero or positive they feel attraction towards it. One teacher reflected that it is common observation that children learn about negativity very fast. Therefore, we should save our children from negative type of cartoons. Otherwise, children's personality will be affected. While others were of the opinion that no children like negative characters.

About the sixth question, sample shared that we observed change in their language, behavior and mind. One said that they feel happy when they discover something new. Two teachers and two parents remarked that children start reciting 'Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem' before eating anything and saying 'Assalam-o-Alaikum' loudly while entering house or classroom.

While commenting on the seventh question, eight parents and teachers testified that children start imitating these positive characters imagining themselves as one of them, while one teacher held that hardly one or two children are trying to imitate these characters. One teacher maintained an altogether individualist stance claiming that children don't imitate.

Offering answer of the eighth question, sample commented that these positive cartoons are very effective for children's learning except one teacher who says that cartoons are fifty-fifty effective in children learning because every child has a different nature.

In response to the ninth question, target population posited that these cartoons are very helpful for children to learn social, moral and ethical values. Some things are not comprehensible for children but through visual instructions these become comprehensible. Even children are trying to enforce and motivate their friends to learn social, moral and ethical values.

The tenth question was answered by the sample saying that these cartoons build children's positive behavior towards others. Good cartoons, like children are watching through this research project, create positive impact in their behavior. Sample further elaborated that cartoons (like Kids Madani Channel and Abdul Bari cartoons) are better and effective source of religious instructions specifically for children. After watching cartoons, they are trying to imitate and follow every step of their favourite character.

Discussion and Analysis

Entertainment-appeal of cartoons has increased exponentially during the last few years. Children watch cartoons in most of their leisure time and it is one of their favorite activities. They learn a lot of things through what they do and what they see. Due to their interest, now cartoons have also become an effective source of religious instructions. Almost all children's parents and children are admitting that cartoons are better and effective source for religious learnings for children. As Moscovici said, "What is perceived replaces what is conceived". (2000, p. 51)

The question about the leisure time activities of children shows that they are always searching to do something or explore new things. In their free time, they exhibit their talent by telling stories which they learn from cartoons or listen from others. It shows their keen interest for learning and showing their talent.

The question regarding activity-preference shows that children are more interested in watching cartoons than any other activity. Most of the teachers and parents responded in affirmative to this question which underscores the influence of cartoons; how they psychologically hook children and contribute to their mental development. According to Moscovici, "To objectify is to discover the iconic quality of an imprecise idea or being, to reproduce a concept in an image" (1934, p.38).

Ideas of the population about the question about the psychological effect of cartoons on children also indicate the importance of it. Because everyone wonders how cartoons have a great psychological effect. For the betterment of children, it is necessary to nourish them with positive psychological impressions.

The response of almost all teachers and parents about next two questions about positive and negative characters of cartoons exemplifies how children like positive characters because they consider themselves a hero. One teacher discussed the negative effects of cartoons. Negativity has its own charm. It attracts the children more than the good side of these cartoons, so it is necessary to monitor the cartoons before showing to children. Little ignorance can lead a child in the wrong direction.

The participants' comments on the next question regarding the effect of cartoons on children's behavior, language and intellect reveals that most of the parents and children agree that children's behavior, language and intellect change after watching cartoons and this change is positive. As they feel happy and light.

Data gathered in the next two questions elaborates most parents and teachers' agreement that children imitate these positive characters. These cartoons are very effective for learning. Most of them start reciting 'Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem' before eating anything and saying 'Assalam-o-Alaikum' in a loud tone while entering house or classroom. 5-10 years old children learn a lesson keenly through visual aids. It attracts them and develops their interest.

Ideas collected from the population on next two questions reveal that these positive cartoons are very helpful for children to learn social, moral and ethical values. They also encourage the same values in their companions. They start respecting their parents and teachers. Children also learn way of saying prayer and other prayers very easily through these cartoons. These cartoons build children's positive behavior towards others. Good cartoons, like children are watching through this research project, bring positive impact in their behavior. Not only these social and moral values can be developed in children through cartoons but also, they can become the source of spreading of these values.

The comments of the teachers and parents about the next question tell us that all the teachers and parents are acknowledging that cartoons are a very important and

effective source of religious instruction. Through these cartoons children not only attract towards religion but also encourage them to practically start understanding and implementing them in their regular life.

We usually see that children often personify an idea, concept or phenomenon and link those with themselves. To attach something well known public persons with themselves is a common discursive mechanism in the media in order to grow attention and popularize courses of events and children do the same.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can say that cartoons have taken the most influential part of children's life. They spend most of their time in watching cartoons, talking about their stories, behaving like cartoon characters and imitating them. Cartoons are also enhanced the children's learning ability due to its audio-visual effects. Cartoons are being effectively scripted and used as a source of religious instruction. Findings of this research also reinforce the same. Most people worried about how to teach religious values to their children can select a particular type of cartoon series designed around the same idea. This research work shows that cartoons are effective source of religious instructions for children due to their importance and significance and it can also minimize their worry. Such cartoons as shown to children in this research also save them from negative animated movies which may be affected them adversely.

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