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KENYA**

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## **PATTERNS OF WATCHING TELEVISED ANIMATED CARTOONS 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 patterns of televised animated cartoons watched by 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. 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. 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.

**Results:** The study also concluded that the children consume more cartoons during the weekends with an average number of between 8 and 9 cartoons a day as compared to between 2 and 5 cartoons on weekdays. They watch cartoons most during the months of April, August, November and December when schools are closed for the holidays. The majority of the respondents watch cartoons from home. It can be concluded that children consume a lot of animated cartoon content from television both during school days and when they are holidays. They spend a lot of time watching animated cartoons on television.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Parents should influence their child's viewing by modifying their own viewing habits and develop guidelines for children on how much animated cartoons he/she can watch; the less the better. Television should be kept out of a child's bedroom preferably in the family room. Parents or guardians should watch and discuss animated cartoons with their children to enable them understand and evaluate the content. Media houses/practitioners need to develop home-grown animated cartoons. The middle level colleges and universities should train their students on how to produce animated cartoons with content for the local market, especially children.

**Keywords:** *Watching patterns, televised animated cartoons, children aged seven to eleven years.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Disney Corporation is a successful and powerful media giant that has become ingrained into the American culture as a provider of wholesome family entertainment. Children in America are socialized through numerous films, animated cartoons and movies that are either produced or owned by Disney, making it one of the most potent forces in shaping an American child's worldview. One can deduce that this same worldview is transmitted to children the world over because of Disney's massive share in the global electronic media market. There have been criticisms of subtle cultural biases and even racial, gender and class biases labelled at some of the depictions in Disney's cartoons and movies. The drive for profit overrides a lot of standards at Disney, and sensibilities get sacrificed in the process (Kinnunen, 2016). Animated cartoons form part of the daily programming for almost all the television channels in the world including Kenya. Children who have access to television are captivated by television such that they spend more time watching television than they spend in any other activity (Joseph & Ahmad 2015). This is because children consume television through primary involvement. This is a process in which the audience is solely concentrating on consuming the media text; they are sitting down solely to watch their favourite program on television. They watch more television than they engage in reading, going to watch movie, listening to the radio or playing with each other. From this fact, there is no doubt that the medium of television is a persuasive influence on children from a very tender age and must then to some degree influence their cognitive and social development from a very tender age (Rozendaal, Buijs & Reijmersdal, 2016). According to research the average American child watches 18,000 hours of television by the time they are fifteen years old (Joseph & Ahmad 2015). With children living in Nairobi spending about thirteen hours a week watching cartoons on television, Kenyans have to start taking a critical view on the possible impacts from the imbedded values in the animated cartoons upon their children. With about thirteen hours a week per station to fill in children programs, parents, educators and policy makers have to start asking the hard questions; do we know the amount of time the average child in Nairobi spend watching television? What signals are being conveyed by this material? What ideas and values are the animated cartoons reinforcing? Do these ideas and values conflict with local sensibilities? What narratives and mythologies are contained within these materials (Were, 2015)?

The cultivation theory was an approach developed by Gerbner (1998) of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania to study how "heavy exposure to cultural imagery will shape a viewer's concept of reality" (Pierson, 2013). Cultivation theorists argue 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. Gerbner argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values that are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together. Gerbner views this television world as "not a window on, or reflection of the world, but a world in itself"(Kinnunen, 2016).

The theory makes a distinction between two groups of television viewers: the heavy viewers and the light viewers with the heavy viewers' as its main focus. It says that people who watch a lot of television are likely to be more influenced by the ways in which television programs frame the

world than are individuals who watch less, especially regarding topics of which the viewer has little first-hand experience (Ehlin, 2015). Cultivation analysis usually involves the correlation of data from content analysis (identifying prevailing images on television) with survey data from audience research (to assess any influence of such images on the attitudes of viewers) (Stoldt, 2016). Audience research by cultivation theorists involves asking large-scale public opinion poll organizations to include in their national surveys questions regarding such issues as the amount of violence in everyday life. Answers are interpreted as reflecting either the world of television or that of everyday life. The answers are then related to the amount of television watched, other media habits and demographic data such as sex, age, income and education (Mosharafa & Mosharafa, 2015).

This therefore begs the question; should Kenyan parents, educators and television programming personnel assume that the views and portrayals of the content of these imported animated cartoons be taken for granted to offer the views that are representative of the Kenyan demographics, realities and situations? And as such with the heroes and villains (illustration 1), settings and cultural traits under representation being predominantly Euro-American, what representation of the world is being portrayed to the Kenyan child (Ekwe, 2018)?



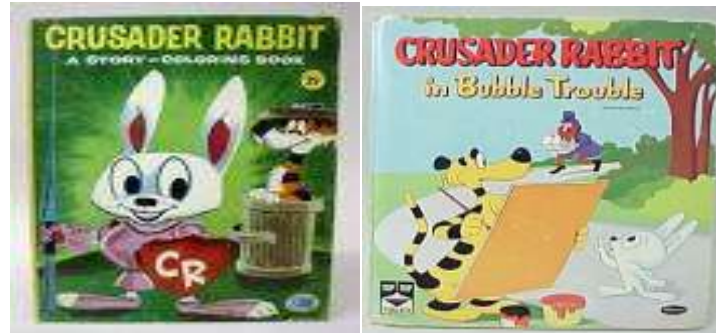
**Illustration: 1a) Kim Possible 1b) Ben 10—the Most Popular Cartoons among children surveyed in Nairobi**

This theory emphasizes the role of repetition and the consequences of behaviour as the key factor in learning. The term operant conditioning refers to the development of behaviour patterns that are under the voluntary control of the learner. Thus the learner may choose to make a response or not, depending on the associated consequences of the behaviour (Gupta & Panna, 2017). Behaviour can be modified or conditioned in a desired direction with rewards as consequences of desired behaviour. The two authors believe that the principles behind this theory are especially applicable to learning that takes place during early childhood (2 to 4) years and the early school age (7 to 11) years because at these ages the children are unlikely to conceptualize about priorities. They are more drawn to where rewards are operating. If behaviour is rewarded then it is considered desirable. We can deduce that it is therefore vital that children should not see bad/negative behaviour rewarded in the animated cartoons that they consume (Tosoni, Tarantino & Giaccardi, 2014).

The first successful designed-for-television cartoon was *Crusader Rabbit* (illustration 2), created by Jay Ward (of *Rocky and Bullwinkle* fame) and Alexander Anderson. It was not created for a TV



network but rather was released directly into syndication and was first distributed in 1949 (Jones, 2016). Network television cartooning came along eight years later. The networks' first cartoon series was “The Ruff and Reddy Show”, which was developed by the most successful producers of television cartoons, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera. The Ruff and Ready Show was also the first made-for-TV cartoon show to be broadcasted nationally in America on Saturday mornings and its popularity helped establish the feasibility of Saturday morning network programming.



**Illustration 2: Crusader Rabbit**

Hanna-Barbera was also responsible for bringing cartoons to the prime-time network schedule though its success in prime time did not result in a trend. Hanna-Barbera's “The Flintstones” (1960) was prime time's first successful cartoon series (Perlmutter, 2010). It was also prime time's last successful series until the premiere of “The Simpsons” in 1989 (illustration 3).



**Illustration 3: Television cartoons that were released into syndication 3a) Flintstones, 3b) The Simpsons**

With *Crusader Rabbit*, *The Ruff and Ready Show*, and *The Flintstones*, the characteristics of the made-for-TV cartoon were established. UPA-style aesthetics (especially limited animation) were blended with narrative structures that developed in 1950s television. One final characteristic of the made-for-TV cartoon that distinguishes it from the theatrical cartoon is an emphasis on dialogue. None of these programs survived more than a year in primetime because adults were not much of an audience. However, networks found success by running these failed shows as Saturday morning cartoons for children. They flourished on Saturday mornings on cable channels like Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network and in syndicated afternoon timeslots as daily programming scheduled children almost on all stations in the world (Wilson, 2014).

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 (Ogle *et. al.*, 2017). Many children learn to watch cartoons while doing other things such as eating or even doing their homework and this affects their behavior and identity. A British study, found that about half of a group of children between the ages 7 and 15 watched cartoons while doing their homework (Siede, 2015 & Kinnunen, 2016). Watching television at mealtimes however may prevent family members from conversing with one another and one may well wonder the quality of home work done while watching cartoons. Children in Nairobi seem to consume a significant amount of animated cartoon programs from television.

This study, therefore, sought to establish:

- i. Where children aged seven to eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya watch cartoons.
- ii. When the children aged seven to eleven years in Nairobi County, Kenya watch cartoons.

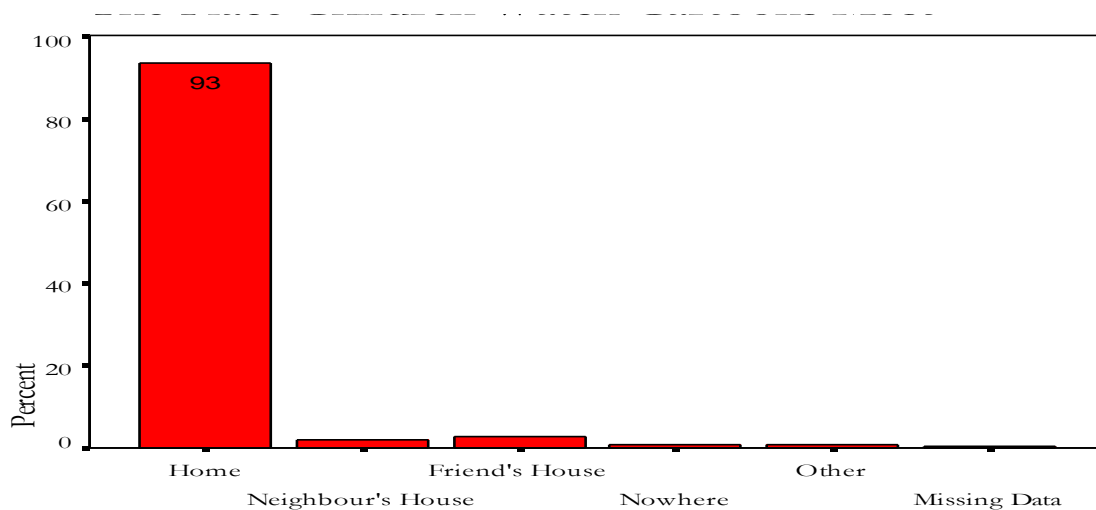
## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

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.

## **3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **3.1 Where Children Watch Cartoons**

The findings in Figure 1 below answer objective number 1 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.



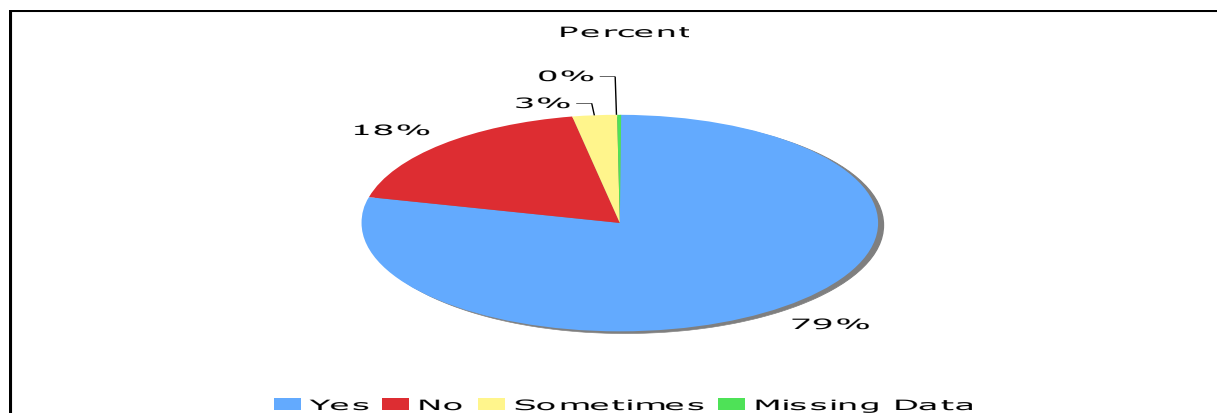
**Figure 1: Where Respondents Watch Cartoons**

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, public holidays 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 (see Figure 1).

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.

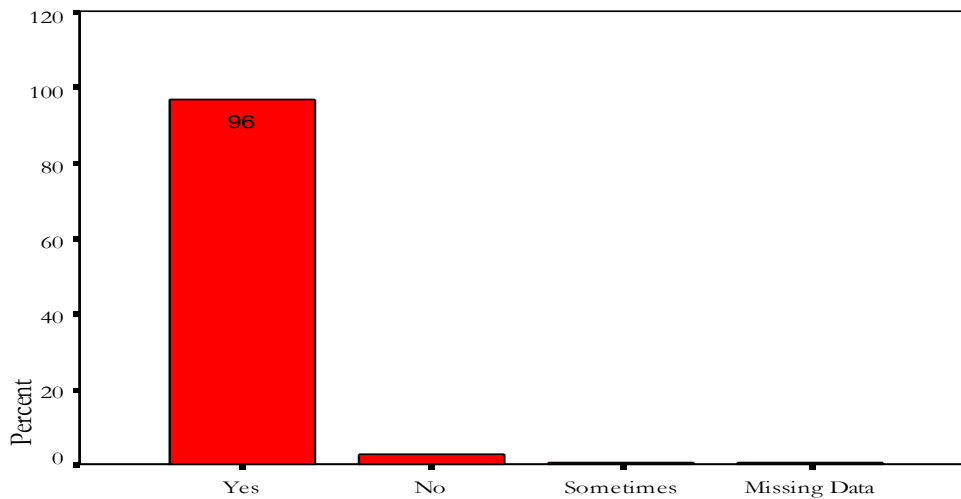
**3.2 When Children Watch Animated Cartoons**

Questions were asked to find out from the respondents when they watch animated 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 2: Whether Respondents Watch Animated Cartoons during the Weekdays**

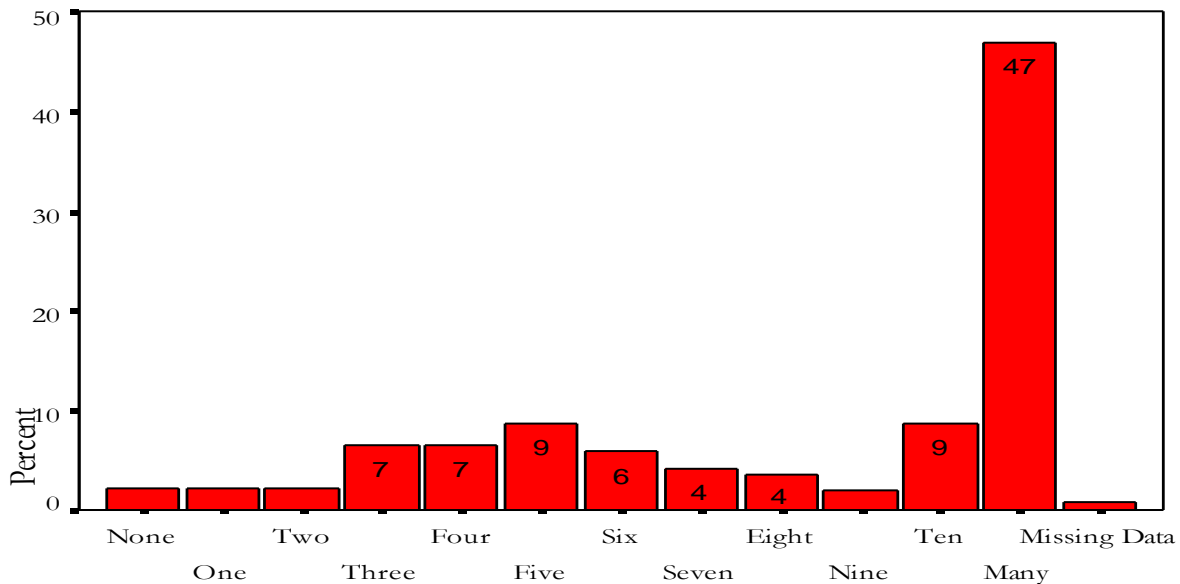
During the school term most cartoon programs are scheduled late afternoon from 4 pm when most children are in school, therefore only the children who get back home early or attend school for half-day are likely to watch cartoons during the week. Half of the respondents watch between 2-5 cartoons during 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 (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Whether respondents watch cartoons during weekends**

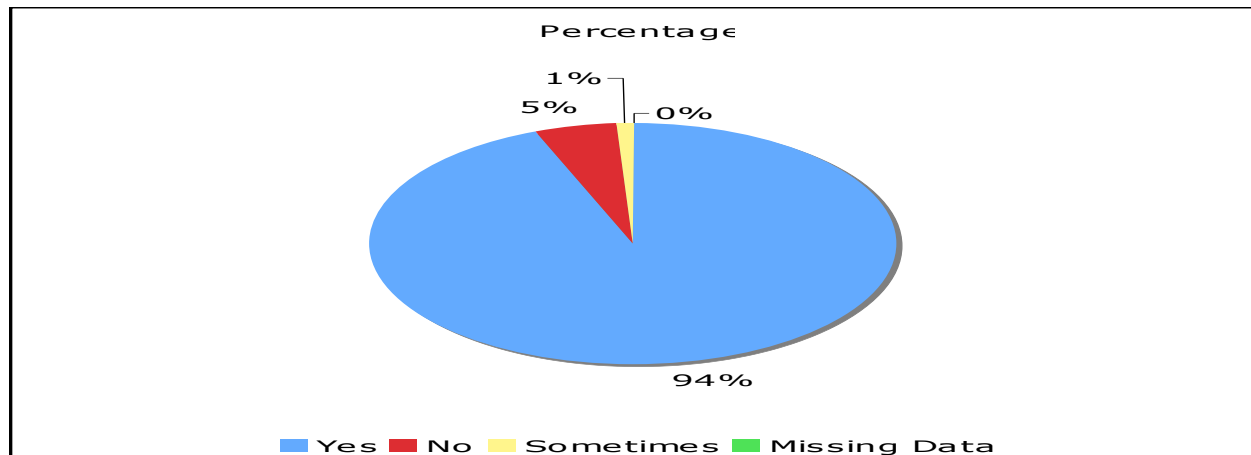
Watching television is a key pastime activity for children during the weekends especially in the morning since most outdoor activities do not pick up until later in the day. The number of cartoons watched during the weekends is also high compared to the number of cartoons watched during the weekdays. 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. See Figure 4.





**Figure 4: Number of Cartoons Watched During Weekends**

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 .See Figure 5.

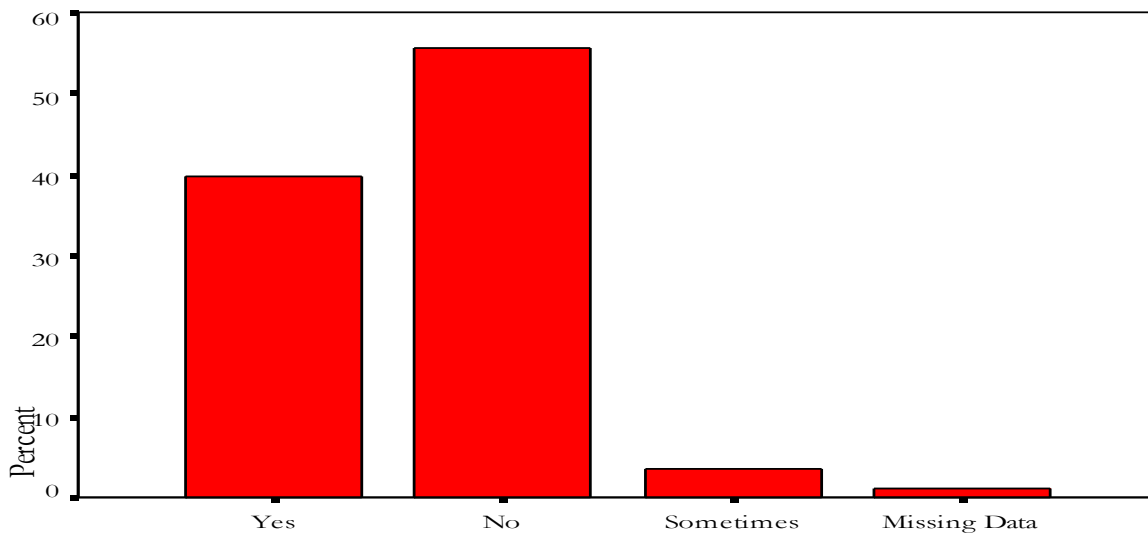


**Figure 5: Whether Respondents Watch Cartoons During Holidays**

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. 18% 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.

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.



**Figure 6: 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**

Statement	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative 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>	

## 4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Summary

From the data analyzed, animated cartoons comprise at least 30 hours of a television network's weekly programming. The children consume more cartoons during the weekends with an average number of between 8 and 9 cartoons a day as compared to between 2 and 5 cartoons on weekdays. They watch cartoons most during the months of April, August, November and December when schools are closed for the holidays. During this period, 43.7% of the children watch cartoons in the morning hours between 8:00 am and 10:30am. 15% watch cartoons in the mid-afternoon between 1:30pm and 3:30pm, with 10.3% watching cartoons between 4:00pm to 6:00pm in the evening. 18.1% of the children watch cartoons all day long. The majority of the respondents watch cartoons from home. It can be concluded that children consume a lot of animated cartoon content from television both during school days and when they are holidays. They spend a lot of time watching animated cartoons on television.

### 4.2 Conclusions

Based on the study, the study concluded that almost all children expose themselves to animated cartoons frequently for different durations of time. Most children watch animated cartoons during weekends and school holidays, at home and parents or guardians are usually not involved in discussing animated cartoons with their children. 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. Studies have proved that what we watch has a profound influence on how we make our lifestyle choices and this is especially true for children who are more amenable

### 4.3 Recommendations

Parents should influence their child's viewing by modifying their own viewing habits and develop guidelines for children the type and how much animated cartoons he/she can watch; the less the better. Keep television out of a child's bedroom. The best place is the family room. Watch animated cartoons together and talk about what your child sees on the animated cartoons. They should also help children understand and evaluate the content they watch in animated cartoons. Media houses /practitioners need to development of home-grown animated cartoons. The middle level colleges and universities should train their students on how to produce animated cartoons with content for the local market, especially children.

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