

## Comparative Study of Patterns of Exposure to Local and Foreign Cartoons by Primary School Pupils in Awka

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### ABSTRACT

The study conducted a comparative assessment of respondents' exposure to local and foreign television cartoons. The objectives of study were to find out respondents' level of exposure to local and foreign cartoons; to ascertain the factors that motivate respondents' to watch foreign/local cartoons; to ascertain respondents' cartoon preferences and to establish the kinds of gratifications they derive from exposure to cartoons. The study adopted the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method using the interview guide as the data gathering instrument. A sample of 120 respondents was selected for the study which was anchored on the uses and gratifications theory. Two government primary schools and two private primary schools were selected for the study. The findings showed a preference of foreign cartoons over local cartoons by the respondents. The study also found that the factors that motivated exposure to cartoons were accessibility, socialization, entertainment and others such as the branding of cartoon characters on cloths, bags, and other reading materials used by respondents in school. The study recommended among others, that parents and schools should deliberately expose their children to local cartoons while the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) should, as a matter of national policy, encourage the production of local content cartoon programmes that can be aired on national and satellite TV stations. This will go a long way in further exposing the children to local culture. While protecting them from the debilitating cultural orientation of foreign content cartoons

### INTRODUCTION

Habi and Soliman (2015) observe that the factors that sculptor children's way of thinking are found mostly in the environment where they grow up. The worldwide spread, prevalence and currency of communication technologies have since made the world of cartoons a vital part of children's environment. Children's inextricable attachment to cartoons and its sociological consequences for society imbue on the subject a veritable target of research interest. Hence, several researches have been conducted on the subject.

Thompson (2010) defines cartoon as a movie made by using animation instead of live actors, especially as it pertains to humorous film intended for children.

Trace to the historical beginning of motion pictures in the 1800s (Habib & Soliman, 2015), Cartoons have been adjudged the first and most common among the types of broadcasts that children watch on the television (Kosker, 2005).

According to Hassan and Daniyel (2013), Children spend more time watching television than participating in any other activity. They go on to stress the point that cartoon watching is the most favourable hobby of children in their leisure time as they would rather watch cartoons than do any other physical activity. Irkin (2012) insists that children in elementary school watch cartoons the most with a rate of 72.1%. A further quantitative corroboration of children's excessive attachment to cartoons states that an average child with a facility of television and satellite connection in his home watches television for an approximately 18,000 hours between kindergarten and high School.(Habib & Soliman, 2015).

Beyond the statistical computation of children's television -watching- habits, considerable research efforts have also been devoted on studying the effects of children's cartoon-watching- habits on their character traits and eventual behaviour. Some of such studies demonstrate that children's exposure to modeled

## Comparative Study of Patterns of Exposure to Local and Foreign Cartoons by Primary School Pupils in Awka

behaviour on television and the movies influence a wide range of attitudes and behaviour such as aggression, victimization and perception of reality and stereotypes (Slaby, Roedell, Arezo & Hendrix, 1995; Fouts and Vaughan, 2002; Comstock & Lawson, 2006; Njiri, Mberia & Muchunku, 2018).

Evidence from the above analysis shows that studies on the subject of cartoons and children have always concentrated on the attitude and effect of cartoons generally, regardless of whether they are local or foreign content cartoons. The objective of this particular study is to deviate from this norm by conducting a comparative analysis of patterns of exposure to local and foreign cartoons. In this way, the study would provide a basis to empirically verify which of the variants (local and foreign) potentially influence the children's behaviour.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is ample evidence of studies that have assessed and documented cartoon contents in television programmes and their effect on children (Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale & Panapa, 2000; Staub, 2003; Fouts, Callan, Piasentin & Lawson, 2006). Some of these studies, which includes content analysis of programmes that children watch, have revealed that cartoons model, distort and stereotype body image as well as promote aggressive tendencies in children (Oyero & Oyesomic, 2018).

However, none of these studies have distinguished between local and foreign contents in a way that clearly situates which of both variants contribute more to the formulation of children's character content and behaviour. In the opinion of the researcher, such generic treatment is misleading, assumptive, pre-emptive and creates a gap in knowledge that needs to be filled.

Therefore, the problem of this study is to fill this gap of knowledge by conducting a comparative study of the respondents' exposure to local and foreign cartoon contents so as to provide a basis for ascertaining which of the cartoon variants contributes more to the much documented behaviour change adduced to cartoons.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

#### The Objectives of the Study Are To

Find out the level of exposure to local cartoons among primary School pupils in Awka.

Find out the level of exposure to foreign cartoons among primary School pupils in Awka.

Determine the respondents' preference of cartoon programmes between the local and foreign cartoon variants.

Ascertain the factors that motivate the respondent exposure to the cartoon variants of their choice.

Establish the kind of gratifications respondents derive from watching the cartoons.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the level of exposure to local cartoons among primary School pupils in Awka?

What is the level of exposure to foreign cartoons among primary School pupils in Awka?

Which of the cartoon variants of local and foreign cartoons is the respondents' preference to watch?

What are the factors that motivate the respondents' exposure to the cartoon variant of their choice?

What are the different kinds of gratifications that the respondents drive from watching the cartoons?

### OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### Primary School Pupils

This refers to primary 2 – 4 pupils of Ben B unique School, Awka, St. Pauls Nursery/Primary School Awka, Unizik Primary School Awka, and Iyiagu Primary School, Awka.

#### Exposure

This refers to the act of watching cartoons on television by pupils of select primary schools in Awka.

#### Television

This refers to the medium through which pupils of primary schools in Awka watch local and foreign cartoons.

#### Cartoons

This refers to local and foreign cartoon contents that the pupils of select primary schools in Awka are exposed to

#### Local Cartoons

This refers to cartoons produced in Nigerian with Nigerian local contents, plot and setting.

### **Foreign Cartoons**

This refers to animation programmes on television with foreign contents, plots, characterization and setting that the respondents are exposed to.

### **After-School Exposure**

This refers to the pupils' practice of watching cartoons after school hours in their respective homes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. Explained by Elihu Katz in the 70s, the Uses and Gratifications Theory challenged existing media theories suggesting that media source and content had overwhelming effects on the audience (McQuail, 2005). The theory suggested that audience members are active, selective, and perceptive consumers.

In this vein, McQuail (2005) highlights the following basic assumptions for the theory in line with previous scholars; that it works within the social and psychological origins of needs which generates expectations of the mass media or other sources; that this leads to different exposure (or engaging in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences. The basic tenet of this theory is that audience members expose themselves to media contents based on the gratifications they derive from such contents.

The Uses and Gratifications theory is related to this study because the respondents' exposure to local and foreign cartoons content is predicted on certain needs and satisfaction derived from such exposure to such media materials.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Animation on Television: Conceptual Understanding**

Television cartoons are common features of Nigerian television stations, just like other television stations. Hardly does a day pass without one television station or the other in Nigeria airing cartoons.

Described by the Encyclopaedia Britannica (MacroPaedia, vol.3) cited in Onakpa (2014, p. 34) as a pictorial parody or imitation which, by the devices of caricature, analogy as well as ludicrous juxtaposition, sharpens the public view of a contemporary or topical issue, event,

political or social trend, cartoon carries with it as an almost indispensable element that provides irresistible attraction and entertainment for children.

There are different forms of cartoons that include the comic strip, animated cartoons for the electronic media (such as "Tom and Jerry," "Superman" "Pocahontas," etc.) and editorial cartoons in newspapers and magazines (Okoro & Onakpa, 2016).

The interest of the current study is animated electronic cartoon, particularly those aired on television. These are motion pictures consisting of a sequence of drawings, each so slightly different that when filmed and run through a projector the figures seem to move (Random House, Inc., 2001, p. 82).

Mahwah (2007, p. 315) commented on TV animation thus:

"Animation has had a rather erratic presence on television. A mainstay of Saturday morning children's programming, small snippets of it appear regularly in commercials, credit sequences, music videos, news and sports, but there have been long stretches when there were no primetime cartoon shows" The above quotation provides insights on how common TV animated cartoons have been. All TV animated cartoons are targeted at the audience. Rideout, Foehr and Roberts (2010, p.2) note that young people have increased the amount of time they spend consuming media by an hour and seventeen minutes daily, from 6:21 to 7:38, almost the amount of time most adults spend at work each day, except that young people use media seven days a week instead of five. This makes it plain that the potential of media to impact virtually every aspect of young people's lives cannot be ignored."

### **FOREIGN CARTOONS VIEWERSHIP PATTERNS**

According to Njiiri, Mberia, & Muchunku (2018), television viewing is the most popular form of media exposure for young children, notwithstanding the increasing exposure to other multiple forms of screen technology.

Though scanty information is available on the average children television viewership time in majority of African countries, it is expected that with the digital migration that has recently been adopted in Africa, the time an African child spends watching television and especially the

cartoon programmes has considerably gone up. Children television viewers could be categorized in three major profiles as heavy television viewers, moderate television viewers and light television viewers.

Few research studies in African countries such as Nigeria and South Africa reveal that compared to a decade ago, children are spending a considerable amount of time watching television (Oyero & Oyesomi, 2014) with the attendant potential of an emergence of heavy viewership tendencies. Mediated viewership by parents of children watching television cartoons could mitigate potential negative effects in their social interactions; mediation could be passive or active with parents either setting up rules pertaining television viewing or actively watching the television programmes with their children. Parental or guardian intervention while children are watching television is not however popular with many children left to watch television unsupervised. Studies done over time suggest that very few parents impose television viewing limits or get actively engaged in discussing television content with their children (Schmidt & Vandewater, 2008, G:tahi 2011).

Lack of mediated viewership, is not only a situation that characterizes parents in developed countries but also in the developing countries where parents are increasingly working for longer hours as they strive to keep the households running effectively, leaving the older siblings to take care of the younger children or leaving the children with a caretaker (Kabiru & Njenga, 2007) note that parents in Kenya as in other developing countries are away from home most of the day in order to supplement family income. This is a strong indication that parents and guardians do not monitor the amount and content of exposure to foreign television programmes of their children.

### **Children and Cartoons**

Baran & Davis (2009:87) make the point that "from the time children learn to talk, they are mesmerized by the sounds and moving image of Sesame Street". This observation is a summation of the connection between children and cartoons. At the level of effect, cartoons easily impact on children's character formation and behaviour because they are exposed to their influence at such impressionistic age. This is the point of Meyrowitz in Buonanno (2008:19) that through captivating effect of cartoons, "television escorts children across the globe

before they have permission to even cross the street".

Much more than the above accounts, there is considerable literature on the effects of exposure to cartoons on children's behaviour (Garden, 2003). While some research findings indicate that the effects of cartoons on child development and behaviour can be positive, others opine that the effects can be negative. Whatever the case maybe, consensus in these researches clearly indicate that cartoons affect child's behaviour and development in some ways that could be both negative and positive. However, the interest of the researchers here is to assess the respondents pattern of exposure to both local and foreign cartoon programmes with a view to determining which of the variants is largely responsible for this behaviour change

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

In the study conducted by Yousaf, Shehzad and Hassan (2014), the researchers sought to highlight the psychological behaviour of the children of Pakistan after watching television cartoons on Pakistani channels. The sample size was made up of 100 respondents. The Study concluded that cartoon series influence the children behaviour as well as their language.

Ergün (2012) did a study aimed to demonstrate the gender-specific impact of violence -oriented television cartoons on children and to identify the behaviours demonstrating this influence. The researcher studied a total of 300 students chosen by a simple, random sampling method, applying a stratified weight in each school. The result showed a significant gender difference between students' favourite cartoon shows, the type of influence those shows exerted, and the ways in which students imitated the behaviours of the cartoon characters. Oyero and Oyesomi (2014) in their study examined the influence of cartoons on Nigerian children's social behaviour from the perspective of the parents and the children. Survey design was adopted. Data were collected from 100 pupils and 50 parents through questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion. Percentages and chi Square were used for data analysis.

The findings showed that both children and parents share disparate opinion on the influence of cartoons on children's behaviour. While cartoons were found to help children's spoken English, learning inventions and good morals, as well as keeping children busy among other benefits, some parents were found to have

## Comparative Study of Patterns of Exposure to Local and Foreign Cartoons by Primary School Pupils in Awka

expressed the feeling that certain influence of cartoons could be negative and therefore some regulations are required in mitigating those negative aspects of cartoons.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method, using interview guide as instrument.

This technique helps in ascertaining audience disposition towards a given issue through engaging few people – about six or more but not more than 20 in few hours controlled discussion (Nwodu, 2006). The strength of the focus group technique is that it allows the intended individuals and groups to be more involved in the research project and discuss their opinions freely. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used because it gave the primary school pupils opportunity to freely express their opinions on the questions regarding their exposure patterns to local and foreign cartoons.

The researchers selected two government primary schools and two private primary schools for the study. The selection was based on the researchers' discretion and convenience. The schools were easily accessible to researchers for the study. The selection of two of each category (government and private schools) was to ensure balance in representation of students that attend such schools. To get these children's opinions, the primary school children from the age of 6 to 10 in primary 2-4 from two public and two private schools in Awka metropolis were selected through purposive sampling. This was to ensure that only students who watch cartoons on television were selected for the study. The selected schools are

Ben B unique School with a total of 116 pupils (primary 2-4)

St. Pauls Nursery/Primary School, a total of 104 pupils

Unizik Primary School 92 pupils (primary 2-4) and

Iyagu Primary School 124 pupils (primary 2-4.) (Source: Head Teacher of all the schools).

The total population of study is 436 pupils. The pupils from primary 2, 3 and 4 were purposively chosen, based on the criteria of pupils' exposure to watching cartoons. Pupils who claimed they were not exposed to watching cartoons were automatically eliminated from the study.

Based on the criterion for selection, a sample of 120 was used for the study. Thus, from the first school with a population of 119 pupils from primary 2, 3 and 4, a total of 30 pupils was selected; the second school with 104 pupils, 24 was selected; third school with 92 pupils, 24 was selected and from the fourth school of 124 pupils, 36 was selected, totaling 120 children. This gave a total of 120 participants in the discussion sessions. Each session was made up of an average of 10 participants. Altogether, a total of 12 FGD sessions were conducted, representing one session per class.

The discussion took place between 11 to 11.30am which was break time in a dedicated classroom(s) in each of the schools. Each group was made up of an average of 10 pupils. A total of 12 sessions were held in all the schools, with each session averaging 10 participants.

For ethical purposes, the participants participated on their own volition. Permission was sought from the participants before proceeding with the group discussion sessions. The management of each school gave permission for the FGD sessions. The venues for the interviews were selected by the participants to suit their comfort. This is because for FGD to be effective, it must be conducted in a conducive environment (Crossman, 2018).

A successful focus group discussion relies heavily on 'the development of a permissive, non-threatening environment within the group' where the participants can feel comfortable to discuss their opinions and experiences without fear that they will be judged or ridiculed by others in the group (Hennink cited in Liamputtong, 2011). For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms were used to disguise the participant's identities and the participants were duly informed.

The instrument for data collection was the interview guide. It contained questions which the researcher, assisted by the school teachers, asked the pupils during the FGD sessions. The researcher had done a pilot study with the interview guide on pupils of a private school not involved in the main study.

This was to ascertain that pupils understood the questions and that the questions were structured to elicit responses that address the theme of study. The pilot study indicated that the content of the instrument was properly structured and understood by pupils.

## Comparative Study of Patterns of Exposure to Local and Foreign Cartoons by Primary School Pupils in Awka

After-school exposure was the focus of this study basically because that is when children watch cartoons based on their own preferences, unlike during school hours when their teachers decide what they watch.

This is essential for this study because children's decision on which cartoons to watch could be based on gratifications sought that could influence their decision as to the local or foreign cartoons to watch.

### FINDINGS

The findings of this study showed a preference of foreign cartoons over local cartoons by the respondents. The findings are here presented in relation to the objectives of the study.

The first objective sought to find out the level of respondents exposure to the local cartoons variant. Results showed that majority of the children were not aware of the existence of local cartoons. Majority of them had neither heard nor watched any local cartoons. Only a few of them had heard of one local cartoon entitled Mudi Goes to School. Those who had heard of this movie said they were told by friends while some said they watched it on GoTV channel 2. According to Uchenna, a primary three pupil at Unizik primary school, "I watched Mudi Goes to School twice on Go TV Channel 2 but since then I have not bothered to watch it again. My friends don't talk about it." Another respondent, Nnamdi, a primary four pupil at St. Pauls Primary school said, "I have not heard of any local cartoon. I just love watching Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon." There was a clear indication that exposure to local cartoons among the respondents was abysmally low.

On objective 2, all the children claimed they were exposed to foreign cartoons. The children were mostly exposed to cartoon channels on Cable TV such as Cartoon Network, Disney Junior, Jin-Jam and Nickelodeon.

Objective 3 of the study sought to determine the cartoon variant the children preferred. The findings showed that the children preferred the foreign cartoons over the local counterparts. A list of such preferred cartoons include BJ Masks, Adventure of kid Danger, The Loud House and Sponge Bob on Nickelodeon; and Sofia the First on Disney Junior.

Objective 4 of the study was to ascertain the factors that motivate the children's exposure to their preferred cartoons. From the respondents'

accounts, basic motivation comes from factors of accessibility and socialization. The children said they had more access to cable TV Channels which aired foreign cartoons. Apparently, there were no television channels dedicated to airing only local cartoons. They were also rarely aired on local television stations. A few Nigerian channels such as AIT and TVC air some local cartoons. However, this appears to be more in default than normal. Most of the respondents opined that they do not watch these local cartoons. Speaking more on accessibility as a motivating factor, the children said they watched the foreign cartoon programmes at home on cable television. In terms of socialization, the children studied said they discuss foreign cartoons programmes with friends in school and at home. Such programmes as Sofia the First, Sponge Bob, PJ Masks and The Loud House are cartoon series discussed in school according to the children. Since their friends hardly discuss local cartoons, they were not motivated to watch them. So, exposure to foreign cartoons is a fall out of the respondents' socialization process. One participant who is a pupil of Iyiagu primary school said, "What our friends discuss in school are foreign cartoon films. They talk about PJ Masks, Ben 10, and Avatar. You scarcely hear anyone talking about local cartoon films." Among the other reasons advanced by the respondents as motivators of exposure to foreign cartoon is the use of foreign cartoon characters on the books, bags, and other items used by the respondents, which is not the case with local cartoons.

Objective 5 of the study was to establish the gratifications the respondents derived from exposure to cartoons. The most common gratifications mentioned by the pupils were entertainment, learning English Language and Socialization. The kids said they were entertained by the cartoon films and that such films also help them to speak good English. According to Okey, a primary three pupil of Ben B Unique school, Awka, "I learn how to speak good English from watching foreign cartoons and that is why I watch them a lot."

The children also said that watching foreign cartoons make it easy to identify with their friends and flow with new friends when they discuss foreign cartoons in school or at birthday parties. They said it was easy to discuss such cartoons as PJ Masks, TMNT, and Sophia the

first in ways that imbues confidence and trendiness.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Objectives 1 and 2 sought to find out respondents' exposure to local and foreign cartoons. Results showed that almost all the children were not aware of the existence of local cartoons. They had neither heard nor watched any local cartoons. In contrast, all the children were exposed to foreign cartoons. The children were mostly exposed to cartoon channels on cable TV such as: Cartoon Network, Disney Junior, Jin-Jam and Nickelodeon. This finding is in tandem with Njiiri, Mberia, & Muchunku (2018) observation that though scanty information is available on the average children television viewership time in a majority of African countries, it is expected that with the digital migration that has recently been adopted in Africa, the time an African child spends watching television and especially the cartoon programmes has considerably gone up.

On the question of what motivates children's exposure to preferred cartoons, the findings show that accessibility and socialization were the basic motivators. As Oyero and Oyesanmi (2014) observe, there is a lot more than goes on when a child is watching a cartoon such as some level of learning. This will in turn affect the development of the child's social behaviour as a whole. Again, the findings agree with the researchers' claim of socialization as a motivating factor. The children excitedly enthuse that they discuss foreign cartoons among their friends in school and at home. As Gonzalez-Mena (2009) put it, television is the one medium with the greatest socialization effects, exceeding all other media in its influence on young children. Similarly, Prot, et al.(2015) observe that television has through the years proven to be an important socialization agent in children's lives. They concluded that socialization is no longer reserved to the influences of family, peers and other people in children's immediate environment but also to cartoons on television. According to respondents, the other motivating factors are the use of foreign cartoon characters on books, bags, and other items used by them. Neeley and Schumann (2004) write that use of cartoon characters capture children's attention. This could make them curious to watch cartoons starring those characters.

On the gratifications the respondents derived from exposure to cartoons, they were unanimous in the submission that gratifications received were entertainment, learning English Language and Socialization. The kids said they were entertained by the cartoon films, and that such films also helps them to speak good English. This agrees with the observation by Oyero and Oyesanmi (2014) that while children are watching cartoons, there is a form of learning process that is going on. The children also said they found it easy to identify with their friends and flow with new friends when they discuss foreign cartoons in school or at birthday parties. Again, this agrees with Oyero and Oyesanmi (2014) in their observation that whatever children learn while watching cartoons, they tend to act out thereby influencing their mode of socialization with other children and with the world in general.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has revealed a preference of foreign cartoons by the respondents. This preference is basically a function of accessibility, socialization and entertainment. Other factors such as use of cartoon characters on cloths, bags, and literature read in school also play crucial roles in the preference of foreign cartoons over local cartoons by primary school pupils in Awka Metropolis.

Invariably, the study concludes that most of the cartoons watched by Nigerian children are foreign, made possible by heavy influx of foreign programmes from satellite TV providers such as DSTV, GoTv, CTL, among others. These foreign cartoons have contents that are at variance with the Nigerian culture, morals, values, language and fashion. By extention, it could be argued that much of the behavior change occasioned by exposure to cartoons can be specifically blamed on exposure to foreign cartoon contents. If the respondents are barely exposed to local cartoon content, then how can it possibly influence their behaviour?

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are put forward based on the findings of this study:

Parents should expose their children to local cartoons by encouraging them through the provision of local cartoon films and directing them to TV Channels that air such cartoons. This will go a long way in further exposing the

children to local culture that are reflective of our cultural orientation and expectations as a people.

Schools should create avenues for pupils to be exposed to local cartoon contents especially during break time. This can help familiarize the children with local cartoon characters. It can also create discussion topics and socialization process for the kids.

Since family is one social institution that plays a vital role in shaping children's social behaviour, parents and guardians should devote ample time to educate their wards on what they watch on the cartoon TV stations, keep an eye on their activities and observe peculiar changes in their behavior and pay a little heed towards providing selective cartoons that will have a positive impact on them. By doing so, parents can help reinforce positive behaviour and discourage negative behaviour in their children. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should encourage television stations in Nigeria to produce air and advertise contents of local cartoons that reflect Nigeria's environment and culture.

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## Comparative Study of Patterns of Exposure to Local and Foreign Cartoons by Primary School Pupils in Awka

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