



Beyond Entertainment: Exploring Enculturation and Behavioural Influences in Children

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of cartoon on children's cultural values, behaviours, and social interactions, providing insights into how animated characters impact young audiences' worldview and social conduct. Based on survey responses from children aged 6-13, this research explores the influence of beloved cartoon characters on children's emulation of behaviours, adoption of character traits, and the desire to replicate favourite characters' settings and language. Findings indicate that children are inspired by characters' positive and negative qualities, which shape their social behaviours and perception of cultural values. The study highlights the critical role of understanding the psychological and social implications of cartoon consumption in shaping child development and offers recommendations for parents and educators to channel these influences positively.

Keywords: cartoons, children, cultural influence, social learning, child development, enculturation

Introduction

In the digital age, children are increasingly immersed in animated media, with cartoons among the most frequently consumed forms of entertainment. Beyond mere amusement, cartoons shape children's social and cultural understanding in ways that extend deep into their developmental psychology. Unlike traditional forms of



storytelling, animated media combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements that capture young viewers' attention and imagination, making it a particularly potent medium for transmitting social norms, behaviours, and cultural values. As children watch cartoons, they are often exposed to a variety of characters, storylines, and interactions that model diverse ways of navigating social, moral, and emotional landscapes. For young viewers, these characters become influential figures whose behaviours and values may be internalized and mirrored in their own lives, forming a foundational part of their worldview.

The developmental impact of cartoon media is supported by psychological theories, notably Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which suggests that children learn behaviours by observing and imitating those they find appealing or socially rewarded. This theory emphasizes that children's repeated exposure to certain character traits, actions, and consequences can reinforce behaviours as desirable or acceptable. Characters in animated shows that exhibit superpowers, moral integrity, or unique attributes are particularly compelling for children aged 6 to 13, an age range characterized by rapid cognitive, social, and emotional development. At this stage, children are in a crucial phase of identity formation, seeking out role models who help them interpret the world around them. Cartoon characters who demonstrate bravery, kindness, intelligence, or resilience can thus become aspirational figures that children admire and wish to emulate.

In addition to social learning, cartoons contribute significantly to children's enculturation- the process by which individuals learn and internalize the norms and values of their society. Cultural messages embedded within cartoons offer children early insights into societal values, expectations, and acceptable behaviours, influencing their developing sense of self and their relationships with others. For example, cartoons may portray specific gender roles, family structures, and cultural symbols that, over time, inform children's perceptions of social order and cultural identity. This is especially relevant in today's globalized media landscape, where children are exposed not only to domestic but also international animated content. As a result, children may assimilate diverse cultural perspectives, fostering either a broadened worldview or, at times, a confusing blend of conflicting values.

This study investigates the extent to which children identify with and emulate cartoon characters, examining how specific attributes, behaviours, and values are internalized and expressed in children's social interactions and personal perceptions. By analysing the appeal of particular character traits, including positive qualities (such as courage and kindness) and negative ones (such as



aggression and deceit), this research seeks to understand how animated media shapes children's behavioural patterns and cultural perceptions. This research is of particular importance to educators, parents, and media creators who play roles in guiding young audiences' media consumption. For educators and parents, an awareness of these influences can aid in fostering healthy media consumption and encouraging constructive character emulation. For content creators, understanding these effects can inform the development of content that aligns with educational and pro-social goals, supporting a balanced approach to media that encourages healthy child development and positive cultural integration.

By examining these influences through the lens of Social Learning Theory, this study provides insights into the psychological and social mechanisms that underpin children's interactions with animated media. The findings aim to deepen understanding of the ways cartoons shape children's emerging identities, social relationships, and cultural awareness, offering recommendations for both media literacy education and the development of animated content that promotes positive social and cultural values.

Review of Literature

This research focuses on examining cartoons as reinforces of enculturation in children. A thorough review of various studies has been conducted to explore how cartoons influence behaviours, cultural assimilation, and the enculturation process. Although substantial research addresses the impacts of violence in cartoons, studies specifically analysing cartoons in the context of enculturation remain limited. This review categorizes the discussion by theme, beginning with the historical development of cartoons.

The Evolution of Cartoons

Donahue (n.d.) highlights Snow White as one of the first major cartoon characters on the big screen, alongside characters like Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, and Bugs Bunny created by notable animators such as Walt Disney, William Hanna, and Joseph Barbera (Furniss, 2007). Early cartoons were designed for broad audiences, containing humour accessible to all ages. However, Kellogg (1992) notes a shift in their appeal, as cartoons increasingly targeted children alone, losing their multi-generational reach. Cartoons have become a primary entertainment source for children, often fostering strong attachments (Kemnitz, 1973). Today, animations are commonly used in educational and marketing contexts, conveying targeted messages to specific audiences (Ginman, 2003).



Effects of Cartoons on Behaviour and Social Learning

Klein and Shiffman (2006) describe how children's preferences for cartoon characters are shaped by traits like gender, appearance, and behaviors, influencing their own perceptions of social interactions. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2009) explain that children often adopt language, behaviours, and social norms observed in cartoons. This influence extends to gender, with cartoons often conveying stereotypical roles that can shape children's understanding of gender. Gökçearsan (2010) found that cartoons contribute significantly to children's gender role development, with male characters frequently occupying more prominent and diverse roles than female characters, potentially perpetuating gender biases.

Hassan and Daniyal (2013) examine how children emulate favourite characters' behaviours, often pressuring parents to purchase merchandise associated with these characters. Notably, violence is pervasive, even in comedic cartoons. Cartoons influence children's psychology, values, and behaviours, often embedding foreign cultural influences (Zakia, 2016). Ghilzai et al. (2017) found that most children imitate cartoon scenarios in real life, which can sometimes lead to unpleasant consequences when mimicry turns violent or confrontational.

Mahsud, Rawan, and Yaser (2009) observe gender-based differences in how children respond to cartoon violence, with boys tending toward more aggressive responses. This trend suggests that exposure to aggressive cartoon characters can have adverse effects on children's social behaviours and attitudes. Yousaf, Shehzad, and Hassan (2015) further highlight the influence of television cartoons on children's psychological development and language use, concluding that many children adopt inappropriate language or behaviours from repeated cartoon exposure.

Enculturation and Cartoons

Enculturation is defined as the process by which individuals learn their cultural norms through exposure, observation, and social instruction. This process allows individuals to assimilate the values, practices, and expectations of their culture. Roff (1989) emphasizes that cartoons serve as modern-day myths that convey and reinforce cultural values, especially those related to gender. Cartoons often promote idealized gender roles aligned with societal norms, as seen in children's perception of American cultural ideals. For example, Kalayci (2015) found that the Turkish cartoon 'Pepee' perpetuates gender stereotypes, as activities like nurturing are attributed to female characters, while males engage in more active or adventurous roles.



Gelen, Duran, and Ünal (2016) observe that while ‘Pepee’ incorporates Turkish cultural values, it may be challenging for preschool children to comprehend certain abstract cultural themes, limiting the cartoon’s efficacy as a cultural education tool.

Theoretical Framework

Children spend a significant amount of time watching cartoons, finding great enjoyment in them. This study incorporates several foundational theories to explore the influence of cartoons on young audiences.

Cultivation Theory

According to George Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory, media has an impact on its audience, though this influence accumulates over time rather than being immediate. Gerbner describes cultivation as “the independent contribution television viewing makes to viewer’s conceptions of social reality” (Gerbner, 1998). The theory explains this influence on two levels: the first-order effect and the second-order effect. The first-order effect involves general beliefs about the world, while the second-order effect pertains to specific attitudes, such as views on law, order, and personal safety.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory suggests that children can adopt aggressive behaviours by observing characters on television. This theory posits that individuals have the capacity to acquire behaviours both appropriately and inappropriately, influenced by real-life experiences and exposure to mass media (Bandura, 1986).

Agenda Setting Theory

The Agenda Setting Theory examines the relationship between media and society, describing how media shape public attention through various channels, including news, cartoons, and commercials. This theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw, highlights the media’s role in directing public focus toward particular issues or ideas, thereby influencing societal priorities and perceptions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Despite their popularity, cartoons have raised concerns about their influence on children’s behaviour and cultural values. Studies reveal that cartoons not only provide entertainment but also serve as channels for cultural transmission and commercial influence, shaping children’s lifestyles and consumer habits. However,



most studies focus on children's preferences rather than the underlying cultural shifts influenced by cartoon exposure. This study, therefore, aims to address the role of cartoons in enculturation and the emergence of a cartoon-based subculture in children's everyday lives, especially in nuclear family settings.

Research questions include whether cartoons play a significant role in children's enculturation process, influencing changes in their behaviours, language, and values, and if such programs contribute to the development of a new cultural framework within families. The findings may aid content creators in producing educational content while offering insights into how cartoons impact social development in children.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the influence of animated media on children's social behaviours, cultural perceptions, and self-concept, with particular attention to the characters they admire and behaviours they emulate. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative observations, the research seeks to capture a comprehensive view of cartoon media's impact on young viewers.

The study involved a sample of 250 children, aged 6 to 13, from South India (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka), selected based on their significant exposure to animated content. This age group was chosen because of its active engagement with cartoons, a common form of entertainment. The sample was purposefully drawn from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to reflect the varied media consumption patterns across different demographics. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the influence of cartoons on children from different walks of life. Parental consent was obtained for each participant, and assistance was provided when needed to ensure that the children fully understood the survey questions.

To gather data on the children's media preferences and the behavioural influences of cartoons, a combination of structured surveys, questionnaires, and observations were used. The survey design included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, which allowed for a detailed exploration of children's favourite cartoon shows, the traits they admired in characters and the behaviours or phrases they frequently imitated. Questions were also included to assess children's perceptions of the moral qualities, bravery, humour, and social interactions of their favourite characters. This approach aimed to identify the key attributes that children



found appealing and were most likely to internalize.

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The surveys included multiple-choice questions, enabling the participants to mark the specific behaviours or their admiration for particular characters. Qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questions that explored children's deeper perceptions of their favourite characters and the emotional or social impact these shows had on them.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive methods to analyse the quantitative responses, providing a clear picture of intensity of children's engagement with cartoon characters and their behaviours. The qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, key themes, and insights into the emotional and social dimensions of children's engagement with animated content. By combining both methods, the study ensured a holistic approach to understanding the influence of cartoons on children in South India, while also highlighting broader trends that may apply globally.

The study also included a subset of case studies where detailed observations were conducted to explore children's interactions and character emulation in natural settings, such as at school or in social play environments. These observations focused on how cartoon-based behaviours emerged in children's interactions with peers and their responses to different social situations. Participant and non-participant observation techniques were utilized, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the nuances in behaviour that surveys alone may not capture.

Observation and Results

The data reflect trends in how children interact with cartoon, the characters they admire, and the behaviours they choose to emulate. Observations also reveal the potential influence of prolonged exposure to animated content on children's perception of reality, behaviours, and cultural values. By analysing the survey responses, this section examines specific patterns related to children's character preferences, the degree of behaviour imitation, and the broader social and cultural implications of cartoon consumption.

Character Preference and Desired Attributes

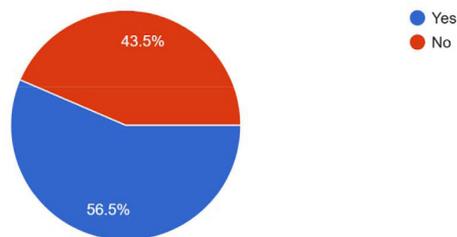
The survey findings indicate a strong preference among children for cartoon characters with extraordinary abilities and unique traits, reflecting a fascination with the fantastical elements inherent in animated media. *Little Singham* emerged



as the most favoured cartoon show among children, accounting for approximately 30% of responses. This preference highlights its significant cultural influence, particularly in regional contexts where the show's themes of heroism and justice resonate strongly with young audiences. *Tom and Jerry* retained its timeless appeal, with 20% of children identifying it as their favourite. This enduring popularity underscores the universal appeal of humour and the dynamic interplay between its characters. Other notable mentions included *Chhota Bheem*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*, and *Doraemon*, each reflecting diverse tastes influenced by both local and global content.

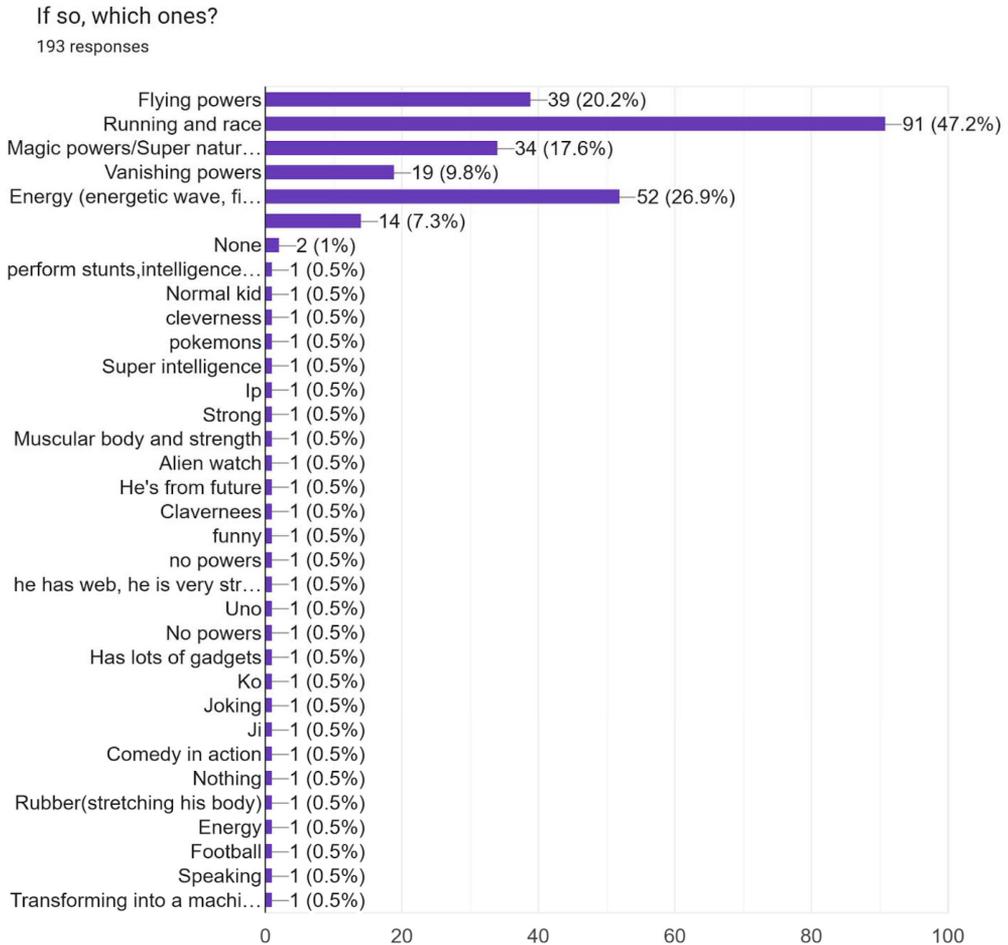
The characters in these cartoons offer children a blend of relatable humour and extraordinary capabilities, such as running at superhuman speeds, flying, or using magical gadgets- qualities that resonate with young audiences.

Does your favourite character have superpowers?
248 responses



A striking observation was the children's fascination with characters possessing superpowers. About 56.5% of participants expressed a preference for characters with physical prowess, such as running and flying abilities, which align with common themes in action-oriented and fantasy cartoons. Additionally, nearly half of the children favoured characters that embodied traits like "strength" and "funny." These preferences underscore a common appeal in animated content: the blending of adventure, strength, and resilience in ways that captivate children's imagination, particularly as they explore ideas of heroism and capability in their own lives.

Among those who admired super powered characters, common abilities included flying, speed, strength, and magical powers. Traits like agility and energy-based skills were frequently mentioned, reflecting children's admiration for dynamic and action-oriented characters.

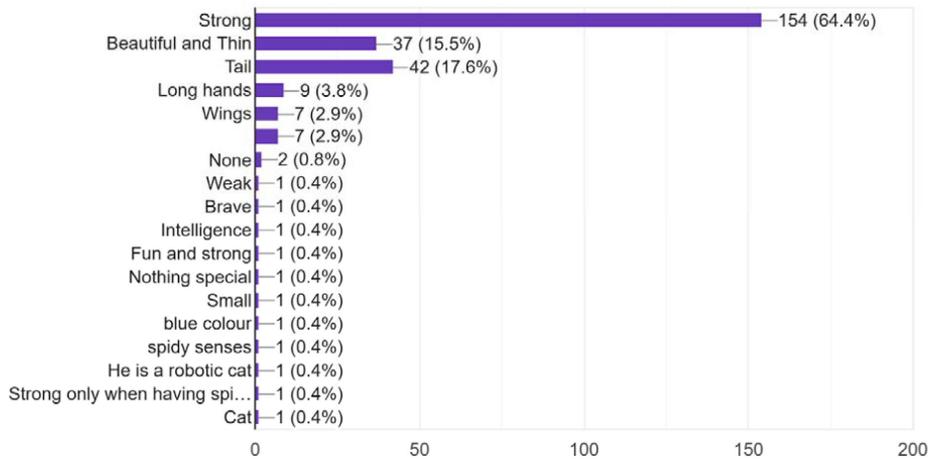


The results of this study reveal that children's preferences for their favourite cartoon characters are strongly influenced by the characters' physical traits and special skills. A majority of children (64.4%) associate their favourite characters with strength, reflecting their admiration for power and heroism. Other traits, such as having a tail (17.6%) or being beautiful and thin (15.5%), also resonate with children, highlighting their varied perceptions of what makes a character appealing. These traits, whether physical or related to appearance, often represent ideals children may aspire to or associate with positive qualities like protection, beauty, or uniqueness.



Does this character have any particular physical quality?

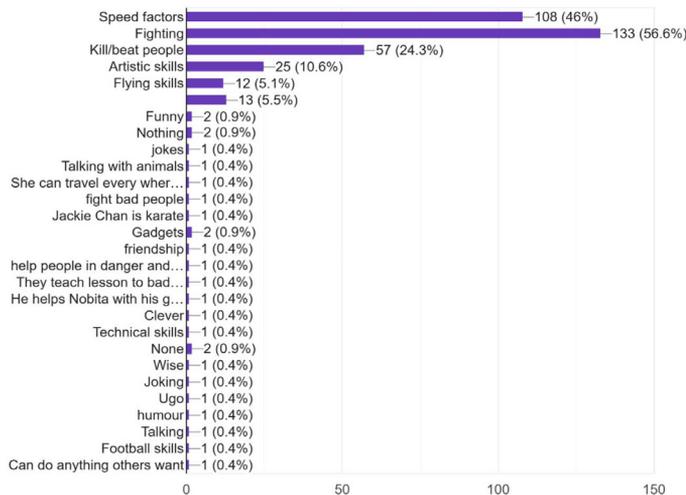
239 responses



In addition to physical characteristics, special skills play a significant role in shaping children’s preferences. Fighting skills, problem-solving abilities, and speed were frequently mentioned as the most admired traits, suggesting that children value characters that are not only strong but also clever, quick-thinking, and capable of overcoming challenges. Other skills like humour, cleverness, and teamwork were also emphasized, reflecting children’s appreciation for characters that exhibit qualities of cooperation, intelligence, and wit.

What are their special skills?

235 responses





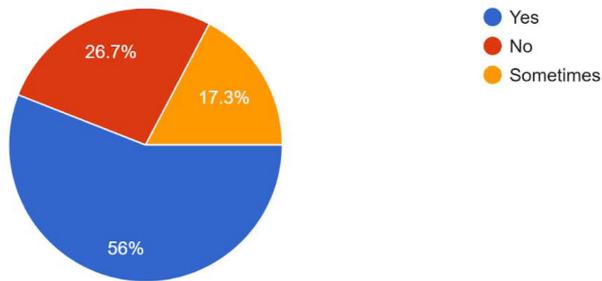
Emulation of Behaviours and Social Learning

The data also revealed that cartoons serve as significant models for social learning, with many children actively imitating behaviours and attitudes displayed by their favourite characters. Behavioural emulation emerged as a prominent theme, with children incorporating these influences into their play and social interactions:

- *Behavioral Imitation*

Do you like to imitate the powers of the character?

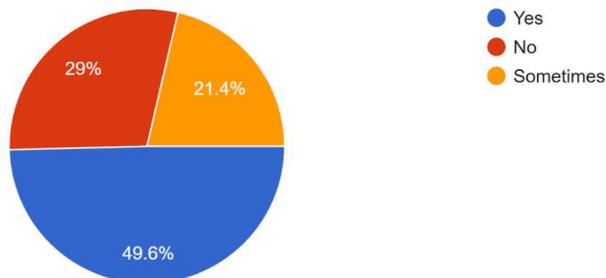
243 responses



A notable portion of the children (56%) reported that they enjoy imitating the powers of their favourite cartoon characters. This behaviour goes beyond mere observation, indicating that children actively seek to embody the abilities they admire in these characters. Such imaginative play becomes a key part of how children connect with and process the media content they engage with.

Do you behave like your favourite character?

248 responses





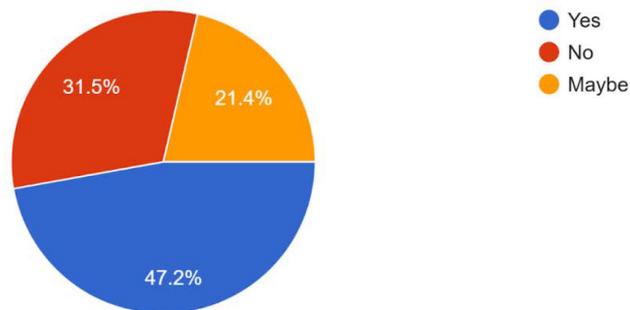
Additionally, about 49.6% of the children mentioned that they imitate the behaviour of their favourite characters, which includes adopting specific actions, values, or attitudes such as bravery, kindness, and humour. This suggests that children are not just passive viewers of cartoons, but active participants who internalize and apply the character traits they find appealing.

- *Catchphrases and Iconic Lines:*

Nearly half (47.2%) of the children revealed that they enjoy repeating the words or catchphrases used by their favourite characters. This highlights the deep emotional and social attachment children form with these characters, as they incorporate memorable lines into their everyday language. Iconic catchphrases like “*Police ki Vardi, Sher ka Dum, Naam Hai Mera Little Singham*” and “*My name is Little Singham*” were particularly popular, with many children repeating these lines to reflect the heroism, bravery, and strength of the characters.

Do you like to repeat the words your favourite character uses the most?

248 responses

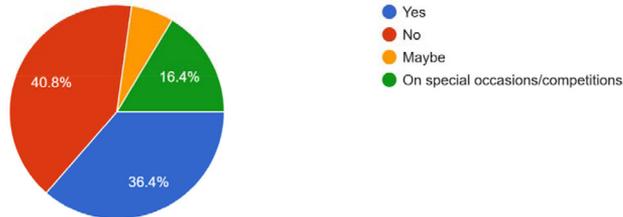


Other commonly cited lines, such as “*Panja Attack,*” “*Sher ki Shayaris,*” and “*Aata Majhi Satakli,*” emphasize the rhythmic, catchy nature of these phrases, which appeal to children. Additionally, lines like “*I am a naughty boy,*” “*Meowww,*” and “*Let’s Go*” represent the humorous or mischievous qualities of certain characters, further indicating that children are drawn to both the strength and the playful personalities of their favourite figures.



- *Desire to Dress like Favourite Characters:*

Do you wish to dress like them?
250 responses

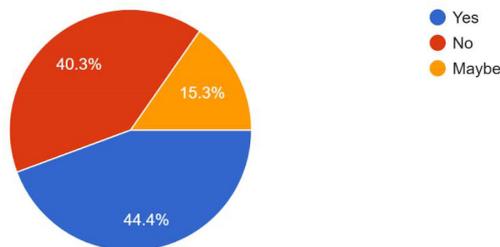


Children's responses about dressing like their favourite characters were divided. Around 36.4% expressed a general desire to dress like their favourite characters, while 40.8% indicated no interest. Others preferred to dress like their characters only on special occasions (16.4%) or were unsure (6.4%). This suggests that while many children appreciate the idea of embodying the physical appearance of their beloved characters, it may not always be a regular desire. For some, dressing like their character may be reserved for specific occasions or moments of role-playing.

- *Food Preferences and Imitation:*

Approximately 44.4% of children expressed an interest in eating their favourite character's favourite food. This illustrates the extent to which cartoons influence children's daily choices and preferences, extending beyond behaviour and appearance to include aspects of lifestyle, such as food. The desire to consume foods associated with beloved characters shows that children often seek to align themselves with their characters, reinforcing their emotional bond and extending their imaginative experiences beyond the screen.

Would you like to eat your favourite character's favourite food?
248 responses



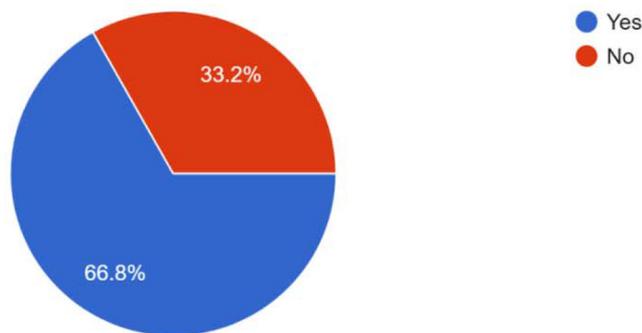


- *Desire to Live with Favourite Characters:*

A significant majority of children (66.8%) expressed a desire to live with their favourite cartoon characters. The reasons for this varied, but many children were drawn to the characters' positive traits, such as strength, bravery, cleverness, and their ability to protect and help others.

Do you want to live with your favourite characters?

250 responses



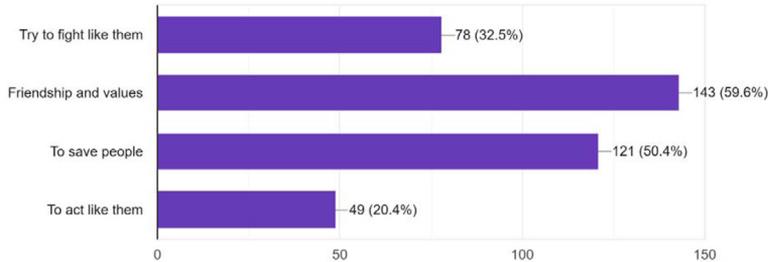
For example, characters like *Little Singham* were admired for their sense of justice and heroism, while others appreciated characters for their humour, helpfulness, and powers. Some children highlighted the fun, adventures, and safety associated with living alongside these characters, while others appreciated the chance to experience beautiful places and exciting scenarios. This desire reflects the emotional connection children have with their favourite characters and their longing to experience the qualities they admire in real life.

The findings underscore the strong influence that cartoon characters have on children's behaviour, language, and preferences. Through imitation of powers, actions, words, and even food choices, children actively engage with the characters they admire. These characters serve as important models for social learning, guiding children in how to express themselves, what to value, and how to navigate the world around them. Whether through repeating iconic catchphrases, dressing like characters, or aspiring to live with them, children clearly internalize and emulate the behaviours and qualities of their favourite cartoon figures.



Cultural Impact and Learned Values

What did you learn from cartoons?
240 responses



Many children emphasized learning critical social and moral lessons through cartoons. A majority (59.6%) reported gaining insights into friendship and values through the relationships and interactions among characters. These stories often highlight themes of trust, cooperation, and kindness, which children identify with and emulate in their everyday lives. Heroic themes, such as saving and helping others, were noted by 50.4% of the children, demonstrating the influence of altruistic and protective behaviours portrayed by their favourite characters. These depictions inspire children to adopt similar attitudes, encouraging them to stand up for others and act selflessly.

A notable portion of children (32.5%) mentioned being motivated by the strength and resilience of cartoon characters, particularly those depicted in action sequences or challenging situations. While this often translates into playful imitations of fight scenes, it reflects a deeper aspiration to embody bravery and determination. The findings also highlight the appeal of action-oriented characters such as *Little Singham* or *Shiva*, who frequently engage in brave and adventurous activities. Many children reported replicating behaviours like play-fighting, simulated chases, or other dynamic scenarios, demonstrating their admiration for resilience and bravery. This behaviour suggests that children not only identify with these characters but also internalize their traits as a form of self-expression and learning. However, the tendency to emulate aggressive or high-risk behaviours raises concerns about the potential negative impact of cartoons. For example, repeated exposure to fighting scenes might encourage imitative behaviours that are not always socially constructive, such as overzealous competitiveness or confrontational tendencies.



On the other hand, some children (20.4%) shared that they imitate actions, gestures, or behaviours of their favourite characters, highlighting their emotional connection and the characters' role as influential figures. Humorous scenes, including the playful antics of *Tom and Jerry* or *Mr. Bean*, were appreciated for their light-hearted entertainment. Acts of kindness and heroism resonated strongly with children, who cherished scenes of characters helping others, such as *Bheem* supporting his friends or Popeye rescuing people after gaining strength from spinach. These portrayals of compassion and bravery further reinforce positive social behaviours.

Beyond Entertainment: Imagining Ideal Cartoon Characters

When asked to design their own cartoon character, children's responses reflect a strong preference for characters that are brave, powerful, and capable of extraordinary feats. *Superheroes* dominate the list, with many children envisioning characters with superpowers such as strength, speed, flying abilities, and time-traveling powers. A recurring theme is the creation of characters like *Little Singham*, indicating that children admire heroes who are brave, strong, and capable of protecting others.

Some children prefer *animal characters*, often with special abilities, such as the "*Fierce Fox*", a small but mighty fox with cleverness and agility, or "*Little Lion*". These choices highlight an affinity for animals with human-like traits, allowing for a blend of relatability and fantasy.

In addition to superheroes, there is a notable preference for characters that embody qualities of kindness, honesty, and helpfulness, such as *a superhero dog* or *a kind princess*. These characters reflect values of compassion, teamwork, and moral integrity.

There are also responses that favour characters from specific genres like *fairy tales*, *anime*, and *action adventures* (e.g., *Power Rangers* and *Tom with superpowers*), showcasing children's interest in dynamic and fantastical worlds. Some children even envision *dual-world characters* that can switch between two forms or universes, a concept rooted in creativity and complexity.

Children's ideal cartoon characters reflect a mix of bravery, strength, intelligence, and compassion. They tend to create characters that can perform extraordinary feats, from superpowers to time travel, while also embodying positive qualities like kindness and justice. The combination of *superheroes*, *animal characters*, and



adventurous themes highlights children's desire for characters that not only entertain but also inspire them to be brave, clever, and caring. These responses demonstrate the significance of imagination in children's development, as they draw from both real-world aspirations and fantastical ideals.

Cartoons play a pivotal role in the enculturation process during childhood, shaping moral values, resilience, and social cooperation. However, the influence of cartoons is not exclusively positive. The replication of fighting scenes and aggressive actions, while symbolizing bravery, can occasionally blur the line between playful behaviour and aggression. Excessive focus on such elements might unintentionally normalize conflict as a primary means of problem-solving, requiring careful guidance from parents and educators to contextualize these portrayals.

By exposing children to narratives that reflect cultural norms and ideals, cartoons contribute significantly to their understanding of acceptable behaviours and societal expectations. The admiration children hold for their favourite characters' actions and values underscores the powerful role these stories play in influencing behaviour, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships.

Cartoons not only entertain but also act as informal educators, instilling essential social norms such as teamwork, honesty, and compassion. However, the enculturation process facilitated by cartoons is not without challenges. The frequent depiction of aggressive behaviours in action-oriented cartoons may inadvertently reinforce such tendencies among impressionable viewers. This duality highlights the importance of parental involvement in monitoring and guiding children's media consumption; ensuring exposure to content that promotes positive enculturation rather than adverse influences.

Some animated series incorporate competitive or confrontational elements as central plot devices, with conflicts often resolved through humour-laden, exaggerated confrontations. This pattern risks imparting a more combative view of social interaction, where competitiveness and playful antagonism become normalized. When children internalize these behaviours without the guidance to differentiate fiction from reality, there is a risk of confusion regarding appropriate ways to handle conflicts in real-life settings.

For content creators, the responsibility lies in crafting narratives that seamlessly blend entertainment with cultural and moral lessons. Characters and storylines should aim to balance action and adventure with values that inspire empathy, cooperation, and resilience. Future research could delve deeper into the long-term effects of



cartoons on children's cognitive, social, and cultural development, providing insights into how media influences their integration into societal frameworks and values.

The findings suggest that cartoons serve as powerful socializing agents, with children adopting both positive and negative behaviours from the characters they admire. Positive emulation includes traits such as kindness, bravery, and loyalty, which can enhance children's social interactions and ethical development. However, the normalization of mild aggression or competitive behaviours in some cartoons presents a potential challenge, underscoring the importance of balanced media consumption and parental guidance. This nuanced influence of cartoons demonstrates the medium's role in shaping young viewers' cultural and social perspectives, pointing to the need for further investigation into how specific cartoon content impacts children's developing values and social understanding.

Discussion

The survey results indicate that cartoons play an influential role in shaping children's social behaviours and cultural perspectives. Positive portrayals of friendship, bravery, and problem-solving were particularly impactful. These findings align with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that children internalize behaviours that appear rewarding or socially approved within cartoon narratives. For instance, children who admire cooperative characters—such as those found in shows emphasizing teamwork and collaboration—may develop a stronger sense of teamwork themselves. Similarly, children drawn to action-oriented characters, like *Little Singham*, may cultivate values of bravery and resilience, encouraging them to face challenges in their own lives.

Moreover, the ability of cartoons to present complex social scenarios in a digestible format allows children to learn important social cues and conflict resolution strategies. Characters that navigate disagreements or demonstrate empathy provide valuable lessons that extend beyond the screen. For example, the depiction of diverse friendships and inclusive behaviours can enhance children's understanding of different cultures and social dynamics, fostering a more empathetic worldview. By engaging with relatable characters and scenarios, children can practice social skills, enhancing their overall emotional intelligence and adaptability in real-world situations.

The enculturation process, whereby children learn the values, beliefs, and



norms of their culture-can be significantly influenced by the media they consume. Cartoons often reflect societal values and cultural narratives, providing children with frameworks to understand their identity and role within their community. For instance, characters representing various cultural backgrounds can instil a sense of pride and belonging while promoting cultural diversity and acceptance. This engagement with different cultural perspectives can enrich children's understanding of the world and encourage them to embrace inclusivity.

Additionally, the messages conveyed through cartoons can reinforce societal norms and expectations, shaping children's perceptions of appropriate behaviour. For example, when characters display kindness and respect towards one another, children are more likely to internalize these behaviours as part of their cultural learning. Conversely, negative portrayals can lead to the internalization of harmful stereotypes, which can influence children's attitudes toward others and affect their social interactions.

By understanding the enculturation process, we can appreciate how cartoons not only entertain but also serve as powerful tools for shaping children's cultural identity. This understanding highlights the importance of providing children with access to diverse and positive representations in media, enabling them to develop a well-rounded and inclusive worldview.

Conversely, the study highlights potential behavioural risks associated with cartoons featuring conflict-based humour or competition. While these elements are often designed to entertain, children may misinterpret pranks, fights, and exaggerated expressions as acceptable social behaviours. This dual influence suggests that parental guidance is essential in contextualizing what is observed on screen and reinforcing positive behaviours over confrontational ones.

For instance, children might emulate aggressive behaviours seen in cartoons, believing them to be a valid form of conflict resolution. The normalization of such behaviours can lead to challenges in social interactions, as children may struggle to navigate their relationships without resorting to aggression or confrontation. Furthermore, the portrayal of stereotypes or negative role models can perpetuate harmful beliefs about certain groups or behaviours, making it critical for parents and caregivers to actively discuss the content and its implications with their children.

Given the potential for cartoons to act as both positive and negative role models, the results point to a growing need for media literacy programs targeted at children and parents. By educating parents on the role of cartoons in behavioural



development, they can better guide their children in interpreting and contextualizing these influences. Encouraging open dialogues about the messages conveyed in cartoons can help children critically analyse what they watch, fostering a deeper understanding of social norms and values.

Moreover, media creators could harness the popularity of animated characters to reinforce constructive behaviours and cultural values, such as cooperation, honesty, and perseverance. By integrating educational content that highlights moral lessons and ethical dilemmas into popular cartoons, creators can effectively use their platforms to foster positive development. Programs designed to promote social-emotional learning, where characters face relatable challenges and demonstrate resilience, can have a profound impact on young viewers.

Additionally, collaborations between educators, psychologists, and content creators could yield cartoons specifically designed to address contemporary social issues, making learning relevant and engaging for children. These educational initiatives could not only provide entertainment but also equip children with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of modern society.

Conclusion

This study provides substantial evidence that cartoons serve as significant cultural and behavioural influences on children. Beyond mere entertainment, cartoon characters embody role models for social interaction, profoundly shaping children's behaviours, values, and cultural perceptions. Through their narratives and characterizations, cartoons communicate various social norms and expectations, making them powerful tools in the enculturation process.

While many cartoons promote positive attributes such as bravery, teamwork, and friendship, they can also introduce less desirable behaviours, such as aggression or materialism. This duality underscores the critical need for mindful cartoon consumption, encouraging caregivers and educators to engage children in discussions about the content they consume. Equipping children with critical thinking skills is essential, enabling them to discern and reflect on the values and behaviours portrayed in these animated narratives.

Furthermore, this study highlights the necessity for future research to delve deeper into the longitudinal impact of cartoon consumption on children's social and emotional development. Long-term studies can provide insights into how early exposure to various cartoon themes influences behaviours and attitudes as children



grow into adolescence and adulthood, thereby informing our understanding of the enculturation process.

The study is region-specific, as the data was collected from South India, where cultural, social, and linguistic factors play a significant role in how media content is received. However, many of the cartoons analysed, such as *Tom and Jerry*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*, and *Popeye*, share universal themes that resonate beyond regional boundaries. These shows typically focus on basic, globally recognizable narratives such as conflict resolution, friendship, rivalry, and humour. The simplicity and visual nature of these cartoons make them accessible to children across various cultures, ensuring their widespread appeal.

While the local shows like *Little Singham*, *Chotta Bheem* shapes how children in South India interpret these shows-through regional language adaptations, cultural references, and social norms-the core themes of these cartoons remain consistent worldwide. The humour, moral lessons, and universal values depicted in these shows allow them to transcend regional differences, making the findings of this study applicable not only to South India but also to other global contexts. Therefore, the results of this study reflect both regional specificity and the global applicability of the themes present in children's media.

Moreover, there is a significant opportunity for integrating educational content within popular cartoons to leverage their wide reach and influence. By designing cartoons that not only entertain but also educate, creators can foster environments where children learn important life skills, cultural awareness, and ethical decision-making. Collaborations between educators, psychologists, and animators could yield valuable content that promotes positive development and enriches children's learning experiences.

While cartoons undeniably play a pivotal role in children's lives, it is imperative to approach their consumption with awareness. Understanding the complexities of these animated influences can lead to more responsible viewing practices, ultimately enhancing the developmental outcomes for children in our increasingly media-driven society. By recognizing cartoons as critical agents of enculturation, we can better guide children toward becoming well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to their communities.



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