

A Study on impact of 'ChotaBheem' on children's social behavior

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Abstract

Today children view hundreds of animation characters with different assigned behaviors in cartoon programs. Children's television programs today are not only source of entertainment but also source of learning for our children. This study analyzes the content of popular Indian cartoon - ChotaBheem. The main focus is to examine the impact of ChotaBheem on children's social behavior through content analysis and participatory observation method. It also analyzes the impact of animated characters on the product liking & preferences of children and on perceptions of parents. Study concludes that cartoon series ChotaBheem influences the children's social behavior and product preferences.

Keywords: *Academic research, Content Analysis, Social behavior, ChotaBheem etc*

Introduction

Cartoons are considered one of the best ways of entertainment and amusement for children. Children spend most of their leisure time watching cartoons. The virtual cartoon characters try to make the children happy in multiple ways such as telling different stories, attractive wardrobe, action, language etc. Television brings their dream world to the magic screen.

Establishing a bond with children by telling stories is a practice that spans over centuries. Even today, when we hear the words "Once upon a time", we can recall the same words said by our grandparents or parents to us. Through narration moral stories, we could cultivate positive values in children. Today, television also has

taken an active role in teaching many things to children such as how to or how not to deal with others, solve personal problems, make friends and make simple decisions skills etc., In the present scenario, watching television is not only an entertainment; rather it reflects the socio-cultural phenomenon of the society.

'ChotaBheem' is a cartoon aired on POGO channel. ChotaBheem is a popular cartoon character nowadays among the Indian kids. ChotaBheem is a phenomenon for the children of today. Some look at him as a role model. 'Bheem, Bheem, Bheem... ChotaBheem' is a song that is famous among Indian children's. Bheem is an Indian mythological character. He is one of the 5 Pandavas of the epic Mahabharata. However, the cartoon character ChotaBheem has no resemblance with the old mythological character Bheem except his strength. ChotaBheem knows how to respect elders, he always encourages his friends and he is a brave boy, who is never afraid of any bad situation. This study will try to explore impact of ChotaBheem on children's behavior.

Review of Literature

Gokcearslan (2010) studied the Effect of Cartoon Movies on Children's Gender Development. He argued that Funny cartoon films have the necessary resources to tap into the educational aspect. (Stutts&Hunnicut, 1987) suggests focusing on children of two to seven years of age. The reason is that during this period they become increasingly susceptible to influence by images and symbolic processes, including those from advertising, and begin to make judgments about the various products they might use in the future.

Recognition of select cartoon trade characters tends to increase with the age of the child. The level of recognition and favorable attitude towards the product were positively associated with age (Richard Mizersk 1995). Parents often find it difficult to deny their children food that is endorsed by their favorite cartoon characters or celebrities on television (Solomon 1996).

Television has the control on children's metacognitive, shared, expressive and other behaviors (Mares & Woodard, 2001). Children show more interest in watching television programs which consist of several child characters (Schmitt, Anderson & Collins, 1999). Kannan (2014) studies about the depiction of Indian cultural values in the popular cartoon program 'ChotaBheem'.

According to Bennett (1995) children must hear moral stories in order to develop good values and moral literacy. Believers of conventional character education state that listening to moral stories in one of the important aspect of moral education. A child acquires the idea about how vital it is to "live" with a good quality and getting a better comprehension of the moral life by reading or listening to a moral story (Narvaez, 2002). Advertising can influence how children view and obtain appropriate models for the adult world, including concepts of appropriate products to use now and in the future (Belk, Mayer, and Driscoll 1984).

From the review of literature it is obvious that cartoon characters have a considerable effect on children. However studies related to impact of cartoons on social behavior of children are minimal. The purpose of this study is to provide much more specific way of looking at the content of children's most favorite cartoon

television program - ChotaBheem. The researcher has focused this study on the impact of 'ChotaBheem' on kid's social behavior.

Research Questions

- Does the ChotaBheem program teach moral values to children?
- What kind of stories does ChotaBheem program tell?
- How ChotaBheem influences the product liking and preferences of children?
- Are heavy viewers of this cartoon more aggressive than low viewers?
- Do children prefer ChotaBheem than physical activities?

Aims and Objectives

- To investigate whether pictures of 'ChotaBheem' characters on products influences young children's product preferences.
- To provide much more specific way of looking at the content of children's most favorite cartoon television program - ChotaBheem, to determine the degree and specification of moral values in a story to children.
- To explore the impact of 'ChotaBheem' on the daily basis activities of children.
- To check the level of aggression in the children after watching this cartoon.

Methodology and Sample

A content analysis of some episodes of ChotaBheem, Participatory

observation of kids and interview with parents and teachers are the methodologies used in this research project. Content Analysis is described as the scientific study of content of communication. It is the study of the content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in messages.

This study will analyze the content of ChotaBheem cartoon program which is aired on the POGO channel. A content analysis of selected 25 episodes of the programme from May to August 2015 will be done. The content analysis methodology will analyse the first two research questions. The second part of the research uses Participatory Observation for conducting the study. Participatory observation are non experimental studies or inquires that are conducted as the subjects are engaged in the natural course of their lives. Here researchers study groups by becoming a part of the group. The participatory observation includes recording behaviors of six children (three girls and three boys) from age group 8 to 12. The second part also includes personal interviewing of the parents of children and school teachers.

Theoretical Perspective

Social learning theory

According to Albert Bandura (1977), social learning theory establishes the relationship between observation and observers action. Also observers learn many things by observing what the fiction character does in the program. Cartoon television programs are designed for children and are repeatedly implementing social learning theory.

Through this theory, we acquire, maintain and modify behaviors that we see others perform. For example, 'ChotaBheem', the protagonist is an honest boy and he is saving friendships forever. So it can influence children's learning of problem solving skills and quality of being honest. This way the concept of social learning is applied.

Labeling theory

It is an extension of social learning theory and also known as social reaction theory. According to Howard Becker, Labeling theory involves how learning can occur by attaching or imposing labels, titles and attributes (real or unreal) to others. Labeling theory is used in this study to learn how popular cartoon programme ChotaBheem affects children's social behavior.

Cultivation theory

According to George Gerbner "the primary proposition of cultivation theory states that the more time people spend living in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on television". Television cultivates from childhood the very predispositions and preferences that used and acquired from primary sources. The repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment. Cultivation (ChotaBheem) leaves children a misperception of what is true in our world.

By using the above mentioned three theories, research explores the question of observational learning of children through watching cartoons.

Findings and Analysis

Part 1 – Content Analysis

The overall ChotaBheem programs are based on short stories or on short incidents which are held in and around Dholakpur. The program, which describes the feats of ChotaBheem and his team of friends, is an original co-production between Turner International India and Hyderabad-based Green Gold studios. Fresh episodes are telecast in the prime time zone that is every day evening 6 p.m. The first part of research is carried out by analyzing 25 different episodes of ChotaBheem. The first part uses Content analysis methodology.

We have listened to stories from our parents and grandparents. Those stories had a moral message at the end. At the same time, the concept and the characters in those stories were real and it could be adapted from the real life situations. Today, the content in the children's television's program are turned into a commercial. But ChotaBheem runs successfully because of the name of the character and portrayal of his behavior, proving team spirit throughout the program. On the other hand, fewer children in ChotaBheem program are portrayed as negative characters and having negative values such as telling lies, possessiveness, bullying others, and gender bias. But at the end of the story, characters who have moral values win over the negative characters. The ways followed by the protagonist to defeat evil characters and to prove justice is a highly notable factor. The stories of ChotaBheem series replicate the old system of governance and also the artifacts used by

the characters in the programs are not applicable to the contemporary period. But the values shown in those programs could be applied to the present situation.

The title song of *ChotaBheem* consists of more than 50 consecutive shots and among those 15 shots deal with good behavior such as helping others, taking responsibilities, protecting people, friends and animals etc. Visuals of title song contain 70% of positive values such as kindness to people and animals, showing responsibility, being generous, tolerance and unity; remaining part consists of negative values such as fighting with people or animals, showing eating too many laddoos, bullying others and gender discrimination. The lyrics of the title song also give importance to positive values and it doesn't include any harsh or rude words.

The main character "Bheem" and his friends are portrayed as good children and they follow moral values in their day to day life. In all the episodes of *ChotaBheem* program, the values such as kindness to others, responsibility, caring, veneration to elders, generosity, helping tendency, giving equal importance to other gender, protecting people and hospitality are emphasized. These values have been considered as positive values.

Bheem's portrayal as an obedient child gives a positive message to young minds of our country. Bheem is portrayed as very kind hearted that he even forgives his enemies. He never wishes for revenge and he is not a hyper violent super hero. These values give a very good positive message to the kids. He solves every mystery and problem in a calm and composed manner. He is very kind to everyone and is liked by everyone in Dholakpur village.

Though Bheem has always been portrayed as a good person generally, in one episode Bheem is shown as stealing laddoos. Later on, his action is justified by stating that he was hungry. At the end of the story, he threw a huge rock to stop a flowing volcano. The impractical situations and behaviors signify only fantasizing the spectators. In such a way, one day Bheem safeguard his people and friends from raging bull in Dholakpur. A nine year old boy who is assumed to be brave and mightiest in character is always portrayed to fight with animals and people who are bad in character in order to prove his power and strength. Out of the 25 selected episodes, there are three episodes which contain no significant moral values at the end.

The overall analysis of ChotaBheem program shows that 90 percent of episodes teach moral values to children. Relatively positive values dominated the negative values. This signifies that the portrayal of the characters in the ChotaBheem and the way they taught stories help the viewers to develop moral values. There is a significant difference in showing positive values and negative values in the program. Positive values are emphasized in this cartoon.

The result of content analysis shows that ChotaBheem programme gives more importance to moral values than negative values. The presence of negative values is very less in ChotaBheem. The kinds of stories discussed in ChotaBheem are related to kindness, love, caring, friendship and unity. Although some episodes have negative characters, the positive characters will win over the negative characters by the end by putting forward some moral values like integrity, respect, honesty and compassion.

Part 2 – Participatory observation and Interview

Second part of the research is done on the basis of a participatory observation and interview. Behaviors of six children (three girls and three boys) are recorded for the participatory approach. A personal interview of kid's parents and teachers has been conducted to know more about kid's behaviors. Television is the major source of advertisement and information for kids. Cartoon channels like Kochu TV, Pogo and Cartoon Network are the favourite choice for kids.

Favourite character

The major characters in 'ChotaBheem' are Bheem, Kaalia, Raju, Chutki, Indumathi, Dholu, Bholu and Maharaj. The most liked character by kids is Bheem followed by Chutki and Raju. The least liked character for them is Kaalia. Kalia, owing to his characteristics of being fatty and lazy, scored the least, while Bheem was liked the most due to his kindness, naughtiness and strong characteristic traits.

All the six kids have liked the character design of Bheem, while five kids have not liked the design of Kaalia. The top common reasons for liking a character were, having a 'funny look', 'strength', 'mischievous' and 'naughty look', 'cute eyes' followed by 'looks smart' while the reasons for not liking were 'fatty look' and 'aggressive nature'. In the case of Kaalia, the top common reason for not liking him was because of 'fat', having bald hair followed by his dressing style. These reflect the character associations and the preference for certain traits over others which could help to determine the popularity of a character. All the kids were also found

to be more fascinated by the mystical nature and appearance of the old witch in an episode.

Influence of ChotaBheem on the product liking and preferences of children

Cartoon characters associated with brands have a great influence in making the brand attractive to kids. Brand promotion strategies involving prominent cartoon characters can create wonders for brands. Cartoon character association with brands leads to strong preference for the brand.

Next thing that was analyzed was the influence of pictures of ChotaBheem characters, which appear on the products like toys, food items, school stationary items etc. on children's product preferences. For fulfilling this purpose, fruit drinks with mix fruit flavor were selected. Now out of 6 children, 3 children were exposed to fruit drink containing the picture of ChotaBheem. It was asked to each child asked "How much did you like this fruit drink?" The responses were noted down on the basis of a 5 star scale. The other 3 children were exposed to similar type of fruit drink whose package had no picture of ChotaBheem on it. Again the responses were noted down using a 5 star scale. In each case the children rated the products just on the basis of visual imaginary of fruit drink packages and they did not taste the fruit drinks at all. The analysis showed that young children preferred those fruit drinks whose packages contained the pictures of ChotaBheem. Thus, this showed that cartoon characters had significant influence on children's product preferences especially for beverages like fruit drinks.

Next thing that was asked to children was that whether they would think of buying this product next time when they visit to the market. In case of fruit drinks with pictures of ChotaBheem on the package, all three children replied that they would definitely buy these fruit drink when they will go to the market next time. In case of fruit drinks without pictures of ChotaBheem on the package, only one child replied that he would like to buy this fruit drink when he would go to the market next time. Finally among the children who agreed to buy these specific fruit drinks, it was asked to them that how they would buy this product. To this 4 children replied that they would go to the store with their parents and would buy this product. One child replied that he alone would go to store for buying these biscuit and another child replied that she would request to her parents to bring the desired product.

Then it was asked to parents of the sample children to describe the behavior that child exhibits for buying his / her desired food item with picture of ChotaBheem characters. Two parents replied that the child starts pleading over and over for buying the desired product. Another two parents replied that their child starts to count and pronounciate the names of his/ her friends/ siblings who had bought the same product and there by starts making the requests for the same. The other two parents said that their child starts listing the benefits of the product and thereby makes requests for the same. All the parents opined that their child starts crying for buying the desired food item.

After determining the child's behavior parents were asked that how do they respond to their child's purchase request for food

item. To this three of the parents replied that they usually allow their child to buy the desired food item. Two parents said that they stop the child from buying the food item by saying that it would be unhealthy or costly. One parent said that they would say straight forward no to their child's purchase request and they would promise the child to buy the food item another day. All parents had opined that they usually suggest alternative item in response to their child's request. Next question that was asked parents was that why do they allow their child to buy the desired food item. To this four of the parents said they satisfy their child's request so as to make him /her happy and the other two parents said that they satisfy their child's request for food item so as to stop him/ her from becoming angry.

The kid's also says that they prefer ChotaBheem school bags and other stationary items. All the six children are very font of ChotaBheem toys. All these kids are having a good collection of ChotaBheem toys. The findings suggest that both boys and girls are very font of Bheem and his friends.

The findings suggest that children get significantly influenced by pictures of ChotaBheem on package of fruit drinks and other products. This suggests that ChotaBheem is an influential character for children. So one can make use of this cartoon character for selling products other than fruit drinks. The influence could be very high in case of food items, toys, dresses and school stationary products.

Behavioral change in children

The children are the most important faction of the society which is being affected by the television contents and cartoons. Children like

dresses and accessories/ belongings of their favorite cartoon characters. Due to their tender minds, most of the children try to imitate the actions performed by different characters. Violence is also an integral part of even those cartoons which are comedic in their genre. Even in comedic cartoons, characters fight with each other which are liked by the kids.

Four children (sample) watch TV more than 2 hours on daily basis while others watch less. This figure prominently indicates that children watch cartoons at least one hour daily. They consider cartoon as the major source of entertainment followed by music and movies.

Due to repeat telecast on POGO channel, the kids are getting addicted to ChotaBheem. During breakfast, after coming back from school, during lunch, in the evening, during dinner - all the time on the television, POGO channel comes only with ChotaBheem stories. Such continuous television exposure also affects the play time of the kids. They find ChotaBheem more interesting than playing and physical activities. As a result, the kids are lacking adequate body movements, which they require to build up their body and mind. One parent opined that they can't even watch the latest news and other programmes on television due to ChotaBheem, as it is telecasted all the time throughout the day. Children prefer cartoons over picnic and outdoor games. They are happier with ChotaBheem and other cartoons. These kids are not even ready to go for an outing during the evening on a holiday because they don't want to miss an episode of ChotaBheem.

The result of the participant observation shows that children

behavior gets changed after watching ChotaBheem. All participant parents agreed that their children's behavior changed after watching this cartoon. They show aggressive behavior during conflict and use the same techniques which they observed in the cartoon. Most of the animation characters show a great skill of fighting, in which most of the students would learn and imitate from their observation through those programme. The most likely aggressive reaction the kids would do was hitting, attacking, kicking, or hurting other people. From the words of kid's parents, it is clear that these kids have learnt different forms of violence from this cartoon show. Too much fight with the evil powers and wild animals brings the kids to the world of violence and they start applying these on their friends and other family members. A primary school teacher when asked about children's behaviors regarding violence and physical actions, she commented that some students are always picking up fights in the class, one of the reasons behind this aggressive behaviour could be that they are way too much influenced by cartoons like ChotaBheem or other programmes which parents without any concern let them watch in excess. Another teacher commented that kids are learning many good things from this cartoon.

All the kids of target sample were willing to share the unique experience and information about watching ChotaBheem. This demonstrates the high level of enthusiasm with regard to the content experience. This insight also depicts the high possibility of 'word of mouth' publicity generation regarding the cartoon and its characters, which can attract additional audiences to watch the movie.

The ChotaBheem had also affected the eating habit of

children. Kids love eating laddoo, which has no good nutritional count. Laddoo is the favourite food of ChotaBheem and he gains energy from this sweet. Kids said that they prefer to have laddoo everyday to be as powerful as Bheem. So, in a way the eating habits of many kids are also affected by this cartoon series. Bheem's eating habits are definitely not a path for kids to imbibe. There were cartoon characters like Popeye – the Sailor man, who encouraged kids to eat spinach. Eating spinach is completely legit on the health index. A school teacher commented that it's better if ChotaBheem encourages children to eat something like banana, carrot, apple etc.

The evil powers and few kids in this cartoon use rude words or phrases which the kids find very different from their day to day conversation and memorize them very fast. Parents said that their kids started using phrases like 'I will kill you', 'I will not spare you', and 'You fool' after continuous watching of ChotaBheem. But the children did not know the actual meaning of those phrases and they are unknowingly using such phrases in their conversation. The parents believe that this may affect the good manner that the kids learn in the school. One kid argued that he doesn't want to go to school and learn, because ChotaBheem is not going to school and he is brilliant enough. It is important to note that the boys perceived more change in their behavior on viewing ChotaBheem.

It is observed that children's behavior is changed after watching ChotaBheem. These children pay more attention to ChotaBheem cartoon's whole story or specific character and this craze affect their behavior.

Limitations and Scope of future research

In every research there are some limitations for the researcher because it is very difficult for researcher to conduct an ideal research. The study was primarily limited by its small sample size. The sample size could have been expanded by including more number of children. Limitation in terms of participatory observation is restricted to six children from 8 - 12 age groups. The participants represented a narrow range of age group. A larger sample with more diversity will give better results. In this study researcher only take one cartoon for the study. Future research can include more cartoons for better understanding of children's behaviors.

Conclusion

The kids are inclined to cartoon programmes, as they find the characters like them in front of their eyes, doing funny activities. So they get very easily fascinated by these characters and start imitating them. The result of this study indicates that children are highly influenced by the cartoons series - ChotaBheem. Because they more pay attention and time to watch this cartoons instead of other activities. When children focus more on the cartoon series it means that they are learning a lot of things from cartoons. In fact, the analysis shows that majority of children have some behavioral change affected through cartoons.

The Kids (sample) have a considerably high brand recall and were found to be brand specific. The kid's preferences for brands were in sync with, 'which' of their favourite cartoon characters was associated with the brand. It is however found that the believability of facts stated by the cartoon character in the advertisement is not

found true by kids. The kids neither believed that strengths and powers of the cartoon characters were due to the endorsed brand usage.

Most of the students (sample) spend daily 1 to 3 hours watching cartoons on television in their leisure time. So it can be said in view of above mentioned facts that cartoon watching is among the most favorite hobbies of the children. Cartoons are not only changing their behavior but it is also changing their language and language is most important part of any culture. Children use cartoon as source of entertainment than the other physical activities. As a result they are becoming fat and unhealthy. This thing is more harmful for children's physical health. It is obvious through the study that the cartoon 'ChotaBheem' affects mentally as well as physically on the grooming children.

The study confirmed that ChotaBheem cartoon program teaches many things to children. Cartoon tells several positive values. At the same time there are some contradictions in the way of portraying Bheem and other characters in the program. Children ought to be children at the age of nine, though he has more strength than others; he has been shown as fighting with animals and villains in order to protect his friends or other people. Children will get the notion that fighting is the only way of solving the problems. This may lead children to act aggressively even when they face simple problems. On the other hand, teaching moral values through telling stories such as what our parents told us about Thenaliraman stories, Aesop stories and Panchatantra tales.

India is the first country to teach ahimsa to the entire world.

Mahatma Gandhi proved to the world we can reach our goals through non-violence. Unfortunately ChotaBheem believes only muscle power. Though ChotaBheem is an indigenous product which depicts many moral values, it does take children to a fantasy world where they get strength through eating laddoos; children take up the role of adults, even over take elders in many ways. Results of content analysis show that this cartoon gives more importance to values, but results from the participatory observation shows that children are highly influenced by this cartoon programme.

To conclude the study, it is analysed that there is a strong impact of ChotaBheem on kids which can be seen on their life style, dressing, aggressive and violent behavior and their language.

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