

Learning the Deviant Behavior among Children by Watching Animated Series (An Analytical Study)

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of watching animated series displayed via the various communication channels, such as TV and YouTube on children's behavior, where episodes from well-known animated series were analyzed to identify how some animated series contribute to child's acquisition of deviant behaviors according to social learning theory and other theories of criminology. To achieve the study objectives, the researcher used a content-analysis approach to analyze the content of two animated series that display inappropriate content. The study sample consisted of (100) episodes of the animated series (X1) and (30) episodes of the animated series (X2). The results revealed that the programs and content displayed in some animated series don't achieve the purpose for which they were designed, and some of them teach children the methods of deviance. The study recommended the necessity of imposing official surveillance on children's animated series displayed on some Arabic and international channels, analyzing them, and verifying the safety of their content by specialists to ensure their appropriateness for the targeted group before displaying them.

Keywords: Deviance, animated series, social learning, children.

Introduction

Between the ages (of 4 to 18) years, children usually watch different types of animated series; some of them are positive and have a desired effect on children's behavior, while others are negative and have an unwanted effect on their behavior. This is particularly true in the light of the absence of parental surveillance, as parents are often busy at work and depend on domestic workers who don't care about the content that children watch during the absence of their parents.

There are several cartoon characters that left an indelible imprint in our memory, where some characters left a good mark, while others left a bad imprint: for example, Sherlock Holmes and detective Conan...etc. However, the real problem lies in some characters embodied in the animated series directed to children, where some characters exemplify violent messages in a direct or even intended way, and thus their content shouldn't be displayed to children. Indeed, those animated fairy

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tales provide children with ways to cleverly plan crimes. Also, this type of animated series shows children the ease of performing deviant behaviors which, in turn, facilitates the child's acquisition of criminal behaviors that harm both the community and the child himself. The problematic issue is more related to the way through which children's animated series are displayed across the audio-visual media, which stimulates children to imitate the deviant behaviors that they watch, and thus the adverse effects are reflected in the community. Those cartoons are like a double-edged sword, where they could be a bad example that leads to deviance, or a good example upon which children's future ambitions are built.

Any children's program aims mainly to instill decent values, teach children the foundations of modern education, and raise their awareness concerning deviant behaviors; however, some animated series show content that contradicts these objectives. For example, Bilalha (2021) highlighted the influence of cartoons, particularly "Uncle Grandpa," on children's socialization. The study indicated that local cartoon production institutions often overlooked cultural compatibility by relying on Western content. Indeed, this can lead to the adoption of foreign behaviors by children, which may continue into adulthood. The study underscored the need for culturally relevant animated series.

Also, Al-Omar, (2020) investigated violence in animated series and its impact on anxiety among children. The findings emphasized the importance of parental guidance in reducing anxiety related to violent scenes. Furthermore, the study confirmed that violent scenes affected males more than females, even with parental intervention.

While Bodir'e et al (2020) focused on the impact of TV programs on children's behavior from a mother's perspective. The study suggested that excessive screen time could lead to weakened social relationships and family isolation. However, active parental involvement in selecting educational programs positively affected children's behavior and enhanced family relationships. Considering the above-mentioned, this study aims to answer the following main question: How do children learn deviance by watching some animated series?

Conceptual and Procedural Terms

- A) Animated series:** they are the drawings or objects that are videotaped so that they look moving when displayed on the screen, where those cartoons could have a role in developing some good concepts among children aged (4-6) years old (Al-Masri, 2020).

Learning is conceptually defined as the process of semi-permanent change in the individual's behavior, which isn't noticed directly but is manifested by the performance or behavior visualized by individuals and develops by

the practice and the change in the individual's performance (Al-Sultani, 2016).

- B) **Deviance:** it is conceptually defined as the violation of community standards and getting off track. It is manifested in the features of the behavior that do not match with the prevalent social behavior - it paves the way towards sliding into the criminal path (Sayid, 2021).

Deviance is procedurally defined as the group of individuals' adoption of socially illegal methods in order to achieve their objectives and satisfy their needs, so they don't comply with the prevalent values and standards in the community which, in turn, results in deviant behaviors.

- C) **Crime:** Durkheim defined crime as the individual's deviation from social norms and standards. As for Durkheim, social organization is a system for controlling human behavior; therefore, when this system is disordered, individuals will be more inclined towards achieving their personal interests without considering the usual means for accomplishing those objectives. In this vein, the controlling parties will lose their control ability which, in turn, results in committing crimes (Toraikh, 2020).

The theories explaining the investigated phenomenon:

This research addressed two theories in sociology (social learning theory, Ronald Akers; imitation theory, Gabriel Tarde) and one theory in psychology (operant conditioning theory). Sociology theories demonstrate the phenomenon of learning and the desire to imitate what is seen by children and adolescents, while operant conditioning theory is derived from Akers' theory, but is attributed to Skinner.

We will, first, address Akers' social learning theory, which gives an explanation for criminal and deviant behaviors by demonstrating the following concepts (differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation), detailed as follows:

- A) **First, differential association:** this concept has two dimensions: interactive behavioral dimension and standard behavioral dimension. The interactive behavioral dimension refers to the direct association with certain behaviors, while the indirect connection refers to the association with distant reference groups. The standard behavioral dimension refers to certain values experienced by community individuals based on their socialization with others; in this way, individuals are affected by the introduced norms and imitate them unconsciously (Akers and Sealers, 2013: 125-126).

B) Second, the concept of definitions: It refers to explaining the individual's directions or the meaning they give to behaviors. They are definitions for value or ethical directions, where they determine the righteousness degree of performing a certain behavior - when the beliefs are negative towards the unwanted action, the individual's behavior will be preferred. Definitions could also be positive referring to the attitudes of ethically biased behavior, whereas the neutral ones refer to committing crimes by finding out justifications to them (Akers and Sealers, 2013: 127-128).

C) Third, differential reinforcement: It refers to the expected reward from a certain behavior or the punishment related to another behavior; meaning that there is a positive reinforcement and a negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement refers to reinforcing the possibility of performing a certain behavior, while negative reinforcement is either direct (positive) relating to painful results, or indirect where rewards and results are still unpleasant. The conditions of reinforcement are amount, frequency, and possibility (Akers and Selear, 2013: 127-129).

D) Fourth, imitation theory: It refers to integrating within a certain behavior and watching it performed by others. Also, the basic prominent models, particularly in media, should have a social or antisocial effect on individual's behavior, where they mainly affect during the first stages in which children acquire behaviors- they gradually erase the acquired behaviors that were learned by family and community. However, the acquired behaviors from family members must have their effect as long as the individual maintains his behavior (Bandura, 1977).

The second theory also addresses the behavior acquired based on what children see during the upbringing stage which is, in turn, reflected negatively on the child's behavior; the imitation theory. The most prominent advocate of imitation theory is Gabriel Tarde (Sayid, 2021), who stated that the phenomenon of imitation takes place due to direct communication. It is usually affected by habit, memory, and people's communication with each other according to rules governing all the community members; it implies that imitating the behavior takes place due to people's communication with each other inside the community. Therefore, each community has its own culture, where this community could be in the form of cartoons that children see as representing their life and attempt to apply what they see in reality.

The operant conditioning theory was cited by Skinner who suggested that the surrounding social environment is the basic supporting source for

behavior and is the product of the process of social interaction. He also suggested that the mixture of cultures in a certain community allows sociologists to predict the effectiveness degree of individuals' support for certain behaviors. We can define operant conditioning as a type of behavioral therapy, where behavior is acquired from an individual's surrounding environment; Skinner distinguished between two types of behavior according to the type of stimuli produced by that behavior (I-Samri, 2011).

Previous studies

Firdausiyah (2019) aimed to identify the ethical values in *Saladin*, the Animated Series, based on Franz Magnes Sucino's theory. The researcher used the content-analysis approach, where observation and review tools were used. The results revealed that there are (24) scenes containing ethical values, such as good behavior, justice, and self-respect in this animated series. The results were limited, and the discussion wasn't complete, as the researcher only counted the scenes of ethical values in *Saladin*, the Animated Series.

Nadia (2019) investigated the effect of cartoons on a child's socialization from a parent's perspective. The study mainly aimed to identify the parent's perspective concerning the impact of cartoons on socialization and the type of that effect. The study used the analytical descriptive approach, where the questionnaire and interviews were used as the study instruments, and the sample was selected randomly. The results showed that parents were satisfied with the content of animated series, where chi-square was (5.11) since those animated series taught children standard Arabic language that they didn't usually practice in their daily lives. Those animated series also contributed to developing the children's mental abilities and taught them good habits, such as greetings and cleanliness. As for the unsatisfied parents, the chi-square was (2.91), where parents reported that the animated series included violent scenes that were inappropriate for children, and thus had adverse effects on the child and community.

Njiiri (2019) aimed to identify the effect of foreign television cartoon programs on children's social behavior in Kenya, identify the effect of foreign cartoon characters on children's behavior in Kenya, and analyze the effect of the patterns of watching foreign animated series on children's social behavior in Kenya. The study relied on social learning theory. The study population consisted of children living and studying in Muranga County in Kenya, while the sample consisted of children aged (7-10) years old from (5) private schools. The study used questionnaires and interviews for data collection. Means, standard deviations, percentages, correlation coefficient, and regression analysis were used to analyze

data. The results revealed that gender had an effect on choosing violent animation. Also, age had an effect on the habits of watching animation.

Ghilzai et al (2017) addressed the impact of cartoon programs on children's language and behavior. The study highlighted the negative effects of watching animated series. The results revealed that (41%) of children watched animated series for fun, (23%) for sports affairs, and (17%) for learning. The results revealed that children acquired knowledge and language, in addition to violent habits, which all were reflected in their behaviors in the community, as they behaved nervously (70%). Here, parents should make a balance between watching animated series, practicing sports, and social life. The study sample consisted of the mothers and siblings of children aged (5-12) years old in Islamabad. A questionnaire was distributed to the sample individuals, and the data were analyzed using (SPSS).

Rai et al, (2017) addressed the effect of cartoon programs on behavioral, habitual, and communicative changes among children. The study sample consisted of (200) children aged (5-15) years old who were selected using the simple random way from the Indore city over a period of (4) months. The researchers used the questionnaire for data-collection and (SPSS) was used to analyze data. The results revealed that (33%) of children showed increased violent behavior, (45%) became more violent when TV was closed due to addiction to cartoon programs, (61%) applied the violent scenes that they saw, and (71%) showed higher sensitivity towards the community.

Al-Zo'bi (2016) addressed the effect of violent scenes in cartoon programs on children from the perspective of mothers and female teachers. The results revealed that mothers and female teachers noticed that children imitated violent scenes and watched an animated series to a high degree. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in imitation in favor of males since they imitated the protagonists of the animated series while playing and interacting with their peers. The results revealed that children caused harm to themselves and others while imitating the violent scenes in the animated series. The results showed that when children watched animated series, this would be reflected in their behavior, and they would become more inclined to discover morale and physical things surrounding them. The study focused on imitation, and it supported imitation theory which wasn't biased according to gender.

Yousaf et al., (2015) addressed the effects of animated series (Ben 10), displayed on Cartoon Network on the behavior of school children. The study sample consisted of a group of children in Gujrat City Pakistan. The researcher used the social survey approach. The results revealed that some animated series had a significant negative effect on children, especially during the stages of developing personality, where children were more inclined to watch violent animation scenes.

Also, animated series affected children's culture and language and directed their behavior towards violence. In short, animated series negatively affected children's mentality.

(Ahmad and Wahab, 2014) addressed the effect of animated series on socialization and the gender role portrayal on cartoon networks. The results revealed that animated series watched on TV were considered an integral part of socialization. The study suggested that socialization included a number of elements, including family, peers, and community, where media played a significant role in the modern community and in disseminating information, ideas, and values about community. The results suggested that TV is an important media means which displays interesting content that attracts children; therefore, children learn more based on what they see on TV during the early stages of their lives.

(BISWAS, 2013) addressed the effect of cartoon characters on preschoolers' behavioral patterns. The study mainly aimed to identify the potential effects of Dora, Diego, Ben 10, and Tom and Jerry characteristics on preschool children's behavior in Bangladesh. The study sample consisted of (20) children and their counterpart cousins aged (5-6) years old. The results revealed that children varied in their preferences for animated series according to gender and other characteristics. They also varied in the degree of attachment to cartoon characters. The study recommended the necessity of educating parents and teachers concerning the risks of those cartoons and the necessity of enhancing positive behavior.

Methodology

The study used a content-analysis approach in analyzing two well-known police cartoons (X1, X2), where the researcher selected a sample of each series and investigated their negative effects on children's behavior.

The study sample consisted of (100) episodes of the cartoon series (X1) and (30) episodes of the cartoon series (X2) which were selected by using the random stratified sampling model, calculated as follows:

$$\text{Number of episodes in each part} = \text{total sample size} \times \frac{\text{Number of episodes in each part}}{\text{Total episodes number}}$$

The researcher used audio-visual platforms on the Internet and mobile phone applications, including:

Majid magazine, YouTube, and gogoanime.

A) The statistical processing and data-analysis methods

In data analysis, the study relied on watching two police cartoon series; (100) episodes of (X1) and (30) episodes of (X2), where LPJ was used for analysis.

B) The study results.

The results of the main question: how do children learn deviance by watching some animated series?

By analyzing the content of a number of scenes displayed in the episodes of (X1) and (X2), we concluded the following:

- **Episode (55) of (X1):**

The crime site is shown in detail. Also, the crime planning and implementation are described in detail, in that children can imitate it easily. In episode 55 entitled "The Design of Poison and mirage", particularly in the minute (15:03), the criminal stimulates the victim to open a book whose pages are filled with poison. When the victim licks his finger to turn the page, poison enters his body without realizing the risk of that.

This episode shows accurate details of committing crimes, where the murderer distracts the victim by using the Gestalt theory; accordingly, the victim takes the targeted poisoned book and, as usual, licks his finger to turn the pages as illustrated in the minute (13:50) of the episode.

- **Episode (5) of (X2):**

Children's lives are at risk. In episode (5), a bomb is detonated in a building and children are stuck between fire and smoke; however, firemen or even policemen aren't able to rescue the children as evident in minute (1:00:05).

Children's lives are also at risk in the minute (1:30:00), when children are only able to get out of the building by car inside the building- the protagonist begins counting to drive the car and jump from the floor (60) to another building.

- **Episode (7) of (X2):**

There are several crimes, such as murder, kidnapping, threat, and burglary. The selected episodes include murder crimes.

There are scenes of individuals exposed to accidents and aggressiveness, as shown in minute (4) of episode (1) for a person exposed to fractures and injuries.

- **Episode (14) of (X1):**

(X1) includes several crimes, including kidnapping, threat, burglary, and murder (murder crime in the art museum, murder crime in the elevator), in addition to several other episodes that include murder crimes.

In one of (X1) episodes, there is an attempt to rescue a victim after riding a helicopter. The pilot is exposed to an injury in his eyes due to an eye drop put on by a serial murderer. A child holds the mission of leading the helicopter and finally lands with a helicopter with (3) other adults on board. In the minute (39:39), one says "But you're still too young", a statement that confirms the dangerous situation and the mistake committed by the director by displaying the undesired scenes- children may attempt to imitate such unwanted actions in reality.

- **Episode (2) of (X2):**

The serial murderer sets a plan to kill (14) individuals, where (2) people are killed by the serial murderer, as in the minute (1:04:08), where a victim is stabbed with a knife in the back. In another scene, three victims are threatened, where some are poisoned and others are exposed to severe injuries.

- **Episode (5) of (X1):**

The episode gives the impression that spying is permitted, as shown in minute (4:59), where the protagonist places a spying device in the chewing gum and puts it under the chair to listen to dialogues. However, he fails and lately, he operates the spying device attached to his glasses, as seen at minute (7:00) in the fifth episode.

In the minute (7:50), the criminals describe the bomb's place and when and how it explodes. Here, the director displays the scenes that shouldn't be shown on the Arabic channels directed to children less than (18) years old. Despite the risks of this animated series, it is still displayed on Arabic channels directed to children.

- **Episode (19) of (X1):**

The policeman seems not to believe the children, but only makes fun and ignores them, as seen in the minute (9:59). In the minute (20:10), the child kicks the bag containing a bomb after which the explosion occurs.

- **Episode (66) of (X1):**

In the minute (3:09), a scene is displayed for drinking alcohol. Indeed, several scenes for drinking and buying alcohol are included in the episodes.

In the minute (3:38), there is a man smoking while meeting a group of criminal investigators. Curiously, a child looks at the man while walking. This scene is displayed simultaneously with the crime, where there is a connection between the criminal and smoking, as a trait accompanying each criminal.

- **Episode (67) in (X1):**

In the minute (4:31), a dead body is seen, and the protagonist investigates it, takes notes, and makes predictions about the crime. Investigating the dead body is normal if performed by a specialist, but won't be normal if performed by a child to know how the crime has occurred. The watching child may be curious to do such an action, so he may try to commit a crime and imitate what he sees.

- **Episode (70) in (X1):**

In the minute (13:45), accurate details are given about the way of committing a crime. Indeed, those details are frequent over all the episodes, which are displayed on Arabic channels directed to children.

- **Episode (65) in (X1):**

In this episode, in the minute (5:01), we can see that the kidnapped victim's father is carrying a bag full of money and going to the place where the exchange takes place. The victim's father doesn't tell the police due to fear of kidnapers, as if the scene telling children not to resort to the police in such cases.

Also, the investigator's family follows the victim's father. Then, the protagonist implements a plan to rescue the victim in the exchange place, as seen in the minute (5:31).

The details of the child's kidnapping start in this episode in the minute (7:57), and that certainly- terrifies the watching children.

- **Episode (77) in (X1):**

In this episode, a woman is exposed to violence by her manager's daughter, as seen in the minute (5:52). Such scenes provoke children and make them curious about many issues, such as violence against women, where they may attempt to do that.

- **Episode (5) in (X2):**

In this episode, we see how the criminal escapes by using a rope, as seen in the minute (12:31).

- **Episode (12) in (X2):**

The criminal appears while holding a knife in his mouth in the minute (11:55) - the crime's tool is seen in two scenes.

- **Episode (89) in (X1):**

A dead body is seen with steel bars tearing it in the minute (12:45).

The emergence of the crime's tool filled with blood, as in the minute (14:30).

- **Episode (95) in (X1):**

In the minute (21:48), the pathologist analyzes the way through which the crime has occurred and documents the details of how the dead body was stabbed by the sharp tool. Several murder scenes are displayed, and all of them are centered around penetrating a sharp tool in a body.

Discussing the results

The researchers have provided descriptions of various scenes from different episodes of (X1) and (X2) and expressed concerns about the content and its potential impact on children. Based on the descriptions, these episodes contain a significant amount of violence, crime, and potentially dangerous actions. Here are some observations and concerns based on the provided information:

1. **Graphic Violence:** Several episodes in both (X1) and (X2) depict violent acts, such as murders, stabbings, and injuries. These scenes may be disturbing and inappropriate for children, as they can potentially desensitize them to violence or even encourage imitation.
2. **Risk to Children:** Some scenes portray children in dangerous situations, like being trapped in a burning building or attempting to rescue victims. Such content could be distressing for young viewers and may lead to misguided imitation of dangerous actions.
3. **Criminal Behavior:** The series includes scenes that describe and demonstrate criminal activities in detail, which may provide children with ideas or methods for illegal activities.
4. **Inappropriate Themes:** Spying, alcohol consumption, and smoking are also depicted in the series, which may introduce young viewers to behaviors that are not suitable for their age group.
5. **Lack of Responsible Authority Figures:** It appears that the series often shows adults, such as police officers not taking children seriously or failing to provide adequate guidance or supervision, which can send the wrong message to children about the role of adults and authorities in their lives.
6. **Encouragement of Violence Against Women:** Scenes showing violence against women may normalize or romanticize such behaviors, which is concerning.
7. **Misrepresentation of Reporting Crimes:** In some episodes, it is suggested that victims or their families do not report crimes to the police. This can convey a message that may discourage children from seeking help from the authorities when faced with a dangerous situation.

Based on the previous Result, the study concluded that criminal behavior is acquired from the surrounding environment by learning, indicating that all the scenes watched during the early stages of childhood affect children's behavior, as demonstrated by imitation theory developed by Gabriel Tarde (Sayid, 2021). The child could also be affected by the violent and criminal scenes displayed in the animated series. The results revealed that the child may apply what he sees. This finding agrees with (Al-Zo'bi, 2016), which confirmed the effect of violent scenes displayed on animated series on children from the perspective of mothers and female teachers.

The results showed that the media has a prominent role in promoting animated police series. For example, X1 is shown on Arabic TV channels and is directed to the age (5-16) years old which is easily affected by what they see and imitate the virtual cartoon characters. These animated series were displayed between (1995-2000), which is the period in which most dubbed cartoon series were displayed in the Arabic cartoon channels directed to children. This period witnessed a decline in the production of Arabic cartoon series, which was replaced by purchasing the publishing rights of some cartoon series and dubbing them into Arabic language, even though some of them are inappropriate for the Arabic, Islamic, and social environment. This finding agrees with (Ahmad and Wahab, 2014) and (Bilalha, 2021).

Those animated series may also teach unwanted behaviors, where they teach criminal methods, especially when those animated series are directed to a sensitive group of community individuals. This finding agrees with (Yousaf et al,2015). Those cartoons also affect children's behavior, since children try to imitate cartoon characters, and this finding agrees with (BISWAS, S. K. 2013), which revealed that children don't realize that what they see in the animated series is only imaginary and unreal characters, and thus imitate them without realizing the consequences of that.

The results showed that the social environment in which those cartoons are produced isn't compatible with the social culture of Arabic communities (Raiet al, 2017). Indeed, those series are produced to be displayed in countries with similar cultures to the producing countries. Those cultures include habits that don't correspond with the Emirati community, such as the scenes of drinking, gambling, wearing short clothes for women, and many other inappropriate scenes. This finding agrees with the (Njiiri, 2019) in the Kenyan community.

The results showed that (X1) shouldn't be directed to children due to its negative effects on their behaviors and socialization. It is almost directed to the above 18-year-old category.

Recommendations

- The study recommended the necessity of conducting further studies in the domain of animated series by using another methodology as well as directing questionnaires or conducting interviews with parents to identify the negative or positive effects of that in reality and provide statistical data supporting that.
- In this study, a sample of episodes was taken from the two animated police series. Therefore, the study recommended conducting studies with larger samples, since each new episode holds a different meaning and issue that should be addressed.
- The study recommended the necessity of imposing more official surveillance on the animated series displayed in the different Arabic and international channels and analyzing their content by specialists to investigate their appropriateness to children.
- Educating parents and those responsible for taking care of children and adolescents about the necessity of supervising the content displayed to children on the various communication channels by holding educational seminars across the various educational institutions and media means.

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