



Mothers' Perceptions of Cartoon Viewing and Young Children's Behavior in Karachi

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Abstract

Animated media are a routine part of many young children's lives, yet their developmental significance depends on content, viewing duration, social context, and opportunities for adult guidance. This exploratory study examines mothers' perceptions of cartoon viewing among pre-primary children in Karachi, with attention to character imitation, violent themes, language, physical activity, and daily viewing routines. The source manuscript describes a quantitative, cross-sectional survey using a self-developed five-point Likert questionnaire administered through private schools in Karachi's Central District. Although the methodology reports a planned or recruited sample of 100 mothers, every supplied results table reports 50 responses. Accordingly, this rewritten paper treats 50 as the analyzable sample and explicitly flags the discrepancy for verification rather than silently reconciling it.

Descriptive analysis shows unanimous agreement across all ten displayed statements: each respondent selected either "agree" or "strongly agree." Strong agreement was highest for children liking cartoons and liking cartoons containing physical violence (62% each), followed by inspiration from cartoon characters (58%). Equal proportions strongly agreed and agreed that children preferred cartoons to physical activity (50% each). For the remaining behavior and routine items, strong agreement ranged from 44% to 48%. These results indicate a highly uniform pattern of maternal concern, but they do not establish that cartoons caused the reported behaviors. The findings are best interpreted as perceptions within a small, geographically bounded sample. Future research should verify the raw data, document sampling and instrument quality, include neutral and disagreement categories in the analysis, and combine caregiver reports with direct observation or longitudinal measures.

Keywords: *animated media; cartoons; maternal perceptions; preschool children; aggression; language; screen time; Karachi*



Introduction

Cartoons are among the earliest screen narratives encountered by children. Their bright colors, compressed storylines, repeated characters, humor, music, and rapid action can hold attention while also presenting models of speech and behavior. For families and educators, the central question is therefore not whether cartoons are uniformly beneficial or harmful, but how particular content is interpreted in a particular viewing environment. A prosocial educational episode viewed with an engaged caregiver is a different developmental experience from prolonged, unsupervised exposure to violent or age-inappropriate entertainment.

Recent research supports this more differentiated view. Screen exposure in the preschool years has been associated with developmental and behavioral outcomes, but relationships vary with the type of use, family characteristics, and the quality of interaction surrounding the screen (McArthur et al., 2022; Swider-Cios et al., 2023). When screens displace conversation and shared activity, children may lose opportunities for responsive language exchange and parent–child closeness (Gath et al., 2023). Conversely, carefully designed animated material can support vocabulary, comprehension, health knowledge, and prosocial learning when content and delivery are developmentally appropriate (Vlachou et al., 2024; Steinbauer et al., 2025).

The concern motivating the present study is that young viewers may identify closely with animated characters and reproduce salient behavior without fully understanding fantasy, consequences, or social norms. Violent actions may be framed as humorous, heroic, or consequence-free; insulting language may be memorable because it is repeated; and extended viewing may displace outdoor play. These possibilities warrant investigation, but they should not be converted into causal conclusions from caregiver opinion alone.

Purpose and Contribution

This paper re-examines a survey of mothers of pre-primary children in Karachi. Its contribution is descriptive: it documents how participating mothers interpreted their children’s attraction to cartoons and the behaviors they associated with viewing. The revised framing separates reported perceptions from observed outcomes, consolidates the fragmented results, and places the findings within contemporary scholarship on content quality, parental mediation, language opportunities, and prosocial media.

Objectives

- To describe mothers’ perceptions of children’s attraction to cartoons and cartoon characters.
- To summarize perceived links between cartoon content, imitation, aggression, language, and physical activity.
- To interpret the survey results cautiously in light of the study’s design and data-reporting limitations.
- To identify practical implications for parents, teachers, content producers, and future researchers.



Research Questions

- How do participating mothers characterize their children's interest in cartoons and identification with cartoon characters?
- What behavioral, linguistic, and routine-related effects do mothers associate with cartoon viewing?
- What limitations affect the interpretation and generalizability of the reported results?

Literature Review and Conceptual Perspective

Content, Duration, and Viewing Context

Research on children's screen use increasingly distinguishes among duration, content, device, and social context. Time alone is an incomplete indicator because a short educational program, a fast-paced violent cartoon, and a video call do not create equivalent experiences. In a large Canadian cohort, preschool screen time was associated with several developmental and behavioral outcomes, although observational associations do not by themselves prove causation (McArthur et al., 2022). A recent review similarly emphasizes the importance of parental mediation and the need to consider what children watch, with whom, and under what conditions (Swider-Cios et al., 2023).

Displacement is one plausible mechanism. Time spent passively viewing may replace physical play, sleep, conversation, or exploration. Gath et al. (2023) found associations between preschool screen time, language development, and parent-child closeness, drawing attention to the quality of interaction that screens may interrupt. This perspective is directly relevant to the present survey items on daily viewing and preference for cartoons over physical activity.

Imitation, Aggression, and Prosocial Models

Social cognitive theory proposes that children can learn by observing models, especially when those models are attractive, powerful, rewarded, or repeatedly presented (Bandura, 2001). Animated characters may therefore supply behavioral scripts, but imitation is neither automatic nor uniform. Age, temperament, family norms, narrative comprehension, and adult explanation influence whether a child notices, remembers, or reenacts a behavior.

The direction of influence also depends on the model being presented. Violent or humiliating conduct may normalize aggressive scripts when it is rewarded or lacks consequences, whereas prosocial narratives can reduce aggressive motivation and reinforce cooperation. Zhang (2021), for example, reported beneficial effects of prosocial cartoon viewing on aggression-related outcomes among children. The important distinction is between the medium and its message: animation is a delivery form capable of carrying both harmful and constructive models.

Language and Learning Potential

Cartoons expose children to vocabulary, dialogue, accents, and recurring phrases. Repetition and visual cues can facilitate word learning, but rapid pacing, unfamiliar language, or decontextualized viewing may limit comprehension. A systematic review of brief animated



stimuli found evidence that animation can support language development under appropriate conditions, while also identifying variation in methods and outcomes (Vlachou et al., 2024). The educational value of cartoons thus depends on alignment with children's age, linguistic background, and opportunities to discuss what they have seen.

Purpose-built animation can also serve broader educational goals. A randomized controlled trial reported that a cartoon-based intervention fostered hygiene knowledge and emotional resilience in preschool children (Steinbauer et al., 2025). Such evidence cautions against treating all cartoons as a single exposure category and reinforces the need to examine content features rather than rely only on total viewing time.

Working Conceptual Frame

The revised study is organized around a content–context–response frame. Content includes violent themes, character behavior, and language. Context includes viewing duration, parental mediation, and potential displacement of physical or social activity. Response includes children's attraction, imitation, speech, and behavior as perceived by mothers. Because the survey captures caregiver judgments at one point in time, it measures perceived relationships rather than verified causal pathways.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The source manuscript describes a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive survey. This design is suitable for summarizing respondents' views but cannot determine temporal order or rule out alternative explanations. Statements that cartoons “cause,” “lead to,” or “determine” behavior are therefore avoided in the interpretation.

Population, Setting, and Sample

The target population comprised mothers of pre-primary children enrolled in private schools in Karachi's Central District. The manuscript states that 100 mothers were randomly selected from ten schools. However, each of the ten supplied frequency tables reports a total of 50 responses. With no respondent-level dataset or explanation available, the present analysis uses $N = 50$ as the effective sample for the reported results. The claimed sampling frame, randomization procedure, school participation, response rate, and reason for the missing 50 cases require author verification before submission.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected with a self-developed questionnaire using a five-point Likert response format from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The source text states that the instrument was piloted, but it does not report pilot size, item development procedures, content-validity review, reliability statistics, language of administration, or dates of data collection. These details should be supplied to permit evaluation and replication.



Data Analysis

The available analysis is descriptive. Frequencies and percentages were retained exactly as shown in the source tables and consolidated into one table. Although the questionnaire reportedly offered five response categories, the supplied tables display only “agree” and “strongly agree”; both categories sum to 50 for every item. No inferential tests are warranted from the available material.

Ethical Considerations

The source manuscript does not report institutional ethical approval, informed consent procedures, confidentiality safeguards, or permission from participating schools. Because the study involves caregivers reporting about children, these matters should be documented in the final submission. No ethical approval number or consent statement has been invented in this revision.

Results

Table 1 consolidates the ten reported items. All displayed responses fall in the two positive categories. The table should therefore be read as a summary of the supplied aggregate results, not as independent confirmation that neutral or negative responses were absent from the original dataset.

Table 1
Reported maternal perceptions of cartoon viewing (N = 50 in supplied tables)

Survey statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Combined agreement
1. Child likes watching cartoons	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
2. Cartoon characters inspire the child	29 (58%)	21 (42%)	50 (100%)
3. Child likes cartoons based on physical violence	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
4. Child acts like cartoon characters	24 (48%)	26 (52%)	50 (100%)
5. Child prefers cartoons to physical activity	25 (50%)	25 (50%)	50 (100%)
6. Physical violence is the most attractive theme	24 (48%)	26 (52%)	50 (100%)
7. Cartoon language negatively influences behavior/language	22 (44%)	28 (56%)	50 (100%)
8. Child thinks killing/destroying enemies is right	24 (48%)	26 (52%)	50 (100%)
9. Child spends most daily time watching cartoons	24 (48%)	26 (52%)	50 (100%)
10. Cartoons contribute to foul language	22 (44%)	28 (56%)	50 (100%)



Attraction and Character Identification

Thirty-one mothers (62%) strongly agreed that their child liked watching cartoons, while 19 (38%) agreed. A similar pattern appeared for inspiration from cartoon characters: 29 (58%) strongly agreed and 21 (42%) agreed. Reports of behavioral imitation were somewhat less intense but still unanimous in direction, with 24 (48%) strongly agreeing and 26 (52%) agreeing that the child acted like cartoon characters.

Violence and Aggressive Scripts

Strong agreement that children liked cartoons based on physical violence was reported by 31 mothers (62%), with 19 (38%) agreeing. Twenty-four mothers (48%) strongly agreed and 26 (52%) agreed that physical violence was the most attractive theme. The same distribution appeared for the statement that children regarded killing or destroying enemies as right. These items reveal concern about violent narratives, but the survey did not independently code the cartoons viewed or observe children's behavior.

Language, Physical Activity, and Routine

For preference for cartoons over physical activity, the two response categories were evenly divided: 25 mothers (50%) strongly agreed and 25 (50%) agreed. Daily time spent watching cartoons produced 24 strong agreements (48%) and 26 agreements (52%). Perceived negative language influence and the use of foul language each received 22 strong agreements (44%) and 28 agreements (56%). These results identify domains of concern but provide no objective measures of viewing duration, activity, or language use.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The dominant finding is not variation across respondents but the uniform direction of the supplied responses. Every mother represented in the tables agreed to every statement, including strongly worded items about violence, foul language, and the correctness of destroying enemies. This pattern may reflect genuine concern in the participating group. It may also indicate acquiescence bias, leading wording, selective reporting of categories, data-entry problems, or a sample chosen because concerns were already present. The raw questionnaires or dataset should be checked before substantive claims are made.

Within those constraints, the results align with the view that children are attracted to vivid characters and may imitate memorable actions. Social cognitive theory offers a plausible interpretive mechanism: models that are appealing and rewarded can supply scripts for later behavior (Bandura, 2001). Yet the present data do not show which programs were watched, whether the portrayed acts were rewarded, or whether imitation occurred before or after exposure. Consequently, the study supports a hypothesis for further investigation rather than a causal conclusion.



Maternal concern about violent themes is consistent with prior discussion of aggressive media content, but contemporary evidence also shows that animation can transmit prosocial behavior. Zhang (2021) found that prosocial cartoon viewing can reduce aggression-related outcomes through changes in aggressive motivation. This contrast suggests that recommendations should focus on selecting and discussing content rather than banning an entire medium.

The reported preference for cartoons over physical activity and the perception of heavy daily viewing raise a displacement concern. Screen use may reduce time available for conversation, shared play, and movement, especially when it is prolonged or unsupervised. Associations reported by McArthur et al. (2022) and Gath et al. (2023) reinforce the value of examining the broader family routine. However, this survey did not record minutes of viewing, sleep, play, socioeconomic conditions, parental screen habits, or parent–child interaction, so competing explanations remain open.

Language findings should also be interpreted by content and context. Mothers associated cartoons with negative or foul language, yet animated material can support language learning when vocabulary is age-appropriate and adults scaffold comprehension (Vlachou et al., 2024). The implication is not that cartoon dialogue is intrinsically damaging, but that caregivers and educators should evaluate language, pacing, cultural fit, and opportunities for conversation.

Practical Recommendations

- Parents should preview or co-view cartoons, discuss fantasy and consequences, and ask children to explain characters' choices.
- Families should create predictable viewing routines that protect sleep, conversation, outdoor play, and shared activities.
- Teachers can recommend age-appropriate, prosocial, and educational animation while helping parents recognize violent or developmentally unsuitable content.
- Content producers should avoid rewarding aggression without consequences and should model respectful language, cooperation, emotional regulation, and problem-solving.
- Schools and parent-education programs should emphasize content quality and active mediation alongside reasonable limits on duration.
- Researchers should use validated measures, document sampling and ethics, record specific programs and viewing duration, and triangulate parent reports with observation or teacher ratings.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several material limitations. First, the reported sample of 100 conflicts with the $N = 50$ shown in every results table. Second, the sampling method is described as random but not documented, and the study is restricted to mothers connected with private schools in one district. Third, the self-developed instrument lacks reported validity and reliability evidence. Fourth, the displayed responses omit neutral and disagreement categories and show complete agreement on every item. Fifth, the items are largely evaluative and may invite socially desirable or



acquiescent responding. Sixth, all measures are maternal perceptions; there are no child assessments, observations, teacher reports, media diaries, or content analyses. Finally, the cross-sectional design cannot establish causality.

Future studies should resolve these issues through transparent recruitment, preregistered measures, balanced item wording, validated scales, and complete category reporting. Media diaries could capture duration and named programs, while systematic content coding could distinguish violence, humor, prosocial behavior, educational goals, and language complexity. Longitudinal or experimental designs would better test temporal and causal propositions. Including fathers, teachers, children from public schools, and families from multiple Karachi districts would improve representativeness.

Conclusion

The supplied survey portrays a group of mothers who consistently associate cartoon viewing with attraction, imitation, violent themes, reduced physical activity, and undesirable language. The pattern is striking, but the evidence is best understood as a record of caregiver perceptions rather than proof of effects on children. Cartoons are not a uniform exposure: their influence is likely shaped by narrative content, viewing duration, developmental readiness, and adult mediation. The most defensible practical response is therefore selective, engaged, and balanced viewing, accompanied by stronger research capable of distinguishing concern from measurable developmental change.

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