

Beyond Childhood Entertainment: A Content Analysis of Violence, Profanity, and Sexual Representation in Sonic the Hedgehog

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Abstract - Cartoons serve as a significant form of entertainment for children and are in high demand within the film industry. Nevertheless, contemporary animators often incorporate substantial amounts of violent, obscene languages, and sexual portrayals, along with special effects, to appeal the audiences and maximize distribution for the purpose of financial gain. Consequently, the portrayal of violence in these animated characters can lead to confusion among children and societal values. This study examines the contemporary challenges posed by animated film *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, by exploring their origins and the representation of the cartoon characters. The content analysis method was proposed and analyses was done by the variables such as violence, disturbing content, sexual activity, obscene language based on IMDb (an initialise for Internet Movie Database). Simultaneously the study reveals the effect and causes of contemporary cartoon which is more diverted to sexual and violent content where there are more chance for the young children audience to get impact. Therefore, the study advises parents to monitor their children's cartoon viewing habit and suggest to aware of the cartoon films or series content before they present to their kids. Finally, the researcher accomplishes the study with open ended conclusion, which motivates the further researchers to explore and work out with the issues and problem related to the study.

Keywords: Children, YouTube kids, Cartoon series, Violence, Sexual profanity, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1800s, when the initial motion pictures were created, cartoons have played a significant role in the evolution of cinema. A cartoon is defined as a film that employs animation techniques instead of live actors, especially in the context of family-oriented comedies, (Thompson, 2010). Contemporary children's animated films depict sexual activity in a forward-thinking way, encompassing a range of violence, gender identities, and expressions of obscene language in the form of humour. When kids watch the channel, the visual narration or information that is shown during the presentation is just as much a part of their viewing experience as the actual program.

Earlier days there are more animated cartoon shows been sired with moral messages which comes along with social issues? The networks like STAR and DISNEY took the strong responsibility in telecasting a successful cartoon shows like Scooby doo, Popeye the sailor, Tom and Jerry and Adams family. When the technology and the innovation developed, there can be seen a vast diversification among the audience mind also. Some of the trending cartoon in a recent time was, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*. Comparing to other forms of programming, animation has the ability to trivialize and make fun of adult issues while also creating an environment where kids accept these representations as normal, *Krendl and Warren (2011)*

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The world of cartoons and bright colours centre's around highlighting a child, influencing their feelings, and setting specific standards. Cartoon shows tell stories through various methods, featuring themes, adventures, and imaginative scenarios. Storytelling is shaped by past experiences, organized into chapters or scenes that connect events. Many young people's memories, ideas, and dreams are framed within these thematic narratives against a vibrant backdrop created by adults. Therefore, the cartoon characters in recent phase were consist of sexual profanity and more violence.

Cartoon violence serves as a significant means of evading restrictions. In children's programming, cartoons represent the predominant source of anti-social violence, (Dauglas Bruce, 2001). Therefore, the producer should have the wise responsibility to produce animated cartoons films with morality. But the contemporary animated characters and the films are not created in an ethical way which may pollute children's perception and learning from cartoon characters and behaviours. The video producers highlight human structure to differentiate their product and boost its comedic elements. This sexual content piques toddlers' curiosity about the opposite gender's anatomy. The cartoon's sexual themes trigger psychological responses, activating the This study reveals the representation of modern cartoon characters and analyse the effect caused by those unethical themes and representations in cartoons in order to fix the issue through analysing two popular cartoon series which is discussed in further topics of the research study.

Sonic the Hedgehog 2

Sonic the Hedgehog 2, a 2022 action-adventure comedy film inspired by the Sega franchise, is directed by Jeff Fowler and follows the 2020 film. It features returning cast members Jim Carrey, Tika Sumpter, Colleen O'Shaughnessy, James Marsden, and Ben Schwartz, with Idris Elba joining the cast. The story follows Sonic and Tails as they race to find the Master Emerald before Dr. Robotnik and Knuckles can get it.

Earlier, Yuji Naka and Naoto Ohshima, renowned Japanese game developers, created the character Sonic the Hedgehog. Serving as the mascot for the Japanese video game company Sega, Sonic is the central figure in the Sonic the Hedgehog series. This character is depicted as a blue hedgehog endowed with supersonic speed and anthropomorphic traits. In his mission to defeat his nemesis, Doctor Eggman, Sonic races through various levels, collecting rings and avoiding obstacles. His supporting cast includes his loyal companion Miles "Tails" Power, his self-identified girlfriend Amy Rose, and his friendly rival Knuckles the Echidna.



source: <https://sonic.fandom.com>

source: from Google image

Table 1.1 Seasons of cartoon series sonic the hedgehog

Name	Episodes	Release date
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: Super Sonic</i>	5	26 February 2002
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: The Complete Series</i>	26	27 March 2007
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: The Fight for Freedom</i>	4	16 September 2008
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: Sonic Goes Green</i>	4	3 March 2009
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: Freedom Fighters Unite!</i>	4	September 2009
<i>Sonic the Hedgehog: Sonic Forever</i>	6	16 March 2010

Source: List of Sonic the Hedgehog (TV series) episodes | Sonic Wiki Zone | Fandom

The series aired on ABC from September 18, 1993, to December 3, 1994, over two seasons and 26 episodes, with rebroadcasts continuing until 1995. Although a third season was planned, it ended on a cliff-hanger after Disney acquired ABC. Despite its cancellation, the show gained a cult following. It also inspired the 1993 video game Sonic Spin Ball and the long-running Sonic the Hedgehog comic series by Archie Comics. Later the game was converted to animated cartoon series and it was aired in Disney channel from 2021 and its latest version sonic the hedgehog 3 is waiting for the release by December, 2024. These series videos are shown and always available in YouTube kids' channel. Subsequently, this animated series gained immense popularity, prompting numerous cartoonists to create their own scripts featuring this character, exploring a variety of themes. The glamorous attire of Sonic and his supporting characters, along with the character narration, showcased a diverse array of styles. Additionally, In the video, there were also occasional conversations about love, romance, and adult content dialogues.

IMDb (Internet Movie Database)

It is a digital platform that serves as a comprehensive source of information about films, television series, podcasts, home videos, video games, and streaming content. It features information on cast and crew, biographies, plot summaries, trivia, ratings, and reviews from both fans and critics. Originally launched in 1990 as a fan-driven database within the "rec .arts. Movies" Usenet group, it transitioned to an online format in 1993 and has been operated by IMDb.com, Inc., a subsidiary of Amazon, since 1998.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Killermann (2011) highlighted in his study "Breaking through the binary: Gender explained using continuums", that sexual diversity encompasses various aspects such as gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientations, and biological sex. Each of these categories is unique and separate from the others.

Elizbeth B. Hurlock (1980) found in her study "*Developmental Psychology a Life Span Approach*" that, the influence of media is extensive and profound, manifesting not only through direct, immediate, and observable impacts but also throughout historical contexts.

Hassan and Daniyal (2013) noted in his research study "*Cartoon Network and its Impact on Behaviour of School Going Children: A Case Study of Bahawalpur*", that most children imitate various characters due to their impressionable nature. After watching comedic altercations, 57.8% prefer playful fights with peers. Cartoon Network significantly influences school-aged children's language, aggression, fashion, and lifestyle.

Krendl and Warren (2011, p.59) in his research "Learning by any other name: communication research traditions in learning and media", detected that when children initiate communication, imitation, performance, or representation of observed experiences, they are participating in active learning. The retention of this information suggests that the material they have encountered has impacted the child's attitudes, leading to the adoption of new behaviours and the gradual influence of the presented content on the child's personality.

Khaled Habib and Tarek Soliman (2015) conducted a study on how cartoons influence school-age children's attitudes and behaviours. They identified sexual content in cartoons as a major concern, noting a trend of suggestive material disguised as humour and action. The researchers argue that the psychological effects of this content far exceed any temporary entertainment, as modern cartoon comedies often feature sexual humour that resembles harassment and seduction.

Marsh et al., (2015) in his research study "Exploring Play and Creativity in Pre-Schoolers" stated that in recent years, YouTube Kids has gained significant popularity among children and their families globally. The two platforms have been utilized by children to watch videos online.

Research objectives

1. To know the inappropriate contents and issues of contemporary animated characters.
2. To analyse ideology used in the representation of the cartoon characters of the modern cartoon films.
3. To find whether the current cartoon characters are safety and appropriate for young children to view.

Research Questions

1. What types of contents are delivered to our kids in the cartoon films Sonic the Hedgehog 2?
2. How the characters are represented in the cartoon films Sonic the Hedgehog 2?
3. Does these Cartoons might work as educators or as brainwashers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study suggests Albert Bandura's social learning theory. This theory suggests that Bandura's social learning theory suggests that exposure to media violence negatively impacts children, impairing their ability to differentiate between reality and the virtual world. Young children, in particular, find it difficult to recognize that cartoons are fictional, even though this developmental stage is vital for observation, memory, and imitation. Additionally, children often observe and mimic the violent actions and storylines they see in cartoons, highlighting the importance of both teaching and observation as key learning methods. When cartoon narratives resemble real-life situations, the information they retain becomes linked to the real world. Over time, the violent themes portrayed in animations can subtly shape children's social understanding and behaviour, potentially leading to increased aggression and violent tendencies in their interactions, which may contribute to criminal behaviour and significant societal issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The content analyses method was selected for the research study and the paper draws discussions on a mixture of the sources from academic journal articles, Google search, and Google Scholar and IMDb websites. Convenience sampling method is used and the cartoon characters of the animation film *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, was selected as the sample of the research study. Based on the IMDb ratings and reviews of these movies, the variable was framed, which focuses on costume, themes, violence, disturbing content, sexual activity, obscene language presented in the sampled movie.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

Sonic the hedgehog: This film, released in 2022, is an action-adventure superhero comedy that draws inspiration from the Sonic the Hedgehog cartoon series. It serves as a sequel to the 2020 movie *Sonic the Hedgehog* and represents the second part in the Sonic the Hedgehog film franchise produced by Paramount Pictures. The film was directed by Jeff Fowler and the story was written by Rick Rubin, Darryl McDaniels, Joseph & Jam Master Jay. The film's Stars with the cast James Marsden, Jim Carrey and Ben Schwartz along with the sonic and supportive animated character crews. The film runs for 2 hours 2 minutes and it was certified in India, as "7" (Unrestricted public exhibition, but with parental guidance for children below the age of 7 years) and in Malaysia, the film was certified as P13 (Parental guidance under the age 13).

Storyline: Tom and Maddie opt to leave Sonic at home during their vacation, believing he is now prepared for increased independence following their relocation to Green Hills. However, shortly after their departure, Dr. Robotnik reemerges, this time joined by Knuckles, who possesses an emerald capable of both creating and annihilating civilizations. Alongside Tails, his loyal companion, Sonic embarks on a mission to find the emerald before it falls into the wrong hands.



Source: www.IMDb.com

CONTENT ANALYSIS ON VARIABLES

1. Violence - Dr. Robotnik is shown mixing a drink with mushrooms when a small creature is accidentally crushed and impaled. An explosion sends Dr. Robotnik flying backward. At the same time, aggressive soldiers are launched into space, with one being knocked out by a large flying rock. In a high-speed pursuit, two criminals hurl bombs at police cars, leading to several crashes as the vehicles speed through the city. Sonic steps in, ejecting the thieves from their speeding car and tossing their bombs into a garbage truck. Just as Sonic intervenes, the truck heads straight for a toddler holding an ice cream cone. Amid the chaos, Sonic unintentionally causes a water main to burst beneath the city, sending jets of water shooting into the streets.

Rachel delivers a grave warning to Tom, stating that she will "end him" if he interferes with her wedding. Sonic is launched through the walls of his home, then sent crashing into a tree before hitting the ground. Knuckles is hit by a speeding car and thrown into a shed. Sonic finds himself in a deadly situation with Knuckles. A car veers off a rail, while Knuckles is sent flying through a truck. Tails is urged to escape by a severed fish head. Both Tails and Sonic are captured and nearly tossed into a fire. As lasers are aimed at them, Sonic grabs a missile and fires it at Dr. Robotnik, causing an explosion that knocks Tails unconscious. In a desperate move, Sonic saves her from an oncoming avalanche. Tom delivers a punch to Randall's face.

After the wedding, people start firing teasers. A man is thrown into the air after threatening Maddie and Rachel. Rachel accidentally releases a flash of light, sending everyone aiming guns at Maddie flying backward. In a fit of anger, Rachel declares her intention to kill Randall for betraying her, just as a man falls from the sky. To demonstrate her weapon's power, she shoots at a cake. A booby-trapped temple tries to crush, incinerate, shoot, and impale anyone who dares to enter. During their fight, Sonic and

Knuckles exchange fierce blows. Just as Knuckles is about to land a lethal hit on Sonic, the temple starts to collapse around them. Sonic steps in to save Knuckles, who is on the verge of being crushed and drowning.

Finally, Sonic, in danger of drowning, is saved by Knuckles. At the same time, Dr. Robotnik unleashes a gigantic, destructive metal robot that lifts vehicles and other metallic items into the sky. Amid the chaos, both Sonic and Tails are hit by missiles. Sonic is then knocked off a bridge by a projectile and falls to the ground, narrowly avoiding being crushed by the enormous robot, which he ultimately defeats by decapitating it.

2. Nudity and sexual activity- Randall and his groomsmen play volleyball shirtless. Randall and Rachel kiss, where the shot runs for greater than 40 seconds.



Source: www.IMDb.com

3. Content that may disturb children- Sonic the Hedgehog 2 includes scenes that may distress children under five, alongside its violent content. Alien soldiers with menacing swords and helmets emerge through a portal but are outsmarted by Dr. Robotnik. At home, Sonic feels uneasy as a sinister shadow loom over his chimney, and he is then violently attacked by Dr. Robotnik and Knuckles, who break through his walls. Just as Sonic seems overwhelmed, Tails intervenes to save him.

There are scenes which disturbs the Children aged 5 to 8 may feel fear in certain situations. For instance, during one of Dr. Robotnik's attacks, Tails is injured, causing Sonic to worry as she remains unconscious. Near a wrecked vehicle, Sonic, Tom, and Maddie unite as Dr. Robotnik launches his final assault. They share their love for each other just as a giant metal foot looms over them, suggesting imminent danger. Although it appears they are crushed, they ultimately escape unharmed.

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After concluding their volleyball match, Randal and his volleyball teammates celebrate by spraying champagne. The individuals encourage each other to take hold of their drinks. In a pub setting, the characters indulge in alcoholic beverages, with Rachel promptly finishing a bottle of wine before disposing of it.

4. Profanity - There's some coarse language in Sonic the Hedgehog 2, including 'shit-ake planet', holy crap', 'screwed' and 'hell'. There's also crude butt humour. According to Knuckles, the most vulnerable part of the Eggman robot is its "groin." During a wedding ceremony, the bride mentions that she had a certain area of her body waxed. While she does not specify, her meaning is quite evident. A notable moment occurs when Rachel comments on her groom's "perfectly man caped body." When Tails reveals to Sonic that he has been observing him since the baseball scene in the first film, Sonic inquires, "Even in the shower?" Additionally, Sonic instructs Tom to take Sunburn to an uncomfortable location. Out of the four kissing scenes, three are only one second long, while one extends to seven seconds.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Cartoons play a vital role in children's culture, representing an essential aspect of spiritual heritage with cultural importance and a sense of social duty. However, the pursuit of substantial profits has ignited a frenzy driven by commercial interests, resulting in an increasing presence of violence and anthropomorphism in cartoons. Consequently, this shift is transforming educational animated films into rare commodities. Therefore, the research finds that many research studies have established a link between cartoons and violent behaviour, indicating that children who view violent cartoons are more prone to exhibit violent actions themselves (Ergün, 2012; Klein & Shiffman, 2008; Odukomaiya, 2014; Thompson, 2018). Cultural appreciation should be grounded in well-defined principles and should dismiss overly simplistic, localized, and exaggerated forms of artistic expression. However,

in the face of intense competition, some media organizations appear to have compromised their professional integrity and social responsibilities.

CAUSE AND EFFECTS OF THE CARTOON CHARACTERS

In the case of sonic the hedgehog, the central theme of Sonic the Hedgehog 2 is that anyone has the potential to be a hero, but the pivotal moments of heroism often arise unexpectedly rather than being deliberately chosen. The characters in the animation offer additional avenues for exploring the narrative. Additionally, the absence of real-world consequences allows for the incorporation of violent themes related to fantasy and conflict. For example, Sonic the Hedgehog 2 can serve as a platform to engage in discussions with children about the real-life implications of actions such as seeking revenge, deceiving others, betraying trust, and using violence to resolve conflicts.

It is evident that using artistic methods to depict and amplify violence in cartoon characters enables children to develop a type of "genuine and safe". In sonic the hedgehog 2, there is a good message also showcased alongside such as loyalty, compassion, teamwork, courage and importance of friendship with the imagination by openly showcasing concealed violence. This gradual introduction of violent language and actions from cartoons into children's consciousness can normalize such behaviours, resulting in detrimental social effects. Although not every child will be influenced by the violent aspects of animation, these representations can desensitize them to violent stories, heighten their subconscious recognition of violent themes, and promote a sense of apathy and indifference.

CONCLUSION

Last but not least, when current systems malfunction, particularly when networks carelessly expose young children to explicit adult-themed information through the animated content, there must be a legal sanction. The most immediate effects of drug use, explicit sex, violence, and profanity are felt by children. Until these fixes are implemented, we will have to rely on our capacity to raise public awareness and keep using research to help hold the system that is turning out to be defective and failing accountable. Regretfully, our children are still exposed to large amounts of adult-themed content as we continue to discuss these solutions, and films and social media continue to decide how much of that content is OK for kids and teenagers to view. Additionally, the creators of the film Sonic the Hedgehog claim that the show is appropriate for kids aged six to eleven. Above all, do the children in any nation, for that matter, need to be exposed to such content?

The researcher, however, would want to keep the research paper open-ended.

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