

A Study of the Impact of Cartoon Characters on Children's Buying Behaviour (With Special Reference to Srinagar District)

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Abstract: This research paper investigates the influence of cartoon characters on the buying behaviour of school-age children in Srinagar District, Kashmir. With the growing exposure of children to mass media and advertising, cartoon characters have become powerful tools for marketers, significantly shaping children's preferences, demands, and consumption patterns. The study aims to analyze how these animated figures affect children's decision-making, brand recall, and pester power, particularly in relation to food products, toys, stationery, and clothing. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to parents and children aged 6–12 years. The findings reveal a strong correlation between frequent media exposure and increased influence of cartoon characters on children's product choices. The study also explores the role of parents in mediating these influences and highlights the ethical concerns around targeted marketing to vulnerable age groups. This Kashmir-based study contributes valuable insights into the socio-cultural dimensions of consumer behaviour among young audiences in a region with unique media consumption patterns.

Key Words: cartoon, children, consumer behaviour, mass media.

1. INTRODUCTION: In recent decades, the media landscape has undergone a profound transformation, significantly altering the way children engage with content and form consumer preferences. Among the most pervasive and influential elements in children's media are cartoon characters, which have transcended entertainment to become vital tools of commercial persuasion. These animated figures are deliberately designed to capture children's attention through vibrant visuals, humor, and narrative appeal, effectively establishing emotional connections that influence product desires (Kunkel et al., 2004; Valkenburg & Cantor, 2001).

Advertising strategies targeting children have increasingly relied on cartoon characters to promote a range of products—particularly food items, toys, clothing, and school supplies. These characters function as powerful marketing agents, contributing to early brand recognition, recall, and loyalty among children (Robinson et al., 2007). Scholars like McNeal (1992) have long argued that children, though not traditional consumers, wield substantial influence over family purchasing decisions through what is commonly referred to as pester power. This influence becomes particularly pronounced when children are exposed repeatedly to branded cartoon content, cultivating preferences that often translate into real-world consumption (McNeal, 1999).

In the Indian context, cartoons such as Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, and Motu Patlu have become household names. Their widespread popularity has not only shaped entertainment preferences but also significantly impacted what children eat, wear, and use in their daily lives (Sharmila, 2015). Studies like those by Bhargava et al. (2013) have highlighted a direct link between cartoon-based food advertisements and children's increased preference for unhealthy, processed food products—raising alarms over the ethical dimensions of such targeted marketing.

However, much of the existing scholarship on this subject has focused on urban and metropolitan areas, leaving a notable gap in understanding how children in regions like Kashmir engage with media and respond to cartoon-based marketing.

With rising access to television, smartphones, and digital platforms in Srinagar District, children in the valley are increasingly immersed in the same media ecosystem as their urban peers. Yet, the region's unique socio-political conditions, cultural practices, and parental mediation strategies necessitate a localized exploration of how such media consumption translates into consumer behaviour.

This study is grounded in Cultivation Theory, originally proposed by George Gerbner, which posits that long-term exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. Cultivation theory argues that the more time people spend immersed in media narratives—especially television—the more likely they are to accept the mediated world as a reflection of real-life norms and values. Applied to this research, the theory helps explain how continuous exposure to cartoon programs featuring branded content and character endorsements cultivates consumerist attitudes among children. In the context of Srinagar District, where children increasingly access television and digital media, the repetitive portrayal of cartoon characters associated with specific products (such as snacks, toys, and clothing) leads to a distorted sense of value and desirability linked to those items. This symbolic cultivation fosters brand loyalty and materialistic desires at an early age. The theory also underpins the concept of "pester power," as children internalize media messages and attempt to translate their media-influenced preferences into real-life purchases by influencing their parents. Therefore, cultivation theory provides a critical lens to understand how children's media consumption habits shape their consumer behavior and perceptions in a localized Kashmiri socio-cultural setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: The influence of media on children's consumer behaviour has been a topic of growing interest among researchers, particularly in the context of advertising strategies that target young audiences. One of the most common and effective techniques used by marketers is the use of cartoon characters to promote products. These characters appeal strongly to children due to their visual appeal, emotional connection, and familiarity (Kunkel et al., 2004). Studies have shown that cartoon characters help in enhancing brand recognition and recall, often making children more likely to prefer products that feature their favourite animated figures (Robinson et al., 2007).

McNeal (1992) was one of the earliest researchers to systematically study children's consumer behavior, introducing the concept of "pester power"—the ability of children to influence their parents' purchasing decisions. Marketers have since used cartoon characters to exploit this influence, especially in product categories like sugary cereals, snacks, toys, and school supplies. Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) highlighted that children under the age of 12 often lack the cognitive skills to understand persuasive intent in advertising, making them particularly vulnerable to such marketing techniques. In the Indian context, cartoons like Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, and Motu Patlu have gained massive popularity among children. Research conducted by Sharmila (2015) noted that children in urban India are heavily influenced by these characters in their day-to-day choices, from what they eat to what they wear. Similarly, Bhargava et al. (2013) found that food advertisements using popular cartoon characters increased children's desire for unhealthy food items, raising public health concerns.

Although much of the existing literature comes from Western and metropolitan Indian contexts, studies focusing on media influence in regions like Kashmir are scarce. Given the growing access to cable television, internet, and smartphones in Kashmir—even in semi-urban and rural settings—children in districts like Srinagar are now as exposed to these influences as their urban counterparts. However, socio-cultural differences in parenting styles, media consumption, and purchasing power may affect how children in Kashmir respond to such marketing.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap by exploring the unique media environment of Srinagar and its impact on children's buying behaviour through cartoon-based marketing. It also aims to understand parental mediation strategies and the ethical dimensions of targeting young children through media.

3. OBJECTIVES:

1. To enlist the cartoon programs viewed by the sample under study.
2. To study the impact of children's preferences on the buying behaviour of parents

4.METHODOLOGY: This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of cartoon characters on children's buying behaviour in Srinagar District, Kashmir. The research focuses on school-age children between 6 and 12 years, as this age group is highly influenced by media and plays an active role in family consumption decisions. The primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to both parents and their children. The questionnaires were designed to gather information about the types of cartoon programs most frequently viewed, the children's preferences related to

products featuring cartoon characters, and the degree to which these preferences influence the parents' purchasing decisions.

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation from different areas within Srinagar. The sample consisted of 100 children and 100 parents, selected from various schools and households across the district. In addition to the surveys, informal interviews were conducted with select parents to gain deeper insights into their experiences with pester power and the impact of cartoon-based advertising on family spending habits.

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distributions and percentage analysis to identify viewing patterns and influence levels. The qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed to highlight recurring trends and parental perspectives. This methodological framework allowed for a well-rounded analysis of how cartoon characters shape consumer behavior in young audiences within the cultural and media context of Kashmir.

5. FINDINGS:

Parameter Finding Sample Size	100 parent-child pairs
Daily Cartoon Viewing	87% of children watch cartoon programs daily Most Preferred Cartoons Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, Motlu Patlu
Parental Influence	73% of parents influenced by children's preferences when shopping for food items, toys, clothing, or school accessories
Cartoon-Themed Product Preference (Children)	65% preferred cartoon-themed lunch boxes, notebooks, snacks, and clothing
Pester Power Impact	Over 50% of parents admitted to giving in to repeated requests for cartoon-themed products
Parental Concerns (Qualitative Insights)	- Rise in consumerism - Brand fixation - Poor nutritional choices due to cartoon ads
Suggested Solutions (Parental Views)	- Need for media literacy - Regulation of advertising targeting children
Cultural Insight	Cartoon characters significantly shape household buying behavior in Srinagar's socio-cultural context

Table 1

The data collected through structured questionnaires and interviews were analyzed to explore the influence of cartoon characters on children's buying behaviour and how it affects parental purchasing decisions. Quantitative data from 100 parent-child pairs were processed using descriptive statistics, primarily through frequency and percentage distributions.

In *Table 1*, the analysis is done based on the information received from the sample under study to know the Impact of Cartoon Characters on Children's Buying Behaviour. The results revealed that 87% of children watched cartoon programs daily, with Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, and Motu Patlu being the most preferred. Approximately 73% of parents reported being influenced by their children's preferences while shopping for food items, toys, clothing, or school accessories. The analysis also highlighted that 65% of children preferred products featuring cartoon characters, such as cartoon-themed lunch boxes, notebooks, snack items, and clothing. More than 50% of parents admitted to giving in to their children's repeated requests for such products, indicating a strong presence of pester power.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews brought forth recurring parental concerns regarding increased consumerism, brand fixation, and poor nutritional choices influenced by cartoon advertisements. Many parents also emphasized the need for media literacy and regulated advertising to protect children from manipulative marketing practices. The insights reinforce the idea that cartoon characters not only capture children's attention but actively shape household buying behaviour in the cultural context of Srinagar.

6. CONCLUSION: This study clearly demonstrates that cartoon characters have a significant impact on the buying behaviour of school-age children in Srinagar District, Kashmir. With the majority of children exposed to daily cartoon programming—particularly shows like Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, and Motu Patlu—these animated figures have

become powerful influencers in shaping young minds and their product preferences. The findings indicate that children's attraction to cartoon-themed products strongly affects parental purchasing decisions, especially in categories such as food, clothing, toys, and school supplies.

The study also highlights the growing influence of pester power, with over half of the parents acknowledging that they often give in to their children's persistent requests for cartoon-branded items. This not only reinforces brand loyalty from an early age but also raises concerns about impulsive consumption and unhealthy food choices among children.

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