

The Evolution and Extent of the Effect of Children's TV Shows Upon Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to focus on the gradual effects various media have on a child's upbringing in the past few decades and to explore the relationship between children's TV shows and the intellectual growth of this select group of youths. In the past years, various television and visual entertainment sources have been garnering increased popularity, especially among children, with the specific effects of these TV shows on children's intellectual growth rarely being called into question. Thus, a study will be conducted through a survey, with the selection of participants being limited to those that have watched this media at a young age. This survey would then be incorporated into a correlational investigation, comparing the responses with an analysis of the TV shows that determines the educational density of the first season of the most popular media among children from 2000 to 2012. After analyzing the perceptions and educational achievement of the survey participants, I discovered that there is a strong correlation in terms of various perceptions of these TV shows and the educational content with a slight relationship between the educational and intellectual content of the shows. This would prove to support existing data while also having the potential of influencing further examination within this field.

INTRODUCTION

Television as an entertainment source has been gaining more and more traction among children, but many of the effects of such TV shows continue to exist in doubt. For example, violent movies and TV shows have been found to have negative physiological implications on children's future wellbeing. However, some questions must still be answered, for example, few studies have analyzed the direct correlation between the explicit content within this media and the educational output within a student's education. This beckons the question as to what is the evolution and the extent of the correlation between children's TV shows released from 2000-2012 and adolescents' perceptions and intellectual growth resulting from such consumption in the United States?

This question is immensely prevalent, especially in our current-day society. Every day, the entertainment industry has become more and more incorporated into daily life with the introduction of more advanced and accessible technologies. TV shows have become a huge part of many adolescent lives, and these lives could be affected negatively by certain popular franchises unknown to the parents. Children spend an average weekly time of 1,103 minutes viewing television and 43% of parents across the United States allow their children to consume up to two to four hours of screen time per day (Jocelyn et al., 2021). The children among today's generation don't know a world without smartphones or the internet, and with these technologies at their fingertips, they're absorbing entertainment at an exponential rate.

Gap in the Research

Many parents across the globe are noticing these new industries and franchises hooking their children in and creating an addiction, becoming a debatable issue as to if these TV shows have an effect on their children and if it perpetuates linguistic and intellectual advancement. Few studies have explicitly analyzed the relationship between children's TV

shows and the educational growth of an individual specifically in the United States with many others not analyzing the evolution, or devolution, of these TV shows in conveying moral and universal lessons.

Hypothesis

A few concrete assumptions can be made regarding the findings within this study. A comprehensive investigation through a quantitative study examining specific television programs is poised to unveil that heightened viewership of scientific shows, such as the illustrious "Magic School Bus," engenders a greater propensity among students to progress in terms of general empirical and biological based-knowledge while the perceptions regarding those TV shows are not affected by the various media. Conversely, non-educational media lacking a dedicated educational foundation will exhibit no discernible correlation between these two variables, while the progression or transformation of the aforementioned TV shows remains indeterminate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intellectual Growth

Saeid Atoofi, a doctorate holder in Applied Linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles, provides specific information on the effect of mainstream adolescent TV shows, specifically the *Bubble Guppies* in this case, on a child's growth at an intellectual level (2015). Sociolinguistics and pragmatics, which are complex divisions of linguistics, are frequently defined as the attempt to learn about the meaning of words or sentences given a specific social context (Atoofi, 2015). It then introduces the definition of the social semiotic method, which is the primary method in which this study was conducted as it explores the dynamic between the content and performance capabilities (Atoofi, 2015). It analyzes specific episodes of *Bubble Guppies*, beginning where the human-like mermaids learn about the mysteries of ancient Egypt, and then analyzes the participants' advancements in knowledge and growth (Atoofi, 2015). This study found that the show could serve to propagate both intellectual and mental health on a neural level, directly connecting to how children's TV shows affect an adolescent in terms of physiological growth and providing a multiplicity of evidence to prove their theory in a specific field of linguistics (Atoofi, 2015).

A separate article ties directly into this, taking a primary focus on the educational and intellectual value of television programs for children, and evaluating future possibilities for children's media (Santomero, 2019). Taking a focus on earlier 21st-century shows, it clarifies how these shows gave children the space to interact, learn, and express their feelings and how these shows helped children score better on standardized tests, taking multiple studies to prove these theories (Santomero, 2019).

Language also proves to be a vital aspect to be discussed with the potential language benefits of children's television programs for infants and toddlers (Linebarger, 2004). Multiple studies were analyzed to determine the relation to child outcomes, including the; predictor of language outcomes, and computation of growth trajectories, concluding that viewing this media at a young age was related to vocabulary size and expressive language use of these individuals (Linebarger, 2004).

Physiological Development

TV might also influence the future personality that these children develop. For example, the physiological reaction that students have to conflict. A study found the effect of TV shows on children from ages 5-7 in terms of violence (Rasmussen, 2014). The study showed some children violent shows and showed other more peaceful television, and then studied whether they mediated in altercations (Rasmussen, 2014). The study found that those who saw violent

content responded much worse, showing the effects it may have on exacerbating conflict (Rasmussen, 2014). The TV shows may very well have made the children more aggressive.

However, this is far from the only effect. Television shows people watch when young may also have an impact on the qualities people look for in a romantic partner as they get older (Eggermont, 2004). The study found that the type of television a child watches determines the qualities they believe they will look for as they age (Eggermont, 2004). While people's views on romantic relationships no doubt shift as they age, the impressions formed at this stage of development may very well have an impact on the future (Eggermont, 2004). This is important, as few factors influence someone's life the way significant others do.

Impacts on Adult Life

Television might have an impact on the adult activities that a person pursues. Studies found that watching increased news and other late-night programming when young has a significant and positive impact on civic engagement (Hoffman and Thomson, 2009). This influence may even lead to someone pursuing a civics career. If news programming has this effect when watched young, others may very well have the same. Lastly, basic moral values may very well be influenced by children's television. A study found that leisure-time activities, especially children's media, have an outsized effect on the basic values that the children have, which in turn will influence the person they grow to be (Pavolik and Ivana, 2022). Considering individual moral frameworks play a contributing factor in most decisions, the potential influence of television cannot be understated. Television might very well influence children's future aggressiveness, significant others, community participation, and basic values.

These factors can be exemplified by a meta-analysis study that synthesized twenty-four other works to study the impact Sesame Street had on both a socioeconomic and cognitive level (Mares and Pan, 2013). 10,000 children were analyzed from all over the world at multiple socioeconomic levels. It ultimately indicated significant positive effects from exposure to the program, aggregated across learning outcomes, and is then divided into three separate categories. The effects were significant across multiple methods and there was also a distinctive result between high-income and low-income countries (Mares and Pan, 2013). This shows that the impact of television may very well be universal through both cultural and socioeconomic groups and that some types of television may very well help children grow, and certainly influence them. The fact that the effect was consistent amongst these multiple perspectives shows the far-reaching consequence of the subject matter and enforces the importance of future study.

Summary

The literature establishes the pressing nature of needing to study the effect television has on adolescents' intellectual and psychological growth on the United States west coast. To determine this, a quantitative study may be used to analyze the frequency of certain educational outputs and universal lessons that are projected through these TV shows. An experimental study may help determine the degree to which TV contributes to or harms the upbringing and development of children. Since this study is focused on individuals who were children from 2000-2012, the analysis will focus on the most popular shows of that decade and shift through multiple shows, evaluating their internal meaning and effectiveness in informing the audiences at the time. Meanwhile, the young adults of this generation will also be surveyed to assess their perception of these shows and how their personality was influenced by these media outputs. Optimally, this study will help shed some light on the impact that television had.

METHODOLOGY

Data Analysis: Correlational Research

Correlational research is essentially defined as a method in which the user collects data to determine the level of correlation between separate variables (Bhandari, 2022). A correlational research design investigates relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating them. It also works to reflect the strength and direction of the relationship between the various variables (Bhandari, 2022). The direction of a correlation can be either positive or negative. There are many different methods you can use in correlational research. In the social and behavioral sciences, the most common data collection methods for this type of research include surveys, observations, and secondary data (Bhandari, 2022). This method would be most useful toward the goals of my research as it aims to determine the association between two separate variables: children's TV shows and intellectual development/perceptions. No other form of research would be able to achieve this objective to this caliber.

An example of correlational research being used within my discipline could be seen in Mahasweta Dubey's "Screen-based Media Use and Screen Time Assessment Among Adolescents Residing in an Urban Settlement (Dubey et al., 2018)." This source discusses how media forms are a huge factor in the lives of adolescents, specifically television, and how there is a growing concern about the influence of media on every aspect of the health of children (Dubey et al., 2018). A study is described in which they assess the pattern of screen-based media usage and how often they were engulfed in their media (Dubey et al., 2018). They then go on to describe the effect of these technologies and TV media on a child's physiological and mental growth, ultimately creating a sort of screen-usage guide for maximized growth (Dubey et al., 2018). This shows how effective correlational research is and also proves to allude to the relevant gap as there are studies in which the use of electronics is measured in behavior, but not the specific relationship between children's TV shows and intellectual growth.

To get more specific research that uses a survey to conduct a correlational study, the "Impact of TV Program Cartoons on Child Viewers of Urban and Rural Areas," serves as a clear example (De, 2021). This source studies how television influences society, specifically cartoons on children viewers in urban and rural areas (De, 2021). They sent out a survey in which they discovered that television had helped children learn different aspects of languages and concepts of a team working (De, 2021). This is a specific instance in which surveys proved to be significant in determining a link between both variables within the experiment.

Research Method: Surveys

Because of this prevalent gap within the research and the significance it holds in modern society, research has to be conducted to determine what the prospects of children's TV shows hold as the result of their upbringing. To do this, the use of quantitative methods was implemented. Surveys were the most effective as they allowed for the evaluation of how adolescents are believed to have grown and also allowed for a specific scale to be created in which the educational output of TV shows could be clearly measured. Determining the level of intellectual and educational output of the most popular TV shows in this time period and then cross-relating it with the perceptions of the individuals within the survey allowed for a clear comparison and measurement of data. For this, a scale was created to have a defined quantification of each of the children's TV shows and the educational output. After this measurement, there was a clear analysis of any prevailing trends within the quality of the TV shows which also aids the field of intellectual upbringing.

The survey also focused on the specific perceptions of the participants who viewed these TV shows extensively. In addition to the questions used for an intellectual analysis, two other inquiries were put into place that asked if the participant believed that the TV shows they watched at a younger age affected their linguistic development and

what the TV shows overall affect on their intellectual development was as a whole. Two indexes were created: educational output and perceptions. In addition to this, there was an evaluation as to if trends between older generations and new generations could be determined to see if TV shows have evolved or devolved.

Selection of Participants and TV Shows

The selected participants consisted of individuals who had aged anywhere from 2 to 14 during the period from 2000 to 2012. More specifically, this included individuals who were born between 1997 and 2010 and were born in the United States. There was also a preference towards those who viewed extensive media at a young age, with the media playing a larger role in their lives. In addition to these participants, TV shows were selected on a year-by-year basis. The most popular children's TV shows from each year were included in the study and survey, with any repeats being eliminated.

Instruments and Study Procedure

As mentioned prior, data was collected through the use of surveys created through Google Forms, an accessible website with a user-friendly interface. The survey was divided into three primary sections. The first section aimed to acquire preliminary information regarding the participants. This included information such as their age, grade, and prevalence of shows throughout their childhood. Only if the participants watched an average of over 5 hours of television a week during their childhood were they able to proceed. The final question of section one listed the most popular TV shows from 2000 to 2012, and participants were required to select the three TV shows they watched the most before proceeding to the next section.

Section two then asked questions relating to intellectual achievements they had accomplished thus far. This included information such as their GPA, rigor of schoolwork, number of AP/Honor courses, and the number and magnitude of awards/honors. The second section consisted primarily of perceptions these participants had of these TV shows. It asked if the participants believed that media consumption at an earlier age affected their intellectual and linguistic development in any way. A follow-up question asked if they believed the shows they watched to be educational in any way. They were then asked to provide a brief excerpt describing how the TV show had educated them and if they were taught any life-long lessons with the provided information.

When evaluating the number and magnitude of awards and honors, the first question asked approximately how many awards they had garnered over their lifetime. The following question inquired about the geographical level at which these awards were given, such as local, state, national, or international. Participants were then evaluated as having minimal, moderate, or significant awards and honors.

DATA COLLECTION

Analysis of TV Shows

I began my research process by watching the first season of each TV show within my list and evaluating the educational content on a select set of standards. I evaluated each show based on the average educational content of each episode. I noted every instance of any sort of education output, culminating in the number of facts per season, and then dividing it by the total number of episodes to determine the overall score.

Table 1: Educational Evaluation of TV Shows

Year	TV Show Name	Education Evaluation Score
2000	Clifford the Big Red Dog	0.225
2001	The Fairly Odd Parents	0.100
2002	Max and Ruby	0.103
	Kim Possible	0.619
2003	Teen Titans	0.154
2004	Peppa Pig	0.000
	Backyardigans	1.050
2005	Johnny Test	0.615
	Go, Diego, Go	0.800
2006	Curious George	0.000
	Mickey Mouse ClubHouse	0.851
2007	Phineas and Ferb	1.115
2008	Sid the Science Kid	2.214
2009	Fresh Beat Band	0.737
2010	Adventure Time	0.730
2011	Bubble Guppies	0.800
2012	Gravity Falls	0.950

As seen above, each of the most popular TV shows ranging from 2000 to 2012 is listed chronologically as I measured the educational output of each individual TV show. As mentioned prior, the educational evaluation score was created by measuring the number of incidents involving educational content for the first season and dividing that number by the total number of episodes. For example, *Clifford the Big Red Dog* had a total of 9 facts divided by 40 episodes, resulting in a score of 0.225. The main attributes to observe in Table 1 are the three rows of the table that hold the highest educational score and the three rows that hold the lowest, as the participants of individuals who consumed those six TV shows will be the primary group within the survey.

When measuring educational output, I had come to the conclusion that the majority of the TV shows held significant life lessons and prominent information regarding various subjects in daily life. For example, *the Backyardigans* describes the adventures of five friends who travel across the world. However, despite being completely fictitious, these characters demonstrate multiple essential life skills that include conflict resolution and creative problem-solving. They describe multiple environmental factors and conditions and how to effectively handle them. They are faced with a new problem in each episode, overcoming various obstacles and demonstrating true resilience and adversity as they progress through the series.

These lessons have the ability to influence the younger audience an immense amount. Children have proved to be more impressionable at younger ages, and if faced with media that demonstrates lessons such as these during those years, it has the potential to correlate with work ethics and success later in their life.

Survey Findings

With a set standard of educational content within TV shows, a clear correlational analysis can be made between responses from the survey with the list of shows above. After garnering 52 responses from individuals across my community, I was able to get an average of each response asked in the prompt. I then proceeded to create two separate charts, the first describing the information of participants that watched the most educationally dense TV shows (As seen in Table 1) and the second describing the information of participants watching TV shows with no educational output. Creating two sections would allow for a clear comparison between intellectual performance and TV shows as outlined below.

Table 2: Correlation and Statistics Between Most Educationally Dense Shows and Participants Who Watched Select TV Shows

TV Show	Correlating Responses	Educational Score
<i>Sid the Science Kid</i>	Average GPA: 3.67	2.214
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 4.3	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Substantial	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 73.4% No: 26.6%	
	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 83.4% No: 16.6%	
<i>Phineas and Ferb</i>	Average GPA: 3.53	1.115
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 3.8	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Moderate	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 69.3% No: 30.7%	

	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 55.8% No: 44.2%	
<i>Backyardigans</i>	Average GPA: 3.56	1.05
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 4.13	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Significant	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 63.4% No: 36.6%	
	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 58.7% No: 41.3%	

Now, a concise conclusion can be reached if the highest rated TV shows and participant information regarding those who watched the selected media were correlated with the participants who consumed media consisting of the lowest rated TV shows.

Table 3: Correlation and Statistics Between Least Educationally Dense Shows and Participants Who Watched Select TV Shows

TV Show	Correlating Responses	Educational Score
<i>Curious George</i>	Average GPA: 3.43	0
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 3.7	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Substantial	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 53.9% No: 46.1%	
	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 83.4%	

	No: 16.6%	
<i>Peppa Pig</i>	Average GPA: 3.55	0
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 4.4	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Moderate	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 69.3% No: 30.7%	
	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 43.6% No: 56.4%	
<i>Fairly Odd Parents</i>	Average GPA: 3.43	0
	Average # of AP and Honor Classes: 4.09	
	Average Academic Achievements and Awards: Minimal	
	Does Participant Believe the TV Show Affected Intellectual or Linguistic Development in Any Way: Yes: 51.8% No: 48.2%	
	Does Participant Believe TV Show to Be Educational and Significant in Their Upbringing: Yes: 48.9% No: 51.1%	

As seen above, there are multiple pieces of information that stand out. The average GPA for those who watched educationally dense TV shows (Table 1) was 3.586, while average of least dense was 3.47, demonstrating a slight increase when looking academically successful in terms of school. *Sid the Science Kid*, the show ranked highest on the index, served to have a much greater proportion of participants who believed that these shows had a greater effect on their upbringing and to those who believed that contributed to their intellectual or linguistic development in contrast to *Fairly Odd Parents*, which is significantly lower. The average number of rigorous courses and magnitude of academic achievements remain relatively the same.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data and conclusions that can be taken away have alluded to one consistent trend: children's TV shows can have a significant impact on how children perceive and understand the world around them, serving to be an effective tool for teaching children valuable life lessons that can shape their attitudes and behaviors.

Table 2 describes the results of the participant's survey who had watched the shows classified as the most educationally dense. The average GPA for these shows is slightly higher, about 0.3 points, than the average GPA of those in Table 3. In addition to this, nearly 3 out of 4 individuals who primarily watched *Sid the Science Kid* believed that the TV show had affected their linguistic or intellectual development in some way, with 4 out of 5 having the perception that these shows were significant in their upbringing. This elucidates how children's TV shows can help children improve their language skills, showing that the use of age-appropriate language and vocabulary can help children learn new words and improve their grammar. These statistics are prominently higher than those in Table 3, with less than half of the participants believing these shows had any effect on their lives.

The specific intellectual development could also be correlated with children's TV shows, something that could be exemplified through *Phineas and Ferb*, as illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 describes the informative capabilities that TV shows have, with each new episode introducing new scientific concepts and techniques that are engraved into the child's mind while also engaging their creativity and imagination. Although exploring relatively basic concepts, these concepts serve as the foundation for success later in life.

As mentioned prior, the hypothesis that I had come to develop described how watching more scientific shows would likely result in students growing in terms of general empirical knowledge, serving as the foundation for schooling to build upon, with the perceptions of all TV shows watched at a younger age remaining consistent as to how most would believe that this media had no impact on their upbringing. This hypothesis is both accurate and flawed. It remains accurate as my study concluded as to how both GPAs, an essential determinant to academic performance, as well as the number of people who viewed these shows to be prominent in their upbringing, were both slightly higher in educationally dense TV shows in comparison to those that were least dense.

This links to information gathered in the literature review. The study in which one specific TV show was observed, the *Bubble Guppies*, served to prove as to how a child grows in terms of pragmatics and sociolinguistics when exposed to media as it allows children to more easily contextualize phrases and words (Atoofi, 2015). They came to the conclusion that the show could propagate intellectual growth, directly correlating to the student survey conducted, with more than half of the participants believing TV shows to affect their linguistic capabilities. Educational TV shows more specifically correlate even further, as 86% of the individuals who watched the media with the highest educational content, *Sid the Science Kid*, had the perception that it created the foundation for their further growth.

A separate article compounds both conclusions, in which they take a primary focus on both intellectual and mental growth (Santomero, 2019). This study found that these shows develop overall learning and linguistic skills and contributed to a fluctuation in standardized test scores. This meta-analysis came to the conclusion that children who watched these shows presented with improved standardized test scores at a younger age and better social skills. (Santomero, 2019). While the study conducted within this paper did not contribute to the field of social competencies, it did support other various outcomes with the perceptions of consumers and added even more data and perspectives to previous research.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In conclusion, the intellectual and psychological aspects of development are crucial during adolescence, and the choice of media consumed at a younger age has proven to have a significant effect on the user's perception and a mildly strong effect on their intellectual growth. Through the analysis of various aspects of data collected over the past

months, we have seen that the participants believed that television they consumed at younger ages had the ability to shape the cognitive development of young minds, affecting their attention, memory, and critical thinking skills.

However, there are multiple restraints on this study. This study was inadequate in analyzing the social ramifications of media consumption at a younger age, an aspect of their life that can prove to be most important. The specific trends in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors were also not attained in this study. Additionally, the study only managed to acquire 50-55 surveys within a singular city, a sample size that is large yet not truly reflective of the entirety of the United States population. It is of utmost importance that research regarding this field of study continues as there is still a massive area of cognitive awareness to explore, such as analyzing the specific neuro effects of certain TV shows upon the empirical aspect of adolescent minds while also exploring the distinct social relationships within each TV show and how the viewing of such relationships can shape these children at a young age. Additionally, a study that is conducted on a global scale comparing intellectual development across various countries can also prove to hold significance in identifying specific aspects of TV shows that prove to be beneficial in a child's development.

Therefore, it is essential to monitor the content of children's TV shows and encourage parents to engage with their children in discussions and examine research about the messages portrayed and overall growth. By doing so, we can help promote healthy development and ensure that our children are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complex world around them. Ultimately, by being mindful of the impact of TV shows on adolescent development, we can help our children grow into well-rounded, informed, and confident individuals.

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