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Cartoon Network – The Indian Experience

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“We own the kids time band.”

- Hema Govindan, Vice-President (Marketing and Public Relations), Turner Entertainment Networks (Asia), in January 2002.

CARTOON CRAZY KIDS (AND PARENTS)

In March 2001, leading satellite television (TV) channel, Cartoon Network, held a cricket tournament titled ‘Toon Cricket 2001,’ in Mumbai, India. In the tournament, famous cricket players were to play against famous cartoon characters such as Scooby Doo, Tom, Jerry, Fred Flintstone, Dee Dee, and Johnny Bravo. The tournament was a promotional exercise, aimed at increasing the popularity of the channel and its cartoon characters. The match was scheduled to begin at 2.30p.m, but the 35,000 plus capacity stadium was almost full by 1.30 p.m. with children and their parents. By 2.30 p.m. the stadium was overflowing and many were waiting outside trying to enter the stadium, leading to a stampede. As the organizers kept trying to manage the crowds, they had to delay the match till 4.00 p.m.

When the organizers announced the start of the match, children and their parents went wild with excitement and broke the barricades to meet their favorite cartoon characters. When pleadings and requests failed to control the crowd, the organizers had to threaten the children with the cancellation of the match to send them back to their seats. Even then, when the match began, a ring of people stayed on the field, surrounding the pitch, obstructing the view of the people who returned to the stands. The organizers and the security people were helpless, as they did not want to physically force the children off the field. By 5 p.m. many disappointed people left the stadium saying, “We can’t see anything, what’s the point?” Observers remarked that judging by the number of people who were there in the first place, the stadium was still probably full, even when half the crowd had left.

The crowd eventually settled down and the second half of the match went well. The cartoon characters entertained and delighted the crowds with their antics. This overwhelming response to the tournament was beyond even Cartoon Network’s expectations. A stunned looking Cartoon Network official said, “I’ve never seen so many kids!” Though it was not the first time Cartoon Network had organized such a promotional event, they had never seen a response like this, where cartoon crazy children and their parents had gone so ‘completely berserk.’ Even the organizers were amazed at the popularity of Cartoon Network’s characters.

What was remarkable about this response to the event was the fact that the channel had built a huge viewership and brand loyalty in a short span of 5 years in the Indian satellite TV market. Considering that most TV programs in India were based on family dramas, movies, and sports, the success of a niche channel such as Cartoon Network was indeed remarkable.

BACKGROUND NOTE

A cartoon literally means a drawing/sketch of a humorous situation, often accompanied by a caption. In the late 19th century, cartoons portrayed political situations in a satirical manner. During the late 1890s, cartoons took the shape of ‘comics,’ which were essentially cartoons with a

storyline. The first comic series that came in the form of a book was ‘The Funnies’ in 1929. During the mid 1900s, comic book characters such as ‘Superman,’ ‘Mickey Mouse,’ ‘Little Orphan Annie,’ ‘Dick Tracy,’ ‘Bizzaro,’ ‘Popeye,’ ‘Aquaman,’ and ‘Flash Gordon’ gained popularity around the world.

Animated cartoons evolved during the early 1900s (Refer Exhibit I for a note on animated cartoons). ‘Sinking of the Lusitania,’ released in 1918, is considered by many to be the world’s first animated feature film. By 1920, many animation studios were established across the US and France. The most influential animation studio in the world, Walt Disney¹ (Disney), entered the market in 1928. Disney’s first venture was ‘Streamboat Willie,’ starring Mickey Mouse. Other leading animation providers during the mid-1900s were Warner Bros. and MGM. Some of the popular animation feature films of those times were ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,’ ‘Pinocchio,’ and ‘The Jungle Book.’ Ollie Johnston, Frank Thomas, Eric Larson, Vladimir Tytla, Jay Ward, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera are some of the people who made noteworthy contribution to the evolution, advancement and popularity of cartoon/animation characters across the world.

Cartoons were introduced for the first time on TV in 1950 with Jay Ward’s ‘Crusader Rabbit’ in the US. However, the development of cartoons specifically for TV did not begin till the 1960s as animated feature films ruled the market till then. However, with audiences preferring TV to cinema houses, many cartoon studios had to close shop.² This gave momentum to the production of animated cartoons for TV. Some of the best-known cartoon series were developed during the next two decades: ‘Scooby Doo,’ ‘The Flintstones,’ ‘The Jetsons,’ ‘The Speed Buggy,’ and ‘The Snorks.’ The leading producers were Hanna Barbara, Filmation and DIC.

Meanwhile, TV extended its reach to all corners of the world with the advent of satellite broadcasting technology during the mid-1970s. It now became possible for TV networks to show their programs all over the world. The satellite TV industry soon established itself, reaching out to millions of subscribers all over the world. By the 1980s, TV had established itself as an effective and powerful medium of communication that had access to the drawing rooms of billions of households, and generated huge revenues through advertisements. The intense competition between TV companies, forced them to device new strategies to stay ahead. One such strategy was the development of programs that targeted specific sections of the community. A few television channels focused on the children’s segment, and began developing programs that would appeal to children.

Since cartoons appeal to children across the world, channels like Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Fox kids were set up to leverage this niche market. Cartoon Network was first launched in the US in October 1992, by one of the world’s leading media companies, Turner Broadcasting System³ (TBS). The channel offered animation programs from TBS’s extensive library of more than 10,000 Warner Bros, MGM and Hanna-Barbera cartoons. Over the next few years, the channel was launched in Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific regions. Cartoon Network not only showed famous cartoons, but also original shows developed in-house such as Mike, Lu & Og, Ed, Edd n Eddy, Johnny Bravo, The Powerpuff Girls, Cartoon Cartoons and Dexter’s Laboratory.

These cartoons became extremely popular across the world, making Cartoon Network one of the leading children’s entertainment channels during the 1990s. In March 1998, Cartoon Network launched CartoonNetwork.com, a website offering cartoons on the net. According to Nielsen Net

¹ Disney dominated the global cartoon/animation market even in the early 21st century.

² Mid-1980s onwards, many US movie studios had again started making animation films. Many of these films – Aladdin, The Lion King – were very successful. Moreover, movies based on cartoon characters proved to be huge money-spinners. Batman, Spiderman, X-Men, and Scooby Doo movies did phenomenally well across the globe.

³ TV industry major TBS is a part of the US-based media giant AOL/Time Warner. In addition to Cartoon Network, TBS runs TV networks such as CNN, TNT, Boomerang, Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Hawks, Atlanta Thrashers, and Goodwill Games.

Ratings, CartoonNetwork.com stood as one of the world's top ten Websites, in terms of time spent on-site, during March 1998. Cartoon Network had huge advertising and promotional agreements with leading companies such as Reebok, McDonald's, Disney, and Nintendo.

According to Cartoon Network sources, in February 2001, the channels had a subscriber base of over 75 million in 145 countries. Analysts attributed the success of Cartoon Network to its appeal to the entire family, its original programming content and its advanced programming technologies.

Cartoon Network entered India in October 1995, sharing airtime with Turner Network Television (TNT). While Cartoon Network was shown in the morning slot (5 a.m.-9 p.m.), TNT showed classic Hollywood movies in the night slot (9 p.m.-5 a.m.). In the late 1990s, Turner Classic Movies (TCM) replaced TNT, though the content remained the same. As the pioneer in the Indian cartoon and animation market, Cartoon Network quickly gained popularity and a huge fan following in major metros.

CARTOON NETWORK IN INDIA

Prior to Cartoon Network's entry, Indian TV viewers could see cartoons only during a few time-slots on the state-owned Doordarshan and some other satellite TV channels. The channel realized that it would have to build cartoon/animation viewership virtually from scratch. In addition, it had the task of building its brand equity amidst the clutter of numerous satellite TV channels (Refer Exhibit II). However, as there were no established players, it was not very difficult for Cartoon Network to get itself registered in the viewer's mind as a channel synonymous with cartoons. Gradually, children across the country tuned in to the channel, and Cartoon Network established itself as a major player in the Indian satellite TV market. Soon, the globally popular cartoons became household names in the country.

The entry of other players into the market during the late 1990s resulted in intense competition. Kermit and Nickelodeon, leading children's channels entered India in 1999 and soon garnered impressive viewership figures. The Star, Zee, and SAB TV networks also started airing cartoons during specific time-slots.

To succeed in this competitive environment, Cartoon Network worked out a broad strategy that emphasized on 'localization' and marketing. It localized the content by dubbing its cartoons in Hindi (January 1999) to appeal to the Hindi-speaking audiences. The first dubbed program, 'Toon Tamasha,' was received very well. The channel then started offering Hindi versions of various popular cartoons. By February 2000, Cartoon Network was offering nine hours of Hindi programming every day.

Taking its localization efforts further, the channel introduced Tamil-dubbed shows in February 2000. Kathy McClaure, Vice President Programming, Turner Network, Asia, said, "The bringing in of Tamil-dubbed cartoons is to further reinforce Cartoon Network's commitment to bring localized programming." Hindi and Tamil dubbing was done in collaboration with Indian TV software production house UTV. Some of the cartoon shows that were dubbed in Hindi and Tamil were Scooby Doo, Flintstones, Swat Kats, The Mask, The Addam's Family, Johnny Quest and Captain Planet (Refer Exhibit III for some of the channel's famous cartoon characters). By mid-2000, Cartoon Network reached an estimated 10 million homes in India, appealing to children between 4 and 14 years.

To strengthen the Cartoon Network brand, the channel carried out a series of promotional activities. In May 2000, it introduced the concept of 'Super-Size Cinema,' that premiered new cartoon shows and involved children in various games.⁴ The first Super-Size Cinema in India was the 'X-Treem Toon Challenge' show. It was featured on a 35-foot inflated screen at Mumbai's

⁴ Launched in India as a part of the channel's marketing efforts, Super Size Cinema was common in US.

Andheri Sports Complex. An estimated 10,000 children attended this event. The challenges involved climbing a wall and rope ladders to climb up. Later on, Super-Size Cinema was offered in other cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. Cartoon Network offered many other programs and contests that involved kids. Promotional activities other than Super Size Cinema and the cricket tournament included:

- **Dream Diwali** – Prior to the festival of Diwali, Cartoon Network asked children to send answers to some questions asked during cartoon shows. Based on these responses, the channel sent popular cartoon characters to visit the houses of selected children.
- **Cartoon Network Sound Machine** – A team of cartoon characters visited various cities to promote a ‘dial-in’ facility, at which children could telephone and leave their messages. These messages were aired on Cartoon Network at a given date later on. Over 0.5 million children participated in the event.
- **Toon Hunt for Scooby Doo** – Cartoon Network stopped showing shows involving one of the most popular characters, Scooby Doo, for a certain period. This was followed by a treasure hunt type of ‘search campaign,’ in which children were asked to search for Scooby Doo.
- **Save Dexter’s Brain** – The cartoon character, Dexter, disappears from the network on account of amnesia. Children were asked to help restore Dexter’s memory by talking to him (an actor) and reminding him of people, incidents and things related to him.

Cartoon Network also focused on leveraging the latest technologies to offer quality and innovative programming. Its website, cartoonnetworkindia.com, allowed children to communicate with their favorite cartoon characters, premiered new cartoons, offered downloadable games, Scrap Book, e-cards and a customized homepage. In July 2001, on account of its growing popularity, Cartoon Network announced that it would offer 24-hour non-stop service. According to industry sources, the 24-hour service was a part of the channel’s global strategic mission to place cartoons and animation in level with general entertainment that appealed to both children and adults.

The 24-hour service introduced a new range of program franchises and many Cartoon Network originals, Japanese animations and other acquired cartoon and animated shows. New program franchises included Boomerang, Cartoon Cartoon Fridays, Toonami and Acme Hour. Acquired shows from other countries included Pokemon, Trouble Chocolate, Cardcaptor Sakura, and GI Joe. The network also offered premier shows such as Samurai Jack, Sheep in the Big City, The Powerpuff Girls, Time Squad, Courage the Cowardly Dog, Ed Edd & Eddy and Mike Lu & Og. The channel also introduced locally made shows such as Pandavas The Five Warriors.⁵

Interestingly, children were not the only ones who watched cartoons. According to Cartoon Network sources, 30 to 40% of the channel’s viewership constituted teenagers and adults. Most of the people who logged in to www.cartoonnetworkindia.com were in the 14 to 18 age group. This was not surprising as even globally, a significant portion of Cartoon Network’s audience consisted of adults. Thus, Cartoon Network launched ‘Night Shift,’ a time-slot to satisfy the tastes of these viewers.

Commenting on this launch, Keith Crofford, Program Development Vice-President, Cartoon Network, said, “A third of our audience has always been adults. This is a way to get more adult shows out there for this audience.” According to analysts, the ‘across age barriers’ appeal of Cartoon Network was the reason why it attracted non-traditional advertisers such as BPL, Intel and the National Egg Coordination Committee. Some of the other leading advertisers on the channel were Luxor, Archies Cards, Novartis, Nestle, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Parle, and Cadbury’s.

⁵ Produced by Chennai-based Pentamedia Graphics, the movie won the National Award for best English feature film (2000) and the second best animation feature film at the Vancouver Effects and Animation Festival (2001).

during May-July 2001, Cartoon Network became the second most watched channel in Kid’s Prime Time (4.00-8.00 p.m.), among 4-14 year-olds in the Cable and satellite (C&S) households. By 2002, Cartoon Network was offering eight hours of Hindi programming on weekdays and nine hours of the same on weekends. Apart from this, the channel was also offering a three-and-a-half hour programming schedule in Tamil on weekdays. The channel was considering offering programs in various other languages also.

As a result of the above initiatives, Cartoon Network emerged as the second most successful channel in terms of audience share by mid 2002. This was a commendable achievement in view of the fact that Cartoon Network was a pay channel, unlike Zee and Sony (Refer Table I). Also, though exact figures were not available, the channel’s advertising revenues reportedly grew at 40% for the calendar year 2000-01 and 47% for 2001-02.

Table I
Audience Share of Major TV Networks among C&S Households
(in %)

Television Network/Company	Audience Share
Star Plus	11.71
Cartoon Network	7.4
Sony	5.1
Zee	3.8
Zee Cinema	2.9

Source: Business Line, June 27, 2002.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the channel was being seen in 15 million homes. Its ratings went up by 73% from April 2001 to April 2002, and its website attracted page views of 5.5 million per month. Cartoon Network tied up with retailing major Weekender in late 2002. It was also reportedly looking for a partner for licensing and merchandising stationery.

ALL’S NOT WELL IN TOONLAND

Cartoon Network’s Hindi and Tamil versions were criticized by some analysts and a section of the audience. They were unhappy at being forced to listen to the localized versions of such cartoon network programs. Initially these Hindi cartoons were offered only for a short time-slot and there was a balanced mixture of the same cartoons offered in English and Hindi languages, at different hours of the day. But gradually most of the cartoons were dubbed in Hindi and they formed a major part of the network’s programs. According to many cartoon fans, characters like Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd, Porky Pig, Tweety Bird, and Sylvester Cat were not even half as entertaining in the Hindi-speaking versions as they were in the English versions.

Many parents objected to dubbing in local languages because they wanted their children to learn a few English words and phrases through the medium of cartoons. In focus group discussions conducted by the Center for Advocacy and Research in early 2002, many parents voiced their concerns and objections about the Hindi versions because their children were picking up inappropriate language from them. As a result, Cartoon Network had to temporarily suspend all Hindi programming and conduct a ‘Standards and Practices’ review.

Commenting on this, a Cartoon Network spokesperson said, “It has been our observation that no real industry standard has been set for the quality of Hindi dubbed children's TV content. We have also observed that what is considered acceptable language differs widely among the small minority

of parents supervising their children's TV viewing.” Following the review, Cartoon Network decided to use the lower end of the tolerance scale as a new benchmark for measuring the quality of its Hindi content and also began to re-dub shows that needed language corrections/improvements. The network restarted its Hindi transmissions in May 2002.

A few industry observers remarked that in order to appeal to older viewers, Cartoon Network had started offering more violence, horror and adventure-based programs. They feared that such programs would have a negative effect on children. The channel was also criticized for exploiting the pester power of children by airing advertisements that targeted children. According to analysts, children play a major role in a family's purchasing decisions. As a result, many companies developed advertisements that appealed to children, and persuaded them to drag their parents to showrooms. The analysts remarked that it was unethical for Cartoon Network to exploit the vulnerability of children.

The growing competition in the industry continued to pose a threat to Cartoon Network. While Kermit and Nickelodeon offered a mix of action, adventure and game shows, movies, serials, puppet and chat shows, apart from cartoons, Cartoon Network was completely based on cartoon/animation shows. Many analysts considered this restrictive programming a major threat to the channel's future in India. Nickelodeon, which had associated itself with the Zee network, was reportedly planning many new shows and promotional exercises similar to Cartoon Network's. By mid-2002, its shows reached 9.8 million homes through its own channel, and around 30 million homes through its programs on Zee TV. Another worrying issue was that Zee, which aired one-hour of Disney cartoons, reportedly drew more revenues than Cartoon Network, largely because it was a free-to-air channel.

However, sources at the channel were confident of sustaining their leadership position in the market on account of its first mover advantage, its rigorous promotional activities and, its indigenization efforts. Ian Diamond, Senior Vice-President and General Manager, Turner Entertainment Networks, Asia Pacific region, said, “It's now time to build on the growth, and ensure that Cartoon Network ‘fits in with local culture and sensibilities.’

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. “The Indian TV audience is largely ‘movie-sports-news’ centric.” In light of this statement, critically comment on Cartoon Network's decision to enter the Indian market. Also discuss the initiatives that helped it become a leader in the children's TV entertainment segment.
2. Do you think Cartoon Network's localization of content destroyed the entertainment value of the original, classic cartoons? As part of a team responsible for the channel's functioning in India, what other measures would you suggest to popularize its programs?
3. Would you agree that TV channels such as Cartoon Network are nothing but ploys to commercially exploit the ‘pester power’ of children? Give reasons to justify your stand. How do you think the channel should deal with the criticism it has received in recent years?

Exhibit I About Animated Cartoons

Animation is a graphic representation of drawings to show movement within those drawings. A series of drawings are linked together to be photographed by a camera. The drawings are slightly changed between one individualized frame to the other so that when they are played back in rapid succession (24 frames per second) there appears to be seamless movement within the drawings. Animated cartoons are made using paper, celluloid, cardboard, pens, paints, brushes and erasers. Pictures of the characters are first drawn on paper. Every second of a finished film consists of 24 frames that requires 12 to 24 drawings to be drawn, based on the speed of movement, i.e. faster movements need more drawings while slower movements can be animated with less number of drawings. The difference between two successive frames is very negligible with just a slight variation in the posture. The animated drawings are filmed on a black and white film to check the smoothness of the movements. This is called a pencil test. The backgrounds of animation film are painted on cardboard or celluloid with tempera, acrylic or oil paints. These painted backgrounds are projected as the landscapes in which the characters are moving. Backgrounds are usually made considerably larger than the picture format, and are referred to as 'Pan backgrounds.'

The drawings are copied onto transparent celluloid or plastic sheets, usually called 'Cels,' so that the animated characters can be superimposed on the backgrounds. The lines are traced in ink and the colors are filled in on the reverse side of the 'Cels' to get even colors, when viewed from the front. The filming is carried out on an 'animation stand.' Sometimes the pictures are divided into various levels, separated by about 30cm or 12". As the fore, middle and backgrounds of the landscape are at varying levels, it creates a 3-dimensional effect, specifically when the camera or background is moving.

Source: www.sci.fi/~animato/cartoon/cartoon













Exhibit II A Note on the Indian TV Market

Till the early 1990s, the Indian TV market had only one player, the state-owned Doordarshan, which offered various free-to-air channels across the country. Criticized for its lackluster and politically influenced programming mix, Doordarshan flourished as regulatory guidelines prohibited the entry of private players. However, during the early 1990s Gulf war, Indian audiences got their first experience of quality programming with channels such as CNN being illegally aired. Things changed when the government allowed satellite channels to broadcast their programs. The Indian TV market was radically transformed as a plethora of channels entered the country. Beginning with Zee and Star networks, by 2002, there were around 200 channels in the country. Of the 70 million households and 400 million viewers, the C&S homes were only 24 million with 150 million viewers.

Indian TV channels offered programs falling in one or more of the following genres – film-based shows, serials, sports, music, game shows and news. This pattern was visible in almost all the regional language, Hindi, and English channels. There were a host of niche channels that offered programs based on religion, business, action, nature, and children's entertainment. General entertainment channels accounted for a majority of the viewership, and hence the highest advertising revenues. Despite the presence of a wide variety of channels, the Indian TV market remains a largely film-based one as it happens to be the most popular genre in the country. Competition was very intense in the industry and the fight for advertisement revenues and Television Rating Points (TRPs) was cut throat. Late 1990s onwards, a majority of the channels were opting to become pay channels from the free-to-air mode.

Source: ICMR

Exhibit III

Cartoon Network's Famous Cartoons				
				
Tom & Jerry	Porky Pig	Johnny Bravo	Daffy Duck	Bugs Bunny
				
Tweety	Sylvester	Taz	Elmer Fudd	Roadrunner Show
				
Granny	Hector	Garfield	Powerpuff Girls	Scooby Doo
				
Jetsons	Flintstones	Dexter	Mike, Lu & Og	Samurai Jack

Source: ICMR

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