

The cultural values embedded in imported animated cartoons An analytical study of a sample of episodes from the SpongeBob series broadcast on MBC3 channel

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the cultural values embedded in animated cartoons through a sample of episodes from the SpongeBob SquarePants series. These values included social values, consumer culture values, and negative behavioral practices. The study also sought to identify the themes addressed in the series, the characteristics of the personalities used, as well as the symbolism of colors. The research relied on the descriptive (survey) method and the content analysis tool applied to a purposive sample consisting of eight episodes.

For data analysis purposes, appropriate statistical tests were used, namely frequency and percentage.

The most significant findings of the study were as follows:

The series addressed several social values represented in: freedom of behavior, exchanging greetings, freedom of mixing between genders, liberation from family values, deviance, emphasis on sexual rights, women's freedom, and freedom of belief. Freedom of behavior ranked first with a percentage of 18%.

The series included a set of consumer culture values such as unrestricted pursuit of money, sexual insinuations, entertainment and amusement, rapid wealth, revealing clothing, reduction of intelligence levels, consumption of fast products, individualistic living, domination, competition, selfishness, wasting time, and fashion. However, the dominant value was unrestricted pursuit of money (love of money), reaching 11.32%.

The series contained various negative behavioral practices represented in: lying, violence in its various forms, exploitation, screaming and evil laughter, intimidation, use of harmful weapons, cheating, obscene language, frightening sounds, cruelty, arrogance, betrayal, dealing with ghosts, and

mockery. Lying and violence in all its forms ranked first among these values with a percentage of 12.17%.

The series presented several strange and foreign values that are inconsistent with Arab-Islamic society, including revealing clothing (encouraging nudity), sexual insinuations such as hugging and kissing, as well as indecent expressions.

The series paid no attention to moral values such as honesty, contentment, sincerity, and patience, despite their importance as ethical values, as none of them appeared in the study sample.

The series relied on reinforcing core traits in the main characters, namely greed and stinginess, envy, laziness and stupidity, power and arrogance, lust, and the representation of a third-gender model.

The series used numerous expressive forms to convey values and communicate them, varying between words, gestures, and context.

Negative themes dominated the series more than positive themes.

The series relied on short episode durations ranging between 10 and 15 minutes.

Keywords: Cultural values, animated cartoons, cultural identity, Western media influence, socialization.

1-The Research Problem

The information revolution has produced a new communication landscape that no longer recognizes the political borders of states, and it has enabled images and media content to circulate to and from all countries of the world. Consequently, the Arab world has become an open arena for receiving numerous international channels through various media platforms that carry a cultural and civilizational model different from the Arab model in its foundations, literature, beliefs, and objectives. This phenomenon is referred to as cultural invasion and media penetration of Arab societies. The overwhelming flood of media information entering the Arab region has introduced a wide range of imported knowledge, ideas, beliefs, and cultural patterns aimed at influencing the Arab mind and reshaping Arab memory.

Programs directed at children, whether Arab or foreign, have increasingly occupied Arab television screens. These programs have contributed to broadening children's horizons and expanding their knowledge and culture through scientific, educational, political, and entertainment content. Thus, children's programs, with their diverse and varied content, have become an integral part of the social fabric and identity of society, exerting influence on the cultural and moral formation of communities. Amid this enormous amount of content, numerous interests and objectives are intertwined and conveyed in different ways. Unnoticed by many, children gradually internalize foreign ideologies and ways of thinking without any real resistance. As a result, children find themselves exposed to a wide range of channels and programs: some focusing on violence and sensationalism, and others aiming to

build a balanced personality for the child. Through their diversity, scripts, and scenarios, children's programs seek to transport children into an imaginary world built upon various perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and values that children store and later integrate into their cognitive and moral framework.

Among these programs are animated cartoons, which have managed to secure a prominent position amid the competition among children's entertainment programs due to their simplicity and their ability to appeal directly to children's minds through attraction and suspense. Numerous studies have¹ demonstrated that the negative aspect is often dominant in this field, especially in foreign animated cartoons dubbed into Arabic, which constitute the majority of content broadcast on Arab children's channels. The danger of these programs lies in the cultural challenges they pose, as they may carry foreign values that are either inappropriate for children's age group or contradictory to the principles and values of Arab-Islamic society. Consequently, children experience confusion and contradiction between what they receive and watch and the reality they live in.

These cartoons do not merely provide entertaining and humorous content; rather, they convey a contradictory value system fundamentally derived from the values of cultural globalization, which serves as an important reference in imported media industries. Accordingly, this study focuses on the SpongeBob SquarePants series, through which we aim to examine and analyze the cultural and moral dimension of the series in order to identify and uncover the most significant imported cultural values embedded within it, as well as the main themes presented in the series and the extent to which they may contribute to shaping children's attitudes and behaviors. The study also seeks to investigate the predominance of consumerist themes, in light of the many criticisms directed at the series regarding consumer culture and homosexuality.²

From this perspective, the problem of the study can be formulated through the following question: What are the cultural values embedded in animated cartoons through a sample of the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

2- Study Questions:

The following questions emerge from the study problem and are divided into: questions related to content categories and questions related to form categories.

2-1- Content Categories:

What are the topics used to present cultural values in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

¹ Wahida Boufdah Bedeissi, Values in the Programs of MBC3 Channel Directed at Children, Al-Mi'yar Journal, Issue 2, Emir Abdelkader University, 2017.

² Based on the statement issued by the American television network Nickelodeon affirming that the character "SpongeBob" is part of the LGBTQ+ community, the network published a tweet celebrating Pride Day through its official account on X. The post included an image of "SpongeBob" alongside queer characters, accompanied by the caption: "Celebrating Pride with the LGBTQ+ community and their allies this month and every month."

What are the characteristics of the characters featured in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

What types of social values are included in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

What types of consumer culture values are included in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

What negative behavioral practices are included in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

2-2- Form Categories:

What is the duration allocated for broadcasting episodes of the SpongeBob SquarePants series on MBC3?

What is the nature of the music and sound effects used to present cultural values in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

What are the color connotations used in the appearance of the main characters in the SpongeBob SquarePants series broadcast on MBC3?

The report presented by the Ukrainian authorities also indicated that “SpongeBob” enjoys wide popularity among homosexuals in the United States, just as it is popular among children.

Earlier, The Wall Street Journal published a report stating that sales of merchandise related to certain animated cartoons reached 500 million dollars, with the primary consumers being homosexuals purchasing items such as “gifts, clothing, and toys” inspired by these cartoons.

3- Importance of the Study:

The importance of this study lies in the significance of cultural values, which are considered one of the major determinants of both individual and social behavior in animated cartoons. Values are an inseparable part of the civilizational and cultural framework of society, and understanding the values of a given society enables us to identify its general ideology. Values are merely a reflection of the way people think within a particular culture and during a specific period of time. Therefore, this study seeks to highlight the importance of Arab-Islamic values and the preservation of the value system of society, as well as how these values can be utilized to protect children from the negative effects of Western satellite television broadcasting. This is especially important since animated cartoons have become a source of socialization due to the behaviors and values they contain, from which children draw both positive and negative influences.

The importance of the study also lies in guiding parents to monitor what their children watch and the amount of time they spend watching television, in addition to raising their awareness of the dangers of such cartoons, which often promote negative behavioral practices among children as well as values that conflict with those of their societies. This would help parents choose meaningful programs with fewer harmful values and encourage children to follow programs rich in educational content, thereby

reducing negative influences and increasing positive ones. Furthermore, the study aims to direct media officials to pay closer attention to the programs, series, and games broadcast on television, especially since the content of media institutions is often designed to serve the interests of the parties that fund and support them.

This study focused more on the negative aspects of animated cartoons than on their positive aspects because of their significant impact on children's language, behavior, and culture. This was done through the analysis of selected episodes from the series *SpongeBob SquarePants* and the extent of their influence in creating and shaping negative patterns and behaviors among children.

4- Study Objectives:

As for the objectives that our study seeks to achieve, they are represented in the findings through which the existing media system can be interpreted and clarified. The study may also contribute to proposing solutions and controls that can help identify and manage the influence of animated cartoons and the cultural values embedded within them. The objectives of the study are as follows:

To identify the topics used to present cultural values in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To identify the characteristics of the characters featured in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To determine the types of social values embedded in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To reveal the types of consumer culture values embedded in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To attempt to identify the negative behavioral practices embedded in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To determine the duration allocated for broadcasting *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes on MBC3.

To identify the nature of the music and sound effects used to present cultural values in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

To infer the connotations of the colors used in the appearance of the main characters in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series broadcast on MBC3.

5- Previous Studies:

5-1- The First Study:

A study conducted by Rachida Bchiche entitled "Animated Cartoons on Algerian Television: A Study of Values and Effects", Master's thesis in Media Studies, University of Algiers, 1996.

This study focused on one of the most important programs through which television contributes to children's socialization, namely animated cartoons, programs specifically directed to children. The study examined the value content conveyed by these programs and the way children interacted with

them through a content analysis of a sample of animated cartoon programs broadcast on Algerian television. It also interviewed a sample of children who watched these programs in order to identify their various effects.

The study relied on the survey method, whether in surveying the content of animated cartoons broadcast on Algerian television or surveying the audience of these programs, namely children. Two tools were used: the questionnaire and content analysis. The research population consisted of children and animated cartoon series.

The study reached several findings, the most important of which are:

Most of the children surveyed were influenced in their preference for certain traits, characteristics, and abilities that the hero should possess, as well as by the heroes' abilities presented in the animated cartoons they watched.

Most of the children surveyed hoped to become like their heroes in the future. Some wanted to gain the hero's fame, others wished to own the hero's tools and clothes, while others dreamed of achieving the hero's victories, among other aspirations.

5-2- The Second Study:

A study conducted by Alyan Abdullah Al-Houli entitled "Values Embedded in Animated Cartoon Films – An Analytical Study", a paper presented at the First Educational Conference "Education in Palestine and the Changes of the Era" held at the Islamic University of Gaza, 2004.

The study aimed to identify the values embedded in animated cartoon films through the content analysis of a sample consisting of 40 films broadcast on satellite channels such as Spacetoon, ART, Sharjah TV, and Palestine TV. The study focused on identifying the frequency of both negative and positive values contained in these films, while also surveying the opinions of a random sample of 100 mothers from the Gaza Governorate.

The researcher relied on the descriptive-analytical method as well as the content analysis approach, using the following tools: questionnaires and content analysis forms.

The most important findings regarding the mothers' opinions were:

The main positive aspects of animated cartoons were "honesty, cooperation, and trustworthiness" at 13.3%, "verbal fluency" at 12.6%, "broad imagination" at 12.6%, "mental ability" at 10%, and "helping others" at 10%.

The main negative aspects of animated cartoons were "violence and crime" at 18.8%, "wasting time" at 17.6%, and "aggression" at 10%.

As for the content analysis of the films, the results showed that:

The most important positive values were "cooperation" at 14.7%, followed by "patience and endurance" at 11.7%, then "linguistic vocabulary" at 9.8%, followed by "positive behavioral patterns" at 9.3%.

The most significant negative values were “violence and aggression” at 16.6%, “negative behavioral patterns” at 12.7%, followed by “various negative rituals” at 8.8%.

5-3- The Fourth Study:

A study by Tasneem Ahmad Mukhaymar entitled “Values in Children’s Television Programs – MBC3 Programs as a Model: An Analytical Study”, Master’s thesis in Media Studies, Middle East University, 2015.

The study aimed to identify the artistic techniques included in children’s television programs on the MBC3 channel, in addition to identifying the values contained in those programs, namely religious values, scientific values, and values indicating negative behaviors.

To answer the research questions, the researcher used the descriptive method represented in content analysis. The study tool was a content analysis form used to collect data from the study sample, which consisted of 32 programs.

Among the most important findings were:

The most common values included in children’s programs on MBC3 were values indicating negative behaviors, with violence in its various forms ranking first among all the sub-values included in the children’s programs on MBC3.

5-4- The Fifth Study:

A study by Wahida Boufdah Bedissi entitled “Values in MBC3 Programs Directed at Children”, published in Al-Mi‘yar Journal, Issue 42, Emir Abdelkader University, Constantine, 2017.

This study came within the framework of interest in analyzing values in media content, which is considered one of the scientific topics that has attracted the attention of many researchers, especially those related to analyzing programs directed at children. The researcher analyzed the content of the programs broadcast on MBC3 in order to reveal the values they reflect in terms of their themes, types, sources, and methods of presentation.

The content analysis method was used on a sample of programs broadcast by MBC3 during a complete television cycle estimated at three months, using a content analysis form that included two categories: form categories and content categories. The study results showed that:

The values reflected in MBC3 programs varied between positive and negative values. However, the latter type predominated in the programs broadcast by the channel, including values of violence, aggression, vandalism, destruction, and belief in the supernatural powers of certain creatures, such as bringing the dead back to life.

5-5- The Sixth Study:

A study by Dalia Ma‘an Al-Sharif entitled “Values in Arabic-Dubbed Cartoon Programs and the Extent of Their Compatibility with the Values of Arab Society – The Series Ginger Tales as a Model”, Master’s thesis in Media Studies, Middle East University, 2019.

The study aimed to identify the values included in the Arabic-dubbed animated series *Ginger Tales*, which included religious, social, national, political, and scientific values, as well as values contradicting the values of Arab society. It also aimed to identify the themes raised by the program, the techniques used in it, and the extent to which its values are consistent with the values of Arab society.

The researcher used the descriptive method represented in content analysis. The study tool was a content analysis form applied to a sample from the Arabic-dubbed animated program *Ginger Tales*. The study results showed that:

Values contradicting the values of Arab society were the most frequent, while scientific values were the least frequent. Political, social, religious, and national values were distributed between them respectively.

The dominance of values contradicting the values of Arab society in the first season of *Ginger Tales* indicates its unsuitability for broadcasting on Arab channels, as it represents moral decline and poses a real danger to the present and future of children who watch it.

6- Definition of Concepts

6-1 Values

Linguistically:

The word values derives from the Arabic verb *yuqīmu* (to evaluate or establish), and *taqyīman* (evaluation). It is an adjective indicating stability and constancy, as reflected in the Qur'anic verses: "Therein are correct writings" and "That is the right religion", meaning a straight and moderate religion.¹

The term *qiyam* (values) may also signify uprightness and establishment. *Al-qīmah* (value) is the singular form of *qiyam*, derived from the root *qāma* (to stand or be worth). It is said that an item "has such a value," meaning that its worth has been determined accordingly. Thus, value refers to the price or worth assigned to something.²

The word value is also derived from the Latin term *valeur*, itself originating from the verb *valus*, meaning "to be strong." Hence, the concept of value carries meanings of strength, solidity, and resistance³.

Terminologically:

¹Ahmad Mukhtar Omar: *Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic Language*, 1st edition, Volume Three, Alam Al-Kutub for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2008, p. 1878.

²Mahmoud Hadi Al-Lahham and others: *Arabic-Arabic Dictionary (A General Linguistic Dictionary)*, 2nd edition, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2007, p. 621.

³Ibrahim Yahiaoui and Nour Eddine Jebali: *The Impact of Children's Satellite Channels on Their Social Values*, Dar Al-Ayyam for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 2015, p. 29.

According to sociologists, value is the belief that something possesses the ability to satisfy a human desire. It is a characteristic that gives importance to an object for both the individual and society. Values reside in the human mind rather than in the external object itself.¹

As for “Samir Mohammed,” he defines values as a set of beliefs representing the fundamental principles or core upon which attitudes are built. These attitudes guide individuals toward certain goals, means of achieving them, or behavioral patterns that people choose and prefer because they believe in their validity. Therefore, values involve human preferences and may consist of realistic cognitive states that direct behavior. They may also be acquired through socialization processes.²

6-2 Culture

Linguistically:

In Arabic dictionaries, the origin of the word culture goes back to the triliteral verb *thaqafa*. One says *thaqifa al-shay'* or *thaqifa al-rajul thaqāfatan*, meaning that a person became skillful or knowledgeable. In the Arabic language, culture carries several meanings, including intelligence, wisdom, sharpness, quick learning, and mastery of something. Among Arabs, it particularly referred to education through which ways of thinking and acting are refined according to time and place. In this sense came the Qur'anic verse: “If you gain dominance over them in war, disperse by them those behind them so that they may take heed” (Al-Anfal: 57).³

The term culture is derived from the Latin word *cultura*, which referred to the care given to fields and livestock, indicating cultivated land⁴.

Terminologically:

Culture is a broad and multifaceted concept with diverse sources, components, and definitions. More than 200 definitions have been proposed for it.

“Henri Laoust” defines culture as a collection of inherited ideas and customs forming the moral foundation of a nation. Its members believe in its validity, and from it emerges a mentality unique to that nation and distinct from others.

“Malek Bennabi” defines culture as the environment that encompasses both visible elements, such as measures, melodies, and prohibitions, and invisible elements, such as tastes, customs, and traditions. In other words, it is the general atmosphere that shapes the lifestyle of a particular society and gives the individual's behavior within it a special character distinct from that found in another society.⁵

¹Cultural and Civilizational Values and Their Role in Development, The First Economic Conference for Investment and Development, El Khmies Region, 2017, p. 3.

²Makhlouf Boumediene: The Impact of the Internet on Social Values in the Urban Environment: A Field Study of Some Internet Clubs in the City of Mila, Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Boudiaf, M'sila, 2010, p. 12.

³ Ibn Manzur: *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 1, Chapter of the Letter Tha', pp. 684–685.

⁴ Denis Cuhe: *The Concept of Culture in the Social Sciences*, translated by Mounir Al-Sa'idani, 1st edition, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2017, p. 17.

⁵ Sabah Mohammed Jassim: *The Concept of Islamic Culture and Its Challenges*, Diyala Journal, Issue 44, University of Diyala, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, 2010, p. 681.

6-3 Cultural Values:

Terminologically: Cultural values are defined as a set of material and spiritual principles, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and fundamental assumptions that satisfy human needs, govern human behavior, and constitute the foundations of what is prevalent among people. They give value to certain matters while diminishing others, encourage and beautify certain behaviors, and discourage and condemn others.

They are also defined as the result of the interaction of a group of historical, religious, and political elements that have become stable through their interaction with various surrounding factors.

Operationally: They refer to the complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, principles, judgments, standards, values, and behaviors embedded in imported animated cartoons, represented by a sample from the SpongeBob SquarePants series.¹ These values include social values, consumer culture values, and various negative behaviors, which together form the basis of the culture upon which imported media content relies in an attempt to achieve the objectives of media globalization and erase subcultural identities.²

6-4 Animated Cartoons:

Terminologically: Animated cartoons are referred to in English as Animated Cartoon or Moving Picture Cartoon, in relation to the paper on which the drawings are designed, while in French they are called dessin animé.

They are a sequence of pre-prepared images or drawings in which each image represents a stage of movement that differs only slightly from the preceding one. These images are displayed at a rate of 24 frames per second, equivalent to 1,440 frames per minute. This process allows the image to remain on the viewer's retina before the next still image is displayed, creating the illusion of continuous movement. Consequently, the object appears to transition smoothly from one position to another. This phenomenon was explained by Peter Mark Roget, who stated that the retina retains the impression of an image for approximately one-tenth of a second before perceiving the next image.³

7- Study Methodology:

Given the nature of the research problem and the questions adopted in this study, the research design is primarily based on description and analysis of the cultural values embedded in animated cartoons, using a sample from the SpongeBob series. This is aimed at collecting information and data that help in diagnosing this reality.

¹ Ahmed Al-Qaddour: Cultural Values and Human Development, Albahth yoo1.com, 15/04/2026, 14:04.

² Boufelja Ghayath: Cultural Values and Management, 2nd ed., Dar Al-Arab Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2003, p. 65.

³ Mamoun Al-Momani and Adnan Salem Doulat: The Impact of Using Scientific Animated Cartoons in Teaching Science on Students' Acquisition of Scientific Concepts, Damascus University Journal, Vol. 27, Nos. 3–4, Damascus, 2011, p. 656.

Accordingly, our study falls within descriptive studies, which are not limited to the collection of statistical data only, but extend to the classification of facts and data, their comprehensive interpretation and analysis, and the extraction of results.

The sampling survey using the content analysis method is considered one of the most appropriate approaches for our study. It helps us reach accurate results by answering the research questions, and also assists in analyzing data, clarifying the relationships between its components, the opinions expressed about it, the processes it involves, and its effects.

8- Research Population and Study Sample:

All episodes of SpongeBob and its seasons constitute the population of the analytical study and its overall framework. However, due to the difficulty of analyzing all of them, it was necessary to define a precise sample from the elements of the research population in order to reach results consistent with the original population. Based on this, we selected a non-random sample represented in a purposive sampling method.

After following the SpongeBob series, we found that it contains a large number of seasons and episodes, making it impossible to study all of them. Therefore, we selected a purposive sample of 8 episodes aired on MBC3, namely: (Ripped Pants, Swearing, Married to Money, Love of Burgers, Valentine's Day, Christmas, Honeymoon, April Fool's Day).

These episodes were chosen because they align with the objectives of the study, which aims to uncover the cultural values embedded in the SpongeBob series and the hidden aspects within it, as well as in dubbed foreign cartoons that may have negative effects on the child and consequently on society, considering that the child is the future adult. This selection was also made in order to reach precise and reliable results.

9- Data Collection Tools:

Given that our study focuses on the cultural values embedded in animated cartoons—an analytical study of episodes from the SpongeBob series—we relied on the content analysis tool to collect data, as it is compatible with our research approach. Content analysis is a method used to examine and analyze the content of sources and messages. Accordingly, we used this tool in order to uncover the content of SpongeBob episodes, which include cultural values and deviant behaviors. We then carried out both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the data through a content analysis form, and attempted to establish logical and scientific explanations by linking variables.

Discussion and analysis of data related to content and form categories

3-1 Discussion and analysis of data related to content categories:

Topics used in the SpongeBob series

The results indicate that the selection of these topics and episode titles contributes to the promotion and reinforcement of a Western model of “lifestyle and behavior,” such as the fashion of ripped pants

or the use of insults considered normal in Western contexts. It also includes the celebration of Christian holidays that are considered impermissible in Islam, such as Valentine’s Day, Christmas, honeymoon-related themes, and April Fool’s Day, as well as many sexual innuendos and connotations. Overall, negative themes dominate over positive ones, including violence, homosexuality, sexual content, fear, and a reduction in children’s ability to think creatively, turning them into passive receivers of content.

It also affects belief systems and religion, especially since the studied series, SpongeBob, is a foreign dubbed series that does not align with Arab culture, customs, or traditions, and may lead to moral decline and social isolation through embedded coded messages intended to be transmitted by the producers of the series. In particular, Western countries have sought to establish a new international information order, known as the “free flow of information,” represented by multinational corporations aiming to impose control over weaker countries especially Arab countries in order to spread the English language, religion (promotion of Freemasonry), and culture through the production of cultural products.¹ The U.S. Department of Culture has also specifically worked to employ animation creators in the cultural field to promote its culture through indecent clothing, sexuality, and Masonic names and symbols.²

Characteristics of the characters in the SpongeBob series

The results regarding character traits in the SpongeBob series indicate that the producers of the series aimed to establish key characteristics in the main characters, which frequently appear throughout the show. These include greed and stinginess in the character Mr. Krabs, evil and envy in the character Plankton, laziness and stupidity in Patrick Star, strength and arrogance in Sandy Cheeks, anger in Squidward, and desire, calmness, and representation of a third gender (homosexuality) in the character SpongeBob. These traits are inspired by anime concepts such as the “Seven Deadly Sins.”

Table (1): Illustrating the Societal Values Embedded in the SpongeBob SquarePants Series

Percentage	Frequency	Methods Used in Presenting Them			Values Related to Public Freedoms
		Gesturse	Context	Words	
18%	45	20	15	10	Freedom of behavior
12.8%	32	11	20	1	Emphasis on sexual rights

¹ Reda Abdel Hamid: What is the meaning of the new cultural imperialism, www.thafya.com, 16/04/2026, 19:45.

²Antonio King: Culture, Globalization and the World System, trans. Mohammed Yahya and others, 1st ed., Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2001, p. 172.

15.2%	38	18	20	/	Freedom of mixing between genders
16%	40	/	20	20	Exchange of greetings
8%	20	15	5	/	Women's freedom
15.2%	38	20	10	8	Liberation from family values
2%	5	3	2	/	Freedom of belief
12.8%	32	15	15	2	Deviance / homosexuality
100%	250	102	107	41	Total
100%	/	40.8%	42.8%	16.4%	Percentage

The results presented indicate that the value of “freedom of behavior” ranked the highest, with a frequency of 45 occurrences, while the lowest value was “freedom of belief,” with a frequency of 5 occurrences. This reflects the intention of the producers of the SpongeBob series to highlight certain values related to general freedoms such as freedom of behavior, social interaction, liberation from family values, women’s freedom, homosexuality, and other related themes.

This appears to be reflected in the SpongeBob series through several attempts to promote the acceptance of homosexuality in Arab and global societies. This was mentioned in a report published on the international website “buzzfeed.com,” which presented an extended article with images about the most important cartoon characters created by animation producers with the aim of spreading homosexuality and homosexual ideas within societies. These characters were presented as heroes who contributed to supporting the rights of homosexual individuals, with explanations for each under the title “Why is he a hero?”

Among the characters allegedly promoting homosexuality, the most prominent and famous is the character “SpongeBob,” which achieved record viewership in the Arab world, and its merchandise became widespread. The report stated that despite the statements of the character’s creator, “Stephen Hillenburg,” that SpongeBob and Patrick are not homosexual, they—according to the report—appear

to represent a duo characterized by love and mutual understanding within an intimate relationship that shows signs interpreted as homosexuality.

One of the episodes in which this was said to be clearly evident is the episode “Rock-a-Bye Bivalve,” where the two characters adopt a sea scallop, similar to how homosexual couples are said to attempt to obtain a child. They then raise it, with SpongeBob taking on the role of the mother. There are also multiple scenes in other episodes in which they are shown calling for acceptance and tolerance of their orientations. In one scene, SpongeBob wears a women’s hat, and his friend Patrick tells him, “The hat makes you look like a girl,” to which SpongeBob replies, “Yes, I am a beautiful girl.”

The presence of such scenes in children’s cartoons may significantly influence children gradually over time. A child, in the formation stage, acquires information from cartoons; for example, if he sees two men kissing as friends or in a comedic context, he may begin to imitate them automatically. In adolescence, this influence may affect his behavior, leading to deviant actions, and later he may fully adopt such behavior in a later stage.

Accordingly, this reinforces the idea that these Western ideas and values are presented as “true” values and as naturally existing in reality. This contributes significantly to changing the child’s mental image of reality and of what our Arab-Islamic values promote. These so-called freedoms are all considered contradictory and rejected in Arab societies, as they lead to harmful behaviors and create imbalance and fragmentation in an individual’s social life. What then happens if children learn these values at an early age, grow up with them, and perhaps become accustomed to them, believing that they are correct and naturally acceptable? This is precisely what Western countries seek under the guise of “cultural globalization,” which aims to implant the cultural values and ideas of dominant powers into the minds of people in the Islamic world so that they can later be easily controlled and accept everything, whether positive or negative.

Accordingly, Western societal values are based on a concept that goes beyond religious text, as it considers that every individual has full decision-making authority and that nothing obliges a person except their own beliefs. Thus, freedoms are what shape laws and constitutions, unlike societal values in the Islamic perspective, where values are defined by religious law and legislation and are subject to both.

Cultural consumer values included in the SpongeBob series

Table (2) Showing the Consumer Culture Values Embedded in the SpongeBob Series

Percentage	Frequency	Consumer Culture Values			Methods Used in Their Presentation
		Gestures	Context	Words	

8.72%	37	15	15	7	Sensory Pleasure and Excitement
9.66%	41	20	11	10	Entertainment and Amusement
11.32%	48	8	20	20	Unrestricted Pursuit of Money (Love of Money)
4.48%	19	4	10	5	Selfishness
4.48%	19	9	10	/	Wasting Time
4.95%	21	1	15	5	Control and Domination
9.19%	39	10	20	9	Quick Wealth
7.54%	32	6	11	15	Consumption of Fast Products
4.95%	21	6	10	5	Competition
8.72%	37	7	30	/	Revealing Clothing
6.60%	28	8	20	/	Individual Living
7.78%	33	8	15	10	Reduction of Intelligence Level
10.14%	43	20	20	3	Sexual Suggestions
1.41%	6	2	2	2	Fashion
100%	424	124	209	91	Total
100%	/	29.24%	49.29%	21.46%	Percentage

From the results, it is observed that the most frequently analyzed consumer culture value was “unrestricted money/greed for money,” which appeared 48 times. This is embodied in Mr. Krabs’

love of money to the extent that he “married money” in the episode “Married to Money.” The producers of this series aimed to highlight the issue of values and consumption and the resulting alienation and reification of human beings, where individuals become preoccupied only with material aspects. Consequently, human values and meanings such as art, love, and service are transformed into mere objects whose human dimension is completely ignored, and which are valued only in their material equivalent.

This was followed by “sexual innuendos,” which indicate a rising level of moral decline in what is broadcast in this series on MBC3 and watched by Arab children.

Among the negative and frequently repeated values are “entertainment and amusement, quick wealth, lowering intelligence levels, dominance, competition, selfishness, and wasting time.” All of these values are not appropriate for the child’s developmental stage and are completely excluded from their life. Their presence in children’s programming is an indicator that the series seeks to reinforce moral deviation and distortion among Arab children, in contradiction with Arab-Islamic values.

As for “revealing clothing,” it was repeated 37 times, reflecting a culture of the body and an emphasis on excessive sensory pleasure, which is one of the characteristics of Western capitalist morality. Likewise, “consumption of fast products,” which reflects the fast-food culture that underpins the series, aims to spread fast-food-related principles and normalize them across broader sectors of American society and the rest of the world, given that children are among the most influenced social groups by consumer culture, adopting its symbols through globalization on the one hand and the creation of new symbols on the other.¹

Accordingly, this consumer culture seeks to entrench what Garaudy calls the “market human,” meaning a consumerist individual who revolves around objects and is entirely preoccupied with the pursuit of ownership².

Thus, American culture, through the consumerist values embedded in the SpongeBob series within the current international system, seeks to eliminate the “Other” and attempts to erase original identities and cultures. In other words, it aims to erase the specificities of different peoples and civilizations by dissolving the world’s diverse cultures into a single culture. This becomes even clearer when we know that the United States controls 65% of media content³.

Table (3) Showing the Negative Behavioral Practices Included in the SpongeBob SquarePants Series

Percentage	Frequency	Methods Used in Presenting Them	
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¹Mona Al-Sayyid Hafez Abd al-Rahman: Cultural dimensions in the study of consumption with special reference to Arab studies, *Annals of Arts*, Ain Shams University, Vol. 40, Ain Shams University, 2012, pp. 336–338.

² Spread of consumer culture in the Gulf, 27/04/2026 18:15 www.albayan.com

³Mohammed Tawfira: Consumer culture, 28/04/2026 19:45 www.sasapost.com

		Gestures	Context	Words	Negative Behavioral Practices
6.99%	27	7	20	/	Cheating
6.73%	26	5	6	15	Offensive language
9.84%	38	/	8	30	Screaming and evil laughter
10.10%	39	15	15	9	Exploitation
3.10%	12	6	6	/	Betrayal
4.14%	16	6	10	/	Arrogance
12.17%	47	10	10	27	Lying
12.17%	47	10	17	20	Violence in its various forms
7.77%	30	5	25	/	Use of harmful weapons
4.92%	19	5	5	9	Cruelty
2.59%	10	/	6	4	Dealing with ghosts
4.66%	18	8	10	/	Theft
8.03%	31	5	11	15	Fear
1.81%	7	/	4	3	Mockery
4.92%	19	/	9	10	Scary sounds
100%	386	82	162	142	Total
100%	/	21.24%	41.45%	36.78%	Percentage

Fourteen value indicators related to negative behavioral practices were identified in the SpongeBob series. The most prominent among them were values related to lying and violence in its various forms, both of which were repeated 47 times. The lowest value was “mockery,” which appeared 7 times. Six values out of the total set fell under the category of violence. The most frequently occurring among them was the value of “screaming and evil laughter,” which appeared 38 times, notably in the episode “Married to Money,” where Squidward begins screaming and laughing loudly. The exposure of children to their favorite cartoon characters screaming and laughing in inappropriate ways is

undesirable, as children may imitate such behavior, becoming a source of disturbance to those around them and exposing themselves and their families to embarrassment.

Next is the value of “fear,” which was repeated 31 times and appeared extensively in the episode “The Torn Pants,” where SpongeBob jokes with his friends by scaring them after pretending that he had died. Fear is a natural emotion in certain situations, but in other contexts—where the child perceives danger in one way or another it should not be presented in cartoons so that it does not develop into a chronic psychological condition that becomes difficult to manage.

The value of “use of harmful weapons” appeared 30 times across most episodes, where sharp objects, stones, and other weapons were used. The use of “vulgar language,” which appeared 26 times, was also frequently observed in the “swearing episode,” from the beginning to the end, where such expressions were explicitly spoken by characters. Mr. Krabs stated that there were 12 swear words, and several of the most offensive expressions were repeatedly used.

Attention should also be drawn to “exploitation and theft,” which appeared significantly in the series when Squidward tries to exploit SpongeBob in order to steal the secret formula. It should be emphasized that taking something that belongs to others is wrong, especially since theft is often linked to deprivation of things the child desires but cannot obtain, or to attempts to appear brave in front of others. This behavior is common among children and must be addressed carefully so that they do not perceive it as acceptable.

All of these negative behaviors are indicators of sources of domestic, societal, and school-based violence in Arab countries, resulting in repeated aggressive behavior where the child harms others physically (such as hitting and punching), verbally (through obscene and offensive language), or emotionally (through domination and humiliation). There is also physical violence that leaves serious psychological effects on the child. Children who are exposed to high levels of violence tend to develop cruelty and aggression.

These behaviors also contribute to the spread of a new Western cultural influence containing a set of values of alienation and liberalization, as well as the emergence of unfamiliar new moral standards that do not align with Arab-Islamic culture and customs. This ultimately represents a direct threat to Arab **cultural identity**.

3-2 Discussion and Analysis of Data Related to Formal Categories:

v The duration allocated for broadcasting episodes of the SpongeBob series

The results indicate that the episode duration ranges between 10 and 15 minutes. This timeframe is sufficient to include many values within SpongeBob episodes. This duration was intentionally adopted as a strategy, based on the assumption that humans concentrate only during the first 10 minutes. Therefore, the episodes were made short to enable the child to focus and pay attention to all the values presented and the objectives intended to be instilled in the child.

The nature of music and sound effects used in the SpongeBob series

The results show that mixed music, which is sometimes loud and sometimes calm, achieved the highest frequency across all SpongeBob episodes, repeated 48 times. This is intended to attract the child's attention at times and provide calmness at other times. Accordingly, this mixture is accompanied by scenes and visuals that correspond to the music, distributed in a way that the child's mind can accept and comprehend. It is followed directly by loud music and sound effects, which were repeated 29 times. It is well known that children are highly influenced by loud music because it strongly attracts their attention and stimulates their emotions. Regardless of the nature of the content, loud music is considered negative in itself, according to the views of some researchers in psychology and sociology. This is especially relevant since the producers of the SpongeBob series relied on a type of loud music known as "rock music" for its promotion. Rock music is a cultural movement and a social phenomenon that is not limited to music alone but extends to other cultural, artistic, and social dimensions. The term "rock" carries sexual connotations; originally, playing rock music refers to spiritual excitement and sexual arousal, as each rhythm is considered to correspond to the body's rhythm, which may lead to negative influences on children in terms of violence, crime, and sexual suggestions.

Symbolism of colors used in the appearance of the main characters in the SpongeBob series

It is well known that color plays an important role in revealing aspects of the human psyche. It is closely linked to the context of design. As a visual element in the design of logos and animated characters, color carries different meanings depending on beliefs, values, culture, customs, and traditions. Each color has either a positive or negative effect.

Yellow color: symbolizes the sun, joy, happiness, curiosity, energy, optimism, fun, positivity, and warmth. Yellow carries mixed messages as it is bright, eye-catching, and highly attention-grabbing.

Pink color: symbolizes appreciation, delicacy, kindness, innocence, romance, tranquility. It is considered a primarily feminine color.

Gray color: symbolizes neutrality, moderation, moodiness, loneliness, and boredom. From a moral perspective, it represents the area between good and evil.

Brown color: symbolizes the earth, nature, roughness, craftsmanship, and seriousness.

Red color: symbolizes energy, blood, danger, fire, excitement, love, strength, and power. It is a warm color that expresses either emotion or aggression. Red is also known to stimulate appetite; therefore, it is widely used in restaurant logos and food product branding.

Green color: symbolizes greed, wealth, and nature¹.

¹ Mohamed Al-Najjabi Awad Allah and Abd al-Basit Abd Allah Al-Khatim: Colors between expressive intellectual content, connotations, and values in logo design, *Journal of Humanities Sciences*, Issue 2, Dar Al-Salam Infrastructure Company and Future University, 2019, pp. 252–253.

All these colors and their connotations are present in the main characters of the series. These colors were chosen because they match the nature of each character in reality. SpongeBob is yellow because sponges are yellow. Patrick is pink because starfish are pink. Squidward is gray because squids are naturally gray. Sandy is brown as she is a squirrel, and she is often shown wearing purple, a color symbolizing wisdom, maturity, elegance, and luxury. Mr. Krabs is red because crabs are red, and Plankton is green because plankton are green.

These colors also form the colors of the rainbow, which has become a symbol associated with LGBTQ+ identity. The first flag of the LGBT community was designed by the gay artist and activist Gilbert Baker near Grove Street Community in San Francisco. His design was a response to the “anti-gay counter-movement,” which had previously used the pink triangle that the Nazis once used to label homosexual individuals.

The first handmade, hand-dyed flag consisted of eight colors: pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, turquoise, and violet.

General Results

After the study we conducted and the analysis carried out on a sample of episodes from the SpongeBob series, we reached the following results:

Negative themes dominate this series more than positive themes.

The series reinforces basic traits in the main characters, namely: greed and stinginess, envy, laziness and stupidity, strength and arrogance, lust, and third-gender representation.

The series addresses several societal values, including: freedom of behavior, greeting exchange, freedom of social mixing, liberation from family values, deviance, emphasis on sexual rights, women’s freedom, freedom of belief. Freedom of behavior ranked first with a percentage of 18%.

The series includes a set of consumer culture values such as: uncontrolled money, sexual innuendos, entertainment and leisure, quick wealth, indecent clothing, reduced intelligence, fast consumption of products, individualism, dominance, competition, selfishness, wasting time, and fashion. The dominant value is uncontrolled money (love of money), reaching 11.32%.

The series contains various negative behavioral practices, including: lying, violence in its various forms, exploitation, evil screaming and laughter, intimidation, use of harmful weapons, cheating, obscene language, scary sounds, cruelty, arrogance, betrayal, dealing with ghosts, mockery. Lying and violence ranked first among these values at 12.17%.

The series presents several strange values that are foreign to Arab-Islamic society, such as indecent clothing (promotion of nudity), sexual innuendos such as hugs and kisses, as well as inappropriate and offensive language.

The series did not give any attention to moral values such as honesty, contentment, sincerity, and patience, despite being very important ethical values, and they did not appear at all in the study sample.

The series uses many expressive forms to convey values, including: words, gestures, and context.

The series relies on a short duration for episodes, ranging between 10 and 15 minutes.

Conclusion

The animated cartoons that our children are exposed to were produced outside our country, outside our environment, and outside our culture, and in societies that differ from ours. They were created by Japanese, American, and other European producers. Their production companies have diversified, such as Turner, Warner, and Disney in recent times. These companies produce cartoons that reflect the culture of their creators, thus meeting the needs of Western children and Western environments.

It is also well known that there is a cultural difference between us and them, especially since divine religion is one of the sources of knowledge in Arab culture, while it has no place in their epistemological structure. They have relied solely on experience and sensory perception as a source of knowledge, turning taboos into personal freedoms and legal rights, such as promoting homosexuality and deviance, and establishing secularism as a cultural reference for their generations. They have promoted these ideas through new media, spreading beliefs that are considered incorrect and rejected in our values.

The negative aspects of animated cartoons are not limited to what has been mentioned; they extend to other areas not covered in this study. The purpose of this research is to understand the cultural values in animated cartoons and how they affect children psychologically, socially, behaviorally, and culturally. Therefore, it is necessary to manage children's screen time and not leave them for long hours under the influence of cartoons that shape their upbringing unconsciously. There is also a call today to specialists in children's media and literature to provide alternatives and give opportunities to Arab companies to produce animated cartoons that reflect and reinforce Arab-Islamic values. Cartoon producers do not create content randomly but according to planned goals and strategies.

This study resulted in several recommendations: not leaving children alone, providing them with affection and care, strengthening their religious and spiritual side, raising their awareness against anything that harms their upbringing, explaining that not everything shown on television reflects reality, interpreting scenes in a way that aligns with their environment and values, supporting Arab animated productions by encouraging production companies, and filtering and monitoring cartoon programs by specialized institutions and committees before broadcasting them.

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