Analysis of the Australian Data from the Cartoon Network’s New GenerAsians\textsuperscript{1} Survey

Presentation made in conjunction with the Sydney release of data from the 12 Asian nation study of youth attitudes, perceptions and behaviours at the Regent Hotel, Sydney\textsuperscript{2}, 4\textsuperscript{th} August, 1998

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Are Australian children unique or are they similar to other children in Asia? In my short review of the truly massive amount of data collected in the Cartoon Networks New GenerAsians survey, I can only touch upon, in a speculative manner some of the interesting findings. These include the importance placed on friendship by Australian children and how that may diminish other institutions like home and school, their belief in importance of individuality, their high access to electronic media, and how this competes with TV. Also there are interesting age and gender patterns.

Because of my background as a researcher into violence on television, I started my examination looking at how much time children spend watching TV.

Chart 1

Australian children have very high access to a range of Electronic Entertainment Systems covering TV (Free-to-air, satellite and cable), Radio, Video/Laser/VCD systems, Music Systems, Computer game systems (handheld, TV-based, computer-based), and the internet. We surveyed ownership of 11 systems and Australian households had 72\% of the these systems, and Australian children owned, around four of these systems (more than twice the ownership of any other country); and one in every nine Australian child owns a computer with internet access.

Chart 2

So it is not surprising that Australian children watch less TV than children in other countries, simply because there is so much else that competes with TV. Only 51\% of Australian children watch TV more that two hours a day most days, compared with the survey average of 66\%. However, TV is still the most time-consuming Australian leisure activity as it is the rest of Asia, and in the order of importance of other activities, Australia does follow regional trends ‘spending time with friends’, ‘listen to...”

\textsuperscript{1} The New GenerAsians Survey covering twelve Asian nations and involving 5600 children between 8 and 18 was sponsored Turner Network Television through their subsidiary the Cartoon Network. The survey covering some 340 response items was done by AC Nielsen. Dr Bridgman, was a consultant in the construction of the survey and in the analysis of data realing to the impact of television and electronic media on children and youth.

\textsuperscript{2} This presentation was also given at the Le Meridian at Rialto, Melbourne, 5\textsuperscript{th} August. Reports specifically identifying this part of the presentation were published in The Age (Melbourne, front page, 5/8/98) and the Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, 4/8/98).
music', in spots 2 and 3. However, sport comes in at number 4, and when we look at the less frequent activities, such as playing computer games, doing an artistic activity, and using the internet, we find that Australian children do relatively more of these than children in other countries.

What they most like on TV, is the comedies – the top three programmes being the Simpsons, Friends, Seinfeld, but with strong gender preferences. Older girls love Friends, while older boys much prefer Seinfeld. However, almost nine out of 10 Australian children watch programmes which are restricted to older age groups – twice the regional average and the highest in the region. This includes 85% of 7-8 year old boys. More than half say they have watching frightening or disturbing programmes, and 12% of teenage girls and boys (in equal numbers) say their favourite movie genre is “adult erotic”.

Chart 3

Doing something is not the same as enjoying it, and although TV is the activity on which most time is spent, the next slide shows that the less than a third of Australian children rate it as one of their three favourite activities, less than half the regional average, and the lowest of any country. However, magazines and newspapers aren’t good marketing alternatives to TV for Australian children, as they are also (with comics thrown in, as well) bottom ranked in the region. Top-ranking in the region as a whole is the Australian children’s passion for spending time with friends and playing sport.

Chart 4

When we go one step further and examine gender, we find 65% of Australian girls rate spending time with friends as one of their three favourite activities, rising to 80% for teenage girls - nearly twice the regional average, and that of their little sisters. While teenage boys also place a high value on friendship enjoy playing sport, watching TV and videos, and playing computer games, whereas girls give strong support by a substantial margin over boys for reading books (other than school books), shopping for clothes and fashion accessories, and doing artistic activities (dance, drama, art, craft, music)

Chart 5

If friendship is big, does something else have to give? There are two institutions that challenge and are challenged by the demands of the peer group, and our next slides examine attitudes towards school and home. We asked a question very early in the survey – “what’s the best thing in life”, and were frankly surprised to find that nearly half the Indian children responded that something to do with school was the best thing in life. In contrast virtually none of the Japanese children responded in this way, and a third said, in fact, that something to do with school was the worst thing in life. The Australian responses were similar – only a 6% positive vote for school, and a 26% negative vote.
We've plotted the score for the ‘best thing in life” being something to do with friendship. A quarter of Japanese children said some thing to do with friendship was the best thing in life, as did 21% of Australians. At the other end the kids who love school, put the least value on friendship.

Chart 6

As we turn to friends do we turn away from family? Another question was “who do you most admire”, and it seems at least at the extremes, that a family member is most likely to be the hero, when friends are least significant, as in India. Japanese children, who most value friends, least admire family. Australian children show a similar tendency. Australian children have other heroes - Learmando di Capprio, Bill Gates, Micheal Jordan, God and Jesus, whereas the Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, and Malaysians all give a big vote to political figures, and one third of the Japanese children say they have no heroes at all.

So if, as I am suggesting, the new generation of children, immersed in its electronic pleasures and other purchasable entertainment, is moving away from the older fashioned institutions of school and home, what essential truths do they hold that will carry them forward into the future?

Chart 7

The children were asked to rate the importance of 10 ecological issues (fighting pollution, crime, global warming, saving the forests, etc) and 9 personal issues (doing well at school, looking good, finding out about yourself, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, etc). Across the board, with the exception of Japan ‘getting good grades at school’ was about the most important issue, rated as “very important” by 80 and 90% of the children in many countries. Australia had one of the lower scores (68%) but was much higher than Japan’s meagre 28%. ‘Saving wildlife from extinction’ was the most important issue for Australian children, with a big vote from pre-teens.

Chart 8

One of the personal questions looked at individualism – “it’s important to be an individual doing your own thing”, while another assessed the need to act collectively – “it’s important to fit in with others - go along with the crowd”. The next slide looks compares the answers to those two questions as a ratio of individualism vs collectivism, and shows that Australian children thought it was more than 4 times more important to be an individual than to be one of the crowd, whereas Taiwanese and Japanese children thought going along with the crowd was 2-3 times more important than being an individual.

Does being an individual mean that you care less about big picture - the needs of the wider ecological system? We compared children’s average ratings on the ecological questions to their ratings on the personal questions, and plotted the result here. The least individualistic children (Japanese and Taiwanese) children were much more concerned about ecological issues than personal ones, with Australia children being somewhere in the middle ground. Indonesia was the only country which rated personal
issues above ecological ones.

So we have the scenario of two countries, Australia and Japan, hugely rich in entertainment options, increasingly disaffected with school and family, powerfully drawn towards the peer group, but emphasising two strongly different personal strategies as they approach the future. Will rugged individualism carry this generation of young Australians through, or is the Japanese emphasis on the collective going to be the key to survival in the global village?

As I said at the beginning, this would be a speculative journey through a small part of huge data-set, which I believe will be of considerable interest to social scientists across the region. This is much more than a marketing survey, and I applaud the vision and energy that the Cartoon Network has brought to this enterprise.
Ownership of Electronic Entertainment Systems
(TV systems, Radio, Video/Laser/VCD systems, Music Systems, Computer game systems, the Internet)

[Bar chart showing ownership percentages for various countries, with categories for home and child ownership.]
Activities done more than 2 hours a day on most days

- Watch TV: 70%
- Spend time with friends: 60%
- Listen to music: 50%
- Listen to the radio: 40%
- Play or practice sport: 30%
- Read books: 20%
- Play computer games: 10%
- Watch videos: 5%
- Do an artistic activity: 2%
- Use the internet: 1%
Activities done more than 2 hours a day on most days

% of children

- watch TV
- spend time with friends
- listen to music
- play or practice sport
- play computer games
- read books
- watch videos
- do an artistic activity
- use the internet

activities

- Total
- Australia
- Rank out of 12 countries

Chart2
The top six activities most enjoyed by children - plus the internet

- watch TV
- spend time with friends
- play or practice sport
- play computer games
- read comics, mags...
- use the internet

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Total  Australia  Rank out of 12 countries
Favourite activities - boys compared with girls
Friendship as the Best Thing in Life vs A Family as the Most Admired Person

- Friendship best
- Family member most admired

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<th>Countries</th>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>India</td>
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Note: The graph shows the percentage of people choosing friendship as the best thing in life versus choosing a family member as the most admired person across different countries.
The nine most important issues

- control AIDS
- stop deforestation
- reduce drug abuse
- understand who/what I am
- reduce organised crime
- stop wildlife extinction
- go to college/university
- reduce pollution
- achieve good grades

% saying that the issue was 'very important'
The importance of individual vs collective perspectives and ecological vs personal perspectives

- Ratio of individual/collective value
- Ratio of ecological/personal value

Countries:
- Australia
- Singapore
- Thailand
- India
- Indonesia
- Hong Kong
- China
- Philippines
- Korea
- Malaysia
- Japan
- Taiwan