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**CHILDREN AND GLOBAL PLATFORMS: EVALUATION  
OF EDUCATIONAL MESSAGES IN THE CARTOON  
*MASHA AND THE BEAR***

**Abstract:** *Global platforms are increasingly accessible to the youngest users through various media, which requires reflection on the media education of preschool children within a family. Although cartoons are part of almost every child's everyday life, research on educational messages arising from cartoons is insufficiently represented; therefore, the aim of this research was to identify educational messages in cartoons that influence the development of children's social competences. For this reason, we analysed the episodes of the cartoon Masha and the Bear, which were selected as the most viewed cartoon on the global platform YouTube. The research applied descriptive content analysis with a focus on qualitative elements for the purpose of identifying educationally positive and negative messages arising from the most-watched episodes of the cartoon Masha and the Bear. Additional purpose was to detect and interpret non-verbal signs from which educational messages arise in the sphere of the development of social competences. Based on Peirce's theory of signs, a semiotic analysis of the content of individual episodes of the cartoon Masha and the Bear was applied in order to categorise the signs into symbols depending*

*on six universal character determinants as criteria of positivity and negativity. The results of the research show that positivity is the dominant aspect in all the analysed episodes, i.e. the actions and behaviour of the character the Bear follow all six universal character determinants criteria of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, care and citizenship, while the actions and behaviour of the character Masha are also positive in most criteria, except for the determinants of justice and care. Based on the results obtained, it is concluded that the most-watched episodes of the cartoon Masha and the Bear send positive educational messages to children that can contribute to the development of their social competences.*

**Keywords:** *semiotic analysis, social competences, media content, visual elements, media education, signs*

## INTRODUCTION

Although unmediated direct interpersonal interaction with peers and adults is irreplaceable in a child's social development, especially during critical periods of growth, media-based communication, i.e., one-way communication mediated by (digital) media, is taking on an increasingly important role in this process. Consequently, global platforms are gaining more significance in upbringing. According to recent research results, YouTube and YouTube Kids are popular platforms that children use to access various videos for educational or entertainment purposes, and to watch cartoons (Ofcom, 2022). YouTube is the most popular video platform for several reasons – it is easy to use, accessible, and enables content uploading and content sharing, with a large selection of different content. According to YouTube statistics, this video-sharing platform has 2.5 billion users worldwide (DataReportal, 2024). It is ranked as the second most popular social network, right after Facebook. Regardless of whether they assess the impact of media (and cartoons) as more positive or negative for individual development, different authors agree in assessing the great influence of media on modern childhood. Despite the importance of such research, final answers have not yet been found, and the appropriateness of methodological choices is being questioned (Topolovčan, 2020).

This research is motivated by the fact that the age at which children are introduced to mass media is decreasing, and the frequency of children's use of mass media and exposure to them is constantly increasing (Bozzola et al., 2018). Scientific research on the effects of screen media on children's development, learning, and family life has difficulty keeping up with the rapid development of the digital environment (Ponti, 2023). Responsible parenting in the modern era requires making decisions about the media content to which children are exposed. In the case of preschool children, this most often

concerns cartoons, which Mikić (2001) defines as a subgenre of animated film in which twenty-four consecutive phases of movement are drawn, coloured and recorded to get a second of film projection, which creates the illusion of continuous movement through projection. They can be based on realistic and semi-realistic drawing forms of two-dimensional or three-dimensional works (Kaur & Shweta, 2018). Nowadays, children have the opportunity to watch cartoons in different ways, regardless of time and space. Apart from watching television, children use tablets, smartphones, and computers, so parents play an important role in accessing and supervising children's viewing of cartoons. Children's media literacy starts with parents as primary and natural educators who have the opportunity and obligation to influence children's experience with media (Mirković Moguš & Varga, 2022). In the case of cartoons for preschool children, this means that parents should check in advance whether the content of the cartoon is educational and age-appropriate. In addition, it is important for parents to watch cartoons together with their children in order to supervise them (Ciboci & Kanižaj, 2011), and discuss the messages addressed to children, but this happens only sometimes (Blažević, 2012).

Parents often use cartoons as a substitute educator, by giving their children their mobile phones when they do not know how to entertain them, and then the children choose the cartoons themselves, most often those that are not appropriate for their age or have educationally inappropriate content, and the parents do not react promptly (Labaš, 2015). There is devastating research that has shown that parents do not even have conversations about media content with school-age children (Labaš & Marinčić, 2018; Acheampong, 2017; Ilišin, 2003; Ilišin et al., 2001). However, if we want children to learn to use the media meaningfully and responsibly, we must develop didactic models, devise numerous ways to introduce them to children, and develop good practice (Mikić, 2015).

Due to the widespread use of the Internet (especially various YouTube channels), cartoons are now more accessible to parents and children than ever before. They have the opportunity to browse and watch cartoons anytime and anywhere; which increases parental accountability. Responsible parental behaviour begins with awareness of the connection between cartoons and children's social development. Therefore, this paper intends to describe the importance of developing children's social competences and to explore the role of cartoons in this process with the educational messages that emerge from them.

## **CARTOONS AND CHILDREN SOCIAL COMPETENCES**

The significance of social competences is placed in the period before school age and by no means ends with the completion of formal education. At birth, a person is placed in human society in order to become a human being in the full sense – through upbringing and education. At the earliest age, children

seek interaction with important people (parents), in preschool age, they begin to socialize with other children of a similar age, and over time, their focus increasingly shifts away from their parents towards other adults (teachers) and peers (other pupils). At school age, peer approval becomes increasingly important, as does the desire to belong to a group and be accepted in the group. Over time, the number of friends increases, and peer relationships become more stable and lasting, compared to the great volatility of mutual liking in preschool age (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).

In the educational documents of the European Union, social competences are placed among the key competences that need to be developed through a lifelong approach (Recommendation, 2010). According to Rose-Krasnor (1997), they can be determined through three levels of interpretation: at the theoretical level, the relational level, and the level of individual skills. At the theoretical level, social competence is defined as effectiveness in interaction. Below the theoretical level, the relational level of interpretation of social competences is presented. It describes social interaction as a permanent dialectical relationship between one's own and others' goals, i.e., goals that the child sets for himself and goals that others set for him. At the relational level, the treatment of other people, both peers and adults, is placed. The skill level is the lowest level of the prism on which the other levels are built, and the skills that are associated with social competences are: perspective taking, communication, empathy, emotion regulation, and solving social problems.

Consequently, social competences are linked to children's later academic success (Livazović, 2012; Buljubašić Kuzmanović & Botić, 2012; Mikas, 2011; Cummings et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2004), and the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (2015) is already focused on the development of children's social competences by ensuring safe and supportive contextual conditions that enable adaptation to the extra-family and institutional context, encourage a culture of communication, living together and interacting, the development of social-emotional connections with peers, collaborative learning, non-violent conflict resolution, teamwork - negotiating and dividing roles, taking responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions towards oneself, others and the environment, etc.

Children's development of social competences can also be influenced by the media, especially through cartoons. Children imitate cartoon characters, and this can be seen in their lifestyle, clothing, and behaviour. Cartoon characters are imitated by children of all ages, regardless of socio-economic status or intelligence level (Rai et al., 2016). Since they contain information about the world a child enters, it is believed that cartoons can play a supporting role in the educational process. Among other things, cartoons help children discover the world and teach children the rules of behaviour in society (e.g., respecting adults, teamwork, etc.).

Many cartoon characters promote a healthy lifestyle and have many positive qualities, and children often imitate cartoon characters. They often promote socially desirable behaviour, so children learn how to control their temper, speak politely, help the poor and the elderly, listen to their parents, cooperate with young people, and work in a group without feelings of hatred. In the context of skills, the positive content of a cartoon could teach children how to be a leader, how to analyse problems scientifically, how to manage risk, and how to plan an action. In terms of life experience, a well-designed cartoon can teach a child about the dangers surrounding them in the environment, such as heights, the danger of electricity, crossing the street, or even scouting skills, such as treating a wound, pitching a tent, properly knitting a rope, or building a small boat (Habib & Soliman, 2015). In other words, with the help of cartoons, children are intentionally encouraged to obey their parents, exercise self-control, express themselves politely, respect others, help those in need, establish friendly relationships, and use technology (Kaur & Shweta, 2018). All the above represent socially desirable behaviour and successful adaptation of new members of society achieved through media-influenced socialisation.

However, cartoons can also play an important role in the realization of socially inappropriate behaviour, mostly through various forms of aggression. According to Acheampong (2017), as many as 48.5% of children see violence as a form of problem-solving behaviour in cartoons, and this pattern is then transferred to children's behaviour. To illustrate, the content of a cartoon can lead a child to have a different view of their own friends, parents, teachers and other people around them in a way that leads the child to doubt their upbringing actions, and a cartoon character with a negative attitude can also lead a child to change their understanding of their life and environment and shape their actions in an aggressive way towards situations (Habib & Soliman, 2015). The results of the study by Ghilzai et al. (2017) showed that children who watch cartoons apply aggressive and violent behaviour towards brothers, sisters, and peers, while imitating cartoon characters, trying to be funny and entertaining. Namely, children imitate their favourite cartoon characters and, by watching cartoons excessively, they also have a high level of fantasy and mostly fantasize about them. In addition to behaviour, cartoons, according to the same research, also influence gender-based prejudices, so cartoons impose on them the attitude that girls are fragile and timid, and boys are brave and strong. These findings are also confirmed by the study conducted by Kaur & Shweta (2018), because their results showed that nowadays there are children who are convinced that cartoon characters are real and that cartoon characters are either black or white. After watching cartoons, children become more aggressive and engage in violence with their peers and prefer to sit at home and watch cartoons rather than engage in games with their peers. At the same time, boys from cartoons adopt more violent behaviour than girls do (Mashud et al., 2009).

Whether the influence of a cartoon will have a positive or negative impact on a child will depend on several factors, such as age, the amount of time the child devotes to it, and the content of the cartoon. First, younger children are more susceptible to media influences than older children because their critical thinking has yet to develop. It is only in the national curriculum, as part of the subject Croatian language, that the development of media literacy is planned to encourage the development of a critical attitude towards media messages (Curriculum of the subject Croatian language for primary and secondary schools, 2019). Second, a preschool child spends an average of up to three hours a day watching cartoons (Laniado & Pietra, 2005), while a school-age child spends an average of up to four hours a day in this activity (Acheampong, 2017), with no significant differences found between boys and girls (Mashud et al., 2009). Third, certain cartoons are designed specifically for educational, not exclusively entertainment, purposes, and therefore do not contain, or at least should not contain, educationally negative messages. On the one hand, a child's development of social competences can be negatively affected by excessive exposure to cartoons with negative educational messages, but on the other hand, cartoons with educationally positive messages can have a positive effect because watching appropriate educational content encourages a child's development of social competences (Habib & Soliman, 2015). Therefore, the research is aimed precisely at exploring educationally positive and negative messages in cartoons intended for young children.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study aimed at identifying the educational messages contained in cartoons and evaluating them in relation to their role in the development of children's social competences. The focus was on cartoons popular on global platforms, with a special emphasis on the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*.

More specifically, we were interested in whether educationally positive or negative messages predominate in a selected cartoon popular on the global platforms that preschool children use. More precisely, in order to isolate and categorize educationally positive or negative messages arising from cartoons that children watch, the research was conducted using the technique of semiotic content analysis. This technique was chosen because of its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of symbolism and meaning within media content. Semiotic analysis is based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs, which classifies signs into icons, indices, and symbols. This framework enables a systematic analysis of the visual, audio, and narrative elements of a cartoon. According to Josephson (2002), there are six universal determinants of character, and those were used as the basic framework for the analysis. Based on Peirce's theory of signs (more details in Short, 2007), semiotic content analysis focused

on the categorization of signs into icons, indices, and symbols according to the criteria of six universal determinants of character, namely: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Josephson, 2002). Each determinant encompasses further subsets of certain values. The standards of behaviour that arise from these values constitute the basic rules of ethics, and thus of ethical decision-making. The determinants act as a multi-level selection matrix through which decisions are processed and can significantly improve the ethical quality of decisions, and thus send positive educational messages. Trustworthiness is the most complex of all six fundamental values and encompasses various qualities such as honesty, integrity, reliability, and loyalty. Respect is the next determinant, which includes respecting others, accepting differences, good behaviour and polite speech, caring for other people's feelings, communicating without threats, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Responsibility includes doing what is necessary, planning ahead, working hard, making efforts, self-control, self-discipline, taking responsibility for one's behaviour, words, and actions, choosing a positive attitude, and making healthy choices. Fairness includes adopting rules, sharing, listening to others, not taking advantage of others, not blaming others, and treating other people with consideration. Caring refers to being considerate, compassionate, showing concern and empathy, and also includes forgiveness, gratitude, helping others, benevolence, and altruism. The determinant related to citizenship includes working for a better world, cooperation, community involvement, establishing good neighbourly relations, respecting rules and laws, respecting authority, protecting the environment, and volunteering. These determinants were used as criteria for evaluating educational messages. Signs and symbols in episodes are categorised according to whether they convey positive or negative educational messages within each category.

The cartoon *Masha and the Bear* was chosen for its highest number of online views in the cartoon category (SocialCounts, 2024). The episodes have different themes and were viewed via the YouTube platform. Sampling was conducted with the aim of selecting episodes that represent different thematic and narrative aspects of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*. The selection criterion for the episodes was based on their popularity according to the number of views on the YouTube platform. Three episodes were selected: *Recipe for Disaster*, *Bon Appétit*, and *Laundry Day*. Together, these episodes form a representative sample due to their diversity in themes and high number of views (over a billion for each episode).

According to its creators, the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* aims to bring eternal truths closer to children in a clear and entertaining way, to present the world in its diversity, and to discover the positive qualities of each situation (Masha and the Bear: Official Website, 2024). The content of the episodes also tries to explain the logic of action in various difficult situations and helps in

fighting one's own weaknesses in an unobtrusive way. The main plot refers to the depiction of the pranks of the main characters, Masha and her friend Bear, with a focus on kindness and comedy. Their relationship is a metaphor for the interaction of a child with the big world and how an adult can help in this difficult task. Masha is a restless girl who has difficulty standing still due to her endless energy because she has to try everything she comes into contact with. She is indescribably friendly and treats everyone as if she has known them for years. Her curiosity and creativity provoke funny adventures (Masha and the Bear: Official Website, 2024). The cartoon has been translated into 36 languages, including English, and has twelve different YouTube channels, which have 62 million subscribers (SocialBlade Statistics, 2024). Each episode lasts approximately 7 minutes.

Considering the popularity of the cartoon, three episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* were selected and analysed. One of the selected episodes, *Recipe for Disaster*, has the highest number of views in the domain of cartoons, according to YouTube viewership data, with 4.5 billion views (SocialCounts, 2024). The remaining two episodes are also the most viewed, but only in the domain of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, with more than a billion views, and they are *Bon Appétit* and *Laundry Day* (SocialCounts, 2024). Data were collected by reviewing selected episodes of the cartoon via the official YouTube channel using descriptive content analysis with a focus on qualitative elements. During the analysis, the focus was on identifying visual and narrative elements that convey educational messages. Each episode was analysed in detail to identify key signs and their symbolic meanings.

Semiotic content analysis was conducted on several interconnected levels. First, in order to identify the educational character of the messages arising from the episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, certain signs were identified that were categorised as either positive or negative. The second level of analysis refers to the interpretation of symbols detected in the signs themselves, while at the third level of analysis, they are included in a specific category of six universal character determinants. The described analysis was conducted separately for each episode.

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for media content research. There was no direct participation of children or parents, and only publicly available data was used.

## **RESULTS**

The research results are split into two parts, the first of which refers to a detailed analysis of the signs of an individual episode of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, and the second to a consolidated presentation of the results obtained. In the first part, the analysis of an individual episode presents a brief

thematic content of the episode and the interpretation of the symbols, and the categorisation of the educational messages that result from this. In the second part, the results for all three analysed episodes are presented in a single table, and in relation to the criterion of six universal character determinants proposed by Josephson (2002).

The data were analysed in three steps that include the identification of signs, the interpretation of symbols, and the categorisation of educational messages. Visual, audio, and narrative elements of the episodes were identified as potential signs. The signs were interpreted in accordance with their symbolic meanings within the context of the episode. The identified symbols were classified into categories according to the universal character determinants, and each educational message was marked as positive or negative. To increase the credibility of the analysis, data triangulation was carried out. The results of the analysis were compared with previous research on the impact of cartoons on children. The coding of characters and messages was carried out independently by two researchers, and the results were then compared to ensure consistency.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE EPISODE *RECIPE FOR DISASTER***

*Recipe for Disaster* depicts the Bear playing chess when Masha interrupts his game by asking him to feed her. The Bear tries to play chess, but Masha constantly distracts him, so the Bear rushes out of the house and into nature. Masha decides to cook porridge herself, but forgets to turn off the stove, so the porridge soon swells, and as a result, all the forest animals will remember this day for a long time because Masha will try to feed them all with the excess cooked porridge. In the episode *Recipe for Disaster*, the main characters, Masha and her friend Bear, face the challenge of cooking a joint lunch. Masha shows her adventurous nature by trying to make unusual and experimental dishes, while Bear shows his passivity and disinterest in cooking. The characters, Masha and her friend Bear, represent two different characters, as already mentioned, Masha is brave and adventurous, while the Bear is fearful and more passive. Symbols that appear in the episode are, for example, a cooking pot symbolising control over food, or porridge symbolising the pleasurable experience of satisfying basic needs.

A semiotic analysis of the episode *Recipe for Disaster* from *Masha and the Bear* presents characters as symbols. For example, Masha can be seen as a symbol of curiosity, innocence, and childlike wonder, and her actions represent uninhibited exploration of the world. Furthermore, the Bear as a symbol embodies a responsible, adult figure whose task is to maintain order and care for Masha, symbolising the challenges and joys of parenthood.

Masha and her friend Bear also serve as central visual cues. Masha's small stature and energetic movements contrast with Bear's larger and more composed

appearance, reflecting their different personalities. The kitchen is a significant visual sign, representing a space for creativity, exploration, and potential chaos. The episode uses warm and vibrant colours to create a visually appealing and lively atmosphere, especially in scenes involving cooking and collaboration. In the context of signs, the forest serves as a backdrop for the story and symbolises nature, the untamed world, and adventure. Food plays a significant role in this episode, representing feeding and the act of sharing. Preparing food symbolises caring for others and the effort required to maintain a household. The character interactions include Masha's interference and the Bear's patience. Masha's interference is linked to Masha's curiosity, which often disrupts the Bear's plans, symbolising the unpredictability of life and the challenges of managing unexpected events. On the other hand, the Bear's patience and eventual acceptance of Masha's help convey themes of adaptability, resilience, and the importance of cooperation.

Positive educational messages that emerge from this episode (Figure 1) relate to promoting reading habits (the Bear reads a book about chess), popularising board games (the Bear plays chess), peaceful conflict resolution (the Bear gives Masha a puck instead of the chess piece she took from him), polite behaviour (Masha sits at the table and eats porridge with cutlery), and encouraging cleaning habits (Masha cleaned up all the mess created as a result of cooking).

### Figure 1

*Positive educational messages (Recipe for Disaster)*



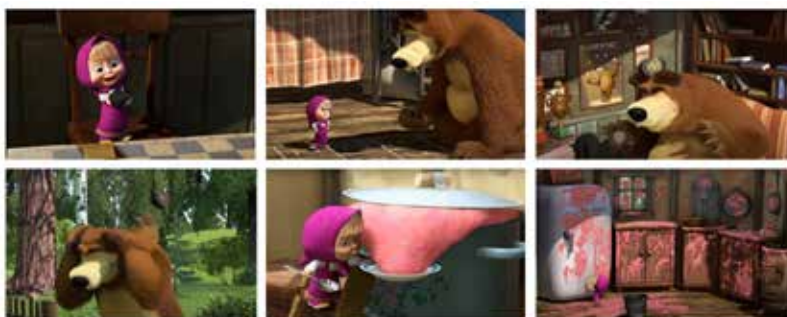
Source: YouTube

Negative educational messages (Figure 2) are mainly reflected in Masha's socially unacceptable behaviour (Masha snatches a chess piece from the Bear, Masha throws a puck at the Bear, Masha throws dishes while cooking, and creates a mess in the kitchen).

The content of the episode conveys messages that emphasise the value of children's exploration and their ability to bring spontaneity and joy into the lives of adults. Learning through mistakes is also emphasised, as Masha corrects her mistakes. Masha's diligent cleaning up of the mess that she has caused in the kitchen indicates responsible behaviour, i.e., the ability to take responsibility for her own actions.

## Figure 2

*Negative educational messages (Recipe for Disaster)*



Source: YouTube

## ANALYSIS OF THE EPISODE *BON APPÉTIT*

In the episode *Bon Appétit*, the Bear looks at Chinese recipes and chooses what to cook, kneads dough, and grinds meat. The Panda has come to visit his cousin, the Bear, to help him make a famous Chinese snack - dumplings. Masha catches butterflies, enters the house, catches a caterpillar, and stores it in a jar. Masha insists on kneading the dough. At first, she is not allowed, but later she is allowed, but she does not follow the instructions. In this episode, the themes that develop are friendship, courage, and creativity. Masha, the Bear, and the Panda must work together to make lunch, which represents friendship. Masha shows courage in experimenting with new dishes, while the Bear and the Panda strive to be consistent and creative in cooking.

The semiotic analysis of the episode titled *Bon Appétit* focuses on the characters as symbols, which include Masha, the Bear, and the Panda. Masha here symbolises the boundless energy and curiosity of a child. Her character embodies innocence and an adventurous spirit. On the other hand, the Bear serves as a symbol of a responsible adult, emphasising the challenges and joys of caring for a child. Cousin Panda is a symbol of other adults that the child encounters in the extended family, and/or in society in general. In this episode, the Bear's house is depicted as a symbol of a safe and comfortable environment, i.e., home and family.

In the episode *Bon Appétit*, cooking and food take centre stage. Food symbolises sustenance, care, and the act of sharing. The act of cooking signifies nurturing and the effort invested in caring for others. The cookbook serves as a symbol of knowledge and expertise, indicating the importance of following instructions to achieve the desired result, and represents the idea that recipes provide guidance and structure in life. The interactions of the characters are evident in Masha's desire to help in the kitchen and the Bear's patience. Masha's desire to help in the kitchen, while well-intentioned, leads to chaos. This highlights the challenges and unpredictability that come with involving children in adult tasks. On the other hand, the Bear's patience and willingness to let Masha participate in the cooking process symbolise the importance of responsible adults guiding young people.

The episode emphasises the value of intergenerational cooperation. This shows that patience and understanding are key when teaching and learning together. Masha's unconventional approach to cooking emphasises the importance of creativity and thinking outside the box. The episode *Bon Appétit* emphasises the bond between the Bear and Masha, showing their shared moments and love for each other.

Positive educational messages (Figure 3) relate to working together to shape the dough, which promotes the social components of socialising. Also positive are the depictions of a walk in nature, washing hands, helping with work, and assistance in finding a caterpillar.

**Figure 3**

*Positive educational message (Bon Appétit), Appétit*



Source: YouTube

Negative educational messages (Figure 4) mainly relate to Masha's carelessness and mischief. Masha destroys shaped dough, takes dough without asking, does not follow instructions for shaping dough, etc.

**Figure 4**

*Negative educational messages (Bon Appétit)*



Source: YouTube

## **ANALYSIS OF THE EPISODE *LAUNDRY DAY***

In the episode *Laundry Day*, Masha drives a pig to the Bear to borrow milk from him and feed her. Masha falls into the mud, and the Bear bathes her. The Bear sews Masha new clothes and washes the dirty ones. Masha asks for milk, but fails to get it. Masha picks raspberries, gets dirty again, the Bear washes her and sews new clothes, and so on several times. The Bear repairs the cart in which Masha drives the pig.

The semiotic analysis of the episode entitled *Laundry Day* focuses on the main characters as symbols, with Masha symbolising the energy and curiosity of the child. Her character embodies the unpredictability and adventurous spirit of the child. On the other hand, the Bear again symbolises the responsible figure of an adult, emphasising the challenges and joys of caring for a child. His character reflects qualities such as patience and adaptability. In the context of the sign, the Bear's house is a symbol of a safe and supportive environment. It serves as a background for many of the story's interactions and represents the concept of home and family.

In this episode, the act of doing laundry symbolises the daily chores and obligations that adults undertake to maintain order and cleanliness. Masha's involvement in the laundry process repeatedly leads to chaos and accidents. These incidents represent the unpredictability and challenges of managing tasks in the presence of a child. The interactions relate to Masha's interference and the Bear's patience. Masha's well-intentioned but destructive actions highlight the tension between the desire to help and the practical difficulties that can

arise when children become involved in adult tasks. The Bear's patience and understanding in dealing with Masha's clumsiness highlight the importance of guiding young people.

The episode emphasises the value of intergenerational cooperation and the idea that adults can guide children through everyday challenges. The content of the episode *Laundry Day* emphasises the responsibilities, care, and patience required to teach children new tasks. The episode depicts the bond between the Bear and Masha, illustrating their shared moments and their relationship with each other.

Positive educational messages (Figure 5) mainly arise from the Bear's behaviour and the help he provides to Masha (the Bear washes the laundry, the Bear bathes Masha, the Bear stops the speeding cart with the pig, the Bear sews new clothes, the Bear repairs the cart), while Masha's disobedience and carelessness (Masha takes food from the refrigerator and jam from the pantry without asking, Masha drives the cart carelessly and too fast) are the causes of problems. Masha's disobedience and accidents resulting from Masha's socially undesirable behaviour can be characterised as negative educational messages (Figure 6) and serve as a model of socially unacceptable behaviour, which children can imitate.

**Figure 5**

*Positive educational messages (Laundry Day)*



Source: YouTube

**Figure 6***Negative educational messages (Laundry Day)*

Source: YouTube

## OVERALL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE CARTOON *MASHA AND THE BEAR*

In addition to the detailed content analysis of each episode, which was conducted and described in the previous section through various aspects of the theme, symbols, and educational messages, it was necessary to focus the research on the evaluation of educational messages in order to determine whether educationally positive or educationally negative messages prevail in the analysed episodes. Hence, the second group of results is organised in Table 1 and offers a summative overview of the types of messages represented in the analysed episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*.

**Table 1***Positive and negative educational messages in the cartoon Masha and the Bear*

Criteria	<i>Recipe for Disaster</i>		<i>Bon Appétit</i>		<i>Laundry Day</i>	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<b>Trustworthiness</b>	x		x		x	
<b>Respect</b>	x	x	x		x	
<b>Responsibility</b>	x	x	x		x	
<b>Fairness</b>	x		x	x	x	x
<b>Caring</b>	x		x	x	x	x
<b>Citizenship</b>	x		x		x	

Table 1 shows that each episode emits more positive than negative educational messages, based on the criteria of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, and citizenship, which Josephson (2002) identifies as six universal determinants of character. The analysis suggests that there are several negative educational messages: the absence of respect and responsibility in the episode *Recipe for Disaster*, the absence of justice and caring in the episode *Bon Appétit*, and the episode *Laundry Day*. On the other hand, each analysed episode contains all six universal determinants of character that are developed as part of social competences and promotes socially acceptable behaviour among children.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained can be compared with those of similar studies that focused on the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, without necessarily studying the same problems or the same episodes. The messages conveyed by cartoons have been studied and analysed in other studies, which also highlight the positive aspects of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*. Themes that encompass friendship, kindness, and some characteristics that are unique to human beings permeate the content of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* (Parlakııldız et al., 2022). Antoniazzi (2016) explores the potential of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* as a transformative educational tool for children. By examining the unique characteristics of this cartoon, its narrative structure, and the inclusion of educational elements, the results of the study identify and elaborate on the emergence of a new paradigm in children's education. This problematises innovative storytelling, as the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* uses innovative storytelling techniques such as a combination of humour, adventure, and moral lessons within each episode to encourage cognitive development in children. From the aspect of encouraging the development of social competences, valuable lessons about empathy, cooperation, and emotional intelligence are also represented through Masha's interaction with the Bear and other characters. Elements of cultural awareness are also present by introducing children to different cultures and traditions through different characters and environments in individual episodes. The cartoon *Masha and the Bear* contains numerous cultural references due to the great public popularity it has gained among children around the world (Olwi et al., 2022). Although dialogues are kept to a minimum in the cartoon, various audio-visual cultural aspects are present, such as traditional clothing, songs, and dances, which ensure the transmission of meaning, but can also create potential problems in the translation of the verbal message conveyed by the dialogue.

The positive aspects of the cartoon include Masha's imaginative problem-solving skills, which encourage creativity and critical thinking in children.

The characters are portrayed as positive role models, with an emphasis on Masha's curiosity, resilience, and the Bear's patient and caring behaviour. This contributes to discussions about the use of popular media to achieve positive educational outcomes (Antoniazzi, 2016). According to Lyanda-Geller (2015), there are many versions of the folktale *Masha and the Bear*, and each version contradicts traditional fairy tale conventions, as the Bear and the forest are no longer presented as cruel and dangerous, but as hospitable and benevolent. The messages that run through the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* promote children's freedom to express themselves, their needs, curiosity, and authenticity. Srimayanti and Widyastuti (2023) explored the themes of friendship by analysing two episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* using descriptive qualitative methods and semiotics. The results of the study identify the value of friendship between Masha and her friend Bear through four components of friendship, namely intimacy in interaction, mutual trust, acceptance in attitudes and society, and support from both parties in a friendly relationship.

Furthermore, Yilmaz (2021) presents the results of the study that arise from examining positive verbal and behavioural expressions of eleven different value categories, including love, tolerance, happiness, responsibility, patience, cooperation, respect/politeness, trust, justice, truth/honesty in the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*. As a result, 10 different value categories are identified: love, happiness, responsibility, patience, cooperation, respect/politeness, cooperation, trust, justice, truth/honesty. According to the results of the frequency analysis conducted in the study, when verbal expressions related to value categories were examined in episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, it was determined that the value *happiness* had the highest frequency. It was found that the value of *happiness* is accompanied by the value categories of *respect/politeness, love, trust, cooperation, responsibility, patience, punctuality/honesty, cooperation*. No findings were found on the values of *tolerance* or *justice*, in terms of verbal expression, in the observed episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*.

According to the results of the frequency analysis conducted in the same study (Yilmaz, 2021), when behavioural expressions related to value categories in episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* were examined, it was found that the value *happiness* also had the highest frequency. It was found that this value is followed by *responsibility, cooperation, love, respect/politeness, justice, trust, patience*. No findings were found in the dimension of behavioural expression related to the values of *tolerance, truthfulness/honesty*. The results of the study by Ali et al. (2024) show that stylistic devices in *Masha and the Bear* serve to convey educational messages, promote learning, and influence development, thereby enriching the educational value of animated content for children.

This study also deepens knowledge about the phenomenon of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear* by focusing on the evaluation of educational messages that children find on global platforms. The selected and analysed episodes *Recipe*

for *Disaster*, *Bon Appétit*, and *Laundry Day* use various semiotic elements such as characters, environment, objects, and actions to convey messages about childhood, cooperation, creativity, learning, and dynamics between children and adults. For example, the characters of Masha and her friend Bear are different – Masha is brave and adventurous, while the Bear is fearful and more passive. These two characters meet in different situations that expose them to different challenges and test their character traits. Set design and costume design also play an important role in depicting meaning. For example, the main characters' house represents a safe and comfortable environment, while the forest is depicted as dangerous. Symbols also play an important role, with the Bear representing strength and power, while Masha is a symbol for cunningness. The content of the episodes emphasises elements of curiosity, adaptability, and the value of shared experiences. All three analysed episodes of *Masha and the Bear* convey educational messages in a visually appealing and child-friendly way that is interesting for both children and adults. The cartoon *Masha and the Bear* had the most-watched episode at the time of writing this paper, based on the number of views, but Akça and Koç Cilekçiler (2019) warn that cartoons that children watch most often at one time are later replaced by other cartoons, so further monitoring is necessary.

The limitations of the study relate to the fact that the analysis was limited to three episodes, which may not reflect the entire content of the series. Focusing on popular episodes may exclude less popular but thematically diverse episodes. The methodology of the study contributes to a quality analysis of educational messages in cartoons, but also provides a basis for further research that would explore broader contexts and additional media content.

## CONCLUSION

By applying semiotic analysis of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, it was analysed how different signs are used to exhibit and develop themes such as friendship, courage, and adventure. The content of the analysed episodes sends children positive educational messages about friendship, care, freedom of creativity, and basic skills in a fun and interesting way.

From the analysis of three episodes of the cartoon *Masha and the Bear*, it is evident that the actions and behaviour of the character the Bear follow all six determinants of the criteria of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, care and citizenship in positive aspects, while the actions and behaviour of the character Masha are also positive in most criteria, but the determinants of fairness and care are not consistently followed in positive aspects, given that Masha often does not adopt and follow the rules, does not listen to others and is not careful in her manner.

This research also confirmed that global platforms are an important source of media content for children and have an impact on the development of social

competences, mostly through the cartoons that children choose. Children who watch cartoons learn about the world around them, develop empathy for others, learn communication skills, and develop concepts of good and evil. Cartoons often depict different social situations and relationships between characters, which can help children understand how to behave in different situations. Children also learn about emotions and how to express them by watching how characters in cartoons experience and express various emotions. In addition, cartoons can also help a child develop critical thinking and understand how to deal with problems and obstacles, which can be extremely important in the early period of development, when children are just beginning to develop their social competences.

The comparison of the representation of educational messages in the three analysed episodes of *Masha and the Bear* has shown that positive values prevail through positive educational messages. Given that children cannot always distinguish between positive and negative educational messages, it is the responsibility of parents to monitor them while watching cartoons and explain those messages to them.

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