

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

The cultural and educational impact of Nobita in the Vietnamese context

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study delves into the cultural and educational impact of Nobita, a central figure in the Japanese anime series “Doraemon”, within the Vietnamese setting. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilized a thematic analysis of specific episodes of “Doraemon”, combined with the Vietnamese viewers’ comments. The episodes were carefully selected to cover a range of scenarios depicting Nobita’s various challenges and interactions. A thematic analysis of viewer comments and selected episodes featuring Nobita was conducted, accompanied by insights from Vietnamese viewers. The objective was to discern how Nobita’s character aligns with, and at times contrasts with, Vietnamese cultural and moral norms. The findings unveil key themes: the cultural hybridization of Nobita’s character, the impartation of moral lessons, viewer identification with Nobita, and his influence on shaping children’s notions of responsibility and self-reliance. The study reveals how Vietnamese viewers, particularly children, actively engage with Nobita’s traits, resulting in a blend of Japanese and Vietnamese cultural elements. This refutes the conventional perspective of global media as a one-way cultural force, highlighting instead a reciprocal process of cultural interpretation and adaptation. Moreover, the research underscores Nobita’s significant role in moral education, illustrating that Vietnamese children do not just emulate but critically engage with his character through observational learning. This process extends beyond imitation, involving a deeper level of understanding and internalization of moral lessons. Furthermore, the study emphasizes Nobita’s role in fostering empathy and understanding, resonating with the universal aspects of human experiences and emotions. These findings offer insights into the intricate relationship between global media content and local cultural dynamics, underlining the influential role of media characters in shaping cultural perceptions, moral reasoning, and empathy in young audiences. The study contributes to the discourse on the impact of international media on local cultures, highlighting the potential of media content in bridging cultural gaps and aiding in child development.

Keywords: cultural interplay; moral influence; Nobita from “Doraemon”; Vietnamese context

1. Introduction

The influence of animated characters on the moral and cultural development of children has been a subject of interest for educators, psychologists, and media researchers alike^[1,2]. In this context, the character of Nobita from the widely acclaimed Japanese anime series “Doraemon” presents an intriguing case for analysis. The

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choice of “Doraemon” for this study is justified by its extensive reach and popularity. The version analyzed in this study is the latest one, which started in 2005. This series has received numerous awards and has been positively received by Vietnamese critics, reflecting its cultural resonance in the country. Additionally, the international acclaim of “Doraemon”, as evidenced by its awards and widespread broadcast in multiple countries, including significant impact in other Asian nations, underscores its global influence and relevance for this research.

This study aims to delve into the characteristics of Nobita, focusing on how his portrayal in the series aligns with or diverges from the moral values and cultural norms prevalent in Vietnamese society. While previous research has often centered on Western media’s impact, this study breaks new ground by examining the influence of a popular Asian media character in a non-Western context, providing a novel perspective on cultural reception and adaptation^[3].

Doraemon, a staple of children’s television in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, has captivated the imagination of young audiences for decades^[4]. The series, set in a contemporary Japanese setting, revolves around the adventures of a young boy, Nobita, and his futuristic robot cat, Doraemon. Nobita, often depicted as lazy, academically challenged, and prone to trouble, is a character that many children can relate to. However, the moral lessons emanating from his experiences and transformations are what make his character particularly significant for this study. The unique blend of humor, adventure, and moral storytelling in “Doraemon” offers a rich canvas for exploring how children in different cultural settings internalize media content^[1].

The cultural impact of foreign media content, especially in the formative years of children, is a critical area of study. With globalization, the influx of such content has increased manifold, making it imperative to understand its implications on local cultures and value systems^[5]. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze Nobita’s character through the lens of Vietnamese cultural and moral values. It aims to explore how his traits, decisions, and the consequent lessons align with or challenge the values that Vietnamese society seeks to inculcate in its younger generations. This approach is innovative as it combines cultural studies with media psychology to offer a comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural media influence, setting a precedent for similar studies in other non-Western contexts.

Through this analysis, the study endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on the influence of international media on local cultures, particularly in the context of moral and character education in Vietnam. By dissecting the character of Nobita and the narrative arcs of “Doraemon”, this research aspires to shed light on the complex interplay between global media content and local cultural norms, offering insights that could be valuable for educators, parents, and media creators alike. The outcomes of this study are significant for the scientific community as they provide a framework for analyzing the cultural adaptation of media content in diverse contexts, which can be replicated and reinterpreted by other researchers in similar studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Impact of animated characters on child development

A significant body of research has examined the influence of animated characters on children’s moral and psychological development. Minks^[6] highlighted how children identify with fictional characters, often emulating their behaviors and internalizing their moral choices. Similarly, Isa et al.^[7] emphasized the role of animated series in shaping children’s understanding of right and wrong, pointing out that characters like Nobita can have both positive and negative impacts on child viewers. Expanding on this, Listyani et al.^[8] conducted a study focusing specifically on Japanese children’s perceptions of Nobita, finding that his character often serves as a role model for perseverance and creativity. Abdullah^[1] further explored this theme, noting that

Nobita's portrayal as a flawed but ultimately kind-hearted character helps children understand the importance of resilience and empathy.

2.2. Cultural globalization and media influence

The work of scholars like Tomlinson^[9] and Pieterse^[10] is critical in understanding cultural globalization. They argue that global media content, such as Japanese anime, plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural identities and values, especially among younger audiences. Kraidy^[11] extended this argument by discussing the concept of "hybridization", where local cultures interact with and adapt to global influences, leading to unique cultural expressions. Lu^[12] added to this discussion by examining the global spread of Japanese anime. His work provides insights into how Japanese anime, including shows like "Doraemon", have been received and integrated into various cultural contexts, impacting the global perception of Japanese culture.

2.3. Vietnamese cultural and moral values in relation to foreign media

Studies focusing on Vietnamese culture, such as Nguyen^[13], have shown a strong emphasis on values like respect for elders, communal harmony, and diligence. Phan^[14] explored how these traditional values are being challenged and reshaped in the face of increasing exposure to foreign media. Particularly relevant is the work of Lent^[15], who analyzed the reception of Japanese anime in Vietnam, noting both the appeal of its universal themes and the concerns over its impact on traditional Vietnamese values. Complementing Lent's^[15] work, Nguyen-Thu^[16] investigated the influence of foreign media, including Japanese anime, on Vietnamese youth. His findings suggest that while Vietnamese youth are drawn to the imaginative aspects of these shows, there is an ongoing negotiation between embracing modernity and retaining traditional values.

2.4. Specific analysis of Doraemon and Nobita's character

Limited but insightful research has been done on "Doraemon" and its characters. Condry^[17] offered an analysis of Doraemon as a cultural phenomenon in Japan, discussing how Nobita's struggles and growth resonate with a broad audience. A study by Nakano^[4] compared the reception of Nobita in different Asian cultures, hinting at varied interpretations based on cultural contexts. Building on this, Octavita^[18] conducted a study on Nobita's portrayal and influence in Japanese society, finding that Nobita's character is often seen as a reflection of the challenges faced by modern Japanese children, such as academic pressure and social expectations.

While there is a rich tapestry of literature covering the broader themes, a noticeable gap exists in the specific analysis of Nobita's character in the context of Vietnamese moral and cultural values. Almost no study has not delved deeply into how individual characters like Nobita are interpreted and internalized by Vietnamese children. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a detailed analysis of Nobita's character and his influence within the Vietnamese cultural and moral framework.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This qualitative study delved into the Vietnamese audience's perception of Nobita, a pivotal character in the Japanese anime series "Doraemon". Through a detailed analysis of viewer comments, the study aimed to uncover how Nobita's portrayal influences the moral and cultural values of Vietnamese society. The focus on more than 200 viewer comments (on Facebook and Youtube) provided a direct insight into the audience's interpretation, making it an effective method to gauge the cultural resonance and impact of Nobita's character.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning this study are twofold. Firstly, the study drew upon the theory

of cultural globalization, particularly the concepts of cultural hybridization and the global-local dichotomy^[19]. This framework allowed for an exploration of how global media content, like Japanese anime, interacts with local cultures, influencing and being influenced by them. The character of Nobita served as a focal point for examining these dynamics, providing insights into how Vietnamese audiences interpret and integrate a foreign character into their cultural and moral understanding.

Secondly, the study employed the theory of social learning, particularly Social Learning Theory, which posits that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling^[20]. This theoretical perspective was particularly relevant in analyzing how children, the primary audience of “Doraemon”, might emulate or learn from Nobita’s behavior and the consequences he faces for his actions. The theory helped in understanding how Nobita’s character can serve as a role model, positively or negatively, impacting the moral development of young viewers.

3.2. Materials: Doraemon

The core of this study revolved around the analysis of viewer comments focusing on Nobita, the central character in “Doraemon”. While it is acknowledged that Doraemon is not solely created for child viewers and has a broad audience that includes adults, these comments, written in Vietnamese and sourced from various online platforms frequented by Vietnamese audiences, especially on Facebook and Youtube, provided direct insights into how Nobita’s portrayal was perceived in terms of moral and cultural relevance. Permissions were not required as the viewers used their accounts on Facebook and Youtube, where the comments are publicly available for analysis. The comments would be meticulously collected from social media, online forums, and anime discussion sites, ensuring a diverse and representative sample of public opinion. To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, these Vietnamese comments were translated into English with the support of a professional translator. This translation process was crucial in ensuring the accuracy and nuance of the viewer’s perspectives were maintained in the analysis.

Recognizing the potential concern regarding the source of these opinions, the study undertook an analysis of the profiles of the commenters to ascertain whether they were likely to be parents or children. While the exact ages of the viewers could not be identified due to the anonymous nature of online comments, this profile analysis was used to infer the probable demographic of the commenter. In cases where the information was uncertain, the authors selected another viewer comment with a similar idea to ensure a balanced representation of perspectives. This methodological approach was designed to differentiate between parent-filtered opinions and direct opinions of children, acknowledging the complexity of online comment analysis.

To complement the viewer comments, a selection of “Doraemon” episodes featuring Nobita would be analyzed. This included episodes from different seasons to capture the breadth of Nobita’s character development and the moral dilemmas he encounters. The episodes were chosen to represent a wide range of scenarios, from daily life to extraordinary adventures, offering a comprehensive view of Nobita’s experiences and their potential moral implications.

Each selected episode was scrutinized for its narrative structure, character dynamics, and the ethical challenges presented, with a focus on how these aspects resonated with or differed from Vietnamese cultural norms and values. The analysis was conducted through the lens of cultural globalization and social learning theories, using viewer comments as a primary source of qualitative data.

Supporting the primary and secondary materials, the study also utilized scholarly articles and research on “Doraemon”, cultural studies of anime, and literature on child development and moral education. These resources offered theoretical and contextual grounding, enriching the analysis of Nobita’s character within the

broader spectrum of media and cultural studies.

In aligning with ethical standards, particularly in terms of copyright, the study adhered strictly to the principles of fair use. The analysis focused on critical and educational evaluation, avoiding the reproduction of copyrighted material. Additionally, the study respectfully acknowledged the Japanese origin of “Doraemon” while exploring its cultural interpretation and impact in Vietnam. This dual focus ensured a balanced view honoring the source material’s roots and its international influence.

3.3. Data analysis

The study employed a detailed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected from more than 200 viewer comments on Nobita, alongside the analysis of selected “Doraemon” episodes, chosen through a stratified random sampling method to ensure a diverse representation of narratives and character development. This qualitative method was adept at identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns (themes) within complex datasets^[21]. The thematic analysis focused on understanding how Vietnamese audiences perceive Nobita’s character in relation to their cultural and moral values. The process commenced with a comprehensive viewing of the selected “Doraemon” episodes, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of Nobita’s character development, moral dilemmas, and narrative contexts. Concurrently, viewer comments were thoroughly reviewed to grasp the public’s perspective and interpretations of Nobita.

The initial phase of coding involved systematically marking and annotating significant aspects of Nobita’s portrayal in the episodes and recurring themes in viewer comments. This included noting behaviors, dialogues, moral challenges, and audience reflections on Nobita’s character. This coding process followed the procedures outlined in earlier works by Braun and colleagues^[22,23], ensuring a rigorous and systematic approach. These codes were progressively refined and categorized to form the basis for broader thematic analysis. In the second phase, the study explored emerging patterns, creating and defining themes. Themes were derived from a combination of inductive and deductive coding, reflecting both the data and the theoretical frameworks guiding the research.

Themes encompassed areas like moral development, cultural resonance or conflict, the influence of Nobita’s character, and audience identification with him. The final themes were: cultural hybridization in Nobita’s character, moral lessons and character influence, viewer identification with Nobita and cultural contextualization, Nobita’s influence on perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance, and the role of Nobita in fostering empathy and understanding. The next step was iterative, requiring continual review and refinement of themes. A crucial aspect was comparing themes derived from the episode analysis with those from viewer comments. The approach illuminated the contrast between Nobita’s portrayal in the anime and his perception among Vietnamese audiences. The study leveraged the theoretical frameworks of cultural globalization and social learning to ensure the themes are insightful and analytically robust. Throughout the analysis, a reflexive stance was maintained to address potential biases and preconceptions of the researcher. This reflexivity was essential for the credibility and validity of the analysis. The final interpretation weaved the identified themes into a coherent narrative, linking them to the research questions and objectives, and positioning the findings within a broader academic context.

The thematic analysis offered a nuanced understanding of how Nobita’s character, as a global media entity, interacts with and is shaped by local cultural dynamics in Vietnam. The study aimed to contribute valuable insights into the fields of cultural globalization, media studies, and social learning through the lens of viewer engagement with anime characters.

4. Findings

4.1. Cultural hybridization in Nobita's character

The comments reveal how Nobita's portrayal blends Japanese cultural norms with aspects that resonate strongly with Vietnamese audiences. For example, several viewers appreciated Nobita's respect for his elders and his unwavering loyalty to friends, which align closely with Vietnamese cultural values. One viewer with the nickname "Tiên Lam" highlighted this, saying, "Nobita's respect for his grandmother and his steadfast support for his friends reflect our Vietnamese values of family and loyalty." This observation was particularly prominent in episodes like "Nobita's Ancestor" and "Goodbye, Shizuka", where Nobita's interactions with family and friends exemplify these values.

Conversely, Nobita's occasional laziness and dependence on Doraemon's gadgets have sparked contrasting opinions among the audience, particularly against the Vietnamese emphasis on self-reliance and hard work. A viewer with the nickname "Ánh Ngọc" insightfully noted, "While Nobita's reliance on gadgets is amusing, it contrasts sharply with our cultural importance placed on self-reliance and diligence." This aspect of Nobita's character comes to the forefront in episodes such as *Fuko*, the *Typhoon*, where his dependency on gadgets creates conflict and learning moments. This dichotomy in Nobita's character encapsulates the essence of cultural hybridization, where Japanese elements in "Doraemon" interweave with and are reinterpreted through the lens of Vietnamese values.

The theory of cultural globalization provides a contextual framework for this phenomenon, suggesting that global media content like "Doraemon" becomes a conduit for cultural negotiation and hybrid forms. This is evident in how Vietnamese viewers both embrace and adapt Nobita's character traits. One viewer with the nickname "Điêu một xú" expressed, "Nobita brings a slice of Japan to us, but his approach to problems and friendships is universally relatable." Episodes like "Nobita's Proposal Strategy" are prime examples of this cultural negotiation, showcasing scenarios where Nobita's experiences are both uniquely Japanese and universally applicable.

Moreover, the findings can be viewed through the lens of social learning theory, particularly in how Nobita's actions and the consequences he faces in the series serve as learning models for young Vietnamese audiences. They seem to emulate Nobita's positive traits while learning from his mistakes. This is highlighted by a parent's (Kimphuong Duong) comment: "My child adores Nobita but also understands the importance of working hard and being responsible, traits Nobita sometimes overlooks." Such learning experiences are evident in episodes like "Nobita's Bride" and "A World Without Mirrors", where Nobita navigates various challenges, providing viewers with examples to learn from.

The way Nobita's character is received and internalized by Vietnamese children indicates a dynamic interplay between his portrayal and their cultural and moral upbringing. It demonstrates the significant role of media characters like Nobita in the process of cultural hybridization and in influencing social learning.

4.2. Moral lessons and character influence

The analysis of Nobita's character has revealed significant insights into the moral lessons perceived by Vietnamese children and their influence on their moral development. Nobita, despite his imperfections, is often seen as a vessel for moral lessons crucial within the Vietnamese cultural context. These include the importance of friendship, perseverance, and understanding the consequences of one's actions.

Viewer comments have played a pivotal role in underlining these aspects. Specific episodes that stood out in this context include "Let's Play in the Clouds" and "A Dinosaur Came", where his actions and their

repercussions were particularly illustrative of these moral lessons. For instance, Vietnamese children and parents have specifically pointed out episodes where Nobita faces challenges and learns from his errors as being particularly impactful. A parent with the nickname “Hanh Nguyễn” mentioned, “My child related deeply to the episode where Nobita, after taking the easy path with a gadget, faces trouble. It was a practical lesson about the value of hard work over shortcuts.” Such scenarios, especially where Nobita initially chooses an easy solution with Doraemon’s gadgets but later faces the repercussions, strongly resonate with the Vietnamese emphasis on responsibility and learning through hardship.

This pattern aligns well with social learning theory, suggesting children learn moral lessons not only through direct instruction but also by observing the outcomes in fictional narratives. Another viewer with the nickname “Ngọc Diệp” commented, “It is fascinating how my kids discuss what Nobita should have done differently. They are learning through his adventures, especially when he makes mistakes.” They are learning through his adventures, especially when he makes mistakes, as seen in episodes like “Dorami Appeared! Nobita’s Submarine Adventure.”

Nobita’s influence on children’s moral development aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that children primarily learn social behavior through observation and imitation. As a character relatable and influential to children, Nobita serves as a behavioral model, influencing their learning and internalization of various behaviors and attitudes. This learning process is active, involving engagement and interpretation of Nobita’s actions within their own moral and cultural framework.

Reflecting on the influence of global media content like “Doraemon”, these findings highlight how it can transcend cultural boundaries to impart universal moral lessons, yet be interpreted uniquely through a local lens. The Vietnamese children’s identification with and learning from Nobita’s character suggests that the themes and lessons of “Doraemon”, while inherently Japanese, have a universal appeal adaptable to local cultural and moral values. Trần Lam Nhi’s, a viewer, insight encapsulates this sentiment: “Doraemon may be from Japan, but Nobita’s struggles and growth are something every child here can understand and learn from.” Episodes like “Where the Traveling Souvenir Picture Doesn’t Go” further demonstrate this universality. These observations underscore the powerful role of media in bridging cultural divides and shaping the ethical development of young audiences across different cultural settings.

4.3. Viewer identification with Nobita and cultural contextualization

The study further delved into the theme of viewer identification with Nobita, focusing on how Vietnamese children and parents contextualize his character within their cultural framework. This theme examines the extent to which Vietnamese audiences connect with Nobita, particularly reflecting on the aspects of his character that align with their cultural and personal experiences.

Vietnamese viewers, especially children, have shown a strong identification with Nobita. Interestingly, this connection is less about his fantastical adventures and more about his everyday struggles and emotional experiences. Episodes like “Goodbye Kibou”, where Nobita deals with everyday challenges, were frequently mentioned by viewers as instances where they found this connection most pronounced. Many children found common ground with Nobita’s academic challenges, his dynamics with friends and family, and his emotional reactions to different situations. For example, a viewer with the nickname “Lê Minh Châu” commented, “My son sees himself in Nobita when he struggles with schoolwork or when he tries to navigate friendships, which are universal experiences.” This sentiment was particularly echoed in episodes such as “The Dream Player”, where Nobita’s struggles with school and friends are central to the storyline. This identification is crucial as it indicates that despite the cultural gap between Japan and Vietnam, some facets of childhood, as portrayed through Nobita’s character, resonate universally.

The theory of cultural globalization sheds light on this phenomenon. It posits that global media content like “Doraemon”, while originating from a specific culture (Japan in this case), can resonate across different cultures, enabling audiences from varied backgrounds to find relatable elements in its themes and characters. The manner in which Vietnamese viewers internalize Nobita within their cultural and social realities exemplifies this transcultural connection.

Additionally, social learning theory offers a perspective on how this identification influences the viewers. By finding commonalities with Nobita, Vietnamese children are more inclined to engage with his experiences and absorb the moral lessons these narratives impart. This was particularly observed in episodes like “Let the Angel Handle It”, where children were seen discussing and learning from Nobita’s decisions and their outcomes. A parent with the nickname “Toan Nguyen” reflected, “When my daughter watches Nobita handle a difficult situation, she seems to understand and learn from it more because she sees a bit of herself in him.” This process underscores the importance of empathetic engagement in learning and moral development. It suggests that children are more responsive to characters with whom they can relate on a personal and emotional level.

4.4. Nobita’s influence on perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance

The further analysis has revealed a critical aspect of how Nobita influences Vietnamese children’s perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance. Although Nobita is frequently depicted as reliant on Doraemon’s gadgets to address his problems, Vietnamese viewers, particularly children, exhibit a deeper understanding of the importance of self-effort and taking responsibility for one’s actions.

The study found that while Vietnamese children are amused by the technological solutions Nobita often employs, they also grasp the moral lessons where relying on such shortcuts leads to more complex predicaments. Episodes like “Instant Robot”, where Nobita’s reliance on gadgets is prominent, were particularly mentioned by viewers as instances where children learned about the downsides of avoiding self-effort. This understanding is in line with the traditional Vietnamese values that emphasize hard work, self-reliance, and facing the repercussions of one’s actions. Children’s responses indicate a level of interpretive engagement with the narrative, where they discern the underlying moral lessons beyond the immediate fantastical elements of the story. For instance, a viewer with the nickname “Vy Nek” remarked, “It is fun to see Nobita use gadgets, but I also learned that it is better to solve problems myself.”

From the social learning theory perspective, this finding reflects the intricate nature of observational learning. It demonstrates that children are not just mimicking Nobita’s actions; rather, they are actively evaluating his decisions and comprehending the results. This shows a mature level of moral reasoning, where children distinguish between Nobita’s immediate actions and their broader moral implications.

In terms of cultural globalization theory, this aspect of the study highlights how global media content, like “Doraemon”, is interpreted through the lens of local cultural values. The way Vietnamese children perceive and interact with Nobita’s character reveals a process of selective appropriation, where they enjoy the global (Japanese) aspects of the narrative but interpret and assimilate these elements in ways that align with their local (Vietnamese) cultural values. This process illustrates the dynamic interaction between global media and local cultures, where global narratives are not just passively consumed but are actively interpreted and integrated within the framework of local values and beliefs.

4.5. The role of Nobita in fostering empathy and understanding

The study also sheds light on a pivotal theme: the development of empathy and understanding. It emerges that Nobita, through his diverse experiences, challenges, and interactions, plays a vital role in nurturing

empathy and understanding among young viewers in Vietnam.

Children participating in the study frequently expressed empathy towards Nobita's predicaments, whether they were related to his academic struggles, friendships, or family life. Episodes such as "Moonlight and Bug Voices", where Nobita faces emotional and moral dilemmas, were particularly noted by viewers for fostering this empathetic connection. They often saw reflections of their own experiences in his challenges, which deepened their emotional connection to the character. This empathy transcends simple identification; it encompasses a deeper comprehension and sharing of Nobita's emotions and experiences. For example, a viewer with the nickname "Lê Hằng" remarked, "When Nobita feels sad or happy, I feel it too. It is like what happens to him happens to me."

This phenomenon aligns well with the principles of social learning theory, which posits that empathy is a crucial component of learning through observation. As children empathize with Nobita, their engagement with the narrative intensifies, enhancing their learning from the series. This process not only fosters a deeper understanding of Nobita's character but also aids in honing the children's own emotional intelligence and moral reasoning.

From a cultural globalization perspective, this theme highlights the significant role global media content plays in cultivating cross-cultural empathy and understanding. Despite being a Japanese character, Nobita embodies experiences and emotions that are universal. This universality enables children from varied cultural backgrounds, such as those in Vietnam, to connect with and learn from his narratives. This connection facilitates a transcultural understanding, effectively bridging cultural divides and promoting a sense of global empathy among young audiences. Thus, Nobita's character in "Doraemon" serves not just as a source of entertainment but as a medium for fostering empathetic connections and understanding across different cultures, underscoring the power of media in shaping emotional and social development in children.

5. Discussion

5.1. Cultural hybridization in Nobita's character

The theme of cultural hybridization in Nobita's character, as observed in the Vietnamese context, offers a compelling addition to the existing body of research on global media and cultural adaptation. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the impact of global media as a one-way process, emphasizing the imposition of foreign cultural norms on local audiences. For instance, research by Tomlinson^[9] and Pieterse^[10] primarily explored the overarching influence of Western media content on non-Western cultures, often highlighting concerns about cultural imperialism. However, the current study's findings present a more dynamic and reciprocal process of cultural interaction, showcasing how Vietnamese viewers actively reinterpret Nobita's character to align with their cultural values. This emphasizes a bidirectional flow of cultural influence, where global media content like "Doraemon" is not passively consumed but actively engaged with and adapted to local contexts.

The concept of cultural hybridization observed in this study aligns with Kraidy's^[11] idea of hybridity in global media, but it extends this concept by illustrating specific ways in which this hybridization manifests in the context of a Japanese anime character in Vietnam. Unlike previous studies that often generalized the impact of global media^[24], this research provides a detailed analysis of how the specific character traits of Nobita are received and interpreted by Vietnamese audiences. The blending of Japanese and Vietnamese cultural elements in Nobita's character presents a nuanced understanding of cultural globalization, moving beyond the simplistic narratives of cultural dominance.

Moreover, the application of social learning theory in this context also marks a departure from traditional

applications of the theory, which have often focused on direct imitation of observed behaviors^[20]. In contrast, this study highlights a more complex process of observational learning, where Vietnamese children not only emulate Nobita's positive traits but also engage in a critical reflection of his actions, learning from both his successes and mistakes. This nuanced application of social learning theory to media studies presents a significant contribution to understanding how children interact with and learn from fictional characters in a culturally contextualized manner.

5.2. Moral lessons and character influence

The finding regarding the moral lessons and character influence of Nobita in "Doraemon" provides a distinctive contribution to the field of media studies and child development, especially when compared with previous research. Prior studies have often emphasized the potential negative impacts of media characters on children, suggesting a direct correlation between media consumption and the adoption of undesirable behaviors^[25]. However, this study reveals a more nuanced interaction between children and media characters, where Nobita, despite his imperfections, serves as a source of positive moral lessons within the Vietnamese context.

This finding aligns with the principles of Social Learning Theory but extends its application by demonstrating how children actively interpret and contextualize the behaviors of media characters. Unlike previous research that often portrayed children as passive recipients of media influences^[26], this study shows that Vietnamese children engage in a critical analysis of Nobita's actions, learning from his mistakes as much as from his successes. This active engagement with media content suggests a more complex process of moral learning, where children do not merely imitate but reflect upon and internalize the moral lessons presented.

Moreover, the study's insights into how Nobita's character resonates with Vietnamese cultural values, such as responsibility and perseverance^[27], contribute to the discourse on cultural globalization. While previous research has highlighted the homogenizing effect of global media^[28], this study illustrates how global media content like "Doraemon" can be localized and imbued with regional moral and cultural significance. This finding challenges the notion of global media as a one-directional force of cultural influence, highlighting instead its role in a bidirectional process of cultural exchange and adaptation.

5.3. Viewer identification with Nobita and cultural contextualization

The theme of viewer identification with Nobita and its cultural contextualization in Vietnam presents a unique addition to the existing literature on media studies and cultural psychology. Prior research in these fields has often emphasized the universal appeal of media characters (e.g., Knoll et al.^[29]) but has not deeply explored how this appeal is specifically contextualized within different cultural settings. The current study's findings about Vietnamese children's identification with Nobita diverge from this general trend by highlighting the specific aspects of Nobita's character that resonate with Vietnamese cultural and personal experiences.

This strong identification with Nobita's everyday struggles and emotional experiences, despite the cultural differences between Japan and Vietnam, supports the theory of cultural globalization but extends it by showcasing a more profound level of cultural contextualization. Unlike previous studies which might have suggested a superficial engagement with foreign media characters^[30], this study reveals a deeper, more empathetic connection. Vietnamese children are not just passively consuming a Japanese character; they are actively relating his experiences to their own lives, suggesting a more meaningful and culturally nuanced form of media engagement.

Furthermore, the application of social learning theory in this context goes beyond its traditional usage, which often focuses on behavioral outcomes^[20]. In contrast, this study emphasizes the emotional and

empathetic aspects of social learning. It demonstrates that the process of identifying with a character like Nobita involves more than just observing and imitating behaviors; it also involves emotional engagement and a deeper understanding of shared human experiences across cultural boundaries.

5.4. Nobita's influence on perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance

The finding concerning Nobita's influence on Vietnamese children's perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance marks a significant departure from traditional narratives in media influence research. Previous studies have often highlighted the risk of children adopting negative behaviors from media characters, suggesting a direct and somewhat simplistic model of influence^[31]. In contrast, this study reveals a more complex interaction, where children engage critically with Nobita's character, discerning the moral implications of his actions beyond their immediate appeal.

This nuanced understanding among Vietnamese viewers, especially children, indicates a departure from the conventional portrayal of media consumption as a passive activity^[32]. Instead, it supports a more active and reflective engagement model. Children are not merely captivated by the fantastical elements of Nobita's use of Doraemon's gadgets but are also keenly aware of the consequences of relying on such shortcuts. This awareness aligns with the principles of social learning theory but extends its application to show a sophisticated level of moral reasoning in children. Rather than imitating Nobita's actions, Vietnamese children are evaluating them, extracting valuable lessons about responsibility and self-reliance.

In the context of cultural globalization theory^[19], this finding also contributes a new perspective. While global media content often travels across cultural boundaries, its interpretation and internalization can vary significantly based on the receiving culture. The Vietnamese children's reception of Nobita's character demonstrates a selective and interpretive process of media consumption. They are entertained by Nobita's adventures yet are able to contextualize and learn from them in ways that resonate with their cultural values. This selective appropriation challenges the notion of global media as a homogenizing force and highlights its role in promoting a diversified understanding of global narratives.

5.5. The role of Nobita in fostering empathy and understanding

The finding regarding Nobita's role in fostering empathy and understanding among Vietnamese viewers adds a unique dimension to the existing literature on media influence and cross-cultural communication. Prior research has frequently focused on the cognitive and behavioral effects of media consumption, often overlooking the emotional and empathic aspects^[33]. In contrast, this study highlights the significant role of emotional engagement and empathy in the viewers' interaction with media characters.

The empathetic connection that Vietnamese children establish with Nobita, as they relate to his struggles and experiences, goes beyond traditional concepts of identification with media characters. This deeper level of empathy and understanding, where children not only see parts of their own lives in Nobita's but also share in his emotions, presents a more complex form of engagement than previously explored in media studies (e.g., McKeever^[34]). It suggests that children are capable of forming sophisticated emotional connections with media characters, which can significantly influence their emotional and moral development.

This finding is particularly relevant in the context of social learning theory^[20]. While the theory has long posited that observation plays a key role in learning, the current study extends this to include emotional observation and empathetic engagement. The children's ability to empathize with Nobita enhances their engagement with the narrative and deepens their understanding of the character's experiences, thus facilitating a more profound learning experience. This emphasizes the role of empathy as a crucial component in the social learning process, particularly in the context of media consumption.

From the perspective of cultural globalization^[19], this study contributes to an understanding of how global media content like “Doraemon” can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural empathy and understanding. The fact that Vietnamese children can empathize with a Japanese character like Nobita and find universal aspects in his experiences challenges the notion of media as a vehicle for cultural dominance. Instead, it highlights the potential of media to foster a global sense of empathy and understanding, transcending cultural boundaries and promoting a more interconnected worldview.

6. Conclusion

This study embarked on an exploratory journey to understand the cultural and educational impact of the animated character Nobita from “Doraemon” within the Vietnamese context. It aimed to analyze how Nobita’s portrayal in the Japanese anime series intersects with, and at times deviates from Vietnamese cultural and moral values. Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyzed viewer comments and selected “Doraemon” episodes featuring Nobita, offering an in-depth exploration of his character and its influence on Vietnamese children.

Key findings from this study reveal several themes that provide a comprehensive understanding of Nobita’s perception and interpretation in Vietnam. First, the theme of cultural hybridization in Nobita’s character underscored a dynamic exchange between Japanese and Vietnamese cultures. Vietnamese viewers actively engaged with Nobita’s traits, showcasing a bidirectional cultural interaction rather than a unidirectional influence. This finding contrasts with much of the existing literature that predominantly views cultural influence in terms of domination or assimilation, thus offering a fresh perspective on how cultures interact and adapt in the context of global media. Secondly, Nobita’s role in conveying moral lessons was highlighted, with themes of responsibility, perseverance, and the consequences of actions resonating deeply with the young audience through observational learning. This aspect of the study extends beyond traditional analyses of media influence on children, which often focus on behavioral outcomes, to explore the deeper moral and ethical implications of media content. Thirdly, the study revealed a strong viewer identification with Nobita, demonstrating how Vietnamese children related to his struggles and emotions, fostering empathy and understanding. This finding is significant as it goes beyond the usual narrative of cultural differences hindering relatability, suggesting a universal dimension to certain human experiences depicted in media. Moreover, Nobita’s influence on shaping Vietnamese children’s perceptions of responsibility and self-reliance was significant. The study uncovered a nuanced comprehension among children about the importance of self-effort and learning from mistakes, aligning with traditional Vietnamese values. Lastly, Nobita’s role in fostering empathy and understanding was evident. His varied experiences and interactions played a crucial role in enhancing the emotional and moral development of the viewers, thereby contributing to transcultural communication and education. This finding contributes a new dimension to media studies, highlighting the emotional and empathic aspects of media engagement that are often overlooked. Overall, the study offers novel insights into the complex interplay between global media characters and local cultural contexts, challenging existing narratives and providing a framework that can be extrapolated to other studies in diverse cultural settings.

These findings have several implications. The theme of cultural hybridization suggests a dynamic and reciprocal role for global media in cultural exchange, offering insights for content creators and distributors about the importance of respecting international audiences’ cultural contexts. The insights into the moral lessons from Nobita’s character underline the potential of media characters in shaping young viewers’ moral and ethical frameworks, highlighting the need for educators and parents to engage actively with children’s media consumption. The aspects of viewer identification and empathy development through Nobita’s character

have significant educational implications, suggesting that media can be used strategically to enhance children's empathy and global understanding. Lastly, the understanding of responsibility and self-reliance interpreted from Nobita's character offers valuable insights for child development specialists and psychologists, indicating the multifaceted role of media in children's cognitive and emotional learning. This opens avenues for using media narratives in developmental interventions and educational content to promote essential life skills among children.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies

While the study of Nobita's character from "Doraemon" within the Vietnamese context offers valuable insights, it also presents certain limitations. The primary limitation concerns the sample size and demographic focus. Concentrating exclusively on Vietnamese viewers might not capture the full range of audience perceptions and interpretations of Nobita's character globally. The cultural analysis, being specific to Vietnam, limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultures where "Doraemon" is popular. Another limitation is the methodological reliance on thematic analysis. While effective in qualitative research, this approach can be subjective, potentially introducing bias in data analysis and interpretation. Moreover, the study primarily focused on "Doraemon" content analysis, not extensively considering the wider media environment, which could also influence children's perceptions and interpretations of the series.

To address these limitations, future research could broaden its scope. Expanding the demographic to include participants from diverse cultural backgrounds would enable comparative analysis, offering a more global perspective on how Nobita is perceived. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, could enhance the robustness of the findings and mitigate subjective biases. Additionally, examining the broader media landscape and other contemporary media influences would provide a more comprehensive view of "Doraemon" and Nobita's role in children's lives. Longitudinal studies could be particularly beneficial, shedding light on the long-term effects of engagement with characters like Nobita on children's moral and social development. Such research would deepen our understanding of the impact of media on child development, enriching the field with insights into how fictional characters influence young audiences over time.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, TTL and TTP; methodology, TTL; software, TTL; validation, TTP; formal analysis, TTL; investigation, TTL; resources, TTP; data curation, TTP; writing—original draft preparation, TTL; writing—review and editing, TTP; visualization, TTL; supervision, TTL; project administration, TTL. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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