

# Analysis on the Character Design of Asian Indian Cartoon Character Chhota Bheem

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## Abstract

Chhota Bheem has become a popular Indian animated character on the global stage. He is India's most successful animation property, with television shows, films, and merchandise. He is a 9-year-old adventurous, bold, and fun-loving boy with astonishing strength. He is one of the fascinating characters among Indian children because of his representation of cultural values, ethics, and positivity. Chhota Bheem is the top-selling animation property in India, including the South Asian markets. Out of Green Gold Animation Studio's Chhota Bheem franchises, *Super Bheem*, *Mighty Little Bheem*, and *Baby Bheem* are the popular spin-offs. This paper sought to analyze the Asian Indian television animated superhero character "Chhota Bheem" as a character and a brand. This study analyzed the character design with reference to his appearance, body type, shape, colour, and evaluated the character's appeal as a brand. The research applied semiotic analysis, aimed at analyzing the character's appeal as a reference to the face of Indian animation character and to improvise the characterization that can have a global identity. The study also examined the media content based on four leading websites such as [licenseindia.com](http://licenseindia.com), [business-standard.com](http://business-standard.com), [financialexpress.com](http://financialexpress.com), and [brandequity.com](http://brandequity.com). The findings of the study would aid in promoting similar Indian animation properties, thereby motivating animation producers and most importantly, will reduce the dependence of importing animation properties.

**Keywords :** Indian animated character, cartoon superheroes, animated mascots, character design, animated characters as a brand, Chhota Bheem

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In the last decade, the kids' genre in the television sector has grown rapidly due to numerous promising aspects. Reports have been obtained from Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and other commendable sources. It is believed that the "future is now streaming" for all entertainment channels, particularly that of children. This is obvious because India has nearly 30% of children's population according to Census India 2011 and is projected as one of the largest in the world (KPMG – FICCI, 2016).

It may be recollected that Doordarshan, since its inception days, has been reserving a major chunk of its program chart to animated characters. Children and elders alike sat in front of their television sets during their vacations to watch cartoon shows of Spider-Man, He-Man, Giant Robot, Talespin, Duck Tales, Laurel & Hardy, and Charlie Chaplin. The list also included some Indian shows like Gayab Aaya and Guchhae. Hundreds of exclusive cartoon channels are established to cater to the entertainment needs of children across the world. After the insurgence of satellite television channels in India, with the Indian sky being covered by satellites, less than 20

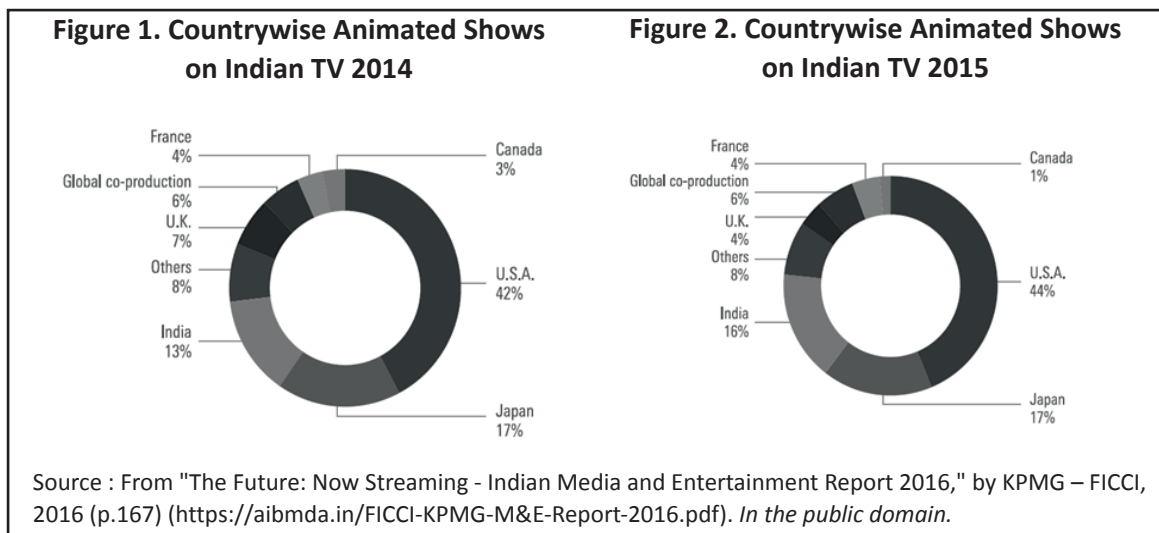
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channels are exclusively available for Indian kids as on 31 January 2016 as listed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the list of permitted satellite TV channels.

A decade back, kids' television channels were mostly dependent upon imported content from the West, which also served as soft power, according to a report by KPMG – FICCI (2016). Animated episodes like Mickey Mouse, Tom & Jerry, Dora, Pokémon, Super Sonic, Spiderman, Popeye, and much more were imported. This business model worked out well since all these Western animated characters were popular, accepted, and successful. They reached Indian children through various distribution channels, animation agents, licensing, and merchandising. The television broadcasting channels had to just work on the dubbing and editing task if they were to telecast in the regional language if the content did not come ready for the telecast. This model proved successful since the cost of importing was much lesser than that of producing original brand-new Indian animation content.

In the year 2014, Indian animation producers produced only 13% of the total animation content broadcasted in cartoon channels (refer to Figure 1) ; whereas, in the year 2015, the production increased to 16% (refer to Figure 2).



Since the recent past, kids' television channels in India have evolved and realized that locally made animation content, though costlier, has great potential in the long run, which would bring low-margin and steady revenues as seen in successful episodes of Chhota Bheem and few others. Some of these characters have become very popular, and they have started appearing in television advertisements endorsing various products. Panda (2015) stated that audiences, especially younger kids, are more inclined towards locally made content and characters based on familiar entertainment elements. The reliability of character, personality, language, clothing, appearance, body type, colour styles, location, environment, lifestyle, theme, and even the name of the characters connect them at their native and personal levels.

Today, the mix of local with imported animated content is experiencing a bigger transformation. Our Indian animation industry is gaining its importance among the global animation industry. Broadcasting channels are increasing their content mix for more local made content. Over the last decade, the Indian animation industry has moved up the production services from an outsourcing model to creating its intellectual animation property. Year on year, there has been a larger intake of local content by the kids' entertainment channels, including some of the regional broadcasting channels.

According to the report from KPMG India – FICCI (2017), the growth of the animation industry in India has

been remarkable. The opportunity for the animation producers to sell the new Indianised content to television networks has compelled the rise of co-production and distribution partner's activity, thus reflecting on the health of the Indian television animation business model. Apart from this, the studios now are also creating local characters, stories, and themes that have a longer shelf life and that can be monetised through various channels – creating a business model around a popular character through licensing and merchandising, mobile games, Internet games, product endorsements, events, exhibition and theme parks around animated properties that has worked very well with overseas studios such as Disney, Pixar, and Universal Studios theme parks.

On a similar model, few Indian animation studios have also created most of the local characters & stories and have seen success with 'Chhota Bheem' and others. With the success and demand of these diverse local ethnic characters, kids' television channels continue to invest in the new characters and new episodes.

## Review of Literature

**(1) Aesthetics of Character Design :** Cobley (2010) referred to the key theory of semiotics, the study of symbols and signs as stated by Charles Sanders Peirce – signifier, signified, and sign ; a sign is made up of icons, symbols, that communicate with meaning and index forms the sign what it represents the object. Images convey stories or ideas – it is a kind of graphic syntax using semiotics, and the graphical patterns are combined as a message by the interpreter. The semiotics process is in-between the image and the interpreter.

On the other hand, Solarski (2012) stated that the shapes can communicate collectively and globally since the concept of shapes is very much taken from nature. Smooth and rounded corners tend to be safer than that of more jagged-edged ones, making us feel more cautious and alarmed. The visual arts represent these reactions and keep it more tactical based on the sense of seeing and feeling. Common people tend to apply their past experiences in reacting to such shapes and forms.

**(2) Culture in Indian Character Design :** The Indian culture is reflected in the stylization of the animation content, graphically reproducing the traditional settings of India through various themes and titles in producing the shows from Chhota Bheem. As the audiences quickly grow and make changes in their choices, this year's audience would be replaced by the younger boys or girls of the next year. Chhota Bheem has become a 3D version of *Super Bheem*, *Mighty Little Bheem*, and *Baby Bheem*. Green Gold Animation, the production house of Chhota Bheem, has created a number of characters with the purpose of education through entertainment, with a new series underproduction titled *Mighty Little Bheem* for Netflix and for Amazon Prime titled *Kalari Kids*. According to Chauhan (2017), these shows aim at building courage, strength, bravery, and character in children. Similarly, Khandelwal (2010) made the following observations regarding the television viewing habits of children : (a) preference of viewing television varies as they grow, (b) children at a younger age are more enthusiastic and reactive with enthusiasm when they share about television, (c) the adolescents are not keen on watching cartoon shows on television.

**(3) Emerging Licensing and Merchandising Models :** The licensing rights of comic books to motion pictures of characters of Marvel Comics are proposed to be acquired by Disney. It all depends on the fans accepting the new characters. Besides movies, comic books, and DVDs, many other formats of entertainment engage fans to follow their favorite hero. According to Steinberg (2009), movies reforming from comic books can generate greater returns. Licensing of these characters can endorse the products by lending their simple shadow image to a full-length picture. According to an annual report from Marvel Entertainment, net sales of about US \$ 292.8 million in 2008 were received from licensing of these characters ("Marvel achieves record results in 2008 : Marvel Studios' film slate launch drives 2008 net income of \$206 million and EPS of \$2.61," 2009). NBC theme parks use

Marvel characters in the form of stories, new rides, and appearances for increasing the footfalls in the theme parks. According to the annual report from Walt Disney, it earned about US \$ 11.5 billion revenue in the year 2008 only from resorts and parks (Steinberg, 2009).

On the other hand, Asthana (2012) strived to trace the elements in the process of transforming a regional brand like Amul to an international brand. One of the key elements is the Amul Moppet, the red and white polka-dotted dressed chubby-cheeked girl, who has been Amul's brand ambassadress since 1967. Brand awareness is achieved by building brand equity among the public. This character is so likeable that the brand reinforcement is done every Friday to Friday as an outdoor billboard since 1967, and the Amul girl is one of the largest running advertisements based on the same theme.

In comparison, Mashwama, Chiliya, and Chikandiwa (2017) asserted that with the advancement of technology and innovation in marketing, the animation artists have provided an alternate for celebrity endorsements with animated spokes character endorsements. These spokes characters are used as brand ambassadors. With this new technology, marketers create cost-effective, customised virtual characters to fit the brand. Usually, companies use characters licensed from cartoon movies or programs. On the other hand, celebrity endorsements may affect the brand by controversies, overshadowing the brand, or decrease in the brand recall due to loss of public image. The researchers revealed in the findings of the study that the spokes characters influenced the brand through their attractiveness, improved the attention to communication, and helped in transforming the attitude of the brand. The study also reflected that the brands using animated spokes characters created trust, endless relationships, and commitment.

New media is helping the comic book industry to take the traditional formats to digital in the form of graphic novels and motion comics that have more interoperability from websites to mobile to digital pads offering a new genre of revenue. These characters can seed to many different ventures, from live-action to cartoons.

Considering the rising popularity of the Anime properties in the U.S. licensing and merchandising market, we ascertain the elements contributing to the growth and the popularity of these characters. Anime, the Japanese animation style, is the new attraction among young children in the U.S. going from designing tattoos to all sorts of merchandising around these characters. Anime characterisation draws huge fan following because these features are generally not found in the Western form of animated characters with vibrant colours, bigger eyes, almost no visible nose structure, and uneven hairstyles of the characters. Even the genres range from comedy to horror, revealing complex human emotions discovering areas shunned by the Western animation industry like religion, war, sex, etc.

One of the factors contributing to the success of the Western animation properties is to have a television show supporting the animated characters ; merchandising and endorsing the products in the market ; and developing a marketing strategy around that character with the help of comic books, videos, and Internet games. Mirroring this format, many of the Anime characters are already popular, and fans are exceptionally informed in the U.S., making these characters' champions and enjoy success.

**(4) Birth of Licensing Nation :** D'sa (2007) stated that character licensing was the earliest form of licensing in India. The use of characters builds an instant emotional connection and bonding with the kids. Credit goes to the television in India for the evolution of character licensing by creating appealing cartoon characters and shows that the kids wanted to watch and want. Studies on “pester power” have showed that the product line – back to school products, toys, and packed food have a definite impact from the use of characters.

The acceptance of international content through movies, television, and multinational retail stores – all make unlimited opportunity for character licensing in India. Initially, licensing was only meant or referred to as a certificate or approval letter to start a business, rather anything to think about intellectual property.

But now, manufacturers, broadcasting companies, publishing houses, and retail stores are taking it seriously.

The first licensing conference in India was held at Bangalore in the year 2016. Leading licensing companies presented and participated in licensors' and licensees' works. The legal presentation of the Intellectual Property Right reinforced the protection of Indian intellectual property to the owners, and several cases presented the efficiency of multiple ways to guard and enforce Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) laws in India.

To make a winning proposition between a licensor and the licensee, efforts are rendered in building a partnership with the distributors, retail agencies, and several creative experts, making fair sharing of the revenue and creating the licensing as a unique business. Licensed brands and characters can benefit in targeting the mass market as a long term strategy.

Hampp (2009) mentioned that SpongeBob Square Pants was worth US \$ 8 billion when the character was celebrating its 10th birthday. The character is the property of Nickelodeon. SpongeBob is with 700 licensing partners across the world, and one of the extensively distributed franchises in MTV. The character was designed to appeal to larger audiences from kids, preteens, teens, and adults. Slapstick humour content helped the character to maintain the favourite position and most-watched shows on television. By the year 2001, SpongeBob started featuring in advertisements, and by the end of 3 years, the character's popularity had increased tremendously, which resulted in revenue amounting to US \$ 86 million. At the same time, the licensing business took off and SpongeBob was paired with all top manufacturers and production houses, thereby becoming the top licensed character in apparel. By the end of 2006, SpongeBob's viewership grew upto US \$ 8.6 million in revenue. In 10 years, SpongeBob managed to reflect the childhood culture of the children in the United States. With new episodes in the pipeline, in the coming years, it is going to continue to attract more viewership. For Nickelodeon, it is a very imperative property, attracting advertisement revenue of US \$ 813 million between the years 2004 – 2008.

**(5) Children as Consumers of Animation Properties :** Shah and Malik (2019) pointed out that as children grow, they influence the family with respect to purchasing decisions. They slowly grow as consumers with specific knowledge and behave like consumers. The credit for this skill needs to go to television, with the increase of cartoon satellite channels and advertisements targeted directly towards children. Children have their demand for the products, and this is called the “pester power.” Marketers attract children with premium toys as their collectables. With the largest population of children, the marketers in India use various tactics in gaining the attention of children and influence the purchase decision of the parents. As children spend more time watching cartoon channels, they are open to a large number of advertisements like back to school products, food & beverages, toys, etc.

Vernekar and Wadhwa (2008) studied the effect of television advertisements upon children. Children in working class families in India take important decisions, in a way affecting the household budget. For the marketers, kids remain a crucial consumer in building a brand and bring in the brand loyalty at an early age. The researchers factored the reasons such as : (a) parents having one or two children, thus spending more, (b) working parents tend to offer gifts for their children to reward for their absence of time. A study conducted by Cartoon Network and NFO in India unveiled that children aged 7 – 14 years were not mute spectators in the purchasing decision making.

Likewise, Kumar (2011) indicated in his study that children preferred to watch cartoon channels. Among them, children in the age group between 2 – 11 years spent 3 hours in front of the television, and the majority of them preferred to watch animation programs. The marketers target children with free offers of collectables like stickers and toys of their favourite animated characters.

**(6) Transmedia Storytelling :** Media convergence enables media professionals to convey a story through transmedia. Jenkins (2010) observed that this enables stories to unfold in multiple media screens and platforms, with each of the technologies making its own contribution to comics, movies, television shows, video games, mobiles, and so on.



Doyle (2013) asserted that this places a new demand upon the producers and the consumers in response to the new media convergence. It helps the brand to spread across from one platform to another. With a long history and success of television programming contributing to the sales of comics, toys, games, and more shows as seen with the success of Disney, this applies to all brands and characters around the world.

Jenkins (2010) stated that the story, characters, and environment itself are complex that cannot be fully explored within a single medium. The enthusiasm drives the fans to gain more information about their favourite shows, not just knowing more about the characters, but also to exchange the gained knowledge.

Online platforms help in the sharing of the content, which gives the media producers more reasons to create touch points to maximize audiences by developing more media products to various targeted audiences. This, in turn, helps the media producers to develop relations with the focused audiences which would be reflected in the online social media platforms.

**(7) Casual Gaming :** The gaming industry is transforming in recent years due to the availability of smartphones, app stores, and good bandwidth. Added new players are contributing to the growth of the gaming industry by a new genre of gamers called “casual gamers.” This type of causal gaming requires no special skills or any long term commitment to play. Dilger (2011) described that by this trend, the sector produces more low-cost games, and the distribution cost is low as compared to the traditional gaming. Games accounted for more than 50% of the mobile paid app services by Apple platform in the year 2010, which was US \$ 1.78 billion.

**(8) New Streaming Services :** Shete (2018) stated that YouTube has created a new revenue channel for the animation studios and media producers in India by the way of posting the shows of their popular IP characters, specifically made for YouTube. The business ecosystem of kids' content is changing remarkably, including content creation and distribution due to digitalization. Children of this generation are familiar with the operation of smartphones or any devices with the advent of digitalization. With the launch of YouTube Kids in India, the content is wide-ranged with regional language shows, and this is growing every day. Now, kids have more choice of content to choose from and decide when and how much to watch by making the digital platform more influential as the control is with the viewer.

Reasonable data plans and better-quality networks by the telecom service providers have changed the consumption pattern of YouTube content, especially in kids' entertainment and learning area. YouTube is now the most preferred content consumption medium by all age groups. It has made babies watch rhymes, while the mother is doing her household chores, making the lives of people stress-free and entertaining.

YouTube Kids, Chu Chu TV, Hooplakids, Videogyan, Peekaboo, and Green Gold Animation are just a few among many animation companies making good quality animation content ranging from pure entertainment to complete learning modules. Chu Chu TV is clearly leading with more than 29 million subscribers and 18 billion viewers. To gain the parent's trust, the content needs to be appropriate for the age group, entertaining as well as educating. Kids' content on YouTube is growing upto 45% year on year, making it the most sought platform.

Lee (2019) stated that the streaming giant Netflix, with its first original Indian animated content, the *Mighty Little Bheem*, a spin-off from Chhota Bheem, surprised the global audience and became the second most-watched and popular original kids content out of India. The content of Chhota Bheem is universally appealing, and became a global hit viewed in 190 countries, breaking all geographical barriers second to DreamWorks' animation, *Boss Baby*.

The findings from the review reveal a lot about making the character familiar and the design elements to make a character for mass media in social construction, connecting symbols and colours with the society. Solarski (2012) shared that shapes can communicate globally since shapes are very much taken from nature. Smooth and rounded corners tend to be more human than that of the jagged-edged ones. Designing the character's appeal based on this

nature helps the audience connect with the character. The licensing and merchandising continue to grow among the children as well as young adults. Connecting with licensing, D'sa (2007) pointed out the studies on “pester power” by the kids for want of merchandise packed with their favourite characters. To make an appealing scheme between the licensor and the licensee, efforts are rendered in building a partnership with the distributors, retail agencies, and several creative experts with the help of conferences to safeguard and apply IPR regulations in India.

## Objectives of the Study

To examine the character design of the television animated character Chhota Bheem with reference to his appearance, body type, shape, size, and colour and evaluate the character's appeal as a brand.

## Methodology

**(1) Qualitative Method :** A broad philosophy and approach to research, a research method, a specific set of research techniques, is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, including in social sciences and natural sciences, but also in non-academic contexts, including market research, business, and service demonstrations by non-profits.

**(2) Semiotic Analysis :** It involves the use of languages, signs, and images which stand for and represent things such as words, images, photos, and content of the media.

The analysis of media content in the present study is based on four leading websites such as [licenseindia.com](http://licenseindia.com), [business-standard.com](http://business-standard.com), [financialexpress.com](http://financialexpress.com), and [brandequity.com](http://brandequity.com). Analysis of articles is taken from the years 2012 – 2018 related to Chhota Bheem in licensing & merchandising, distribution, endorsements, and marketing. This study focuses on semiotic analysis of Chhota Bheem as a character and also aims to understand Chhota Bheem as a brand.

## Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis is applied to the television animated character Chhota Bheem, a 9-year-old adventurous, bold, and fun-loving boy with astonishing strength. This little character helps people who are in need and those who are victimised. His favorite and special food are *laddoos*. He becomes strong after eating *laddoos* like Popeye and Bugs Bunny become strong after eating spinach and carrot, respectively.

To make children familiar with the character Chhota Bheem, his personality, language, clothing, appearance, body type, colour styles, and even the name of the characters are carefully crafted to connect them at their native and personal level. Children interpret these design elements based on their cultural understanding, social and economic backgrounds, and presumptions in creating myths about this superhero. It can relate to colour, shape, and size of the character.

The semiotic analysis is based on the historical and cultural meanings that are built upon the relation of the three-key theory of semiotics – signifier, signified, and sign. Analyzing the signifier, the word – “Chhota Bheem,” the signified is the image we associate with the word “Chhota Bheem,” where “*Chhota*” means small derived from Hindi and the word “*Bheem*” makes the audience imagine a well-built and strong person as the character Bhima from the great Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*. The sign is the image or ideas connected to the signifier or signified, here it is from cultural specific symbol like that of the *tilaka* on the forehead of Chhota Bheem, which is a religious mark usually worn on the forehead of a person. *Tilaka* is applied for special religious events or even on a day-to-day basis on the forehead depending on religious customs. The *tilaka* on Chhota Bheem's forehead is

applied in a flame-shaped pattern symbolising wisdom, light, and knowledge. The strand of hair poking out, otherwise referred to as the trope of hair, cowlicks or idiot hair, that would not comb down in its place, challenging gravity is the iconic reference to Chhota Bheem, and this conscious design element characterises a playful quality in general.

With the attire of a *dhoti*, Chhota Bheem is directly connecting to the Indian traditional men's outfit, clearly making him connected to Indian children more with the Indianised look. This traditional attire is predominately worn in India.

As the signified has a message connected to our cultural background, historical events, and the society we live, it is portrayed by the process of signs in the society. And this sense of the sign is not fixed and is always unpredictable based on culture, history, and society.

**(1) Colour :** Artists use various colour palettes to add different meaning and sense to the character, reflecting the cultural background of the character. The colour palette tells a lot about the character, its environment, and lifestyle. Colours are culturally dependent and add a strong meaning to the character's world.

Considering the foremost colours in the character design of Chhota Bheem, the colour palette is more of analogous in nature. These are colours in groups that are next to each other. They are in groups of more than two colours on the colour palette, with one colour being the leading colour. The colour chart for Chhota Bheem was sampled to identify the leading colours in the character design. For this task, the colour palette was keyed using Adobe Color online application : <https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel/> which sampled the image and extracted colours to create a colour palette of Chhota Bheem. From the outcome of the colour palette, saffron was recognised as the prime colour, and other allied colours were found to be red, yellow, and red-brown. These colours are very strongly patterned to the culturally dependent colours of Hinduism.

☞ **Colour - Saffron :** Chhota Bheem's *dhoti* in saffron colour relates to creativity, happiness, warmth, sunlight, passion, achievement, inspiration, revolution, willpower, well-being, motivation, fun, pleasure, stability, liberty, appearance, and attraction.

☞ **Colour - Yellow :** Yellow bracelets and other fittings give a feeling of freshness, cheerfulness, positivity, simplicity, liveliness, confidence, wisdom, celebration, intelligence, honour, trustworthiness, and joy.

☞ **Colour - Red :** Chhota Bheem's red *tilaka* relates to self-confidence, bold, strong-minded, active, authoritative, passionate, thrilling, and even destructive. It is the most intense and visible colour.

☞ **Colour - Symbolism :** To study the colour diversity applied in designing Chhota Bheem's character and the associations between cultures, the colour palette was tweaked to see how random variations in colours resulted in creating a different look and cultural connotation of Chhota Bheem.

**(I)** The skin was made darker ; usually the hero characters are designed with light colour skin palette, changing the colour to a bit darker shade gave Chhota Bheem more of the coastal region class look.

**(ii)** By removing the *tilaka*, the character seemed not to be connected with any faith and religion.

**(iii)** By adding gaudy colours, the character appeared to be more trendy, flashy, and with a rejoicing look.

**(iv)** When the colour of the *dhoti* was changed to green and his accessories to blue, the character looked extremely different, culturally connecting to a different faith.

**(v)** Finally, when its accessories were removed, which are connected to the mighty, strong, and adventurous character, the attitude of Chhota Bheem was lost and he looked like a normal village boy.



**(2) Shapes :** Shapes can communicate collectively and globally since the concept of shapes is very much from nature. Smooth and rounded corners tend to be safer than that of more jagged-edged ones, making us feel more cautious and alarmed. According to Solarski (2012), as discussed, the visual art represents these reactions and keep it more tactical based on the sense of seeing and feeling. Common people tend to apply their past experiences in reacting to these shapes and forms.

Character designers carefully create characters using basic design elements, such as simple geometric shapes like square, rectangle, triangle, or circle that can create a deeper impact upon the audience. These shapes can be either organic or abstract or geometric. However, each would have their unique characteristics and qualities.

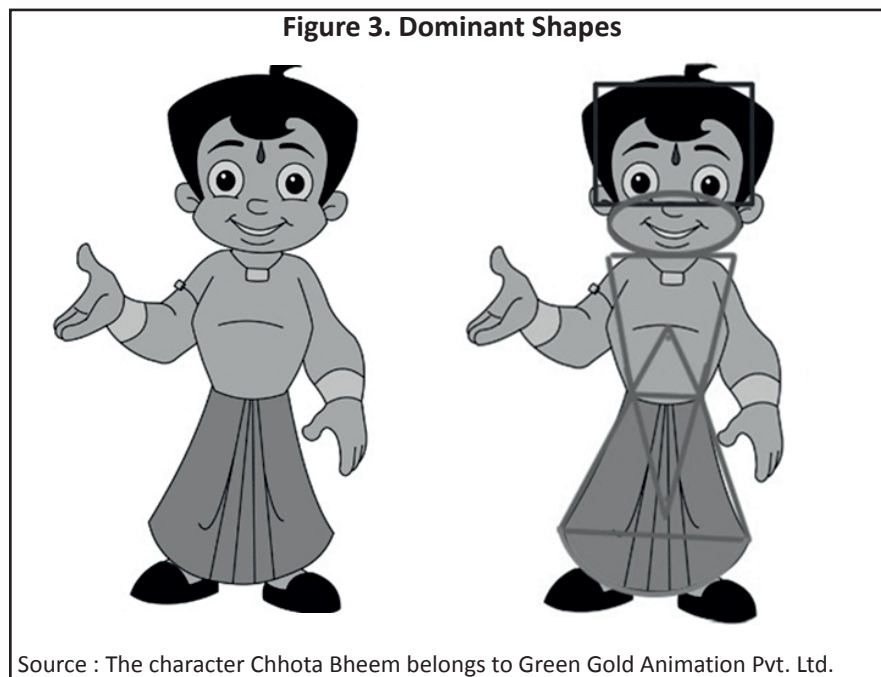
Organic shapes that are found in nature represent things that are more dynamic and asymmetrical. Dynamic shapes such as branches, leaves, flowers, river flow, rocks, and organic shapes have a distinctive synchronisation and add great pictorial curiosity. Basic and simple elements of forms are abstract shapes often found in organic shapes such as the outline of the element. Geometric shapes are basic shapes like squares, rectangles, circles, and triangles, which are symmetrical and have an organized look.

Analyzing the dominant shapes in the character design of Chhota Bheem (refer to Figure 3), the following three shapes are considered for the study : square, triangle, and circle which give a deeper meaning of the overriding forms and shapes.

To study the dominant shapes in the character of Chhota Bheem, the geometric shapes were blocked out of the character design.

✦ **Square :** The default and common shapes used to create Chhota Bheem's head compose of square and rectangle ; they create a meaning of stability, order, rationality, security, similarity, honesty, equality, familiarity, and traditionalism. This shape is treated as a trusted shape with four identical sides. Otherwise, two identical vertical horizontal or lines make a rectangle (refer to Figure 3). It is unchanging and obedient.

✦ **Triangle :** Chhota Bheem's shoulder to waist and waist to toe is composed of triangle and inverted triangle.



Triangles hint at stability on their base and opposite when they are pointing down (refer to Figure 3). They exhibit tension, control, liveliness, and action. In a cultural context, they refer to some religious meaning like that of spiritual “father – son – holy spirit” or “past – present – future” made up of three lines interesting to each other. This shape finds its place in common sights like that of direction signs, navigation, and a structure like that of a pyramid. They also represent masculine strength, purpose, and evolution.

☞ **Circle** : Fillers on face and bottom of the *dhoti* are made of circles (refer to Figure 3). Circles are created with no start and no end ; they depict the planets like sun, moon, and earth ; they bring in wholeness, a shape with no starting point, and they simply suggest free dynamic motion, infiniteness, and harmony. Circles are normally used to represent shapes that we know like a ball, wheel, and have womanly connotations expressing warmth, power, strength, reassurance, and love. A shape with no open end gives the meaning of infinity and unity.

## Analysis of Chhota Bheem as a Brand

This analysis is based on four leading websites such as [licenseindia.com](http://licenseindia.com), [business-standard.com](http://business-standard.com), [financialexpress.com](http://financialexpress.com), [brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com](http://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com) to do the content analysis of Chhota Bheem as a brand. Analysis of articles is taken from the years 2012 – 2018 related to Chhota Bheem in licensing & merchandising, distribution, endorsements, and marketing.

**(1) Licenseindia.com** : Gargi (2017) observed that Chhota Bheem's brand value is about INR 4 billion. Chhota Bheem is a fascinating character for the Indian children because of his representation of cultural values, ethics, and positivity. The character was created from a mere investment of INR 7.5 million. Since the year 2008, the character is progressively promising a 20% year-on-year growth as a brand. He is the top-selling property in school classification of products in India including South Asian markets. Two decades ago, school pencil boxes, lunch boxes, water bottles, and school stationaries were very simple, but now, this back to school segment is filled with children's favorite characters and sometimes more than one.

The back to school category brings in 30% of business revenue to the brand Chhota Bheem, which includes bags, water bottles, pencil boxes, lunch boxes, and other stationaries used in schools, leaving apparels and toys at 15 – 20% separately apart from 15% from food-based endorsements.

Notty (the drink) was the first endorsement by Chhota Bheem and later got the attention from Unilever to promote Knorr Soupy Noodles in the year 2012. Chhota Bheem collaborated with Bradford to endorse footwear, toys, bags, and cycles ; wall posters with Asian Paints ; Chhota Bheem cakes with Monginis ; ice-cream with Havmor ; a tie-up for the theatrical movie in Emirates Airlines ; Flipkart's gaming studio for “Mech Mocha” gaming with Chhota Bheem.

Illustrated reference publishing company Dorling Kindersley (DK) has signed up with Chhota Bheem for producing digital and print products like Chhota Bheem Character Encyclopaedia for children on the popular cartoon characters.

Chhota Bheem even made his debut as a brand ambassador for a cultural festival in Dubai Global Village, being part of special kids' show at the fest. A 20-minute show was played daily on the main stage from February – April 2017.

**(2) Business-standard.com** : Rao (2013) mentioned that the first Indian television animated character Chhota Bheem tied-up with McDonald's to distribute toys and used the character's *desi* image to lift up McDonald's sales among Indian consumers. Overflow of licensing & merchandising activities from the producers of Chhota Bheem, Green Gold Animation has endorsed everything from food, drinks, toys, school stationaries, Del Monte Ketchup,

IPL Season 6, and even bigger companies like Usha Fans have covered Chhota Bheem on their products. According to Bhagia (2013), Chhota Bheem is the brand ambassador for Shemrock Playschool and is the school's summer camp programs. According to Kohli – Khandekar (2014), the 40 million viewers of Chhota Bheem on YouTube act as a catalyst for several other endorsements and promotional events. The character is going strong and is presently getting distributed to Asian countries to extend his popularity.

**(3) Financialexpress.com :** Bhattacharyya (2014) stated that Chhota Bheem has helped Pogo to beat Cartoon Network. Pogo became the number one channel in the kids' entertainment category. Indian children, after growing up with Western animated characters like Spiderman, He-Man, Duck Tales, and Tom & Jerry in the year 2008 were introduced to a *desi* superhero, Chhota Bheem. It was not surprising for the children to develop an instant fondness for this local character. The animated show boosted Pogo's top ranking in the kids' entertainment genre.

Pogo channel was launched in the year 2004, and over the last 10 years, it has performed well in India under the popular kids' channel genre. With the success of Chhota Bheem, the channel has launched various mix of local entertainment content. The introduction of language feeds has helped Pogo to make the content more relevant to the regional audience in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu. The strategy of acquiring new seasons of the show helps the channel to stay on top.

A significant part of the online strategy is online games. Games were constructed around the characters of Chhota Bheem and his friends. Through the on-ground activities, the popularity of these characters was taken to millions of kids in schools & malls.

**(4) Brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com :** Balakrishnan (2016) stated that the character of Chhota Bheem was designed out of fascination with the Mahabharatha characters and Disney shows. Over the last decade, Chhota Bheem has beaten all the other global as well as Indian competitors. He endorses everything from school stationaries to electronic gadgets.

The producers of Chhota Bheem knew that it would get tougher as they progress. In the last decade, the brand has become universal covering almost every product targeting children that were once endorsed by the Western characters. To keep the audience on hold, the animation producers oversee that the characters and storylines are on track. Now, Chhota Bheem has transformed into Super Bheem in 3D avatar with lots of promising variants to keep up the interest of the kids.

## Managerial Implications

Promoting Indian animation character properties, in terms of licensing, merchandising, marketing and distribution will reduce the dependence of imported animation properties. The animation producers need to create characters that connect with the children through various distribution channels, stores, and licensing & merchandising.

This trend would be healthier for local animation producers and markets for a better economy in several categories, including food and beverage, consumer packaged goods, toys, and fast-moving consumer goods. However, licensing partners need to be educated about royalty and payments and there is a need for awareness about the usage of intellectual properties. Piracy of animation properties is affecting a lot of products that are offered at a low-price with very popular characters endorsing them.

## Conclusion

Characters in television animation shows are essential to take the story forward. It is important to design an

influencing and familiar character, to decide the success of the show, by connecting with the viewers. Establishing the characters through marketing & merchandising like that of the Western characters widens the scope of monetizing the property and creating a long shelf life for the character.

Shapes add interesting visual meaning to a character ; the artist needs to be aware of using simple shapes wisely to communicate the characteristics of the character. The character is built upon strong principles and elements of design using the three dominant shapes like square, triangle, and circle reflecting upon the qualities and characteristics of Chhota Bheem in his animated show.

Colours palettes of Chhota Bheem are very simple, and use the analogous colour palette, with just four dominant colours, keep it easy with the kids to have a recall value. The colour palette was consciously chosen not to overlap with any dominant colours of the popular Western superhero characters such as red, blue, green, and yellow.

The character design strongly portrays Chhota Bheem as an Indianised character with *desi* appeal through his traditional Indian attire, *tilaka*, and earthen Hindu religious colour palette.

Analysis of articles show that the Indian children were entertained only by grown-up characters such as “Shaktimaan” and others who were adults, with no child Indian superhero to connect with the younger audience in the animated segment. Children could now connect with Chhota Bheem quickly because of this gap in the local animation content.

The producer of Chhota Bheem, Green Gold Animation Pvt. Ltd., has effectively utilized the animation property in monetising the revenue beyond animated shows on television. Top brands and many others have massed on the success of Chhota Bheem for their products. Chhota Bheem has 60 product licenses and 40 promotional licenses, with more than 4000 product SKUs.

According to Gargi (2017), Chhota Bheem has become the reference of original intellectual animation property in the Indian animation business. Based on his steady ratings, he has certainly replaced Mickey Mouse and Tom & Jerry in India. The character design strongly portrays Chhota Bheem as an Indianised character with traditional *desi* appeal, with a deep-rooted Indianised look. An animation producer needs to consider characterisation and global appeal, which may have a worldwide demand for every generation if the character is set to distribute in Western countries.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research**

The analysis of articles was based on limited websites and the data ranging from the years 2012 – 2018 only was considered. Additional limitations are due to the lack of data on Indian reference to television animation and character design. Since the animation industry is at a nascent stage, there is a lack of resources on animated intellectual property, licensing, and merchandising.

Studies can be carried out with other similar popular Indian animated television characters. The study can be further strengthened and extended based on other Indian & international television animation characters. A detailed study can be conducted by comparing and contrasting several Indian television animation characters. A study covering the overall brand equity structure of animation properties and their trends could be examined. An empirical study considering different age groups of kids and their viewing patterns in terms of animated shows could also be conducted.

## **Authors' Contribution**

A.C. Balaji and Nandini Lakshmikantha contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results, and the writing of the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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