

Audiovisual Consumption in Lockdown Context: Research Paths



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ABSTRACT: During the health crisis of Covid-19, individuals around the world were placed under lockdown between the months of March and June 2020. In some countries, this has occurred even in the next two years. A situation experienced for the first time by current generations with strong economic, social and psychological impacts, as well as considerable effects on the consumption habits of the population. Similarly, the audiovisual consumption habits have undergone a change characterized by the use of some media more than others. This work is a literature review, exposing the latest theoretical advances in research on audiovisual consumption during lockdown situations. In addition, we attempt to explain the factors guiding consumer choices through media use models that focus on psychological, emotional, personal and environmental aspects of media consumption choices. The aim of this work is therefore to suggest research paths linking audiovisual consumption habits during lockdown to media use models.

KEYWORDS: Audiovisual consumption, lockdown, covid-19, media use

INTRODUCTION

Countries around the world have been taking measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, balancing the need to save lives with the economic and social disruption caused by physical distancing and isolation measures [1]. Thus, the lockdown of the population for set periods became necessary to limit the spread of the virus, and keep the situation under control.

In this respect most of the world's population was put under lockdown in the months from March to June 2020. Some countries have opted for the same measure several times since the spread of the pandemic. This is a particular situation experienced for the first time by the current generations with strong economic, social and psychological impacts. This has had an impact on the consumption habits of populations. Similarly, the audiovisual consumption habits have undergone a change characterized by a reliance on certain media more than others.

These new behaviors should prompt researchers to link them to the phenomenon of selective exposure, which is used to explain individuals' media choices. This concept recognizes that choices are likely driven by affective, psychological, and functional factors and seeks to discover what these factors are and the relationships between these factors and individuals' ultimate media choices [2].

The purpose of this literature review is therefore to suggest research paths based on media use models: uses and gratifications, emotional affection, mood management and adjustment, personality traits, and sociological factors, with the aim of being able to provide explanations for audiovisual consumption behavior in a context of lockdown.

Thus, our work is articulated around three main axes. A first axis is set to define the general context of lockdown and its psychological and socioeconomic effects, a second axis to identify the different trends related to audiovisual consumption during lockdown, and finally a third axis dedicated to the factors guiding the audiovisual choice of individuals and possible applications to this particular context.

I. COVID-19 PANDEMIC : WHAT CHANGED FOR THE CONSUMER

In general, lockdowns require staying at home, closing businesses or working from home, and avoiding physical contact with others. On this basis, Sibley et al. [3] argue that the consequences of the virus are therefore not only physical (e.g., illness, hospitalization) and financial (e.g., layoffs, financial insecurity), but also likely psychological (e.g., fear, loneliness). In what follows, we attempt to gather from the recent literature, the main trends identified in relation to the effects of lockdown on the population.

A. Psychological effects

Sibley et al. [3] note a scarcity of information available to assess the psychological effects of COVID-19 responses immediately or in the short term. Sood [4] discusses the rapid rise in fear and anxiety among individuals due to the uncertainty of the disease

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and links it to essential but socially disruptive measures such as lockdowns. These can lead to disorders such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and behavioral disorders. Predisposing factors for these disorders include staying away from family, loneliness, misinformation on social networks, financial insecurity and stigma.

Referring specifically to the impact of lockdown due to COVID-19, Carvalho et al. [5] suggest that it can generate feelings of boredom, loneliness and anger. For Perez-Fuentes et al. [6] the perceived threat of COVID-19 is positively related to negative affect and emotional states, i.e., sadness-depression, anxiety, and anger-hostility, while the relationship shown with positive affect and feeling happy was negative.

B. Effects on family relationships

In terms of family lifestyles, the Biroli et al. [7] study reports disruptions in the form of new work patterns, changes in household task allocations, and family tensions. According to the study, although men have taken on a greater share of childcare and resupply tasks, the reallocations are not as severe as the disruptions in work patterns. However, families who have to change the division of tasks still face greater tensions.

In Morocco, the report of the High Commission for Planning [8] also refers to these changes at the national level with an increase in the average time spent using smartphones, tablets, or computers for communication and leisure, the allocation of more average daily time to housework at home with an increase of 33 minutes compared to the daily average before the lockdown, and a time spent with children in school that is 4 times higher than before the lockdown. According to the report, despite men's participation in these tasks, women's contribution remains greater in terms of time allocated.

C. Economic effects

The extent to which individual households as well as the economy as a whole have been disrupted is without recent precedent. Industries and entire cities have been largely shut down, with estimates of the decline in economic activity reaching historic highs. Policymakers at all levels of government and across a wide range of institutions worked to mitigate the economic damage to households and small businesses.

In Morocco, according to the High Commission for Planning [9], more than half of households (58%) have at least one member who has had to temporarily stop working as a result of lockdown, 56% in urban areas and 62% in rural areas. Similarly, the survey shows that about 2 out of 3 employed persons with a paid job (62%) saw their income decrease during the lockdown period, 35% stagnated and 3% increased. To compensate for the loss of employment and the drop in income, 30% of people in working age sought state aid or employer aid as part of support programs for people who lost their jobs in the private sector, whether formal or informal. Three-quarters of them (73%), representing 22.4% of the working-age population or 6 million people, received this support

D. Effects on consumption

The economic situation and consumption remain strongly linked despite the exceptions that may exist. The onset of the crisis was marked by panic buying behavior. For Hobbs [10], one of the most dramatic images of the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic was the emptying of supermarket shelves of major food and non-food items, including pasta, rice, canned goods, flour, frozen foods, bottled water, hand sanitizers, hand soap, and toilet paper. In the following months, the effects of the crisis were more evident in consumption priorities. For example, the EY Future Consumer Index study by Rogers and Cosgrove [11], conducted in the U.S., Canada, Germany, the U.K., and France during the spring 2020 lockdown, suggests four segments that reflect how consumer behavior may be related to age groups, family, or employment status:

- **Deep cuts:** These consumers are primarily over 45 years of age and have seen the greatest impact on their employment situation. Nearly a quarter of them have had their jobs suspended, temporarily or permanently, 78% of them make less frequent purchases, while 64% buy only basic necessities;
- **Stay calm, keep going:** These consumers do not feel directly affected by the pandemic and are not changing their consumption habits. Only 21% are spending more on groceries, while 18% are spending less;
- **Save and stockpile:** This segment is particularly concerned about their family and long-term prospects. More than a third (36%) spend more on groceries, while most spend less on clothing (72%) and entertainment (85%).
- **Hibernate and spend:** Primarily between the ages of 18 and 44, these consumers are the most concerned about the impact of the pandemic. However, only 40% of this segment report shopping less frequently. While 42% say the products they buy have changed significantly, 46% say brands are now more important to them.

II. AUDIOVISUAL CONSUMPTION DURING LOCKDOWN

The restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19 have also changed the way people entertain and inform themselves. Meanwhile, as theaters, cinemas, and museums face forced closures, plays, operas, ballets, and exhibitions have been streamed over the Internet. For many audiences, this allows for cultural experiences previously unavailable in the comfort of their homes [12]. In terms of information, the hold of digital services has been reinforced by the cessation of print media and the shutting down of newsstands.

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During the COVID-19 lockdown period, people experienced anxiety and emotional disruption [13]. At the same time, the fact that people faced days of isolation at home created, according to Dixit et al. [14], an ideal condition for engaging in online activities and watching television. Thus, the limitation of sources of entertainment and social interaction worldwide directs people to the modes of entertainment readily available in their homes.

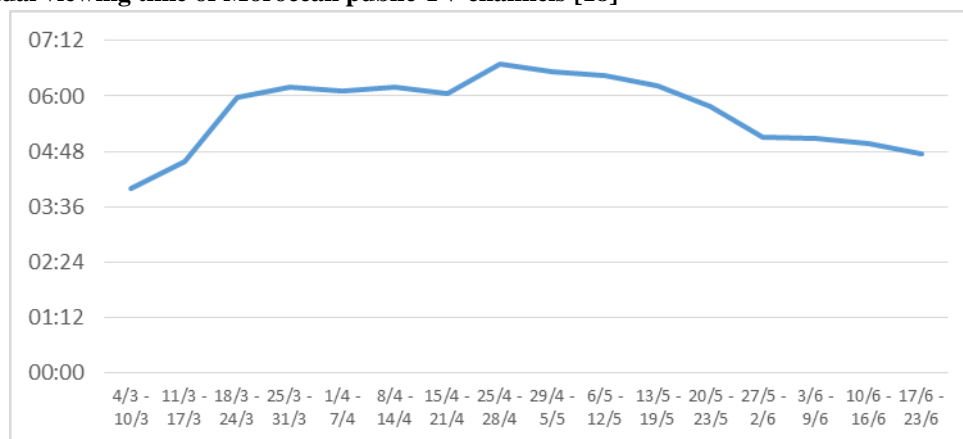
A. Increase in the audience of TV channels

The change in lifestyle, the need to inform oneself, as well as Fake-news coupled with worries are elements that push individuals to return to traditional media to get informed, according to the General Manager of SOREAD 2M, in his intervention during a webinar organized by the Moroccan Association of Advertisers [15].

These same elements were the subject of the EBU survey [16], which shows that television channels were the most used source in European Union countries during the lockdown to get news and the second most credible source after press briefings and government releases. In the United Kingdom, the OFCOM [17] study shows a similar trend that resulted in the public broadcasters-BBC, ITV, STV, Channel 4, and Channel 5-achieving their highest combined monthly share in more than six years in March (59%), also due to a demand for reliable news programming as the pandemic developed.

Considering the chronology of the Moroccan case, since the imposition of the state of health emergency on 20 March 2020, a sharp increase in individual viewing time for Moroccan public channels was observed for the following weeks, rising from 4h34 to 5h59, i.e. an increase of almost an hour and a half between the week of 11-17 March and that of 18-24 March, the week of the imposition of the state of health emergency. After 5 weeks of stagnation, the upward trend resumed with the beginning of the month of Ramadan on April 25, with almost 40 minutes of additional viewing. After the end of Ramadan the trend began to decline starting on 27 May, with the announcement of measures to ease some restrictions and the resumption of some economic activities.

Graph 1. Individual viewing time of Moroccan public TV channels [18]



B. Use of streaming services and binge-watching

Social distancing norms and isolation of people have increased at-home digital consumption, thus creating a surge in the demand for subscription-based streaming services [19]. As specialized streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime grow in number and value, television channels are trying to follow the trend and combine linear programming with streaming. In Crisis, Pogorel and Preta [20] argue that the model of streaming platforms has been changing the structure of the audiovisual industry (film and television). On the one hand, platforms are bypassing, due to circumstances and probably in the time to come, the media chronology model that the oligopolistic film industry imposed. More and more films that cannot be shown in theaters are being shown directly online. On the other hand, as linear TV can no longer rely on live TV shows, sports and other events, broadband is gaining more space over satellite delivery to provide premium content.

To illustrate the importance that streaming platforms gained during the lockdown period, we present, as an example, the figures given by the pan-Arab MBC Group [21] in relation to its streaming service "Shahid" regarding the first day of Ramadan 2020, having coincided with the lockdown period. These figures show an increase in users by 49% and views by 108% across the MENA region compared to the same day of Ramadan 2019. In Morocco, the numbers mark the largest increase in the entire region with 301% and 753% for the two indicators mentioned respectively.

With limited sources of entertainment at home and internet and television readily available, accessible, and of course affordable, this use of streaming platforms could lead to Binge-watching behavior. People with this behavior often watch multiple episodes in one sitting [22].

This is the case in the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown situation, in which people have little to do, Dixit et al. [14] suggest that it gives rise to increased Binge-watching. Conducted on a sample in 4 Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Nepal),

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this research shows that most participants (52.6%) report a major psychological motivation for Binge-watching to pass the time and escape boredom, 25% use it to relieve stress and 15.7% use it to overcome loneliness. Such motives are part of the media use models that we will try to link to this context in the rest of this paper.

III. FACTORS GUIDING INDIVIDUALS' AUDIOVISUAL CHOICES AND POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS TO THE LOCKDOWN CONTEXT

While research on the impacts of media began in the early 20th century, there has been a lag in research on the reasons for media use. In fact, according to the history of the field, the first research efforts focused on selective exposure to media content emerged in the mid-20th century, with work focusing on uses and gratifications.

According to Zillman and Bryant [23], selective exposure refers to behavior deliberately implemented to achieve and maintain perceptual control of a particular stimulus. In other words, it is an intentional choice by individuals to consume media content that is presumed to be broadly consistent with their existing attitudes, beliefs and thoughts.

A. Uses and gratifications

The concept of gratifications was first coined by Herzog [24] to describe specific types or dimensions of satisfaction reported by audience members of radio programs during the day. Subsequently, researchers have focused on why audiences are interested in different types of media, such as listening to the radio and reading the newspaper [25].

McQuail [26] identifies the four main detailed uses that audiences are able to satisfy with media, namely information, personal identification, social relationships, in addition to entertainment and escape. Based on these uses and the effects of lockdown on individuals, it would be interesting to study audiovisual consumption behavior through:

- The need to be informed and to be aware of the developments of the pandemic in the world and in the national territory;
- The need for personal identification that pushes individuals to watch contents they identify with, especially when they have more time to do so;
- The need to maintain social relationships, which could be expressed in a return to family viewing, as the family is gathered at home;
- The need for distraction or escape that drives some individuals to consume entertaining content, such as series and movies, and away from the discussion around covid-19.

B. Personality traits

According to Krcmar et al. [2], research looking at personality traits and media exposure falls into three main categories: work linking personality characteristics to exposure to various types of media [27]; work linking personality characteristics to viewing motives [28]; and work linking personality factors to specific content exposure [29].

Finn's study [27] can be considered among the first to have attempted to establish a link between personality and media use, by analyzing the relationship that might exist between the five basic personality traits of extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness, on the one hand, and media exposure on the other. From this work, Finn [27] draws the conclusion that personality traits could at least predict which type of media is used. A point of view also shared by Weaver [29] who argues that horror films attract individuals with a high degree of psychoticism (characterized as impulsive and non-conformist individuals), while those who are more neurotic show a preference for news programs. Taking these elements into consideration, it would be interesting to examine the effects of lockdown on individuals' audiovisual consumption behavior, including the types of content consumed, the motives for viewing, and the types of media preferred according to individuals' different personality traits.

C. Personality traits

Generally, individuals evaluate, relate to and actively interact with characters in media. This is an object of interest in the studies of pleasure in media consumption, which try to give an explanation to the phenomenon. Among the most relevant explanations, we find the affective disposition theory, which was first proposed in the work of Zillmann and Cantor [29], and later developed by Raney [31] [32] [33]. The basic premise of affective disposition theory is to provide a way to explain how emotions become part of the entertainment experience during media consumption. Affective disposition theory shares with other disposition-based theories six principles that Raney [32] summarizes as follows:

- Enjoyment or appreciation of media content;
- Emotional reactions to media content;
- Media enjoyment that begins and is driven by the viewer's feelings about the character;
- Affiliations with characters formed and maintained on a continuum from extreme positive to indifferent to extremely negative affect;
- Consideration of justice as a key element, as disposition-based theories rely on evaluating the outcomes of conflicts between characters;

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- Differences between individuals in terms of emotional reactivity, personal experiences, basic morality, and countless other psychological and social-psychological factors.

In a context of lockdown where the media play an important role in informing and entertaining the public, especially the audiovisual media, certain presenters, celebrities, fictional characters or even shows could weave emotional links with individuals. In Morocco, for example, the presenter of the show "Assilat Corona" on channel 2M has made an impression on a large part of the Moroccan public, with his way of presenting, raising awareness and interacting with the public. The program, which aimed to answer viewers' questions about the COVID-19 health crisis, reached an audience share of 51.5% in June 2020 [18]. To this end, it would also be wise to study this relationship by taking into account the psychological states of individuals, caused by the situation of lockdown to understand more deeply the impact of emotional affection on audiovisual consumption orientations during times of lockdown.

D. Mood factors

Individuals strive to minimize negative mood states and maximize or maintain positive mood states by arranging their environment (including media) to achieve this goal [2]. To this end, Zillmann [34] introduces selective exposure to media stimuli as a choice favoring exposure to certain content over others. In principle, when the individual is excited, he tends to consume calming content. In case he is bored, he tends to consume exciting content. Moreover, when he feels bad, he tends to avoid any content that reminds the origin of this feeling. However, some works such as Knobloch's [35] feature states in which individuals prefer to prolong mood states rather than end them. This process is referred to by Knobloch [35] as "mood adjustment," as media selection and use can be a means of maintaining or adjusting mood in the context of a situation that requires it.

Faced with the psychological effects of confinement that can modify the mood of individuals, including feelings of boredom, loneliness and anger [5] or sadness-depression, anxiety and anger-hostility [6], it also proves interesting to build a model addressing the implication of mood factors on audiovisual consumption patterns in the lockdown state.

E. Sociological factors

Researchers typically identify sociological-level variables as social controls guiding media consumption. For example, the work of Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan [36] and Krcmar et al. [2] treat media consumption in relation to the gender variable. While the former find that, among children, boys watch more television and play more video games than girls, the latter argue that, among adults, women consume slightly more television than men. As for Papacharissi & Rubin [37] and Saxena [38], they are more interested in the role of quality of life and material conditions. As for the age variable, it is addressed by Gauntlett and Hill [39] and Bondad-Brown et al. [40], focusing on the differences that might exist between different generations: silent (+65 years old), Baby Boomers (50-64 years old), Generation X (35-49 years old), Generation Y (21-34 years old) and Generation Z (15-20 years old).

Covid-19 lockdown has imposed a situation on many individuals that has transformed their living conditions. Some have seen their income decline, which could mean a shift from one socio-professional category to another. Similarly, staying at home for a long period of time could mean for both genders and for certain age groups new daily living habits. These changes could be of scientific interest to study audiovisual consumption behavior among individuals by taking into account demographic variables.

In outlining the different models of media use, Krcmar et al. [2] suggest that they can all be brought together in the Social Cognitive Theory framework. For them, uses and gratifications as well as arousal and affect-based behaviors can be grouped mostly under the category of environmental or personological factors. Similarly, the importance of personality in the choice of media falls under the category of personological factors. Sociological factors are included in environmental factors.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 health crisis and the measures taken by the authorities to slow the spread of the virus may be interesting examples to study in the context of special circumstances that impact consumption in general and media use in particular.

Looking at the literature and the survey reports of entities specialized in audience measurement, we find that the number of works that have dealt with the lockdown situation are still limited after more than two years of the global outbreak of the Covid-19 health crisis. Similarly, in reviewing the literature on selective exposure and media use patterns, we notice how enriching it would be to link these concepts to the context of lockdown, taking into account not only the objectives sought in the audiovisual consumption experience, but also factors associated with personality, mood, emotions, and demographic groups of individuals.

Such a connection is essential for researchers in order to enrich the scientific knowledge about audiovisual consumption in such particular contexts, and for professionals in the audiovisual industry in order to better understand the changes in the environment and to be proactive towards future developments.

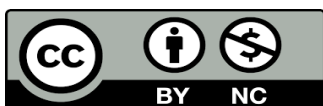
Finally, audiovisual consumption, like media consumption in general, remains an interesting phenomenon to follow closely during this third decade of the 21st century, being a consumption that is not only influenced by socio-economic, demographic and psychic factors, but also by technological factors. The latter multiply consumer choices, but also open important paths of thinking at the scientific level and of action at the business level, especially in particular circumstances such as the Covid-19 health crisis.

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