

The Role Of Television And Its Impact On Saudi, And Non-Saudi Audience During The Coronavirus (Covid-19) – An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role played by television and its cognitive and behavioral impacts on the audience in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the Covid-19 pandemic. A questionnaire was distributed to 365 respondents from Saudi society, citizens, and non-Saudi residents. The study adopts a descriptive analytical approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data through a survey tool about the relationship between respondents and media in general and television in particular. The survey also aims to identify the reasons for reliance on Saudi television during the pandemic and assess public opinions about its performance. The results indicate that television was the main source of news and information about the pandemic. The rise in television viewing is also due to quarantine restrictions and press conferences by government officials. Television educated and entertained the public during closure periods. The crisis also reinforced television's continued ability to unite audiences, especially in emergencies. The study recommended enhancing the role of television in health awareness during crises and developing its broadcasting to keep up with modern communication means. It also called for more research to measure the role of different media in such circumstances.

Keywords: Viewers' behavior; mental health; information; health education; social interaction

Introduction

The world has lived for more than two years with the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected individuals, communities, countries and changed the way of living, relationships, practices due to the virus, quarantine, isolation, economic, social and even political and cultural stoppage in most countries in order to limit the spread of the virus. While some countries - few - among them the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were able to tighten an integrated strategy that enabled them to face the Covid-19 pandemic with the least damages, losses and preserve people's lives compared to advanced countries such as the United States, France, Italy and Britain where the death toll reached fantasy numbers due to lack of preparedness to face this virus and mismanagement of the crisis.

In this critical situation, communication and media played a major and essential role, whether to inform and inform people about developments of the virus, or to raise awareness, caution and take precautionary measures, or to reassure them and boost their morale during repeated curfew periods, or to highlight the efforts of ministries, institutions and agencies working to confront and combat a new virus without a vaccine quickly. Each means of communication and media had a share of this informational and media role, with intensive and excessive resort to the use of social media platforms, digital platforms and connected electronic

devices. The pandemic also showed that traditional and modern television was the main source of following pandemic developments nationally, regionally and globally, and a means of entertainment and recreation during isolation and quarantine periods after channels adapted their programming, filming, broadcasting, direction and production to the new situation in response to audience needs and to minimize financial implications.

This study seeks to find out the role played by television during the Covid-19 pandemic and its cognitive and behavioral impacts on the audience in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through analyzing the results of a survey we distributed to a sample of Saudi society with its Saudi and non-Saudi components.

1- Problem of the study:

What is the role of television during the Covid-19 pandemic and its cognitive and behavioral impacts on the audience?

2- Research questions:

Stemming from the study problem, we posed the following main questions:

- What is the relationship of respondents with media in general?
- What is the nature of the relationship between respondents and television?
- What are the reasons for respondents' reliance on Saudi television during the pandemic?
- What are the cognitive and behavioral effects of television on respondents during the Covid-19 pandemic?

From these main questions, we posed the following subsidiary questions:

- What media sources do respondents rely on to follow news, events and obtain information?
- Which TV channels do respondents watch and follow and why?
- What role did television play during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Why did respondents watch and follow Saudi television during the pandemic?
- What are respondents' views on the performance of Saudi television during the pandemic?

3- Research Methodology:

The study adopts the descriptive approach, which aims to collect comprehensive and accurate information about any phenomenon or society or activity. It is the most suitable for studying phenomena and obtaining information and data related to them. Through the descriptive approach, the researcher can study reality with great accuracy, understand the causes leading to the phenomenon, contribute to discovering solutions for it, analyze the phenomenon studied, extract relationships between phenomena, and then clarify and compare them to other phenomena before analyzing them. In our study, the descriptive approach helped us collect quantitative and qualitative data related to our research topic and describe the phenomenon, events and related data with precision to reach profound results about television, its role and impacts during crises in general and during the Covid-19 crisis in particular.

4- Study Tool and Sample:

In this study, we used a survey tool to determine the role of television during the Covid-19 pandemic and its cognitive and behavioral impacts on the audience. The survey included the following sections:

- A section about respondents' relationship with media
- A section about watching and following television and its programs
- A section about watching and following television during the pandemic and its cognitive and behavioral impacts on the audience.

After distributing the electronic survey via email and social media platforms to reach the study community, we finally obtained 365 completed and valid surveys with full data.

5- The pandemic increases television viewing globally

The quarantine of three billion people worldwide affected visual and audio communication and media practices, most notably the rise in television viewing rates. According to the annual report of the GLANCE foundation (2020), which covered 94 countries across all continents, the average viewing time reached three hours and forty minutes.

The report indicated that television consumption worldwide has become more uniform than ever before, with differences between continents diminishing. Rates increased in regions like Asia and Oceania, historically known for their low average daily individual viewing time. While the global health situation contributed to raising these rates, it also confirmed that television continues to play an informational and entertainment role during crises.

French researcher Céline Séguéla said, "The increase in television viewing rates reminds us that it remains a major cultural and social practice, despite some predictions of its decline in favor of the internet. This calls into question television's place in our society today."

Since the spread of Covid-19, television viewing times increased across all age and social groups. The increase was notably high among youth, a group typically low in television consumption as they abandoned traditional screens for the internet and tablets.

This phenomenon is not new, as previous researchers (before the pandemic) indicated that television fills leisure time available to individuals, especially those with more free time like retirees. Naturally, the lockdowns associated with Covid-19 led to more time available for television viewing as people of all ages and occupations were forced to stay home regardless of their normal activities and responsibilities.

Rising viewership was also attributed to television appearances and press conferences by heads of state, ministers, senior officials, and health ministry spokespersons - part of their communication strategies to reassure public opinion.

We can thus deduce that the exceptional situation caused by the spread of Covid-19 reinforced television's continued ability to aggregate and unite audiences, especially during crises. The global health context also compelled visual media actors to adapt to the unprecedented scenario that forced people to stay home, limiting movement to only essential life needs and sometimes total home confinement as infections, deaths rose sharply.

6- Media Dependency Theory

The media dependency theory is one of the theories of media effects that was established by researchers Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur. It focuses on the relationship between audiences and media, considering it a mutually dependent relationship.

The theory is based on the idea that social systems in society such as educational, economic, political and family institutions rely more on information provided by media than other means or methods. This relationship then determines how individuals use media, and thus the extent of media's effects on audiences' beliefs, feelings and behaviors depends on their level of dependency on media.

According to the theory's principles, individuals rely on media because it meets their individual needs for news, information, entertainment and other functions. The more individuals depend on media, the greater the various effects: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

Media dependency is also related to the stability of society in times of crisis or disruptions - such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The level of social stability affects the degree to which people depend on or less rely on media: the more social instability caused by a threat, the more people depend on media. This occurred during the pandemic.

The theory focuses on answering the question: why do audiences follow media? And when and why? Its proponents explain the potential cognitive, emotional and behavioral effects resulting from individual dependency on media.

The media dependency theory represents an appropriate framework for this study as it emphasizes the importance of individuals relying on media during threats or social instability, as experienced by all societies during the Covid-19 pandemic. People felt fear and terror as the virus spread rapidly with no effective treatment, halting economic and trade activities between countries and creating concerns around food, medicine and supplies. Long lockdowns and isolation also had significant psychological impacts.

In this climate, societies and individuals relied heavily on social media and television for news, updates on the virus spread, research efforts and other essential or recreational activities to cope with instability and uncertainty. This validated the theory's main constructs around media dependency increasing significantly during times of crisis.

7- Previous Studies

Cedillo, Gloria Rosique, Flores, Paz Andrea Crisotomo. (2020). Analysis of COVID-19 news coverage by television Espanola TV1.

The study addressed the media coverage of the Spanish television channel TV1 of the Covid-19 pandemic and the extent of its commitment to objectivity and respect for journalistic profession rules in publishing news and information related to the virus. It analyzed news sources, headlines, topics, visual and audio effects, and adherence to media work ethics in television investigations and fieldwork. The study found that the Spanish television did not slip into drama, exaggeration or scaremongering in its coverage, but rather contributed to disseminating educational and informative news and content for television audiences. The editorial line and mission was to provide viewers and followers with news and information to help curb the virus' spread in Spain. It also showed the channel's reliance on public testimonies as main sources of information and news, in addition to experts, scientists, doctors and others.

Fennoushi, Rabia. (2021). Media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic on Algerian television from the audience perspective.

The study aimed to highlight the views and attitudes of a sample of information and communication students at the University of Medda toward the media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic on Algerian television, in terms of content, forms, styles and discourses provided. The results showed that Algerian television tried its best to adhere to professional rules and regulations through balanced reporting on Covid news without exaggeration or trivialization while maintaining official sourcing. However, this did not prevent some lapses and deviations in media practice due to confusion over the enormity of the pandemic, which represented a real health crisis requiring experience, skill and specialization in health communication.

Adel, Dua. (2020). Towards awareness efforts of the Corona virus COVID 19 in Jazan region.

The study aimed to monitor and analyze public trends regarding awareness efforts of the Corona virus COVID 19 in the Jazan region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia using a questionnaire on a sample of 705 individuals. The results showed that 92% of the sample acknowledged the success of the awareness campaign and 84% said that awareness efforts helped them prevent infection. Public trends regarding these efforts were positive and cognitive effects were higher while behavioral effects were lower. The account of Jazan Health Affairs Directorate on Twitter topped the preferred social media sites for the public to obtain information about the virus. The sample proposed dedicating an official Twitter account to disseminate information and receive and respond to public inquiries.

Zaidan, Amal Ismail Mohammed. (2020). Evaluation of the Egyptian elite of the government's strategies and official media in managing the Corona crisis.

The researcher sought to identify the trends of the Egyptian elite towards the role of the official spokesman of the Ministry of Health and Population in managing the Corona crisis and to identify the strategies used by the spokesman in crisis management. The researcher applied the study to a sample of 170 individuals from the media, political, economic, medical

and academic elites. The results of the study showed the influence of the official spokesman on shaping and guiding public opinion in crises and refuting rumors and confronting them. Ayedee, Nishu, Manocha, Sanjay. (2020). Role of media (television) in creating positive atmosphere in COVID-19 during lockdown in India.

A descriptive exploratory study conducted by the researchers to identify the role of television during the quarantine period in India. They found that media in general and television in particular played a major and essential role and assumed its social responsibility by having a positive impact on Indian society during quarantine through messages of reassurance, hope of relief and overcoming the pandemic and its catastrophic effects. Television remained the link between people and government and was followed regularly by all, which raised their morale and helped reduce the spread of fear, panic and what could have resulted from uncontrollable disasters in a society exceeding one billion people.

8- Results and Analysis

A- Characteristics of the sample

The study sample consisted of 365 individuals distributed as follows: (83.7%) males and (16.3%) females.

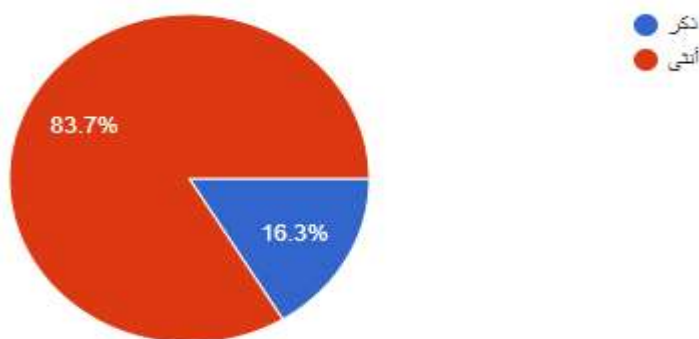


Figure 1- Distribution of males and females in the sample

In terms of age, the age group (15-25 years) represented the highest percentage of the sample (44.9%) and in second place was the age group (25-35 years) with a percentage of (24.5%) followed by the age group (45-55 years) with a percentage of (18.4%) then the age group (35-45 years) with a percentage of (10.2%) and finally those over 55 years of age represented the lowest represented group in the sample. The results showed a rise in the proportion of youth, where this group formed (79.6%) of the sample, reflecting the population structure of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the youth group represents a large proportion compared to other groups, representing a great human wealth.

The General Authority for Statistics reported in a report issued in August 2020 that Saudi youth aged (15-34 years) represent 36.7% of the total Saudi population. It is noted that the majority of male youth are specifically in the age group (20-24 years) with a percentage of 27.6%, while the highest percentage for young females is equally distributed in the age groups (20-24 years) and (25-29 years) with a percentage of 26.2%, according to the official Saudi website of the General Authority for Statistics (<https://www.stats.gov.sa7>).

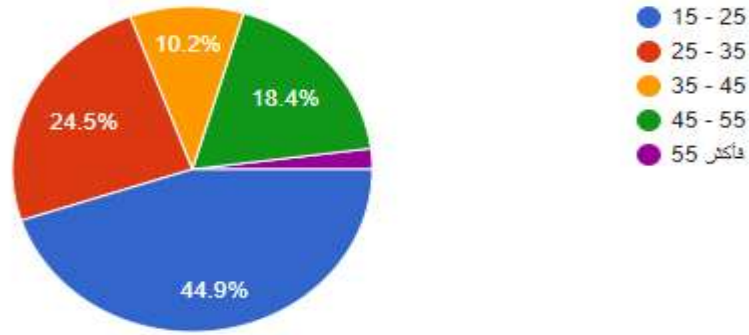


Figure 2- Distribution of age groups in the sample

Individuals in the sample who have a university education level represent (83.7%) and a high school education level or another education level that may be a stage of high school, (8.2%) and this reflects the high percentage of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and encouragement to continue studying up to the university level.

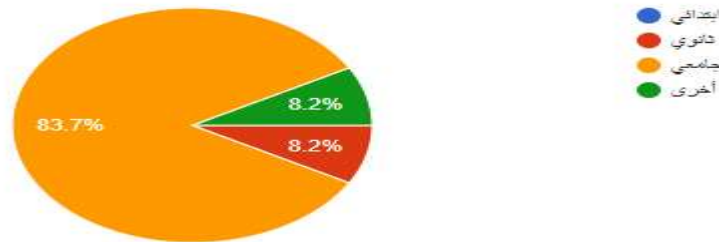


Figure 3- Educational level of the sample

In terms of marital status, the sample is distributed almost equally between married (49%) and unmarried (49.6%) with a very small percentage of divorced (1.4%).

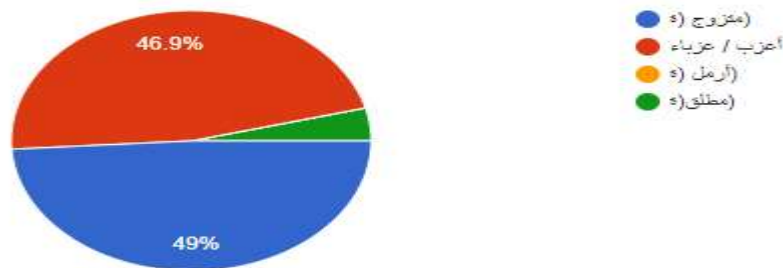


Figure 4 - Marital status of sample individuals

The population composition of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consists of Saudis and residents of various Arab and non-Arab nationalities. The sample of the study consists of (83.7%) Saudis and (16.3%) residents. Although they represent an important part and element in Saudi society, their percentage remains lower compared to the percentage of Saudis in the population composition.

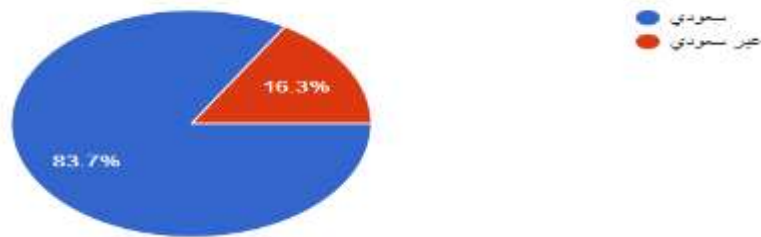


Figure 5 - Distribution of the sample between Saudis and non-Saudis

B- Relationship with media

Before delving into understanding the role of television during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its impacts on Saudis and residents, we first wanted to identify their relationship with media in general and the extent of their reliance on it to follow news and obtain information.

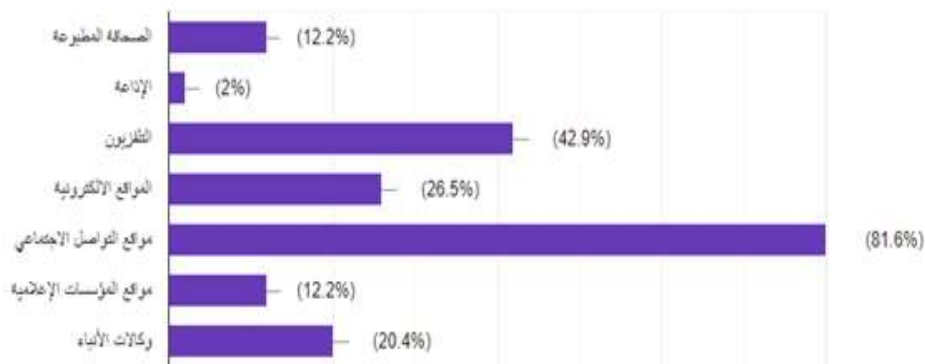


Figure 6- Distribution of individuals' sample usage and consumption of media

Through analyzing the data in the table, we see that there is diversity in the use and reliance on media and communication outlets, but the use of social media platforms dominates with a percentage of 81.6%, followed by television with 42.9%, then websites at 26.5%, news agencies at 20.4%, and printed press and media institution websites with an equal percentage of 12.2%. Radio has the lowest percentage at 2%. These results confirm what local and international reports have found about the massive spread of Internet use and social media platforms, including in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the number of Internet users in the Kingdom reached 24 million users and the Internet penetration rate was 74.88% according to the Individuals and Households Report on the results of the Communications and Information Technology Market Survey prepared by the Saudi Communications and Information Technology Commission in 2019.

([HTTPS://WWW.CITC.GOV.SA/AR/INDICATORS](https://www.citc.gov.sa/ar/indicators)).

Regarding the use of social media, the survey results showed that 63.3% of the sample spend more than three hours daily on social media sites, 20.4% spend between one to three hours, 12% spend between one to two hours, and a very small percentage spend less than one hour.

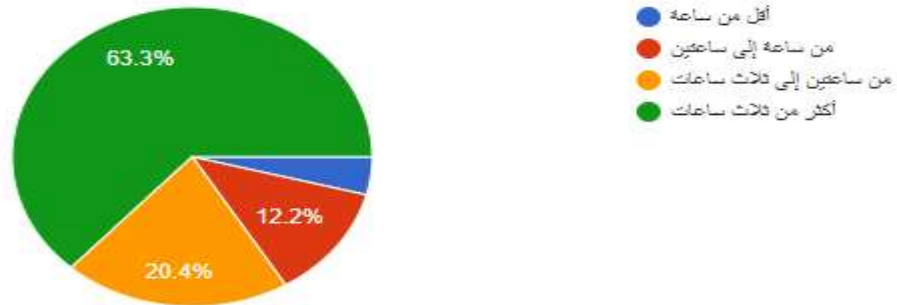


Figure 7- Number of hours individuals in the sample spend daily on social media platforms.

When asking the sample about the most and best used social media platforms, 85.7% answered WhatsApp, followed by Twitter at 77.6%, then Instagram and Snapchat equally at 63.3%, Facebook at 12.2%, and other platforms at 12.2% for the rest of the sample.



Figure 8 - Most used social media platforms by individuals in the sample

C- The second axis: Watching and following television.

Despite the wide and overwhelming spread of using modern communication and connection means and media, the survey results showed that 55.1% still watch television and 44.9% do not watch it. These percentages can be read and analyzed in different ways. First, it shows that television still occupies a place in the media landscape and is followed and watched by the public. At the same time, other means affect this following and compete with it, and have attracted many segments of this public, especially social media sites, due to their many attractive features such as ease of use, speed of information and news reporting, in addition to features such as instantaneity, interactivity, freedom of use and expression.

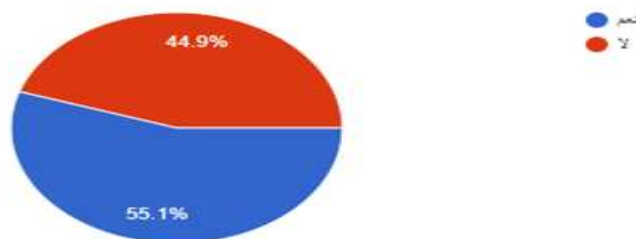


Figure 9 - Whether individuals in the sample watch television

The era of single household devices has passed, as living standards evolved along with technological progress, leading to the multiplicity, and spread of television viewing devices that became fixed, portable and interactive, contributing to their widespread dissemination. The results of the survey demonstrate this trend towards diversifying and multiplying television viewing devices owned by the public, with 28.6% of the sample owning one device, 30.6% owning two devices, 22.4% owning three devices, and 8.2% owning more than four devices.

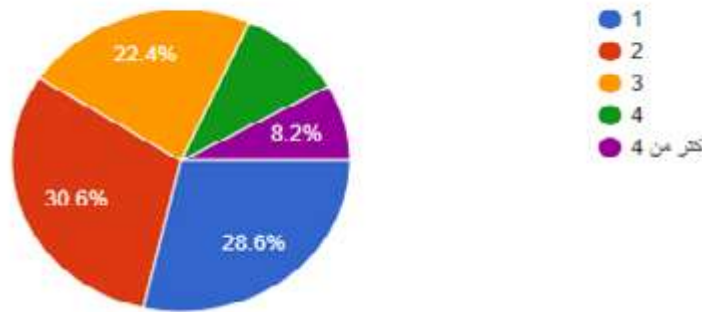


Figure 10 - Number of TV devices owned by individuals in the sample.

The "traditional" television device - which has evolved in terms of broadcasting, reception, sound and image quality and other features - remains the most commonly used means for the sample to watch television at 71.4%, followed by the smartphone at 44.95%, then the computer at 16.3%, and tablet devices like iPad at 2%.

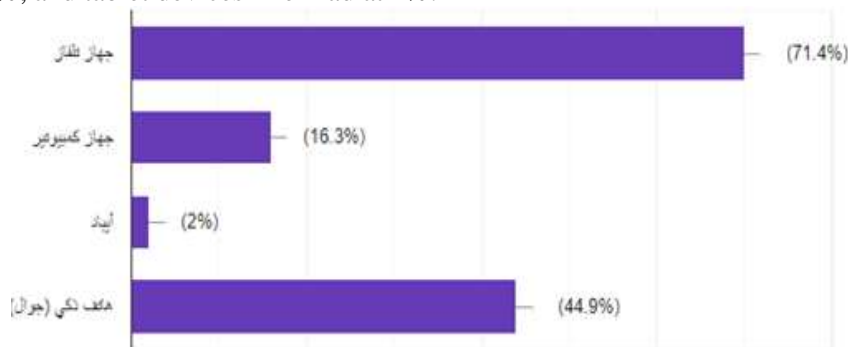


Figure 11 - Means of watching and following television by individuals in the sample

67.3% of individuals in the sample watch television daily between half an hour to one hour. 14.3% watch between one to two hours. 10.2% watch more than three hours daily. The rest of the sample watches between two to three hours.

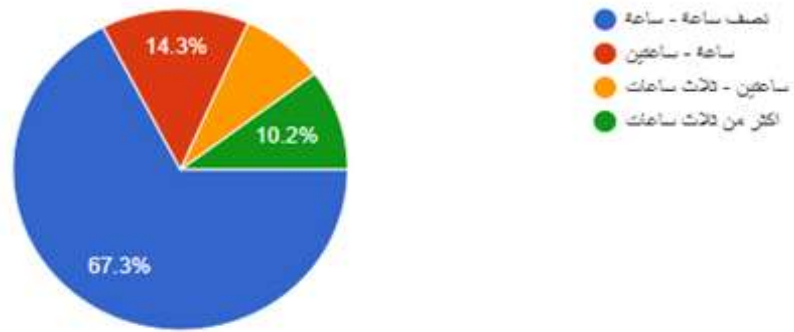


Figure 12 - Average daily hours of television watching by individuals in the sample.

The preferred periods for the sample to watch television are those not tied to a specific time, but rather according to each viewer's circumstances (65.3%). This type of television following has been aided by the development of viewing devices such as smartphones and tablets that are easy to use anytime and anywhere without time or location restrictions. 44.9% of the sample watches television in the evening, 12.2% during late night, 6.1% in the morning, and 4.11% in the afternoon.



Figure13- Most preferred periods for television watching by individuals in the sample.

Studies and statistics by specialized bodies studying television watching and following have shown that the rate of playback watching has increased compared to live television watching (GLANCE, 2020), which is confirmed by the results of this survey where the percentage reached 71.4% of the research sample, and 46.9% watch programs at the time of their live broadcast. Some of the reasons leading to this practice include lifestyle, busy schedule, family, and work commitments, as well as the diversity, evolution and advancement of entertainment, leisure, news and information means, making it difficult and sometimes impossible to watch television at the exact time programs are broadcast live.

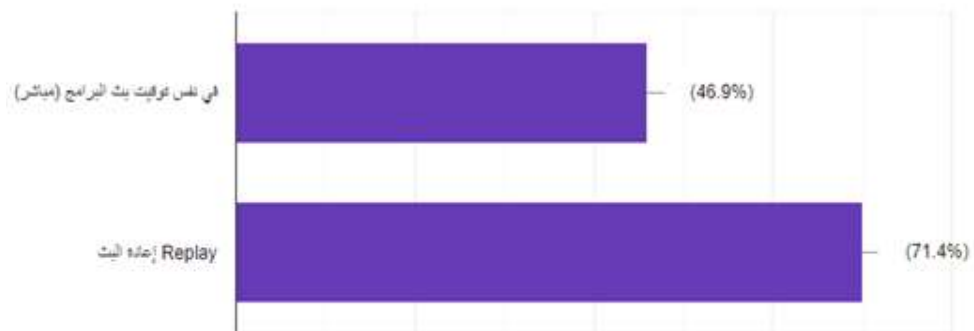


Figure 14 - Individual preferences of the sample regarding live vs. playback television watching

For a long time, television remained the main media and entertainment means that would gather all family members around a single device placed in the living room. However, developments and changes on all levels have gradually contributed to fading this practice, replacing it with individualized viewing at different times. Nonetheless, the results of this survey show that television still brings together all family members in 73.5% of cases. 57.1% watch it at home, while 32.7% watch alone and 4.1% watch with friends. 6.1% watch outside the home.

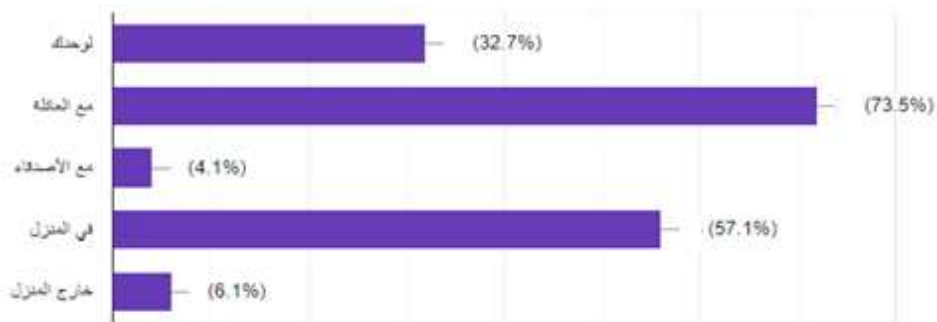


Figure 15- Individual preferences of the sample regarding how to watch television.

Saudi channels rank first among the channels watched by the sample at 71.4%, followed by Arab channels at 69.4%, then foreign channels at 26.5%.

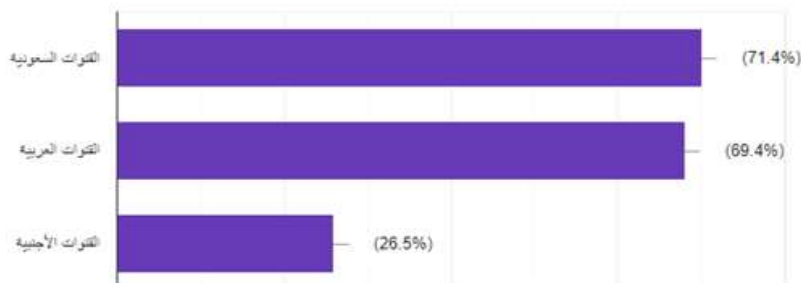


Figure 16 - Individual preferences of the sample regarding television channels (Arab, Saudi, foreign)

MBC group channels came first among the most preferred channels of the sample at 63.3%, followed by the Saudi news channel at 49%, then Saudi Channel at 30.6%, then Quran Channel at 28.6%, then SBC Saudi Channel at 22.4%, then Sports Channel at 18.4%, then Rotana channels at 16.3%, then the Cultural Channel and Sunnah Channel at the same rate of 8.2%, then 24 TV channels at 4.1%. Meanwhile, the sample did not watch Channel 2 and Afaq Channel.

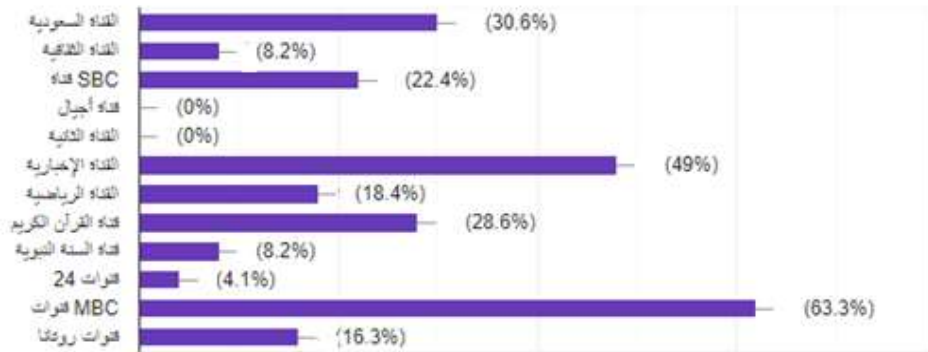


Figure 17- Individual preferences of the sample regarding types of television channels

The research sample was presented with a group of television programs to determine their preferences, and the results of the survey were as follows:

- 61.2% for news bulletins
- 34.7% for television drama (series)
- 32.7% for talk shows
- 26.5% for religious and entertainment programs
- 22.4% for cultural programs
- 16.3% for movies and medical and women's programs (same percentage)
- 8.2% for economic programs

Therefore, entertainment programs came first in attracting the interest and following of the research sample audience, followed by news in second place. This is confirmed by all indicators, statistics and analyses regarding types of television programs. (GAILLARD, 2006).

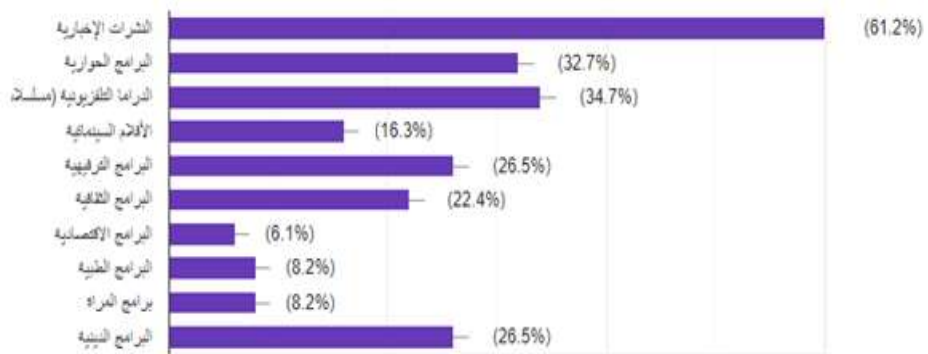


Figure 18 - Individual preferences of the sample regarding television programs

In terms of Arab channels, individuals in the sample prefer to watch, first, television drama, especially series, at 46.9%, followed by talk shows at 44.9%, then news bulletins at 40.8%, then movies at 36.75%, then entertainment programs at 30.6%, then cultural programs at

14.3%, then economic programs at 12.2%, then religious programs at 14.3%, and finally women's programs and medical programs at 6.1%.

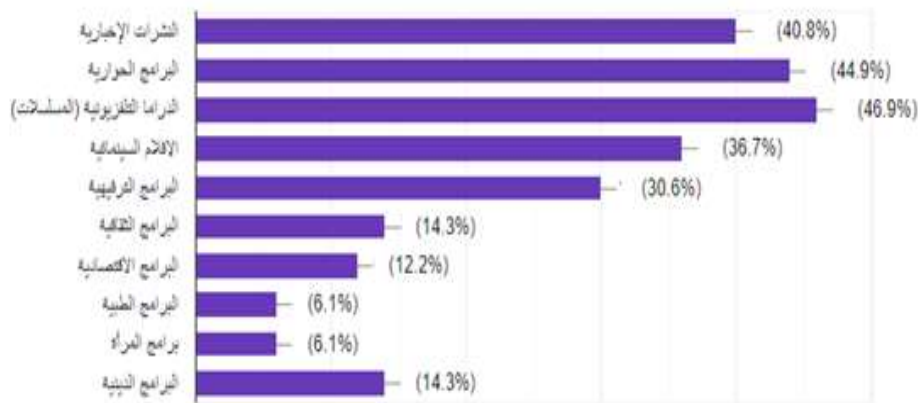


Figure 19- Individual preferences of the sample regarding television programs on Arab channels

In terms of foreign channels, movies topped the preferences of individuals in the sample at 77.6%, followed by television drama at 42.9%, then entertainment programs at 34.7% (general entertainment programs), then news bulletins at 24.5%, then cultural programs at 20.4%, then talk shows at 18.4%. The percentage of viewing medical programs rose to 12.2% compared to their percentage on Arab channels. Finally, women's programs at 4.1%, which maintained their weak percentage regardless of the nature of channels.

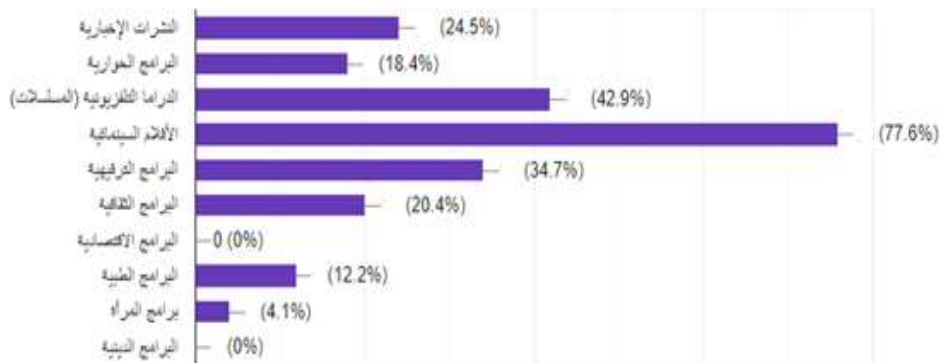


Figure 20- Individual preferences of the sample regarding television programs on Saudi channels

Figure 21 aimed to identify the key reasons why individuals in the research sample watched Saudi television channels. Based on the results of the survey, the top reasons were:

The Saudi channels provided them with up-to-date news and information about current events (63.3%). Over half (53.1%) watched because the programming had a local focus and context, explaining and analyzing domestic news stories. For 28.6%, the channels offered useful information needed for daily life and reflected their interests and concerns. Credibility was also important, with 18.4% citing it as a reason. Finally, 14.3% watched because they found the programs entertaining and educational. In general, proximity to local content and contexts, information relevance, and credibility seemed to drive viewership of Saudi channels for this research sample.

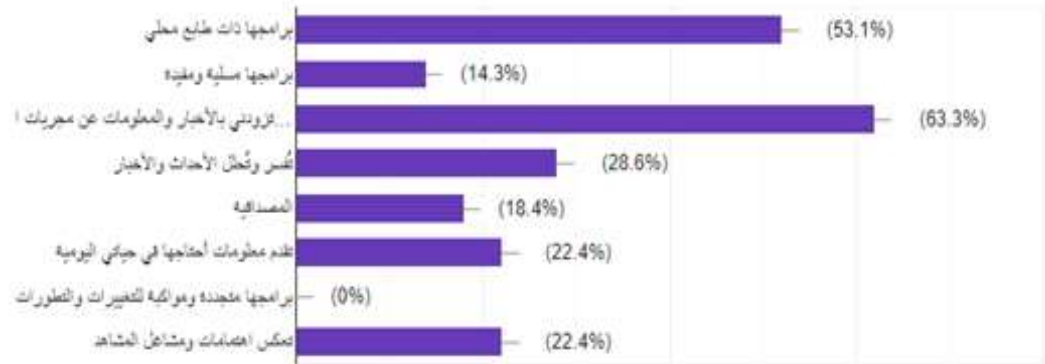


Figure 21- Reasons for individuals in the sample watching Saudi channels.
D- The cognitive and behavioral impacts of television during the COVID-19 pandemic

We wanted to understand the extent to which individuals in the sample relied on television and its impact during the pandemic, and whether this viewing increased or decreased. The answer was: 57.1% of the research sample watches and follows television more than before, while 42.9% their viewing was not affected by the pandemic.



Figure 22 - The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on television viewing
 The results showed that 98% of the sample followed news and events about COVID-19 on Arab channels, while only 16.3% followed on foreign channels.

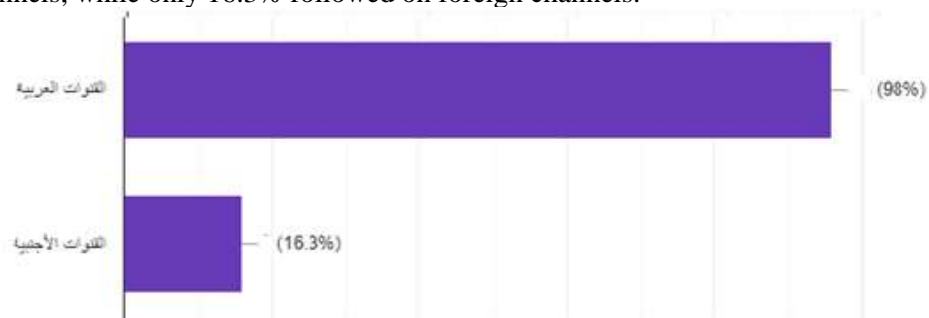


Figure 23 - How individuals in the sample followed news about COVID-19 through television.

Regarding following news and events related to COVID-19 on Saudi channels, 24.5% of respondents said they always followed, the same percentage said sometimes, 28.6% said rarely, and 22.4% said they never followed on these channels. The statistics showed variability in answers but similarity in percentages.

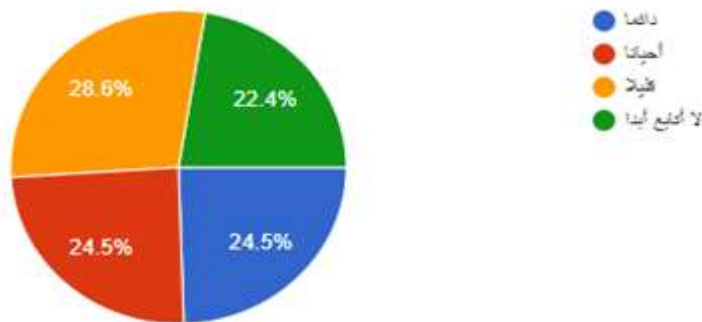


Figure 24 - How individuals in the sample followed news about COVID-19 on Saudi channels.

The reasons and motivations for the researchers to follow COVID-19 news varied on Saudi television between continuous monitoring of COVID-19 developments at 73.5% and the daily press conference that the Ministry of Health routinely provided the public with all updates at 57.1% and feeling reassured and safe as well as community awareness at 49% and the health and accuracy of information and news at 40.8% in addition to the speed in broadcasting news about the pandemic at 34.7% and reliability at 32.7% and professionalism of journalists at 18.4%.

The researchers mentioned other reasons centered around proximity (related to Saudi society), belonging (because it is my country), keeping up with the latest developments of the virus and pandemic, and distrust of other news sources.

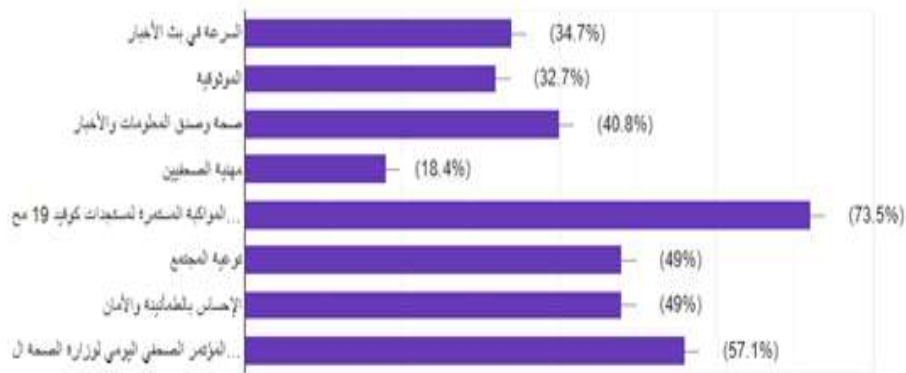


Figure 25 - Reasons for how individuals in the sample followed news about COVID-19 on Saudi channels.

The figures showed that the research sample had an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the media coverage of COVID-19 by Saudi television channels. The majority, 67.3%, rated the coverage as "excellent". A further 18.4% rated it as "very good", while 14.3% thought it was "good". Notably, none of the respondents assessed the television coverage of the pandemic as "weak" in terms of monitoring or follow up of developments. It appears Saudi television channels succeeded in keeping their audience well informed about COVID-19 according to this research, with over 95% rating the coverage positively as either excellent, very good or good.

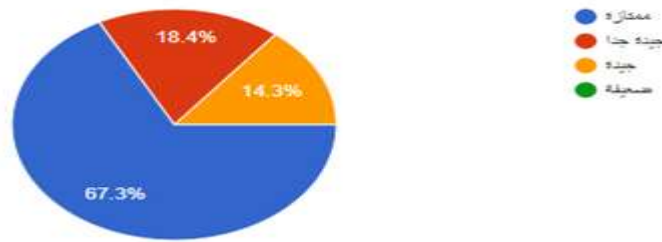


Figure 26 - The research sample's assessment of the performance of Saudi television during the COVID-19 pandemic

91.8% of respondents benefited from the contents, information and news about COVID-19 broadcast by Saudi television, while a small percentage of 8.2% did not benefit.

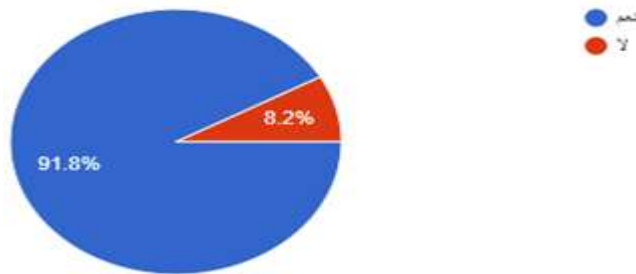


Figure 27 - The extent to which individuals in the sample benefited from COVID-19 news and information broadcast by Saudi television.

The cognitive impacts on the researchers through watching and following news and awareness campaigns about COVID-19 on Saudi television manifested in increased knowledge of prevention methods of the virus and their application at 83.7%, knowledge of precautionary procedures put in place by relevant authorities at 67.3%, knowledge of virus symptoms at 63.3%, knowledge of travel procedures such as travel at 55.1%, knowledge of infection at 38.8%, and ability to differentiate between virus symptoms and those of other diseases at 30.6%.

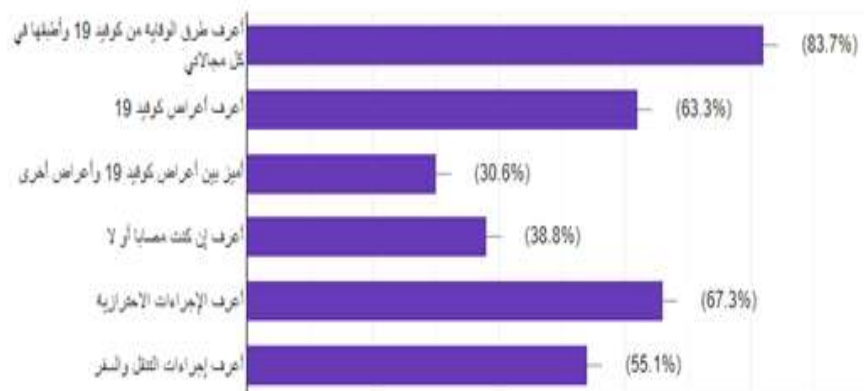


Figure 28 - The cognitive impacts of relying on television for individuals in the sample.

The cognitive impacts gained through watching televised news and awareness campaigns about COVID-19 resulted in several positive behavioral changes among respondents. A majority maintained physical distancing, with 81.6% leaving a two-meter safety

space. Wearing a face mask saw high adherence at 77.6%, as did constant hand washing at 75.5% out of infection fears. Other behaviors included regular hand disinfection for 63.3% along with increased health awareness for 51%. Preventative measures extended to 22.4% constantly disinfecting clothes and 18.4% adopting healthy practices overall. In totality, the research demonstrated how the knowledge obtained from television translated productively into behaviors aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 through vigilant application of prevention guidelines.

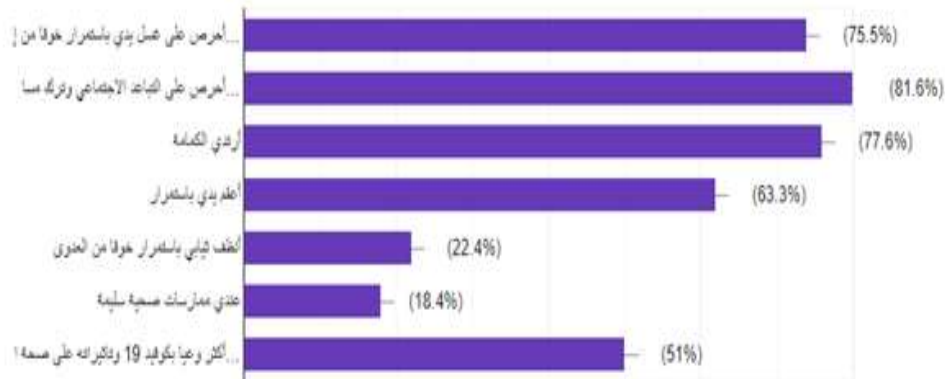


Figure 29 - The behavioral impacts of relying on television for individuals in the sample.

We asked the researchers about their views on Saudi television's coverage and monitoring of the COVID-19 pandemic and their suggestions for developing its performance in the future. Most answers reflected complete satisfaction with its performance and thanked it for the good job in fulfilling its media and news role and reassuring public opinion. Some researchers called for diversifying awareness message styles and formats to avoid repetition that causes boredom for viewers. The suggestions generally concerned improving Saudi television's performance, including the need to better select journalists and presenters hosting talk shows.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite predictions of the gradual disappearance of television in the face of the overwhelming proliferation of modern communication means and the competition from social media platforms, television still enjoys public interest, following and viewership as a source relied upon for news and following local, regional and global events. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the best evidence of this media, news, awareness and entertainment role played by television, whether through its traditional screen or advanced screen or via electronic devices relied upon by the public as a trusted source for all matters related to the pandemic.

The following presents a summary of the most important results and conclusions based on the opinions of the studied sample and its relation to framing the research questions, theoretical framework and previous studies.

Television still plays an important role in providing news and information to audiences, despite the rise of digital media and social communication platforms. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the vital role of television, both traditional and digital, in informing people about the pandemic. Most of the study sample heavily relied, especially on local channels, on television to follow COVID-19 news and updates. This reflects television's important role in serving local communities and meeting their information needs. On the other hand, television contributed to raising the cognitive awareness of the sample about the symptoms of COVID-19 and ways of prevention. This increase in knowledge was translated into positive behavioral changes to prevent the spread of infection. Previous studies also noted television's key role in

covering COVID-19 through objectively informing the public and combating rumors, and creating a positive climate through reassuring messages, confirming the results of this study.

Despite the proliferation of digital media, television still enjoys appeal thanks to its entertainment-related content and social interaction. The portability of its consumption and viewing according to schedule enhanced its popularity. Local broadcasts are preferred as they provide relevant local news and information. This confirms the continuing importance of television despite modern technologies.

In summary, television remains the main reliable source of COVID-19 information for the sample. It also effectively contributed to raising awareness and encouraging preventive behaviors through its educational and awareness-raising role during the crisis. Despite the impact of digital transformation on viewing habits, television has maintained its social function and appeal.

The data indicates some key points about the characteristics of the study sample. The sample was predominantly male, which may be related to the nature of the topic studied. In terms of age distribution, young age groups were highly represented, consistent with the demographic composition of Saudi society.

Most of the sample had higher education, reflecting high awareness of issues discussed, while their heavy reliance on social media for information reflects the influence and spread of these media. The popularity of applications like WhatsApp and Twitter also aligns with the age group's use of them.

The study results demonstrated television's retention of a significant share of viewership despite the proliferation of modern communication and media. This can be explained by the added value of television content that remains hugely popular, whether entertainment or news. The diversity of viewing devices and their availability anytime enhanced television's spread.

The high repeat broadcast rate reflects contemporary pressures on lifestyles, while broadcasting technologies allowed greater viewing freedom. Television also maintained its social role by gathering family members around it despite evolving individual consumption media. Local channel preference is attributed to serving local audiences and meeting their needs through locally relevant news and information. In general, television's appeal and role endure despite tremendous technological changes.

The results indicated a high percentage of the study sample (57.1%) increased their television viewing during the pandemic, reflecting its key role in conveying information in such circumstances. It also showed most of the sample (98%) followed COVID-19 news via Arabic channels, reflecting the local nature of Saudi society. The results demonstrated positive cognitive impacts on the sample through increasing knowledge of virus symptoms and combating methods. Behavioral impacts stemming from this knowledge reflected adopting sound preventive health behaviors. This attests to television's effective awareness role during the crisis.

In conclusion, despite predictions of television's gradual disappearance with modern communication proliferation and social media competition, television still enjoys public interest and reliance as an important news source. The COVID pandemic clearly demonstrated the vital role of television, both traditional and digital, in providing public information about the pandemic.

The study results affirmed television's ongoing appeal and important role despite technological changes. Television remained the prime source for following COVID news for the study sample. It also effectively contributed to spreading awareness and promoting healthy behaviors to curb virus spread. The results also confirmed television's informational, educational and social role during crises like the COVID pandemic. Therefore, it can be said

that television remains an important media platform for reaching audiences, especially in emergencies, despite evolving other communication means.

Based on the results obtained from this study, the following recommendations can be proposed:

- Enhance the role of television, especially local channels, in spreading health awareness and countering rumors during crises and disasters.
- Invest in television's entertainment and social aspects through family-gathering programs that boost morale.
- Develop television broadcasting and content to align with younger age groups' viewing habits.
- Diversify television broadcasting platforms to include modern communication means like smart devices and the Internet.
- Conduct more research to measure public reliance on different media sources during crises.
- Activate the role of local media in providing target audiences with relevant information.
- Leverage lessons learned from the COVID experience to strengthen preparedness for any future crises.

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