

## Lebanese reading habits following the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial crisis and the August 4 explosion

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### Abstract

The recent catastrophes that are hovering over Lebanon are causing panic, distress and anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic disaster, the severe financial crisis and the ugly August 4 explosion greatly influenced the reading habits of the Lebanese people. This study aimed to find out how much Lebanese read during these disasters and their preferable types of reading. One hundred and twenty-eight men and women filled out a questionnaire that was presented to them through a survey. This study analysed the collected data using descriptive statistics, frequency count and simple percentages. Based on the results of the study, 28% read books and magazines and 16% read more than they used to. The inability of the Lebanese to purchase newspapers, magazines, books and even to subscribe to e-books due to the severe financial crisis is an important factor that hindered reading.

Keywords: August 4, COVID-19, explosion, financial crisis, reading;

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## 1. Introduction

During times of crisis, people find themselves faced with lifestyle changes. Some of these changes seen during the COVID-19 lockdown were how much we read and the genre selected. Due to the stress made by the crisis, people sought comfort in reading. One group of people referred to the books they read before. They were not able to go out to book stores or libraries as a result of the lockdown and the financial situations which obliged them to save money. Another group preferred reading new topics during the pandemic for considering it a chance to be used, thus reflecting a noticeable change in their reading habits (Boucher, Harrison, & Giovanelli, 2020; Yildiz, Tezer, & Uzunboylu, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic disaster caused a sudden change in all aspects of life. Many people around the world had to stay home unable to attend any social or cultural events. However, reading books and magazines were the only cultural activities people were able to perform. The question is how much time people have spent reading? When most of the people went into lockdown when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many people found themselves with so much free time (Debczak, 2020). Some people used that time to bake bread or make cookies; others watched television or played video games. Book lovers took this opportunity to go through the piles of books they have.

A study was conducted in China to examine the increase in reading time during COVID-19. Statistics were gathered by the editing and proofreading service Global English Edition from various sources, including Pew Research and Amazon's bestsellers page. It was found that 35% of web users worldwide reported reading more during the pandemic and 14% read much more. Moreover, this increase was remarkably shown in March 2020. There were 1.5 billion visits to book and literature e-commerce sites. The trend was to read fiction (Debczak, 2020).

### 1.1. Literature review

Reading could be seen as an activity to collect information and for entertainment. It requires a clear state of mind. This literature review consists of two parts: one is on the reading habits before the COVID-19 pandemic and the other is during the pandemic.

#### 1.1.1. Reading habits before the COVID-19 pandemic

Thanuskodi (2011) examined the reading habits among library and information science students of Annamalai University. He found that students liked reading their courses and the materials given to them. The researcher also found that work hindered students' academic performance. Sakakini (2013) examined the reading habits and reading for pleasure of the Lebanese people. He collected some data on the topic in 1993. He found that people read newspapers, magazines and books much more than in 2013 and much, much more than in 2021 as will be shown.

Owusu-Achesw and Larson (2014) investigated the reading habits of Koforidua Polytechnic students in Ghana and their effects on academic performance. They concluded that students read to pass their exams and to improve their academic performance. They also read for entertainment and fun. Sandhu (2020) studied the reading habits of the public library users in Amritsar Public Library in Punjab, India, and concluded that the public library users read every day to update their knowledge.

Pal and Sing (2019) examined the reading habits of postgraduates of Khalsa College, Amritsar. They concluded that the majority of students enjoyed reading and collecting information from books. To conclude this part, reading could be seen as an activity to get information and for entertainment. It requires a clear state of mind.

### 1.1.2. Reading habits during the pandemic

Pew Research and Amazon’s bestsellers reported that 35% of web users worldwide read more during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and 14% read significantly more. Clark and Picton (2020) conducted an online survey on children and young people between 9 and 18 years old in UK schools to examine the changes in their reading habits during the lockdown. The results showed that there was an increase in reading hours for children and young people from 47.8% before the lockdown to 55.9% after the lockdown. The research also found that during the lockdown 25% of males versus 22% of females enjoyed listening to audiobooks.

Parikh, Vyas, and Parikh (2020) conducted a survey to find out the reading habits of library users during the COVID-19 lockdown. They found that more than half of the respondents acknowledged that reading was their major activity and that e-books were their resources. ERI-Lecture (2020) investigated the reading habits of Spanish adults during the first few months of the COVID-19 lockdown. The research reported that the time spent reading increased by 1 hour during the lockdown, from 4.5 to 5.5 hours. The research also found that the majority read to get information about the disease and for pleasure.

Two studies were carried out in India. The first one was conducted by Tyagi, Gaur, and Shama (2020) in a form of a survey on college students during the pandemic lockdown. They found that students read much more than they used to. The second study was conducted by Vyas and Tandel (2020), who examined the impact of the lockdown on the reading habits of academic staff at Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University. The study found that academic staff read e-books and on their phones.

Tammamo (2020) investigated the libraries that continued giving access during the lockdown. It was shown that Italian libraries offered all online services and developed many tools for people to use through mobile phones and social media apps. These libraries were changed into digital ones with e-books access to promote people’s reading habits.

Adeyemi (2021) conducted a case study that examined the effects of COVID-19 on the reading habits of Nigerians in Lagos State. Data were collected using a web-based questionnaire. It was found that the Nigerians’ reading habits improved during the lockdown. Some citizens had difficulties in reading due to the cost of the books, their inability to access resources and their lack of motivation. The results showed that the lockdown positively influenced their reading habits.

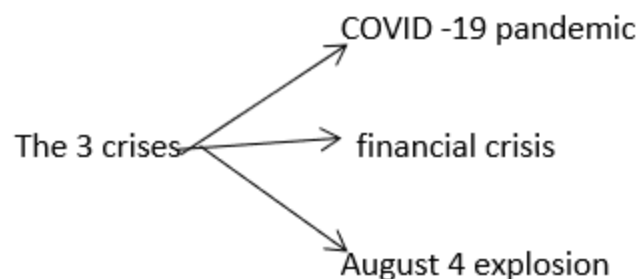


Figure 1. The three major crises that are facing Lebanese and influencing their reading habits

### 1.2. Purpose of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic hit people around the world unexpectedly, leading to a far-reaching effect on our lives. The Lebanese people had two catastrophes to worry about: the financial crisis and the August 4 explosion. Several cultural, socio-economic and educational problems appeared on the scene. They brought about hardships and misery. The three disasters caused depression, panic and anxiety in people (Qiu et al., 2020). All these problems are expected to hinder the reading habits of the Lebanese, especially the financial crisis. This study investigates the impact of these disasters. This study attempted to find out how much Lebanese read during these disasters and their preferable types of reading.

### *1.3. Research questions*

The present study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 lockdown influence the reading habits of the Lebanese people?
2. What are the effects of the financial crisis and August 4 explosion on the reading habits of the Lebanese?
3. How much time did they spend reading?
4. What are the devices and materials they used?

## **2. Materials and methods**

The study focuses on the effects and influences of the COVID-19 lockdown, the financial crisis and the August 4 explosion on the reading habits of the Lebanese people. A mixed-method design was chosen for this study. A quantitative and a qualitative type of design will help the research to interpret the obtained data.

### *2.1. Participants*

Seventy-two women and 56 men, a total of 128 participated in this study. They filled out a questionnaire of 21 items. The participants came from different professions (Appendix A). They live in major cities and districts of Lebanon.

### *2.2. Data collection instrument*

A questionnaire consisting of 21 items was developed by the researcher and was given to 2 experts in the fields of research and education to validate it. Specifically, questions on the reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the financial crisis and the August 4 explosions were tackled.

### *2.3. Procedure*

The questionnaire was sent to the participants through WhatsApp. They were given a week to respond, which was the first week of March 2021. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency count and simple percentages. This method of analysis allows for simple interpretation of data and easiness of understanding.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1. Age*

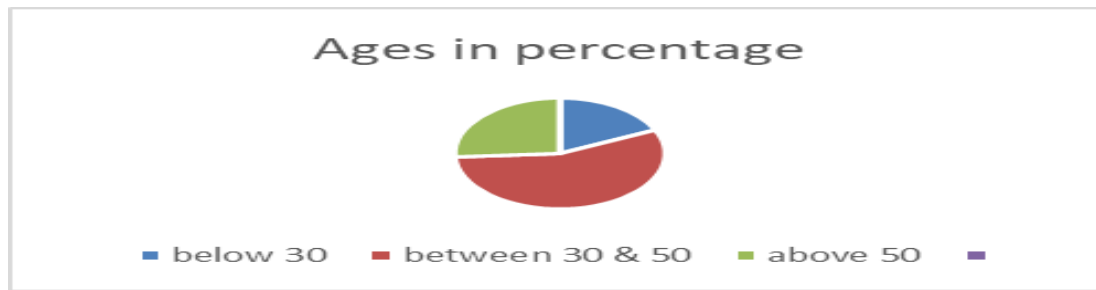


Figure 2. Ages represented

From Figure 2, it is seen that out of the respondents to the survey, 18% are below 30, 56% are between 30 and 50 and 26% are above 50.

### 3.2. Education

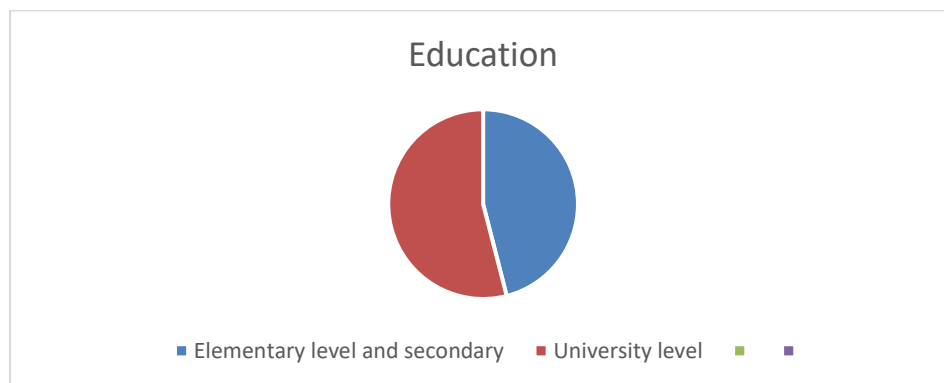


Figure 3. Education level

Based on Figure 3, it is evident that 46% of the participants have elementary and secondary education, whereas 54% of the participants have a university education.

Also,

- Most people spend 3–5 hours watching television.
- All people have mobile phones and use them most of the time to chat and get information.
- Those who have computers used them for 2–3 hours a day.
- 68% of the respondents read for 1–2 hours a day. They read to collect information and for entertainment; 15% read books of political, religious and technological nature.

## 4. Discussion

ERI-Lecture (2020) reported that the majority of Spanish adults read for information during the COVID-19 lockdown, which coincides with one of the findings of this study. Also, results from this research show that the majority of respondents read newspapers, magazines and used their mobile phones and computers to get information. This is in line with what Vyas and Tandel (2020) concluded from a study they conducted on academics in India that people read from print and non-print resources. Moreover, a finding of this survey revealed that the majority of the respondents read for 1–2 hours a day, but during the COVID-19 lockdown, they read a little bit more.

However, the inability of the Lebanese to purchase newspapers, magazines, books and even to subscribe to e-books due to the severe financial crisis is an important factor that hindered reading, which coincided with findings from another study reported by Tveit (2020). Finally, Adeyemi (2021) concluded from a study that the lack of motivation to read can hinder one from reading.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, 28% read books and magazines and 16% read more than they used to. The majority of the respondents read at least 1 hour a day. They read to collect information and for entertainment. The topics of interest ranged from political to religious and technology. The reading habits of the Lebanese people were therefore influenced by the three phenomena under discussion.

The present researcher concluded after surveying that the Lebanese people might have read much more during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, but the other two disasters – the severe financial crisis and the devastating August 4 explosion – hindered their reading habits. A final point is that during crises, there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

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## Appendix A Reading Habits Survey

Dear Participant,

This survey is a part of a study on reading habit in Lebanon I am conducting.

Please fill in the banks with x.

Thank you.

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex \_\_\_\_\_
3. Profession \_\_\_\_\_
4. Education: elementary\_\_\_\_\_, Secondary\_\_\_\_\_, University\_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you watch television? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
6. Number of hours a day: 1 to 2 \_\_\_\_\_, 3 to 5 \_\_\_\_\_, More \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you have a mobile phone? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
8. How often do you use it? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you use computers? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
10. Number of hours a day: 1 to 2 \_\_\_\_\_, 3 to 5 \_\_\_\_\_, More \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you read? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
12. The purpose for reading: bored \_\_\_\_\_ for information \_\_\_\_\_ for fun \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you read newspapers (paper or on line) Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_?
14. Do you read magazines? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you read books? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_
16. Number of hours a day: 1 hour \_\_\_\_\_, 2 hours \_\_\_\_\_, More \_\_\_\_\_
17. Numbers of hours a week: 1 hour \_\_\_\_\_, 2 hours \_\_\_\_\_, more \_\_\_\_\_
18. Choose the types of books you read and number them.  
 Narrative \_\_\_\_\_ Political \_\_\_\_\_ Artistic \_\_\_\_\_  
 Historical \_\_\_\_\_ Scientific \_\_\_\_\_ Religious \_\_\_\_\_  
 Detective \_\_\_\_\_ Economic \_\_\_\_\_ Literary \_\_\_\_\_  
 Poetic \_\_\_\_\_ Technological \_\_\_\_\_ Psychological \_\_\_\_\_
19. What was the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on your reading habits?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
20. What was the influence of the financial crisis on your reading habits?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
21. In what ways were you affected by August 4 explosion?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix B

Professions employed in this study and number of participants in each profession

- Secretary.....12
- Supermarket personnel....13
- Housewife..... 11
- Teachers..... 12
- Taxi driver.....5
- Misc.....28
- \* Lawyers.....5
- \* M.D.....6
- \* Educators.....14
- \* Businessmen.....16
- \* IT personnel.....6

**Thank you**