

Reading habits of Algerians during the COVID-19 lockdown period

Souhila AZIZI^{1,*}, Zohra Boufidjline²

¹University of Blida²Lounici Ali (Algeria)

²University of Algiers²Bouzareah(Algeria)

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate Algerians' reading preferences during the COVID-19 lockdown and find whether there is a correlation between reading habits and certain demographic factors. A descriptive survey design was adopted and a simple random sampling technique was used. To meet this endeavour, a web-based questionnaire was administered owing to the risk of paper and the total number of responses collected was 1002. Results revealed that Algerians' reading habits were significantly improved during the lockdown. It was shown that, despite Algerians' growing digital reading habits during the period of lockdown, readers still prefer reading on paper since it is more comfortable, and at that time, homes were the most popular reading locations.

Keywords

Reading habits; reading attitudes; Lockdown; COVID-19 pandemic; Algerian readers.

1. Introduction

On March 2020, The WHO declared an outbreak of a novel called the COVID-19 pandemic and reiterated its place for countries to act immediately and step up responses to treatment, diagnosis, and transmission reduction to save lives (UNCTAD, 2021). The Algerian government imposed a nationwide lockdown that was repeatedly extended in several states to halt the virus from spreading throughout the country and break the chain of transmission. Even though the lockdown was implemented for the people's safety, it had an impact on many activities and habits, including reading, in various parts of the country.

The study focused on the reading habits of Algerian inhabitants in several states during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021 when the whole country was under lockdown owing to the widely spread of the epidemic Corona virus (موقع مجموعة البنك الدولي, 2021). The majority of individuals in the country spent most of their time staying at home. The traditional reading patterns of readers had not changed with the influence of digital media, Nevertheless, reading habits, whether using modern patterns or traditional patterns, played an important role in improving reader performance.

This study attempts to answer several research questions as formulated below:

- What is the Algerian attitude toward reading during the lockdown period?
- Is there any relationship between gender and reading habits and attitudes?
- How much time do Algerian readers spend on reading before and during the lockdown period?

Objectives of the study

The study tries to investigate specific objectives which are:

1. Inspect how important reading is to Algerian readers;
2. Investigate the reading devices utilized during the COVID-19 lockdown;
3. Find out how many books were read during the pandemic;
4. Discuss the amount of time spent reading Algerian readers before the lockdown period;
5. Relate time spent reading Algerian readers during the lockdown period.

Literature review: Studies on Reading habits during COVID-19 Pandemic

Reading habits as an old field of research still attract the attention of scholars of different fields of sciences including Sociology, Psychology and library and information science. The researchers have been particularly interested in several studies about educational aspects, particularly reading habits (Sharma, 2021). Currently, the theme has provided enough subject matter to researchers, and Organizations. However, in Algeria and most developing countries, a close look at the available literature shows the lack of any substantive research by scholars on this theme, especially under the influence of COVID-19. The following is a summary of some academic studies on the subject:

1. **Vyas and Tandel (2020)** In their study, they tried to investigate the impact of the lockdown due to COVID-19 on the reading habits of the academic staff of Dr Baba sahib Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) (Vyas, et al., 2020). They have discovered that the rise and use of electronic media as well as the internet has not altered traditional reading habits and that readers' reading habits were maintained throughout the lockdown in both modern and traditional patterns.
2. **Parikh et al. (2020)**: Parikh and other researchers have conducted a survey on the reading habit of library users during the COVID-19 lockdown and found that staying at home has motivated library users to invest their free time in reading more digital resources particularly eBooks (Parikh, et al., 2020). The survey revealed that Libraries need of making internet bandwidth available to users at home even in faraway places.
3. **Jonchery Anne and Lombardo Philippe (2020)**: in their study administered by the French ministry of culture, they endeavour to find how the lockdown of the Corona virus pandemic has changed practices of French inhabitants and specifically social pursues and more exact perusing routines during the confinement in France (Jonchery & Lombardo, 2020, p. 44). The study shows that Lockdown hurts French inhabitants' reading habits, due to the widespread use of social media sites to gather information concerning the spread of COVID-19 world wide and in France.
4. **Mirza et.al. (2021)**: In their study 'English Reading Habits in Online Learning among Tertiary Learning in Pakistan', they attempt to identify the effects of the pandemic on the students' reading and their reading motives during the lockdown. They have discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected students' education and had caused some mental distress among students related to their health and education (Mirza, et al., 2021).

The study has brought out that most of the students do not have digital skills, and some of the students also lack self-learning (autonomy) and English reading skills that should be addressed as part of training them for a world that runs on knowledge. Besides, one positive and interesting aspect of this study is found that some students are motivated to use their time during lockdown to increase their learning skills even if they were not academically oriented.

5. **Tabbi Akila (2021)**: Her study has examined the influence of the social environment on reading practices and reading identities of graduates in Algeria. The study shows that family and peers are among the strongest influencers of reading. The study found that social environments including members of families, peer groups, educational institutions, as well as the readers themselves have different effects on reading practices.

The studies reviewed above, concerned with reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the influence of the pandemic in the context of readers from Indian, Indonesian, and Pakistani countries. Students, faculty members at colleges and universities, as well as the general populace in various areas, make up the reading community.

All the studies mentioned above indicated that strong reading habits act as a strong weapon for one to excel in life. It has been noted that readers frequently lead successful lives as they are open to opportunities and motives. Therefore, reading habits exhibited by an individual indicate a regular tendency toward reading. This is often a psychological act. Besides the foregoing, this article seeks to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Algerians' reading preferences.

2. Reading Habits and reading attitudes

2.1. Reading habits as a concept

Reading is an interesting and significant activity in society. The word "reading habits" is combined of the words "reading" and "habit". Reading is an action of a person who reads, and "habit" is a product of this action or learning (Sharma, 2021). Most people considered reading as a good hobby but reading is the foundation of skills. Reading offers a constructive approach to improving one's vocabulary and language skills. Reading habits are closely associated with their emotional vocabulary. Young persons (kids; pupils and students) who are frequent readers can produce more emotional words than those who are less frequent in reading.

2.2. Reading attitudes

Attitudes toward reading are defined as an individual feeling about reading causing learners to approach or avoid a reading situation. Attitude and interest in reading can be related in association with feeling and with learners' spirit to learn or in this situation it can be said best with the readers' spirit to read (Nor Shahriza, et al., 2007). Positive reading attitudes direct readers to positive reading experiences, which also lead to higher academic performance.

2.3. Impact of COVID-19 on cultural practices in Algeria

COVID-19 is a pandemic disease that largely caught the world unprepared. It had a far-reaching effect on various spheres of life. This is ranging from education, medical, religious practice, social activities, and economic activities and soon. It brought about untold hardship and irreparable damage to many in developing countries like Algeria, which may take years to restore from (موقع مجموعة البنك الدولي, 2021). Algeria and Algerians alike were hit by the consequences which resulted from the spread of the pandemic disease. Particularly, during a period when the disease was on a geometric rise, the governments devised various measures to help alleviate the troubling increase. One of these several measures is "lockdown." This is in a bid to stop the rapid spread of the disease among the populace. Lockdown simply involves grinding down all activities and putting all on hold within a defined geographical location over a specific period.

In Algeria, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in February 2020. The spread of the pandemic disease was fast from Blida to most states. The rise of the cases in Algeria led the Algerian government on March 10, 2020, to announce a "general lockdown", in Blida (International Monetary Fund, 2021), as this State was the most affected and had the highest number of COVID-19 cases at this time. The lockdown was adopted as a mechanism to stop the spread of COVID-19 before it becomes uncontrollable in Blida and other states; it was extended over a year; which means that Algerians were under lockdown for months. As a result, the inhabitants were faced with unavoidable reality, which led to paradigm shifts in a lot of activities and habits.

Staying at home for a significant period alters a lot of practices and activities for many people. For a country like Algeria, which several states are renowned for their bustling and hurried life styles, lockdown crippled virtually all activities. Mean while, the significant reduction of these activities may lead to bore demand redundancy. It was noted that reading is the foundation of enjoyment in life and is closely related to vocational efficiency.

More importantly, reading was essential in keeping up to date on the most recent information or development regarding the pandemic or the lockdown. Reading is a form of

entertainment that stimulates imagination and thoughts. This implies that in a time when both information and entertainment are essential, reading offers a hybrid benefit.

3. Methods and Materials

Population and Sample: This descriptive study focuses on reading habits during the period of lockdown among Algerian readers. Only 1002 of the 1200 people who were part of the convenient sampling method, which was used to identify the target research sample participated. A survey was created using Google Forms and employed as a tool for data collection.

Data collection: Data review has been gathered from different sources including books, journal articles and reports.

Data analysis: Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the researcher's Google Forms backend page, the researcher transformed the survey data into descriptive statistics, frequency counts, and basic percentage statistics.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic analysis: The total responses were 1002, which are distributed in the following table.

Variables		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Male	352	35.1%
Female	650	64.9%
Total	1002	100%
Occupation		
Student	466	46.5%
Government employee	325	32.4%
Self-employed	75	7.5%
Temporary employee	24	2.4%
Retired	07	0.7%
Housewife	24	2.4%
Unemployed	81	8.1%
	1002	100%
Group of age		
Less than 19 years	68	6.8%
20–29 years	588	58.7%
30–39 years	252	25.1%
40–49 years	70	7.0%
50 to 60 years and above	24	2.4%
Total	1002	100%

Table1: Demographic information of respondents

Table1 has shown that there were more female respondents (64.9%) than male respondents (35.1%). It reveals that more than half of the respondents were students (46.5%) with other occupations aside from these government and private structures (32.4%). According to the data, 58.7% of respondents were between the ages of 20–29 years, while 25.1% were between the ages of 30–39. The responders who were 50–60 years old and older had the lowest representation (2.4%). This youth ful majority of respondents may influence the overall findings of the study.

Algerian attitudes towards reading

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly agreed	687	68.6%
Agreed	269	26.8
Neutral	22	2.2%
Disagreed	17	1.7%
Strongly Disagreed	06	0.6%
Total	1002	100%

Table2.Importance of reading during the COVID-19 lockdown

It can be seen in Table2 that most respondents agreed with the idea of the importance of reading during the lockdown (68.6% strongly agreed and 26% agreed) to eliminate the boredom of staying at home and collecting data on COVID-19 and for academic examinations for students and researchers. The data in Table 02 also illustrates that only 1.7% disagreed and 0.6% strongly disagreed that reading was important for people during the lockdown.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Everyday	675	67.4%
Sometimes	244	24.4%
Rarely	61	6.1%
Never	22	2.2%
Total	1002	100%

Table3. Frequency of Reading electronic resources during the lockdown

Table3 shows that more than half of respondents (67.4%) practice reading on electronic forms daily, and 24.4% read electronic forms sometimes, which means that they give importance to practicing reading on electronic forms during the lockdown.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Home	483	48.2%
Library	57	5.7%
Both of them	418	41.7 %
Other public spaces	44	4.4
Total	1002	100%

Table4. Place preferred for practicing the reading habit

Table 4 shows that the majority of Algerians have read during lockdown at their homes (48.2% and 41.7%) because of the repetitive lockdown imposed on several states, and after the reduction of confinement, libraries (5.7%) such as the National Library opened on September 2021, with strict measures for protecting the lives of readers.

This means that the most popular space for reading among the respondents is home, followed by libraries, and some other spaces could be preferred places for readers, like public gardens, train stations, bus stations, or at the beach.

Algerians reading habits

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Less than 01 hour	341	34.1%
1-2hours/day	281	28%
More than 02 hours/per day	235	23.5%
Not fixed time	145	14.5%
Total	1002	100%

Table5. Time spent reading during the lockdown period

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of the amount of time spent on reading per day by the respondents during the lockdown. According to the results, 34.1% of Algerians read for less than one hour per day, 28% spent between one and two hours per day, 23.5% read for more than two hours per day, and 14.5% don't have a specific amount of time to spend reading, because it depends on their free time and their occupation. In a comparison with a survey

administered to visitors of the Algerian Book Fair in 2018, results have shown that the majority of respondents read less than one hour per day.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Mobile	539	53.8%
Tablet	47	4.7%
Laptop	358	35.7%
IPad and E-book reader	08	0.8%
No response	44	4.4%
Total	1002	100%

Table6. Electronic Devices used to read

It is shown in Table6 above that more than half of the respondents (53.8%) have used Mobile devices for reading during the lockdown, followed by Computer/Laptop with 35.7%, then Tablets(4.7%) and only 0.8% notebooks. This indicates that a significant number of the respondents read from Smart phones.

Discussion of findings

The results of this study revealed that the lockdown has changed the reading habits of Algerians, as Algerians now have positive attitudes toward reading at home and reading electronic resources to eradicate the boredom of staying at home all the time. This is dissimilar other findings of Anne Jonchery and Philippe Lambardo, which show that French inhabitants read more electronic resources than printed ones during the confinement in 2020 and that the COVID-19 lockdown had both a positive and negative impact on French reading habits(**Jonchery, et al., 2020**).

In a similar vein, the findings of this study showed that more than half of Algerians have read from 01 to 02 hours per day during the lockdown to keep themselves in touch with information about COVID-19. It was however revealed by Ismail Olatunji Adeyemi (2020) that more than half of Nigerians read for 3 to 4 hours daily during the lockdown(**Adeyemi, 2020**). Moreover, it was found that more than half of the respondents read using Mobiles devices during the confinement. This means that when Algerians are on lockdown, they don't look to read printed books as a traditional form of practicing reading. Perhaps, they looked for other devices to avoid the transmission of the virus.

Furthermore, the study is partly dissimilar to the findings of Philippe Lombardo and Loup Wolff (2020), which found that during the COVID-19 lockdown, French inhabitants read less than one hour per day (**Lombardo, et al., 2020**) and that the lockdown had a negative influence on reading habits and reduced the reading of both electronic and printed resources.

Conclusion

It is observed from the results above that the COVID-19 lockdown influenced Algerians' reading habits in both positive and adverse ways. Numerous studies have shown that during the pandemic period, readers spent more time reading at home than they normally would have. The readers have read both printed books and novels on electronic devices. According to the findings, the majority of Algerians read more than 10 books during confinement.

The above-discussed results related to reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal that people have spent more time at home reading books on their smart phones, computers, and the Internet. Many responders believed that the COVID-19 pandemic was unfortunate in many ways for the public, but it was also the appropriate time to develop and improve many knowledge-oriented traits, including reading habits, especially for audio books, to explore digital resources, and to sharpen foreign language learning skills.

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