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Sociodemographic Analysis of TV Genre Preference: The Lebanese Case

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Media studies have investigated the ability of audience's sociodemographic variables to predict media preference and selective exposure. Yet the roles that religion and politics play in the Arab media scene has largely been overlooked in the literature, despite the importance of this market. Using stratified random sampling, we surveyed 784 Lebanese viewers who shared their level of interest in watching 8 different TV genres and subgenres. Through logistic regression models, we analyzed eight sociocultural variables and their ability to predict the audience's genre preference. The findings clearly showed that religion and political affiliation are strong predictors of genre preference in a diverse partisan context. Our exploratory empirical work provides critical contribution to media preference research and genre studies and provides insights to help media producers schedule the best mix of programs anchored in audience analysis.

Keywords: Arab World, audience analysis, genre studies, media preference, partisanship, religion, selective exposure, television

Academic as well as commercial audience research have noted the ability of audience demographics to predict a preference for certain types of content (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Webster, Phalen, & Lichty, 2000). In television studies, research consistently points to social stratification in audience viewing preference. Whereas men tend to watch more sports than women, older audiences prefer to watch news and information programs more than the younger generation (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Biological features (such as sex, age, or race) do not make individuals attend more to certain media messages, but the situational priorities and needs and roles associated with them shape these preferences (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hoplamazian, 2012).

The audience preference for certain media content and its subsequent media exposure does not "occur in social vacuum" (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 41). Media selection and genre preference are an

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important part of cultural expressions. Most of the media preference studies were predominantly located in Western contexts, thus overlooking audience viewing and content preference patterns in the Arab World, especially where religious and political partisanship prevail.

Mass media studies have long investigated the nature of television use and viewers' motivations and gratifications (Weimann, Brosius, & Wober, 1992). According to the uses and gratifications perspective, viewers actively seek out mass media experiences that can "meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs" (Hawkins et al., 2001, p. 239). Selective exposure theory (Finn, 1997) proposes that individuals actively choose media content by orienting their attention to specific stimuli in their environment (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). The selective exposure framework suggests that individuals are loyal to particular content areas (genres) based on their underlying drives (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). It conceptualizes observable bias of exposure to available communication content.

According to Hawkins et al. (2001), mass communication "enterprise" has been searching for "enduring individual characteristics and beliefs predicting mass media use" (p. 238) to help segment the market based on relating television use to viewers' characteristics and needs (Bower, 1973; Greenberg, 1974; Steiner, 1963). Media studies literature points to significant differences in audience viewing practices and preferences (Hawkins et al., 2001). One important way to understand these differences is through identifying predispositions affecting viewers' television genre preferences.

Genre has been used extensively in media studies, especially in the context of the television and film industries (Buozis & Creech, 2018). Genres, defined as "a systematic categorization of various television programs based on the formulas and characteristics that a group of programs share" (Sayre & King, 2003; Shim & Paul, 2007, p. 301), work as a mediating category between the producers (industry) and the users (audience), allowing for proper market segmentation and audience targeting (Chandler, 1997; Tolson, 1996). People still use genre labels to choose and communicate about their television viewing preferences and behaviors (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2012; Bilandzic, Hastall, & Sukalla, 2017), and for this, there is great value in understanding the predictors of television genre preference among viewers. Hawkins et al. (2001) confirm a positive moderate correlation between genre preference and attention paid to specific television genres.

Although the literature has established a link between genre preference and sociodemographic variables such as age and gender, all these studies were located in Western, non-Arab contexts. Furthermore, key variables such as religion and political affiliation were not addressed in the literature despite being of prime importance in highly partisan and religiously diverse contexts. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by not only replicating previous studies to test the applicability of findings in a non-Western context but also to add to genre theory and media studies key variables such as religion and political affiliation. Taking Lebanon as a religiously diverse and politically partisan country as a context for this study, we seek to answer the following: What sociodemographic factors predict television genre preferences among viewers in a highly partisan, religiously diverse context?

We start by locating this study within the framework of the genre theory, then provide contextual background on Lebanon and its TV consumption scene. This is followed by the Method section, which

provides how data were collected (survey) and the different data analysis tools used to answer the research question. In the findings, we identify the sociodemographic variables that are significant predictors of eight TV genres. In the Discussion section, we explain these findings and anchor them in the Lebanese society as we identify the convergences and divergences from those found in literature. This article ends with the presentation of the study's limitations and some recommended future research directions.

Genre Theory

The definition and boundaries of genres have always been fluid. As genre is an abstract conception (Feuer, 1992), the way we define it depends on the purpose for our definition and the intended classification (Chandler, 1997). What connects "a collection of communicative events," as Swales (1990, p. 46) suggests, to a specific genre is "some shared set of communicative purposes." Consequently, what came to be known as "genre theory" is not a set of fixed laws but rather a system of organization open to debate and critical interpretation (Creeber, 2015). Derrida (1980) denied the assumption of generic "essence," as generic categorization is believed to be a subjective formation. Yet media studies scholars highlighted the important role genre categorization plays in media analysis (Cohen, 1986; Creeber, 2015).

Genres are important "labels of social practice" that enable audiences and producers to communicate about content and preferences (Bilandzic et al., 2017, p. 114). By situating "textual conventions" into appropriate contexts of production and consumption, attention to genre allows scholars to make broader claims about the ways in which structure and culture work over large groups of texts (Buozi & Creech, 2018, p. 1436). With the vibrant nature of the current media environment, studies of genre must be timely and culturally contextualized (Buozi & Creech, 2018). The study of popular genres reveals "the way in which particular cultural groups interpret texts and supertexts in the process of making them part of their everyday lives" (Buozi & Creech, 2018; Cawelti, 1985, p. 60). Studies that emphasize the relations of gender, race, or class offer avenues for further explication of a genre's cultural context (Buozi & Creech, 2018). Some cultural studies scholars have embraced the idea that genres can reveal social conditions and the "crucial ideological concerns" of a particular culture in a particular time (Buozi & Creech, 2018; Chandler, 1997, p. 4).

Genre and Market Segmentation

Viewers maintain a blend of preferred genres in their media repertoire (Bilandzic et al., 2017) despite having multiple viewing options in terms of channels and modes of media consumption. Audiences use genres to organize fan practices for personal preferences and in their everyday conversations and viewing practices (Mittell, 2001). As for the industry, it usually constructs an ideal consumer for its production with certain sociodemographic profile and an assumed attitude toward the subject matter (Chandler, 1997). The industry uses genre to create and maintain loyal media consumers who become used to viewing programs belonging to their preferred genres (Chandler, 1997). Having different genres allows for different loyal audiences with varied expectations to be catered to. Through the creation and proper identification of loyal audience groups, the industry uses genres to control demand and predict audience expectations (Chandler, 1997; Neale, 1981). For media producers, this means more stability in production and programming (Gledhill, 1985; McQuail, 1987).

It is crucial to understand genre classification from consumers' perspectives as they come to identify and categorize media artifacts in their everyday life (Chandler, 1997). The categories themselves emerge from the relationship between the elements they group together and the cultural context in which they operate (Mittell, 2001). Mittell (2001) connects this process of grouping texts into genres to cultural practices such as production and audience reception (Mittell, 2001). Genres exist only through "the creation, circulation, and reception of texts within cultural contexts" (Mittell, 2001, p. 8).

In television, there are no genre delimitations, with some defined by setting (Western), some by actions (crime shows), some by audience effect (comedy), and some by narrative forms (mysteries; Chandler, 2017). The genres mix presented becomes a cultural process sensitive to the audience's viewing practices and enacted by industry personnel (Mittell, 2001). Consequently, as Mittell (2001) calls for the need to locate genres within "the complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts" (p. 7), this work attends to these complexities as it situates genre preference within a contested context with diverse audience composition at a specific point in history. Genre theory emerges from these cultural contexts by looking at how industry and audience practices constitute genres in their fluidity and coherence (Mittell, 2001).

As genres go through phases of popularity, it is important to recognize the changing audience preference as well as the rise and fall of new genres and subgenres (Chandler, 1997). Studying genres as a historical phenomenon helps in defining a moral and social world (Chandler, 1997; Tudor, 1974). According to Chandler (1997), mass media genres from a particular era reflect values that were dominant at the time. Buozis and Creech (2018) suggest "news texts and narratives when viewed as cultural artifacts reveal the relationship between truth and power tied to specific historical and cultural contexts" (p. 1434). The transformations of genres influence and are influenced by political, social, and economic conditions (Chandler, 1997; Thwaites, Davis, & Mules, 1994). In our study, we capture genre preference of the Lebanese audience as it reflects the interrelations of the political, social, and economic conditions of the place and time.

Genres and Subgenres

Industry practitioners and the general public make use of their own genre labels irrespective of the academic constructions of genres. Some publicly defined genre names tend to be more widely used than others (Chandler, 1997). According to Mittell (2001), generic terms are still salient enough that most people would agree on a common working definition for any genre. Consequently, we need to attend to genres as constructed by the viewers and operationalized from a cultural perspective (Mittell, 2001). Although some TV genres tend to be defined primarily by their subject matter, setting, or narrative form (Chandler, 1997), Abercrombie (1996) suggests that the most important genre distinction is between fictional and nonfictional programming as it relates to the purpose of the genre being informative or entertaining. Rubin's (1983) analysis of television viewing revealed two main types of television users: those who watch to pass time and get entertained, and those who seek information. Yet this strict distinction between information and entertainment formats became obsolete with the growing global popularity of infotainment programming (Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp, & Vorderer, 2014; Thussu, 2007). The boundaries between fictional

and nonfictional and between entertainment and information became blurred when an increasing number of people began using social media and late-night shows to stay up-to-date and informed.

Based on the laypeople's construction of what constitutes these genres, we test the predictive power of various sociodemographic factors in identifying viewers' preferences for watching the main television genres as defined by the publics and TV practitioners in Lebanon. Consequently, this work seeks to answer the following: What sociodemographic factors of media consumers help predict their genre preference? We take the Lebanese viewers' genres preferences as a case to answer this question.

Contextual Background

Lebanon is a Middle Eastern Arab country with an estimated population of 4.6 million (UNData, 2015) and around 1.2 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Human rights Watch, 2016). Lebanon has suffered persisting geopolitical unrest along with economic and safety concerns due to local and regional wars that affected the social fabric of the country (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). At the turn of the 21st century, Lebanon was still strongly influenced by Syria through a prominent Syrian military presence. This extensive Syrian political control remained until the explosive assassination of Lebanon's prime minister Rafic Hariri on February 14, 2005. The assassination sparked anger, public demonstrations, and extreme partisanship among the Lebanese, directly contributing to the establishment of two main political fronts—namely, March 8 (pro-Syrian coalition) and March 14 (anti-Syrian coalition). These two coalitions differed fundamentally on their position regarding the Syrian presence and intervention in Lebanon and its assumed responsibility for the tragic assassination of Hariri, a Sunni national leader (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016; Khatib, 2007; Nasr, 2010). March 8 and March 14 supporters and politicians split on partisan grounds, infusing a climate of extreme partisanship and raised tensions. The March 8 coalition mainly included two Shiite political parties (Nasr, 2010) and later attracted the Free Patriotic Movement party, a predominantly Christian party. March 14 supporters were mainly Sunni, Druze, and Christian citizens who were not part of the Free Patriotic Movement. Thus, politics and religion in Lebanon intertwined and were shown to affect Lebanese viewers' TV consumption (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016).

In 2011, a Syrian civil war erupted, spilling its tensions over to the Lebanese scene and influencing the political, economic, and social fabric of Lebanon. The Lebanese split between those who supported the Syrian revolution (opposition) and those who stood with the ruling government represented by President Bashar al-Assad. In Lebanon, March 8 followers are affiliated with the Syrian ruling regime who is supported by Iran, whereas the March 14 front openly criticizes and opposes the Syrian ruling party and has been supported by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 2015, March 8 and March 14 alliances embodied the wider spectrum of the Lebanese political parties, controlling more than 90% of Lebanese parliamentary seats (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). Although the political alliances moved with time from the initial momentum of Mr. Hariri's assassination, the complex political scene in Lebanon still revolves around a dichotomy of power between the March 8 pro-Syrian/Iranian axis and the March 14 pro-Saudi/American axis. Since 2011, the battles over power in Syria still get played in Lebanese politics through these two political fronts.

The Television Scene in Lebanon

Kraidy (2016) emphasized the importance of studying the popular culture of the Arab World, as it exhibits the social and political tensions and intersections in this region. All private commercial local television stations offer mixed programming, presenting news, political talk shows, and various locally and internationally produced entertainment programs such as sitcoms, series, and comedy shows (Khatib, 2007; Nötzold, 2009). Despite having access to news from national and international TV stations and online agencies, 94% of Lebanese still favor Lebanese news organizations to international ones (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2015). Keeping their news reporting partisan and entertainment cross-communal to receive a higher market share, Lebanese stations “pluralize internally particularly with regards to non-political programming to reach beyond their traditional partisan audience” (El Richani, 2013, p. 70; Nötzold, 2009).

Television remains the most popular medium for the Lebanese among all available media sources (Dennis et al., 2015). Because of its paramount importance, television as a medium was seen as a major tool for political parties in Lebanon to communicate with their audiences and to promote their political agendas (Dajani, 1992; Kraidy, 1999). Lebanese political parties used television for their propaganda by exerting pressure to control the news and political programming in their affiliated television stations (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016; Harb, 2013; Kraidy, 1999). The Lebanese media scene in general reflects the political and religious makeup of the country’s population with its diverse sectarian constituents (Dajani, 2002; Melki, 2013). During the civil war (1975–90), many unlicensed TV stations mushroomed in Lebanon, representing the various religious sects and political parties in the country. In 1990, the Taif agreement ended the war and closed most of the illegal TV stations, keeping a handful of licensed broadcasting organizations affiliated with the major political parties in the country. As politics and media intertwined, the polarization and antagonism in the country were further propagated through the news and the various programming carried by the local television stations (Cochrane, 2007).

Also, religion has imprinted the television scene in Lebanon with private TV stations affiliated with the main religious groups in Lebanon (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). Religion influences society by shaping people’s views on social issues, identifying moral values on what is right and what is wrong, and ultimately influencing media consumption choices (Farah & El Samad, 2014). In Lebanon, religious affiliation and religiosity were found to be key indicators of how a consumer perceives product advertisements, especially for controversial products (Farah & El Samad, 2014). Religion was also correlated with political affiliation predicting the selective exposure of media consumers to religiously affiliated partisan TV channels (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). With such a level of political partisanship and religious diversity in Lebanon, what sociodemographic variables can predict genre preference?

Method

Data Collection

With the diversity in the religious and political makeup of the Lebanese population, the best sampling technique to capture this diversity is the stratified random sampling method. The long civil war in Lebanon resulted in a sectarian country with homogenous religious groups living in communities based on

geography/location (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). Consequently, the population was divided into strata based on geographic location, and within each stratum, we performed a random sampling to select respondents. The strata divided by the geographic spread was meant to capture the diversity in the population by ensuring proper representation from all Lebanese religious sects and political affiliations.

Using a structured questionnaire, we surveyed 784 participants from various cities and villages in Lebanon's six geographic districts. We used shop intercept as well as home visits at different time slots to ensure representativeness of citizens from various backgrounds and occupations. We did not ask for participants' identifying information to preserve confidentiality. The self-administered survey was collected by a qualified data collector between May and June 2014, during regular programming seasons, to capture the normalcy in media consumption and genre preference, instead of exceptional viewing seasons, such as World Cup, Christmas, and/or Ramadan. We also avoided collecting data during abnormal political activity such as elections, in an attempt to understand the regular viewing patterns (opposed to extreme and exceptional periods of preelections and elections).

The survey included 48 questions asking respondents about their political orientation, religious backgrounds, and demographics (education, income, gender, marital status, etc.), as well as their television genre preferences. Genres in the questionnaire fell into three main groups categorized based on the common program offerings of the major Lebanese channels: political and news, drama series (Turkish, Syrian, and Lebanese), and entertainment (comedy, sport, and music). Turkish drama series (dubbed in Syrian Arabic dialect) have become extremely popular in recent years in the Arab region, attracting criticism from religious clerics and seen as a form of cultural imperialism (Buccianti, 2010; Kharroub & Weaver, 2014; Salamandra, 2012).

Viewing preferences are measured by asking each participant to indicate his or her interest level while watching a specific subgenre in each group on a 4-point Likert scale: (1) *not interested*, (2) *somewhat interested*, (3) *interested*, and (4) *highly interested*. By indicating their interest level, the participants provide a self-reported preference to watch the eight genres, but not necessarily actual viewership or media consumption patterns.

Methods of Analysis

The participants' responses on genre preferences were analyzed using logistic regression models. More specifically, for each subgenre under the three main genre groups, we created a viewing preference indicator that assumes a value of 1 if the viewer interest level was "interested" or "highly interested" and zero otherwise. "Somewhat interested" responses were collapsed with "no interest" responses as they do not reflect a strong conviction of interest in watching a certain genre. This collapse of categories allowed for logistic regression through the creation of a binary viewing preference and is conceptually sound to reflect a clear indication of interest in viewing genres. This binary viewing preference indicator is used as the dependent variable in the logistic models and is explained by the political partisanship of the viewer, his or her socioeconomic variables (education, income), religion, age, marital status, gender, and if a viewer lived abroad for at least one year. It is worth noting that we kept our regression models in this study parsimonious (parsimony is a desirable criterion in statistical model building according to Ledolter & Abraham, 1981).

Results

The participants in the sample were from various age groups, sects, education levels, and income groups (see Table 1). The sample was almost equally divided between women and men, had a majority (71.3%) of young participants (18–37 years of age), and 36% were married. The majority of participants were highly educated, with 65.3% having earned a university degree and 13.1% a graduate degree. They belonged to households from different income levels, with 44.5% having a high monthly income (more than \$3,000); 41.6% lived abroad for at least one year. As for political orientation, 47.8% of the sample declared being neutral, compared with 23.1% who identified themselves with the March 14 movement, and 29.1% with March 8. Concerning religion, all participants, except 7 respondents, identified their religious affiliation reflecting a distribution similar to that found in the population. With the absence of a national referendum since 1932, estimates of the religious breakdown in Lebanon are 28.7% Sunni, 28.4% Shia, 36.2% Christians, and 5.2% Druze (Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, 2019).

Table 1. Participants' Sociodemographic Data.

Variable	Percent	Variable	Percent
Political affiliation		Age	
March 8	29.1	Young (18–37)	71.3
March 14	23.1	Middle (38–48)	13.3
Neutral	47.8	Older (>48)	15.4
Religion*		Income	
Druze	4.7	Low (\leq \$1,000)	15.5
Catholic	5.5	Middle (\$1,000–\$3,000)	40.0
Maronite	18.2	High (>\$3,000)	44.5
Orthodox	8.8	Education	
Shia	28.1	Precollege	21.6
Sunni	28.1	College degree	65.3
Other	5.7	Graduate degree	13.1
Gender		Marital status	
Man	50.1	Married	36
Woman	49.9	Unmarried	64
Abroad			
Yes	41.6		
No	58.4		

* 7 participants did not answer this question

Exploring the factors that affect genre preferences involves first studying the overall preference for each category of programming. Besides the demographic information, the participants indicated their level of interest in watching eight different TV genres. The data analysis revealed that there were significant differences in genre preference among viewers.

As the samples are dependent, we used a repeated-measures ANOVA to compare the mean scores of preference. More specifically, we employed the Greenhouse–Geisser test because the assumption of sphericity

(equal variances) was violated. This test produced an F statistic of 98.84 with a p value of zero. According to Table 2, Comedy ($\mu = 2.9$) was the preferred genre among the Lebanese viewers (except for Shia), followed by News ($\mu = 2.6$). Turkish series ($\mu = 1.8$) were the least preferred genre, especially among the Shia viewers, closely followed by Syrian series ($\mu = 2.0$) that were least preferred by non-Muslim viewers.

Table 2. Average Scores of Viewing Preferences.

	News	Political	Turkish	Syrian	Lebanese	Comedy	Sports	Musical
Religion								
Shia	2.99	2.58	1.45	2.20	1.78	2.57	2.32	1.92
Sunni	2.32	1.85	2.14	2.15	1.88	3.08	1.89	2.42
Druze	2.38	2.00	1.65	1.57	2.11	3.05	2.22	2.30
Christian	2.63	2.21	2.02	1.82	2.24	2.96	2.25	2.32
Other	2.36	2.11	1.32	1.61	1.75	2.93	2.07	1.86
Affiliation								
March 14	2.64	2.33	1.97	1.76	2.10	3.04	2.24	2.25
March 8	3.00	2.65	1.62	2.15	1.91	2.63	2.22	1.93
Neutral	2.39	1.86	1.92	2.03	1.97	2.96	2.09	2.38
Gender								
Woman	2.36	1.85	2.08	2.14	2.06	2.94	1.87	2.38
Man	2.89	2.55	1.61	1.87	1.91	2.82	2.45	2.06
Age								
Young	2.49	2.09	1.81	2.00	1.91	2.97	2.26	2.30
Middle	2.92	2.44	1.87	1.97	2.12	2.70	1.96	2.02
Older	3.01	2.50	2.00	2.04	2.21	2.64	1.88	2.00
Income								
Low	2.38	1.90	2.11	2.41	1.79	2.84	2.01	2.48
Middle	2.61	2.21	1.89	2.16	2.00	2.87	2.18	2.25
Upper	2.77	2.35	1.72	1.77	2.05	2.89	2.16	2.07
Education								
Precollege	2.78	2.37	1.89	2.23	2.04	2.74	2.26	2.08
College	2.56	2.12	1.86	1.98	1.94	2.96	2.14	2.30
Graduate	2.70	2.36	1.68	1.70	2.08	2.77	2.07	2.03
Abroad								
Yes	2.64	2.21	1.76	1.98	1.95	2.93	2.10	2.15
No	2.62	2.19	1.90	2.02	2.00	2.84	2.20	2.26
Married								
Yes	2.86	2.46	1.89	2.05	2.17	2.65	1.96	2.06
No	2.49	2.05	1.82	1.97	1.88	3.01	2.27	2.31
Overall mean	2.60	2.20	1.80	2.00	2.00	2.90	2.20	2.20

Predicting and Explaining Viewing Preferences

In addition to the descriptive indicators, we used logistic regression analysis to better understand and explain the TV genre preference in terms of various sociodemographic factors, such as political affiliation, religion, and gender. For each category in the genre groups, we estimated a logistic model using as the dependent variable the viewing preference indicator explained in the Methods of Analysis section, and the eight predictor variables described in Table 1. For each set of the predictor variables, we chose a dummy for comparison. The dummy for religion, political affiliation, gender, age, education, lived abroad, and marital status is Christians, neutral, woman, young, precollege, not abroad, and unmarried categories, respectively. Thus, we obtained eight logistic regression models and arranged their results into three tables. We presented in each table the regression coefficients with their statistical significance, the odds ratios, and Nagelkerke's pseudo R -squared, which evaluates the goodness of fit of a logistic model. According to Pampel (2000), Nagelkerke's pseudo R -squared can have acceptable values between 10% and 20%. Bou-Hamad and Yehya (2016), in their work on partisan selective exposure among Lebanese viewers, found that Christians from different sects exhibited homogeneity in terms of their television viewing behavior. Consequently, we combined Christian sects into one group, which is used as a reference category for religion in the regression models.

Also, knowing that in Lebanon political affiliation is highly intertwined with political affiliation (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016), this study tested the impact of religion and political affiliation interaction on the significance of variables in predicting genre preferences. Seven of the eight regression models associated with the genres tested did not show any change in the significance and directionality of the independent variables when accounting for the interaction between religion and political affiliation. Only in the Syrian series subgenre did political affiliation alter the significance and directionality of Sunni's viewing preference.

News and Political Shows

For news, all independent predictors were significant ($p < .05$), except education, marital status, and living abroad for at least one year. Table 3 shows that middle-aged and older viewers are about 2.5 times more likely to be interested in watching news than the young group. As expected, it has also shown that men have significantly higher interest in watching news than women. According to the odds ratios, the strongest predictors for news viewing preference can be ranked as follows: age, gender, political partisanship, religion, and income. March 8 viewers tend to give importance to watching news about 2.5 times more than the neutral audience. In regard to religion, Shia participants were different from all other groups by showing a higher interest in watching news. This is not surprising, because Shia in Lebanon are more likely to affiliate with the March 8 movement. On the other hand, the news appears to interest those in the upper income rather than the lower income group about 78% of the time.

Table 3. Factors Predicting News and Political Genres Preference.

	News		Political Shows	
	Beta (SE)	OR	Beta (SE)	OR
Religion				
Shia	0.659** (0.223)	1.933	0.589** (0.219)	1.802
Sunni	-0.019 (0.215)	0.982	-0.006 (0.235)	0.994
Druze	0.203 (0.381)	1.225	0.190 (0.409)	1.209
Others	-0.074 (0.346)	0.929	0.136 (0.355)	1.146
Affiliation				
March 14	-0.151 (0.200)	1.083	0.574** (0.211)	1.775
March 8	0.909** (0.204)	2.481	1.15** (0.201)	3.157
Man	0.911** (0.167)	2.487	1.15** (0.173)	3.157
Age				
Middle	0.913** (0.306)	2.492	0.376 (0.297)	1.456
Older	0.962** (0.297)	2.616	0.333 (0.294)	1.395
Income				
Middle	0.142 (0.229)	1.153	0.837 (0.255)	1.472
High	0.578** (0.226)	1.783	0.873** (0.250)	2.395
Education				
College	0.137 (0.216)	1.147	0.196(0.217)	1.216
Graduate	0.057 (0.294)	1.058	-0.033(0.293)	0.968
Abroad	-0.234 (0.167)	0.792	-0.222(0.173)	0.801
Married	-0.103 (0.241)	0.902	0.255(0.244)	1.291
R-squared	21%		25%	

Note. Beta(s) are regression coefficients, OR(s) are odds ratios, standard errors (SE) are shown in parentheses. R-squared is Nagelkerke's pseudo R-squared for logistic regression. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The preference for political shows was similar to the preference patterns for watching the news, except for age, which was significant for news, but not for political shows. The strongest predictors for political shows were political affiliation and gender. March 8 viewers and men are 3 times more likely than those with a neutral affiliation and women, respectively, to prefer watching political shows. As in news, Shia and those earning higher incomes show higher interest than Christian and participants with lower incomes, respectively, in watching political shows.

TV Drama Series

In this study, we considered the three dominant types of drama shown on Lebanese TV channels—namely, Lebanese, Turkish, and Syrian series. Table 4 shows that three predictors were significant in Lebanese series: religion, gender, and income, with religion being the strongest predictor. Muslims whether Shia or Sunni show much less interest than Christians in watching Lebanese series. Men were 77% less likely than women to be interested in watching Lebanese series. The more affluent audience showed greater interest in watching Lebanese series than lower income viewers.

Table 4. Factors Predicting Turkish, Syrian, and Lebanese Series Genres Preference.

	Turkish		Lebanese		Syrian	
	Beta (SE)	OR	Beta (SE)	OR	Beta (SE)	OR
Religion						
Shia	-1.816** (0.285)	0.163	0.211 (0.218)	1.235	-0.997** (0.234)	0.369
Sunni	-0.064 (0.419)	0.938	0.506* (0.225)	1.659	-0.743** (0.226)	0.476
Druze	-0.605 (0.419)	0.546	-0.461 (0.452)	0.631	-0.336 (0.378)	0.715
Other	-1.992** (0.624)	0.136	-0.957* (0.471)	0.384	-1.406** (0.465)	0.245
Affiliation						
March 14	0.040 (0.216)	1.041	-0.483* (0.224)	0.617	0.114 (0.210)	1.121
March 8	-0.057 (0.234)	0.944	0.148 (0.197)	1.159	-0.241 (0.216)	0.785
Man	-0.713** (0.187)	0.490	-0.259 (0.169)	0.772	-0.569** (0.176)	0.566
Age						
Middle	0.124 (0.321)	1.132	-0.112 (0.299)	0.894	-0.155 (0.300)	0.856
Older	0.088 (0.318)	1.093	0.193 (0.289)	1.213	0.051 (0.290)	1.052
Income						
Middle	0.020 (0.244)	1.020	0.046 (0.224)	1.048	0.352 (0.260)	1.422
High	-0.575* (0.248)	0.563	-0.630** (0.230)	0.533	0.587* (0.254)	1.799
Education						
College	-0.346 (0.241)	0.707	-0.377 (0.212)	0.686	-0.278 (0.222)	0.757
Graduate	-0.480 (0.329)	0.619	-0.230 (0.293)	0.794	-0.107 (0.295)	0.899
Abroad	-0.192 (0.187)	0.825	0.235 (0.170)	1.265	-0.263 (0.177)	0.769
Married	0.390 (0.266)	1.478	-0.031 (0.239)	0.970	0.543* (0.247)	1.720
R-squared	19%		10%		12%	

Note. Beta(s) are regression coefficients, OR(s) are odds ratios, standard errors (SE) are shown in parentheses. R-squared is Nagelkerke's pseudo R-squared for logistic regression. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

As for the Turkish series, the strongest predictor was religion, with Shia viewers being 6 times (1/OR) less likely than Christian viewers to prefer watching Turkish series. Gender and income were also significant. Affluent viewers show less interest in watching Turkish series compared with those with lower incomes, and men are twice as less likely than women to prefer watching Turkish series. Although the political affiliation was not statistically significant, the signs of March 8 and March 14 coefficients were opposite.

Syrian series viewing preference appear to be highly affected by political partisanship. In fact, only in this subgenre, the political affiliation trumps the effect of the religion. Although Sunni viewers appear to be significantly more interested than Christians to watch Syrian series, when taking political affiliation into account, March 14 Sunni viewers were significantly less interested in watching Syrian series than were neutral and March 8 Sunnis. In effect, March 14 and March 8 have contrasting preferences, and March 14 audiences are 60% more likely than neutral viewers to avoid watching Syrian series. As for income, we noticed that upper income viewers are much less interested than those with lower incomes in watching Syrian series.

Entertainment

The entertainment genre in this study included comedy, sports, and musical shows. For comedy shows, the only two significant predictors were religion and income. Table 5 informs us that Shia are twice less likely than Christians to favor comedy shows, and participants from the middle and high-income groups are significantly more interested in comedy than are viewers belonging to the low-income group.

Table 5. Factors Predicting Comedy, Sports, and Musical Genres Preference.

	Comedy		Sport		Musical	
	Beta (SE)	OR	Beta (SE)	OR	Beta (SE)	OR
Religion						
Shia	-0.709** (0.216)	0.492	0.275 (0.211)	1.316	-0.988** (0.223)	0.372
Sunni	-0.102 (0.233)	0.903	-0.655** (0.225)	0.519	-0.415* (0.212)	0.660
Druze	-0.292 (0.397)	0.747	0.227 (0.368)	1.254	-0.288 (0.378)	0.715
Other	-0.661 (0.347)	0.516	-0.539 (0.356)	0.583	-0.790* (0.365)	0.454
Affiliation						
March 14	0.165 (0.218)	1.179	0.442* (0.204)	1.556	-0.160 (0.198)	0.852
March 8	-0.324 (0.194)	0.723	0.002 (0.197)	1.002	-0.685** (0.203)	0.504
Man						
	-0.104 (0.168)	0.901	0.697** (0.163)	2.008	-0.275 (0.164)	0.760
Age						
Middle	-0.241 (0.285)	0.786	-0.260 (0.292)	0.771	-0.499 (0.297)	0.607
Older	-0.339 (0.279)	0.712	-0.635* (0.294)	0.530	-0.620* (0.290)	0.538
Income						
Middle	0.510* (0.231)	1.665	0.058 (0.232)	1.060	-0.231 (0.222)	0.794
High	0.592** (0.230)	1.807	0.322 (0.228)	1.380	-0.587** (0.254)	0.490
Education						
College	0.020 (0.212)	1.020	-0.333 (0.207)	0.717	0.255 (0.216)	1.291
Graduate	-0.252 (0.282)	0.778	-0.459 (0.286)	0.632	-0.013 (0.297)	0.987
Abroad						
	0.143 (0.169)	1.154	-0.174 (0.165)	0.840	-0.179 (0.164)	0.836
Married						
	-0.558* (0.234)	0.572	-0.364 (0.236)	0.695	0.360 (0.240)	1.434
R-squared	10%		13%		13%	

Note. Beta(s) are regression coefficients, OR(s) are odds ratios, standard errors (SE) are shown in parentheses. R-squared is Nagelkerke's pseudo R-squared for logistic regression. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

As for sports programs, the strongest predictor is gender, where men were twice as likely than women to prefer watching this genre of programs. Political affiliation and religion as well as age were also significant predictors for sports. Although March 14 audiences are 50% more likely than neutrals to watch sports, Sunni are about twice less likely than Christians to be interested in sports. As for age, we can see clearly that older adults are much less interested in sports than the young group.

Muslims generally avoided musical shows. This opposition is more pronounced for Shia who are 2.7 times less likely than Christians to watch musical shows. From the political perspective, March 8 audiences showed less interest in music than neutrals did. As for age, older adults are about twice as likely than young

people to not watch musical shows. Finally, the upper income group showed less interest than the lower income group in watching the musical genre.

Discussion

This work contributes to the media studies literature by connecting genre preference to sociocultural factors such as religion, political affiliation, and socioeconomic standards. It shows that people's belief systems might influence their choice of media content and their worldview of what is interesting and worth pursuing. Media content reinforces individual disposition and is chosen based on its congruence with existing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Atkin, 1973; Dutta-Bergman, 2004). These connections solidify the genres theory in its historical and cultural underpinnings through attending to the complexities of audiences at certain historical points.

This study shows that sociocultural factors can affect the lens through which audiences come to value certain genres. Participants who exhibit similar genre preference might be reflecting a social expectation in their cultural contexts, and thus they are conditioned to conform to these expectations. Society penalizes those who violate stereotypes and does not condone defiant behavior (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). As Knobloch-Westerwick (2015) noted, sociodemographic characteristics such as age or gender do not cause "the shared media selection behavior" (p. 253), but rather people with similar sociodemographic are "just more likely to be in similar life circumstances and similar concrete situations" (p. 256).

In agreement with findings in the literature, men were more likely than women to prefer watching sports, political programs, and news, and less likely to prefer watching soap operas (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Also, findings show that older viewers are more likely to watch news and less likely to watch sports and musicals. In many cultures, men are expected to exhibit an achiever attitude, to excel in their professional world, and to be interested in sports. Women, on the other hand, are expected to focus on social relationships and serve as supportive social beings. These expectations become implicit knowledge acquired at a very young age (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Eventually, media users tend to adhere to these gender roles constructed in their social environment.

In Lebanon, social expectations of men and women fall in line with what is found in the literature in terms of nurturing a more outgoing lifestyle for men, feeding their interest in sports and politics, which in turn translates into engagement in political activities and sports. The patriarchal system in Lebanon still confines women's participation in politics with a symbolic presence of women in the Lebanese parliament and in the political arena. Historically, the very few Lebanese women who participated in politics inherited their husbands' legacy in politics rather than benefiting from grassroots support. Also, men are socialized into sports as young boys, who are encouraged to play sports such as football or basketball, whereas girls are encouraged to learn dancing or noncompetitive sports such as gymnastics. Petersen (2011) notes this lack of social support for women and girls to play sports in Lebanon, especially in rural areas, and highlights recent efforts to encourage girls to enter sports.

Furthermore, in contexts with high political tensions and religious diversity, media consumption patterns can reflect stratification echoing this diversity. News and political programs in Lebanon are divisive,

feeding on the diverse political and religious affiliation of the viewers (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016). The news agenda in Lebanon is tied to the politics of the TV stations, who in turn are connected to complex religious–political systems. Partisan selective exposure was observed in news consumption (Bou-Hamad & Yehya, 2016), with viewers' political affiliations affecting which TV channels they watched based on the congruence of their politics and the channels' political news agenda.

It was clear in this study that religion was a main predictive factor in genre preference, especially for news, political programs, and series. Shia viewers were more likely than Christians to watch news and political shows and less likely to watch comedy, Turkish and Lebanese series, and musicals. Sunnis reflected less preference than Christians to watch Lebanese series, sports, and musicals, and surprisingly more preference to watch Syrian series only when these Sunni viewers supported March 8.

It is surprising how the viewers' political and religious backgrounds affected their preferences to watching series (soap operas) based on the country of origin and the perceived affiliation of these soap operas with larger social structures and political agendas. This study is the first to our knowledge to examine the impact of the country of origin for a specific genre (series) on the viewers' preference. Based on their religious and political affiliation, Lebanese viewers exhibited significantly different levels of interest in viewing Lebanese, Syrian, and Turkish series. In the Lebanese context, this preference might be a function of the culture and the social construction of the Lebanese identity.

The Shia viewers, for example, were less likely than their fellow Sunni viewers to watch Turkish series, and Christians were more likely than both the Sunnis and the Shias to show preference for the Lebanese series. This viewing preference based on the country of origin might reflect the political and religious alignment of the viewer with that of the country of origin, or similarity to the depictions of lifestyle propagating in these series.

To help contextualize these findings, it is important to connect them to sociohistorical elements. For example, the majority of Lebanese Christians express pride in their Lebanese Phoenician heritage and thus root for the Lebanese production that speaks their language and resembles their Lebanese identity. As Khazaal (2018) notes in her book *Pretty Liars*:

Historically situated political interests have played a crucial role in constructing Lebanese identity through language. Christian minority sects . . . have constructed a version of Lebanese identity by "distancing" with a mythological Phoenician past through the use of the Lebanese vernacular. (p. 23)

This might explain why Christians were significantly more interested than other viewers in watching Lebanese series that speak their language and reflect their way of life.

As for the Turkish series, they entered the Arab World dubbed in colloquial Syrian Arab dialect. Popular Turkish series such as *Nour* and *Harem El-Sultan* created a social phenomenon that caused a stir in the region. Turkish series "went where Arab television drama never dared in depicting independent career women, equitable marital relationships, extramarital sex, drinking and abortion" (Salamandra, 2012, p. 52).

These Turkish productions included beautiful scenery, fancy locations and, handsome actors who caught the hearts of women (Salamandra, 2012). Although it was expected that women were significantly more interested than men in watching Turkish series, it was surprising to discover that the religion and political affiliation of the viewers were also significant factors in the preference to watch this subgenre. For example, Shia viewers and March 8 viewers are significantly less interested in watching Turkish series. This is in line with the politics of these viewers, knowing that Turkey opposes the Syrian regime and is heavily involved in the Syrian conflict.

Compared with the Turkish and the Lebanese series, the Syrian series feature a more conservative narrative with traditional gender roles and greater focus on family dynamics. March 8 viewers who support the Syrian regime expressed a significantly higher interest than did neutral viewers and March 14 viewers in watching Syrian series. Religion also was a significant variable in the viewers' preference to watch Syrian series. Historically, Muslims (especially Sunnis) were more open to Arabism and associated with an Arab identity more than their fellow Christians. It could be that Muslim viewers were more interested than Christians in viewing Syrian series as these productions reflected a more conservative lifestyle and promoted family-oriented content. Yet the partisanship of the Sunni viewers seemed to affect their interest in watching Syrian series. After the civil war started in Syria in 2011, Syrian drama operated in production sites under regime control. Although neutral and March 8 Sunni viewers preferred watching Syrian series significantly more than Christians did, those who identified with the March 14 movement were significantly less interested than Christians and other sects to prefer to watch these series.

Conclusion

Despite this clear selective exposure to TV genres based on religion and political affiliation, there is an opportunity to look for common grounds that can unify people through converging experiential moments. For example, during the civil war and the Israeli invasions, the Lebanese went to great lengths to watch the World Cup series (Khazaal, 2018). At that time caring for sports might have seemed inappropriate (Khazaal, 2018), but the passion to watch football unified the Lebanese, despite their differences in religion, political affiliations, and teams they supported. Sports still bring Lebanese together, especially when a national team is competing on an international or regional level. Comedy, too, can serve as a platform to unify the Lebanese through satirical programs that move away from partisanship and closer to elevating the daily pressures through lightheartedness and humor.

Limitations and Future Research

As the study was based on the Lebanese context, it presents culturally biased results and interpretations from an Arab, Middle Eastern, highly polarized, contested context. This constitutes one of the limitations of the study, but also one of its main strengths, as it highlights cultural tensions as they come to play on media preferences. With the dearth of research on the Arab World and the complexities of the region, this work provides fresh light on the media scene and the interplays of politics, religion, and media preference. We call for replication of this study in other similar contexts (such as Singapore) where religious and political diversity prevail.

As participants self-reported their genre preference without any tracking of actual viewing behavior of the various genres, it would help to match the declared preference with measured viewership to confirm results. We recommend future research to delve into the uses and gratifications of various religious groups as they deconstruct why they prefer certain genres over others. It is important to understand why genre preference is linked to religious practices and political partisanship, and what role the viewers' upbringing plays in shaping these preferences.

We also recommend that future studies look more to the issue of country of origin and how people exercise selective exposure to genre and subgenres based on the politics of the place. It is also interesting to track these preferences over time as politics change.

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