


Viewing Habits and Patterns of Ramadan Television Programs Among the Community of the United Arab Emirates: A Field Study of a Sample of University Students

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to analyse the viewing habits and patterns of Ramadan television programs among university students in the United Arab Emirates, with a focus on the impact of technological advancements on their consumption of media content. Employing a descriptive survey methodology, it utilized an electronic questionnaire that included a purposive non-probability sample of 151 university students in the UAE. The study yielded the following results: 1. A decline in traditional television viewing in favor of digital platforms such as "Shahid" and "Watch It," with 58% of students spending less than two hours watching, while 30% do not watch at all. 2. Stable viewing rates during Ramadan and outside of it, with 70% continuing to watch television during the holy month. 3. An increase in viewing hours during Ramadan, where the percentage of those watching for less than an hour rose to 46% compared to 28% outside of Ramadan. 4. The preferred viewing times were between 9 PM and midnight (46%), followed by periods before and after iftar. 5. The favored channels were predominantly Emirati, such as Abu Dhabi, Sama Dubai, Dubai, and Emirates. 6. Dramatic series topped the list of the most viewed programs (45%), followed by heritage programs (18%). 7. Motivations for viewing included acquiring knowledge (37.1%), passing time (21.9%), and alleviating boredom (15.9%). 8. The challenges faced by students included family visits (37.7%), community events (21.9%), and scheduling conflicts with university lectures (18.5%). 9. The evaluation of television programs was moderate for 42.4% due to repetition, whereas 31.1% regarded them as strong, and 14.6% considered them very strong. 10. The most favored television program among the sample was "Al-Sharah," followed by "Awlad Badia Al-Atawila," with entertainment value and the subject matter being the prominent reasons for preference.

Keywords: Television viewing, Viewing habits, Satisfactions and motivations, Ramadan Programming, Traditional Television.

INTRODUCTION

The media and entertainment landscape during the month of Ramadan in the Middle East, as well as in other regions with significant Muslim populations, witnesses a marked surge in media consumption. This increase is driven by distinctive cultural and social dynamics that prompt television networks across the region to intensify their efforts in producing high-quality content. These networks engage in heightened competition to capture audience attention through a wide array of programming, including comedy series, hidden camera shows, dramas, fantasy productions, and reality television.

Ramadan represents the peak television season in the region, often referred to as a "return to television" period. For many years, Muslim families have traditionally gathered around their screens during Iftar, the evening meal that breaks the daily fast. In response, Arab television channels design tailored programming heavily interspersed with advertisements—advertising rates typically double during this month. The expansion of satellite and digital broadcasting has further enabled Ramadan-related content, including entertainment and drama series, to reach diasporic audiences around the globe. Thus, Ramadan emerges not only as a religious occasion but also as a cultural moment wherein television serves as a medium through which individuals reconnect with their cultural origins and identities.

Conversely, the evolving media environment—characterized by screen fragmentation, shortened attention spans, and message saturation—has had a profound impact on television viewership patterns, content scheduling strategies, and the audience's self-programming behaviors. This study aims to explore these shifts by examining the television viewing habits and patterns of young people in the United Arab Emirates during the month of Ramadan.

Problem Statement

Consumer behavior undergoes significant transformation during the month of Ramadan, marked by noticeable shifts in purchasing patterns across consumer goods, travel, luxury items, and electronics, as well as changes in media consumption—including increased engagement with television content. While social media remains influential in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, approximately 72% of online time is spent on the open internet (Kane, 2024). Consumers devote most of this time to websites, mobile applications, digital audio platforms, gaming, TV streaming services, and various forms of out-of-home digital advertising.

According to the "Ramadan Insights" report, the MENA region holds the global record for the highest number of internet-connected devices per household, with an average of 14 devices. The way people spend their time online is evolving, with media consumption becoming highly fragmented. Consumers now interact daily with a diverse array of devices and digital channels.

During Ramadan, time spent watching television content increases significantly, with a 24% rise in traditional TV viewership and a 19% growth in streamed and online video consumption (The Trade Desk Intelligence, 2023). In an increasingly connected communication environment—characterized by ubiquitous internet access, the proliferation of online platforms such as social media and video-on-demand services, and the use of diverse digital devices including smartphones and tablets—new viewing habits and patterns have emerged, particularly among Generations Y and Z. These evolving behaviors pose a substantial challenge to traditional television networks, which rely heavily on the Ramadan season as a critical driver of audience engagement and advertising revenue.

In light of the aforementioned dynamics, the central research problem lies in investigating the following question:

What are the viewing habits and patterns of the Emirati audience regarding television programming during the month of Ramadan in a rapidly evolving communication environment?

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure the level of interest among university students in television programs during the month of Ramadan.
2. To analyze the impact of communication technologies on television content consumption among university students during Ramadan.
3. To evaluate audience perceptions of the television programming offered during the Ramadan season.

Research Questions

Arising from the study's problem and objectives, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of television viewership during Ramadan programming?
2. What are the viewing habits and patterns of university students in the United Arab Emirates regarding Ramadan television programs?
3. What are the motivations behind the viewing behaviors of university students toward Ramadan television content in the UAE?
4. How do university students in the UAE evaluate the quality and relevance of Ramadan television programming?

Conceptual Framework of the Study

1. Television Viewing

Television viewing is considered both an individual and collective activity. According to Nasr Eddine Al-Ayadi (1998), it is “a personal or social practice, although it appears to be an intimate individual decision made within a family context.” Often, individuals watch television programs not solely based on personal preference, but rather due to group affiliation, enabling them to engage in conversations and analyses with peers and avoid social isolation. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, television viewing is defined as “a visual-interactive process between perceived stimuli—via television images—and the viewer, within a selective and temporally structured context governed by simultaneity and various temporal layers of television” (Laraj, 2005, p. 107).

2. Audience

Milon Boom defines the audience as “a group of people who have watched or listened to a particular broadcast, whether on radio or television” (Boom et al., 1990, p. 11). Audience measurement is conducted regularly by various opinion polling institutions. Numerically, the audience refers to the total number of individuals expected to receive a media message from a radio station, television channel, newspaper, or website. These individuals typically possess specific characteristics relevant to the media sender, such as being intellectuals, youth, homemakers, employees, or consumers.

Francis Balle further expands the concept, stating: “The audience consists of newspaper readers, television viewers, radio program listeners, theatergoers, website visitors, and advertising consumers” (Balle, 2009, p. 565). In this study, the audience is defined as university students in the United Arab Emirates who watch television programs during Ramadan to fulfill specific needs.

3. Media Use

The French equivalent of “use” is *usage*, which the Dictionary of Sociology defines as a behavior pattern accepted by society (Ghaith, 1979, p. 36). Behaviorists view use as linked to repetition and practice; according to their theory, if a stimulus-response bond is formed, repetition reinforces this link (Taha, p. 360). In media studies, the concept is addressed through the “Uses and Gratifications” approach, which seeks to understand what people do with media. It emphasizes an active and purposeful audience that selects media content to satisfy specific needs, within a defined context. Media use, particularly of television, is intentional and goal-oriented, shaped by users’ experiences, preferences, and social interactions. Accordingly, media use in this study refers to the deliberate use of television by university students to watch Ramadan programs in order to fulfill personal and social needs.

4. Gratification

Gratification is defined as “the satisfaction of a desire, achievement of a goal, or reduction of a drive. It refers to the state in which this occurs” (Hegab, 2003, p. 403). From a psychoanalytic perspective, gratification reduces tension and restores a state of pleasure. There are natural gratifications (e.g., social interaction) and compensatory gratifications (e.g., through media). The less individuals experience natural gratification, the more they depend on media-based gratification.

Wenner categorized media gratifications into two types (Bouzeidi, 2009, pp. 21–22):

- **Content Gratifications:**
 - *Directive:* Gaining information or affirming identity.
 - *Social:* Connecting individual knowledge with social relationships.
- **Process Gratifications:**
 - *Quasi-directive:* Reducing stress, excitement, entertainment.
 - *Quasi-social:* Emotional empathy and identification.

In this study, gratification refers to the fulfillment of university students' various needs through selective exposure to preferred television programs during Ramadan, motivated by different personal and contextual factors.

5. Motivation

According to the *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (Doron & Parot, p. 712), motivation emerges from studying variables within a network of relationships, with the complexity of needs reflecting the complexity of action. Motivation evolves through four stages:

- A) Framing of needs,
- B) Cognitive formation (goals/projects),
- C) Instrumental incentive (means and ends),
- D) Personality (functional autonomy).

Motivation is also defined as a physiological or psychological state that drives behavior toward specific stimuli (Abdel Wahab, 1984, p. 73). Fargaly adds that it represents a state of inner tension or readiness that stimulates and sustains mental or physical behavior toward a specific goal (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1992, p. 306).

Thus, motivations are driving forces behind communication behavior, shaped by biological, psychological, and social factors. If natural means to fulfill needs are unavailable, individuals turn to media as alternative tools. In this study, we aim to identify the key motivations that prompt university students to watch television programs during Ramadan, whether for entertainment, psychological, or social reasons.

Study Methodology and Tools

This descriptive study employs the survey method, which is considered one of the fundamental approaches in descriptive research (Ahmad Badr, 1982). Researcher Thouqan Obeidat defines it as: "The method that involves collecting information and data about the studied phenomenon in order to understand its current status, and identify its strengths and weaknesses" (Ahmad bin Mersali, 2005).

This method was applied through the following two approaches:

A. Documentary Approach

This involved collecting theoretical data from books and academic sources to build a scientific perspective on the study topic by reviewing various relevant references and materials.

B. Applied Approach

This approach was used to gather data and information from the research sample through a questionnaire, which served as the main tool for collecting quantitative data.

Questionnaire Design

Based on the nature of the required data, the chosen methodology, the available timeframe, and the financial resources, the researchers concluded that the most appropriate tool for collecting information from the specified sample was the questionnaire. This tool is not merely a set of questions posed to respondents, but rather carefully designed verbal stimuli. Accordingly, the researchers developed the questionnaire based on:

- Previous studies related to the topic
- The theoretical framework of the study
- Consultations with professors specializing in media and communication sciences, as well as sociology

Validity of the Questionnaire Statements: Expert Validation

The preliminary version of the questionnaire was presented to a group of expert reviewers in the field, who have sufficient knowledge of the study topic. The number of reviewers was three professors. The aim was to validate the questionnaire and determine its accuracy in terms of: the clarity and linguistic precision of the questionnaire items, the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire in covering all dimensions and areas of the study, and the relevance of each item to its designated domain. Items that did not achieve at least 90% agreement among the experts regarding their suitability were either removed or replaced with new suggestions. Accordingly, the final number of questionnaire items was determined based on this step (Abu Howeij et al., 2002). The researchers considered the reviewers' feedback and made necessary modifications to the questionnaire items. As a result, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of eighteen questions distributed across three axes:

- Axis 1: General Information – Questions 1 to 4

- Axis 2: Viewing Habits and Patterns of Television Programs during Ramadan – Questions 5 to 13
- Axis 3: Audience Evaluation of Ramadan Television Programs – Questions 14 to 18

Reliability of the Questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient)

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers distributed the revised version, following the experts' recommendations, to a pilot sample consisting of 20 individuals from Liwa College students in Abu Dhabi. The reliability of the questionnaire scores was verified by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each axis separately to confirm the reliability of the sub-items. Then, the average was calculated to obtain the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the second and third axes using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The resulting Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.839, which is high and close to the value of "1", indicating a strong reliability. Additionally, the test allowed the researchers to verify the consistency of the questionnaire's axes and statements by calculating the Alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire in case any primary or sub-item was removed.

Study Population and Sample

From the outset, the researchers defined the study population as citizens and Arab expatriates residing in the United Arab Emirates. Due to the difficulty in obtaining exact statistics of the study population, the researchers adopted a non-probability purposive sample from university students. The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms and shared through student groups on WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The snowball sampling technique was employed, whereby initial respondents were asked to share the questionnaire with their peers within their social networks and among students at various universities across the UAE. The total number of valid responses collected during the study period (from April 20, 2024, to July 20, 2024) reached 151 respondents.

Study Challenges

The study faced several challenges, notably the slow and delayed response to the questionnaire and the limited number of Arabic references and studies specifically focused on the Emirati society's viewing habits of television programs during Ramadan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Samer Raja Al-Ghalilat (2009): The Use of Satellite Channels and the Gratifications Achieved by Jordanian University Students

This study aimed to identify the habits and patterns of exposure to satellite channels among Jordanian university students and to explore the motives and gratifications achieved. The researcher posed the following question: How do Jordanian university students interact with the content of satellite channels? The researcher applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory using a descriptive-analytical approach, distributing a questionnaire to 480 male and female students from various public and private universities in Jordan.

Key findings were:

- The majority of respondents watch satellite channels, particularly those specialized in broadcasting films, while economic issues received the least attention.
- MBC topped the list of most-watched channels among the respondents.
- The levels of gratification were positive, especially regarding psychological influences.
- Respondents' motivations for watching satellite channels were also positive, particularly in terms of psychological satisfaction.
- No statistically significant differences were found in the levels of gratification based on the type of university the students attended.
- Statistically significant differences were found in the level of motivations for watching satellite channels based on the university type.

2. Iman Abdulrahman Hamid (2019): The Role of Egyptian Ramadan Drama in Promoting Values and Behavior among Female University Students in Baghdad

The researcher aimed to identify the impact of Egyptian drama series aired during Ramadan on the behavior and value systems of female university students, particularly considering that dramatic content is especially appealing to women. The study raised the following questions:

1. What are the most-watched types of Egyptian drama series during Ramadan?
2. What are the reasons behind this, and how frequent is the viewing?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the content of Egyptian dramas and Iraqi society?
4. What behavioral changes result from watching Egyptian drama series?

The researcher adopted a survey method focused on current or ongoing phenomena. To achieve the study's goal, 120 questionnaires were distributed equally between students from the College of Education and the College of Science.

Key findings include:

- Lying was the most influenced behavior at 16.6%, indicating that these series pose a real threat to students' behavior by introducing foreign and unfamiliar conduct.
- 51% of respondents reported a negative shift in their perception of societal values due to exposure to Egyptian dramas, with 27.5% changing their views on equality and justice in Arab countries.
- 65% of respondents believed that the content of Egyptian drama contradicts Iraqi cultural norms, particularly regarding clothing, nightlife, alcohol consumption, and illicit relationships.
- The primary reason for watching Egyptian dramas was habitual viewing during Ramadan, especially due to the strength of Egyptian production and the lack of Iraqi drama.
- The researcher emphasized the need to support local Iraqi drama production, including theme selection, scriptwriting, and unique directorial vision to compete with Egyptian drama.

3. Ashraf Al-Zoubi (2022): The Role of Ramadan Drama in Influencing the Jordanian Audience: A Descriptive Survey Study

This study focused on the viewing habits and patterns of the Jordanian public regarding Ramadan drama and examined its cognitive, behavioral, and emotional impacts. Using a descriptive methodology, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to gather respondents' opinions.

Key findings include:

- Most participants watch Ramadan dramas more than four days a week, averaging two hours per day in the evening after Iftar.
- The vast majority of the sample follows Ro'ya TV and prefers Syrian dramas with social themes.
- The use of colloquial dialect in Syrian dramas attracted a large segment of the Jordanian audience.
- Most respondents viewed Ramadan as an opportunity to watch dramas with family, with moderate cognitive and behavioral effects.
- Participants considered Ramadan dramas to be moderate in terms of presentation, topic relevance, and alignment with social customs.

4. Reem Al-Sharif (September 2021): *Watching Drama Series on Alternative Screens and Its Impact on Traditional Television Viewing*

This study aimed to identify the reasons why Egyptian youth watch Ramadan series on websites and mobile applications (alternative screens) and to assess the influence of modern technology platforms on the frequency of traditional TV viewing. A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 361 educated Egyptian youth aged up to 35 who follow television drama. The sample was selected using the available sampling technique. Key findings include:

- The ability to skip advertisements and watch content at a convenient time were the main reasons for choosing to view Ramadan series via websites and mobile apps.
- Egyptian youth perceive a significant impact of digital platforms and mobile apps on declining traditional TV viewership.
- A substantial proportion of youth considers the availability of Ramadan series on websites and apps—even if unauthorized—as either outright theft or a violation of intellectual property rights.

5. Mai Ahmed Abu Al-Saud (2015): *The Social Responsibility of Egyptian Television Drama: An Analytical Study of a Sample of Ramadan Series*

This study aimed to identify the types of issues addressed in Ramadan dramas, the nature of their treatment, the presence of conflicts within the shows, and the main causes and nature of these conflicts. It also examined how well the Ramadan dramas adhered to the values, principles, and behaviors of Egyptian society. The content analysis focused on three 30-episode Egyptian TV series aired between June 29 and July 29, 2014, totaling 51 hours. The main findings were:

- Some positive behaviors supporting social responsibility appeared infrequently, despite their importance to society.
- The series *Ibn Halal* led in depicting negative behaviors that undermine social responsibility.
- Detailed portrayals of crime, primal instincts, and brutal prison torture were evident in *Ibn Halal* and *Sijn Al-Nisa*, but not as much in *Dalaa' Al-Banat*.
- The selected dramas demonstrated a high level of non-compliance with social, ethical, and professional responsibility standards.

6. **Amina Al-Oumari & Ashraf Doudah (2017):** *Moroccan Youth Consumption of Ramadan TV Programs and the Challenges of the Digital Space*

The researchers focused on exposure patterns and the consumption of Ramadan TV programs by Moroccan youth, viewing Ramadan as an opportunity for institutions to promote their products, while audiences exhibit unique behaviors. With the advancement of digital platforms allowing audiences to control their viewing experience, the study investigated youth consumption behavior in the digital age. This qualitative study surveyed 180 Moroccan youth selected based on demographic and social characteristics through interviews conducted during Ramadan 2017. The study found:

- 50% of respondents used digital platforms to download their favorite shows due to the unsuitability of traditional TV broadcasts (91%).
- 85% of respondents used YouTube, along with other on-demand platforms.
- 50% expressed disinterest in Ramadan programming due to its content, which they deemed inappropriate.
- 45% of viewers occasionally discussed Ramadan content.
- National TV channels no longer attracted viewers in terms of format and technique, although a return to these channels was noted during Ramadan due to improved content quality.

Commentary on Previous Studies

Most studies have attempted to focus on the relationship between Ramadan TV programs and Arab audiences in Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco. These studies varied between quantitative approaches, which concentrated on habits and patterns of exposure and viewing especially during the holy month of Ramadan but largely neglected the type of content favored by the targeted audience; and qualitative studies, which focused on media content and its effects but overlooked audience-related variables.

However, what draws attention is the scarcity of studies that have addressed the Emirati society both in form and content. This gap will be the focus of our study, which investigates the viewing patterns of Ramadan programs in the UAE and identifies the types of content that attract the Emirati audience.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Uses and Gratifications Approach

Every academic study is built on a theoretical background that serves as its foundation. In our study, the Uses and Gratifications approach forms the theoretical basis. Whereas earlier research focused on what media do to the audience, the emphasis has shifted to what the audience does with the media. This shift did not come arbitrarily but was preceded by studies that paved the way for this thinking, including the Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory views the audience as an active and positive participant in the communication process, primarily examining motivations, needs, desires, expectations, and gratifications in a dialectical relationship between media and the audience.

The Uses and Gratifications approach is based on five fundamental assumptions:

1. Media audiences are active participants in the communication process, and their use of media aims to fulfill specific goals and meet expectations (Makkawi, p.241). Exposure to media is seen as an expression of psychological motivations or needs of the audience (Katz, 1974, p.21).

2. Media use reflects needs recognized by the audience, influenced by individual differences and social interaction factors, so needs vary from one person to another.
3. Audience members select messages and content that satisfy their needs; they use media rather than being passively used by it.
4. Audiences clearly identify their needs and motivations and thus choose appropriate media to satisfy these needs, possessing sufficient awareness of their interests and motivations, and can express or at least recognize them if asked.
5. Cultural norms prevailing in a society can be inferred from audience media usage, not just from content analysis.

This approach rests on essential elements important to understanding its dimensions, such as:

- The Uses and Gratifications approach acknowledges that media audiences are not isolated individuals detached from their reality and society. Audience members belong to organized social groups and share a common culture, so many of their media-related needs are linked to their social environment, affirming the psychological and social origins of this theory.

Regarding motives for exposure, two types can be distinguished:

- **Instrumental motives:** Aimed at acquiring information, knowledge, and learning generally, including watching news bulletins, educational, and cultural programs.
- **Ritualized motives:** Aimed at passing time, entertainment, relaxation, companionship, and escapism, including exposure to dramatic content such as movies, series, variety shows, and entertainment programs (Al-Husseini, p.83).

Expectations from media are among the most important aspects of this approach. They arise from audience motives for media exposure, influenced also by individuals' psychological and social backgrounds. Media exposure depends on audience expectations, which vary by individual differences and cultural distinctions, reflecting the dominant culture in society (Makkawi, p.243).

Studies confirm a relationship between seeking gratifications and media exposure; increased exposure reflects the audience's activity and ability to select information that satisfies their needs. The Uses and Gratifications approach emphasizes that audience members are driven by psychological and social factors to engage with media to satisfy different needs. In summary, diverse social and psychological conditions create various audience needs, which they seek to satisfy through media exposure (McQuail & Gurevitch, 1974, p.290).

Development of the Uses and Gratifications Approach

Early traditional research was dominated by the concept of "escapism" criticized by popular culture theorists. However, studies in the early 1970s tried to overcome this limitation. For instance, McQuail et al. (1972) focused on describing audience members' subjective experiences with media, specifically television, exploring the functions specific content fulfills under certain conditions. They assumed that:

- Television viewing is goal-oriented,
- Viewers themselves can reveal their goals, interests, and motivations,
- There are diverse patterns of motives and gratification,
- Gratifications can be analyzed as distinct conceptual units,
- Media use is an interactive process linking content, needs, perceptions, roles, values, and context, where social experience creates needs some of which are satisfied via media (Boumaiza, p.62).

This framework portrays audiences as active and positive rather than passive receivers, consciously selecting media and content that meet their psychological and social needs through available informational and entertainment channels (Mizyan, p.41).

McQuail et al. identified three components of escapism:

- Escaping routine daily life,
- Escaping life's burdens,
- Emotional catharsis (Boumaiza, p.63).

They also linked personal relationships to media through "parasocial interaction," meaning:

- Virtual companionship with characters and situations,
- Social utility, where individuals gain information useful in their social interactions.

Regarding personal identity, three psychological elements were noted:

- **Personal reference:** Exposure to content aligning with individual preferences and values,
- **Reality exploration:** Gaining insight through realistic content like news or fictional content like dramas,
- **Value reinforcement:** Engaging with content consistent with one's values while avoiding conflicting content,

- **Environmental surveillance:** Keeping informed about political, economic, and cultural events.

Windhal & Rosengren (1972) studied media and audience relationships in Sweden, linking motivations to biological, psychological, social, and cultural needs, fulfilled via natural or substitute (media) functions (Boumaiza, p.64).

Windhal (1979) summarized Uses and Gratifications, noting that media content characteristics largely determine outcomes, media use acts as a mediator enhancing content effects, and media use can displace or limit other activities. When media use is the main cause of an outcome, this is termed a "consequence," bridging influence and uses and gratifications research.

Zillman (1980s) linked mood with media choices: boredom encourages exciting content; stress promotes relaxing content. Needs relate to personality, maturity, background, and social roles.

McQuail (1987) identified typical reasons for TV use: information, education, self-education, personal identity, integration and interaction, and entertainment (Boumaiza, p.70).

Measuring needs fulfillment remains a challenge for social research as individual behaviors are variable. The Uses and Gratifications approach is valuable for our study, as we utilize its key concepts: use, needs, desires, motives, and gratifications that viewers gain when watching their favorite Ramadan TV programs.

Television Consumption Modeling Approach

Perticoz and Dessinges (2015) proposed a television consumption modeling approach that helps understand consumer diversity by shifting from the "TV viewer" to the "TV watcher." Contemporary audiovisual consumption methods answer three conceptual axes:

- **Axis of viewing autonomy:** Is viewing part of a scheduled program or self-created by the viewer?
- **Axis of connected interfaces:** Is viewing via one screen or multiple interconnected screens (including TV)?
- **Axis of participation:** Does viewing have a specific purpose or does it lead to participation forms, potentially including new content creation?

Within these axes, various modes of consumption are possible, which are not mutually exclusive (for example, an individual can be a viewer, a blog contributor, or a fan fiction creator). Timing can be synchronous (live broadcast) or asynchronous (Perticoz & Dessinges, 2015, p.121).

Axis of Viewing Autonomy

Technological advancements and the richness of available content have enabled the first possibilities for personalized programming for television viewers. With the advent of the video recorder in the mid-1970s, followed by the introduction of cable and satellite TV throughout the 1980s and 1990s, viewers gained the ability to navigate between imposed programs that require their presence in front of the television set, and more personalized programs that can even reach the ideal model of self-programming (Gaillard, 2006). This represents a mode of consumption asynchronous with the traditional programming schedule, potentially fragmented across different media platforms, at different times, or even beyond regional boundaries (such as series not broadcast on local television channels).

Axis of Connected Interfaces

The internet, digitization of content, and proliferation of screens have collectively allowed for the emergence of new user profiles that expand and complicate the historical identity of the television viewer, sometimes even surpassing it. Thanks to the diverse modes of content access (television, downloads, live streaming, etc.) that have evolved since the early 2000s, along with the multiplication of devices available for viewing (TV sets, computer monitors, tablets, smartphones, etc.), alternative viewing patterns have emerged compared to the traditional and dominant consumption model presented by television until then. From a unipolar "scene" (a single screen connected to the sole terrestrial network—the television set), television viewers are now equipped with numerous interconnected screens (including the television) via the internet, marking the rise of multimedia audiovisual consumption (Perticoz and Dessinges, 2015, p. 122).

Axis of Participation

It is undeniable that since the early 2000s, the internet and new digital communication tools have enabled the expansion or even creation of new forms of participation such as personal pages, fan blogs, or forums.

Concurrently, television channels developed defensive and later more proactive audience engagement strategies (websites, blogs related to programs or channels, and digital social networks leading in recommendations and participation). Today, transmedia storytelling projects offer the most creative and innovative forms of participation (Jenkins, 2006), ranging from participation and recommendation of personalized transmedia experiences to the production and description of creative content (Cailler and Masoni Lacroix, 2014).

Analytical Study

Axis One: General Data

Referring to Table (1), the general data concerning the sample characteristics indicate that the largest proportion of the total respondents by gender were males, constituting 64.2%. Regarding age groups, participants aged over 35 years represented the highest percentage of respondents at 40.4%, followed by those in their twenties at 27.2%, then the group over 25 years at 16.6%, and finally those in their thirties at 15.9%. Employed students formed the majority at 84.1%, whereas full-time students accounted for 15.9% of the participants

Table 01: General Demographic Data of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	64.2%
	Female	35.8%
Age	18–24	27.2%
	25–29	16.6%
	30–34	15.9%
	35+	40.4%
	Student Status	Full-time Student
	Employed Student	15.9%

Table 02: Daily TV Viewing Hours (Outside Ramadan)

Viewing Duration	Percentage (%)
Do not watch TV	30.0
Less than 1 hour	27.8
1 to 2 hours	29.8
2 to 3 hours	7.0
4 hours or more	5.0

Table 02 illustrates the daily television viewing hours outside the month of Ramadan. The data reveals that 30% of the study sample do not watch television at all throughout the year. Meanwhile, the majority of viewers (70%) are divided between those who watch TV for 1 to 2 hours daily (29.8%) and those who watch for less than 1 hour (27.8%). A smaller portion of the respondents reported watching TV for 2 to 3 hours (7%), or 4 hours or more (5%).

Table 3 : TV Viewing During Ramadan

TV Viewing in Ramadan	Percentage (%)
Watch TV programs	70%+

Table 03 presents the responses of the sample regarding television viewing during the month of Ramadan. The data shows that just over 70% of participants reported watching TV programs during Ramadan, while approximately 30% stated that they did not watch any television content during the holy month.

Table 4: Daily Hours of TV Viewing During Ramadan

Viewing Duration (%)	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	~46%
1 to 2 hours	~38%
2 to 3 hours	12%

Table (04) illustrates the number of daily hours spent watching television programs during Ramadan. About 46% of the study sample reported watching these programs for less than an hour, while approximately 38% watched between one and two hours. Meanwhile, 12% of respondents said they spent two to three hours watching TV, and 5% reported watching four hours or more during Ramadan.

Table 5: Preferred Viewing Times for TV Programs During Ramadan

Preferred Time Slot	Percentage (%)
9 PM to Midnight	~46%
Midnight to 5 AM	~18%
5 PM to 9 PM	~18%
1 PM to 5 PM	10%

Table (05) shows the preferred times for watching favourite television programs during Ramadan. The time slot from 9 PM to midnight was the most preferred by about 46% of the sample, representing peak viewing hours.

This was followed by two other time slots—midnight to 5 AM and 5 PM to 9 PM—each preferred by about 18%. Meanwhile, 10% of respondents preferred watching TV between 1 PM and 5 PM.

Table 6: Top 5 Most Watched TV Channels During Ramadan

Rank	TV Channel
1	Abu Dhabi TV
2	Sama Dubai
3	MBC1
4	Dubai TV
5	Emarat TV

According to the ranking of the five most-watched channels during Ramadan, Abu Dhabi TV ranked first, followed by Sama Dubai, MBC1, Dubai TV, and Emarat TV.

Table 7: Types of TV Programs Watched During Ramadan

Type of Program	Percentage (%)
Drama Series	45%
Heritage Programs	~18%
Movies	~9%
Historical / Comedy / Religious / Celebrity Interviews	Remaining %

Table (07) shows that traditional television remains the dominant platform for watching TV programs during Ramadan, preferred by 85% of respondents. YouTube was the second most popular platform, attracting 7% of the sample, followed by other social media platforms at 5%, while streaming services accounted for the smallest share at 3%.

Table 8: Motivations for Watching TV Programs During Ramadan

Motivation	Percentage (%)
Gaining knowledge and information	37.1%
Breaking boredom	21.9%
Passing time	15.9%
Escaping life's problems	13.2%
Relaxation	11.9%

Looking at Table (08), which shows the motives of the study sample for watching TV programs during Ramadan, gaining knowledge and information ranked first at 37.1%, followed by breaking boredom at 21.9%, then passing time at 15.9%, escaping life's problems at about 13.2%, and finally relaxation at 11.9%.

Table 9: Country of Production for Ramadan TV Programs

Country of Production	Percentage (%)
UAE	65.6%
Egypt	14.6%
Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait	Remaining %

Regarding the countries producing the Ramadan TV programs watched by the sample, as shown in Table (09), the majority were produced in the UAE at 65.6%, followed by Egypt at 14.6%. The remaining percentage was distributed among Syrian, Saudi, and Kuwaiti productions.

Table 10: Number of TV Programs Regularly Followed During Ramadan

Number of Programs Watched	Percentage (%)
One	51%
Two	27.8%
Three	11.9%
Four	4.6%
Five or more	4.6%

According to Table (10), which shows how many TV programs were continuously followed by the sample during Ramadan, the majority—51%—said they followed one program consistently, while 27.8% followed two programs. Those who followed three programs accounted for 11.9%, and 4.6% followed four or five or more programs.

Table 11: Challenges in Watching TV Programs During Ramadan

Challenge	Percentage (%)
Family visits	37.7%
Community events during Ramadan	21.9%
Timing conflict with university lectures	18.5%
Academic duties	8.6%
Timing conflict with work	Lowest %

Table (11) outlines the challenges faced by the study sample in following their favorite TV programs during Ramadan. Family visits ranked highest at 37.7%, followed by Ramadan-related community events at 21.9%, and schedule conflicts with university lectures at 18.5%. Academic duties accounted for 8.6%, and the lowest percentage went to conflicts between work and program timings.

Regarding the suitable time for airing TV programs during Ramadan, most respondents indicated that the ideal time is after Isha and Tarawih prayers, when families gather and are free from earlier commitments. The second preferred time is after Maghrib, and the third is before Maghrib to allow fulfilling religious and family obligations. This aligns with the sample's demographic data, as most respondents were employees or university students in the UAE.

Table 12: Evaluation of TV Programs During Ramadan

Program Quality Level	Percentage (%)
Average	42.4%
Strong	31.1%
Very Strong	14.6%
Weak or Very Weak	11.9%

Table (12) assesses the quality of TV programs watched during Ramadan. The majority (42.4%) rated them as average, citing repetition and lack of innovation in both content and values. Meanwhile, 31.1% said the programs were strong, noting their educational and cultural role. A further 14.6% rated them as very strong for their positive messages and high production quality. Lastly, 11.9% rated the programs as weak or very weak, citing redundancy, Western imitation, violence, and inappropriate themes for the holy month.

Table 13: Most Followed TV Programs During Ramadan

Rank	Program Name
1	Al Shaara
2	Awlad Badee'a Al Ataoula

As for the best-followed TV programs among the study sample during Ramadan, respondents mainly named "Al Shaara" as the top program, followed by "Awlad Badee'a Al Ataoula" in second place.

Table 14: Reasons for Preferring Certain TV Programs

Reason for Preference	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	43.7%
Addressed topic	19.2%
Presence of beloved actors	15.9%
Attractive directing style	10.6%
Informational & cultural value	10.6%

According to Table (14), the reasons for preferring the TV programs "Al Shaara" and "Awlad Badee'a Al Ataoula" during Ramadan included entertainment (43.7%), followed by the addressed topic (19.2%), participation of beloved actors (15.9%), attractive directing style (10.6%), and other reasons such as knowledge enrichment and cultural value (10.6%).

DISCUSSION

1. In the past three years, the average daily time spent watching traditional television has witnessed a steady decline in favor of digital platforms—3 hours and 10 minutes in 2021 (TCL statistics), 2 hours and 33 minutes in 2022 (Wikipedia), and 2 hours and 25 minutes in 2023 (AIMC). Among the study sample of university students in the UAE, this downward trend is even more pronounced. Approximately 58% of respondents watch traditional TV for less than two hours daily, while only 12% exceed that duration. Moreover, 30% of the sample reported no interest in watching traditional television programs at all. This shift can be attributed to the growing reliance on digital platforms and the younger generation's preference for digital content over linear television. The results reflect a continuous transformation in TV viewing habits, marked by increased engagement with digital media and reduced dependence on traditional broadcasting.

2. The proportion of respondents who do not watch television remained unchanged during and outside of Ramadan, with 30% reporting no viewership and 70% engaging with TV programming during Ramadan. According to the Television Consumption Modeling Approach, this suggests that viewers who avoid traditional TV seek autonomous, non-linear viewing experiences, favoring digital platforms that offer interactive and personalized content—such as Saudi Arabia's "Shahid" and Egypt's "Watch It." "Shahid" offered 25 drama series, some of which aired a day before their satellite broadcast, and made six series available for free. Meanwhile, "Watch It" provided 22 series along with a variety of talk shows and children's animation, leveraging its competitive subscription pricing (Al-Arab Newspaper, 2024). This is confirmed by findings on preferred media, where 40% of respondents reported watching Ramadan programs on digital platforms, often using multiple media sources concurrently.

3. TV viewing hours saw a notable increase during Ramadan among the sample. Viewership for less than one hour rose from 28% (outside Ramadan) to approximately 46% during Ramadan. Likewise, viewing for 1–2 hours increased from 30% to about 38%, and 2–3 hour viewership rose from 7% to 12%. Despite this, total daily viewing time remained under two hours on average, both during and outside Ramadan. This stability is likely due to the convenience of digital platforms like YouTube, Netflix, and Shahid, which offer flexible and on-demand viewing. The ability to self-curate one's content schedule aligns with the autonomy emphasized in TV consumption modeling. Additionally, social and religious activities in Ramadan, along with mobile device use for social interaction and real-time updates, contribute to reduced traditional TV consumption. According to the "Ramadan 2023 Insights" by TGM Research, 90% of UAE respondents used social media for sending greetings during Ramadan, and 87% used it to learn and acquire new knowledge.

Notably, this finding diverges from results of the Ipsos survey on media consumption in the UAE, which reported that 91% of residents watched TV daily during Ramadan for an average of 4 hours and 40 minutes—14% higher than during non-Ramadan months. The largest audience segments were women and members of Generation Z (Ipsos, 2023).

4. Numerous factors shape TV viewing habits during Ramadan, particularly the timing of broadcasts and reruns, which varies across cultures and regions. The 9 PM to midnight slot was the most favored among respondents, aligning with the post-Tarawih period for many Muslims. It was followed by the 5 PM to 9 PM window—just before and after Iftar—when families gather to relax and watch TV. Some respondents preferred watching light or short programs before Tarawih, while 18% favored the 1 AM to 5 AM timeframe, coinciding with Suhoor, for comedy and competition shows. These findings highlight how Ramadan-specific spiritual and social routines influence the media habits of university students in the UAE.

5. Certain TV channels emerge as favorites during Ramadan due to their relevant and culturally resonant programming. The study identified four local channels from Dubai and Abu Dhabi networks—Abu Dhabi TV, Sama Dubai, Dubai TV, and Emarat TV—as top choices. This reflects the sample's active preference for content that emphasizes Emirati heritage and traditions, especially in Gulf dramas. These findings align with broader surveys; for instance, Sama Dubai ranked as the most-watched channel during Ramadan 2024, with its series "Wedima wa Halima 3" topping viewership ratings (Dubai Media & Ipsos, TAM UAE). Dubai TV reached a 95.4% audience penetration during the first week of Ramadan 2024 (Al-Bayan, 2024), while Abu Dhabi Media recorded a 10% growth in audience reach compared to 2023.
6. Respondents expressed a strong preference for a variety of programs that reflect Ramadan values and Gulf/Emirati culture. Drama series, particularly Emirati and Gulf productions like "Wedima wa Halima," "Shaabiat Al Cartoon," "Khattaf," and "Al Boom" ranked highest. Heritage-themed programs like "Al Mandoos" and "Al Shaara" were also popular. Interestingly, viewership of religious programs dropped to just 1%, possibly due to their availability on digital platforms at any time, reducing the need to rely on traditional broadcasts. Other factors include the competitive edge of entertainment programs, inconvenient time slots for religious shows, and younger viewers' preference for short, engaging content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. According to TGM Research (2023), 71% of UAE respondents planned to use Islamic apps and websites during Ramadan, with the Quran app being the most popular, illustrating the growing role of digital tools in the religious life of Emiratis.
7. The study sample revealed diverse motivations for watching television during Ramadan. The most cited reason was gaining knowledge and information, suggesting a demand for educational or informative content—especially relevant given that respondents are university students. This aligns with the cognitive and informational gratifications discussed in the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Passing time came second, reflecting a desire to fill leisure hours, while breaking boredom was the third most common motivation—indicating a need for entertainment and escape from routine. Relaxation was another key motive, aligning with emotional gratification, while some respondents cited escapism as a reason, consistent with the psychological gratifications recognized by the theory.
8. The high percentage (65.6%) of Emirati TV viewership among student respondents highlights several influential cultural and media-related factors. Viewers often gravitate toward local content due to cultural and linguistic proximity, which fosters national identity and belonging. Emirati students prefer local productions because they reflect their values, environment, and traditions. Additionally, the UAE's investment in the media and entertainment sector has enhanced production quality, making local programs more appealing. Emirati programming typically aligns with societal norms and traditions, making it a preferred alternative to foreign or pan-Arab content.
9. Selective and focused viewing habits (with 51% following only one program) indicate that most Emirati students adopt a targeted approach to television, opting to concentrate on a single show rather than switching between multiple options. This trend is consistent with modern media consumption models under the TV Consumption Modeling Approach, where on-demand digital platforms encourage focused, interest-driven viewing. It may also reflect time constraints during Ramadan, when social and religious obligations are high, leading students to choose just one program to follow consistently.
10. The study also highlights several challenges that hinder audience satisfaction during Ramadan. Social obligations such as family visits and community events (37.7% and 21.9% respectively) interfere with scheduled programming. Academic duties—conflicting lecture times and assignments—also limit viewers' ability to watch their preferred content live. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, audiences seek educational and entertaining content; however, these obligations restrict access, pushing viewers toward catch-up viewing online. Although professional obligations had a lower impact, work schedules—especially evening shifts—still posed obstacles for some viewers during Ramadan.
11. The majority of respondents rated Ramadan TV programming as average, citing repetitive themes and lack of innovation. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, audiences seek fresh content that delivers cognitive or emotional benefits. When programming becomes formulaic and lacks added value, satisfaction declines. This assessment underscores the need for content creators to offer original, engaging ideas to maintain viewership. The finding presents a challenge to TV producers to rethink their creative strategies and respond to evolving audience expectations.

STUDY FINDINGS

1. Decline in Traditional TV Viewing

The study indicates a notable decrease in traditional TV consumption in favor of digital platforms. Around 58% of the sample watch traditional television for less than two hours daily, while 30% do not watch it at all. This trend

is driven by the younger audience's preference for digital platforms like Shahid and Watch It, which offer greater flexibility and convenience.

2. Consistent Viewing Rates During and Outside Ramadan

According to the study, television viewership rates remained stable during Ramadan compared to the rest of the year. Around 30% of the respondents reported not watching TV at all, while 70% watched TV programs during Ramadan. This consistency is attributed to a preference for on-demand viewing rather than adherence to traditional TV scheduling.

3. Increase in Viewing Hours During Ramadan

The study found an increase in the percentage of viewers watching for less than one hour per day, rising to 46% during Ramadan compared to 28% outside the month. Viewership of one to two hours rose to 38%, and two to three hours to 12%, although the overall average remained under two hours. This can be explained by a combination of traditional TV and digital content, as well as the influence of religious and social activities during Ramadan.

4. Preferred Viewing Times in Ramadan

The most preferred viewing time during Ramadan was between 9 PM and midnight (46%), followed by 5–9 PM and midnight to 5 AM, both at 18%. These time slots align with prayer schedules and communal gatherings, highlighting the cultural significance of Ramadan in shaping media consumption patterns.

5. Preferred TV Channels

Emirati channels such as Abu Dhabi TV, Sama Dubai, Dubai TV, and Emarat TV were favored by the sample. This reflects a strong interest in local and heritage-based content. These findings align with national surveys, which showed Sama Dubai topping viewership ratings during Ramadan 2024.

6. Preferred Program Types

Drama series were the most watched programs (45%), followed by heritage programs (18%) and films (9%). Viewing motivations included acquiring knowledge (37.1%), spending time (21.9%), and breaking boredom (15.9%).

7. Challenges in Watching TV During Ramadan

About 37.7% of participants cited family visits as a challenge, and 21.9% pointed to Ramadan social events. Program timing conflicts with university lectures affected 18.5% of respondents, while academic assignments and work commitments were less significant obstacles.

8. Evaluation of Ramadan TV Programs

The majority of respondents (42.4%) rated Ramadan TV content as average due to repetition and lack of originality. Around 31.1% considered the programs strong, and 14.6% viewed them as very strong for their positive values. A minority (11.9%) rated them negatively, citing weak content, Western imitation, and misalignment with Ramadan values.

9. Most Popular Ramadan TV Programs

"Al Shaara" was the most followed program, followed by "Awlad Badee'a Al Ataoula." Reasons for their preference included entertainment (43.7%), meaningful themes (19.2%), the presence of popular stars (15.9%), and quality of production (10.6%).

CONCLUSION

Ramadan is a culturally and socially significant period that reflects evolving viewer preferences and behaviors. As media platforms continue to develop, their role extends beyond serving immediate audience needs to shaping the future of entertainment in Muslim societies.

The study highlights that Emirati university students tend to support local productions, influenced by cultural identity and content quality, while also maintaining interest in Arabic content from other countries. Their viewing behavior reflects modern media consumption patterns characterized by selectivity and purposeful engagement rather than random viewing. Social, academic, and professional commitments significantly affect TV consumption during Ramadan, prompting audiences to shift toward digital platforms to overcome these challenges.

Audience evaluations of Ramadan programming varied: some found the content repetitive and average, while others appreciated its educational and entertaining value. There is a clear interest in content that balances

entertainment with cultural and social values—posing new challenges for media producers to create innovative and meaningful programming.

To enhance the quality of Ramadan television content, the study sample suggested several improvements:

- selecting suitable airtime,
- presenting engaging topics,
- improving dialogue quality,
- increasing heritage-based content,
- reducing imitation-based shows and musical segments,
- focusing on meaningful and educational themes,
- promoting family- and culture-oriented storytelling,
- producing action and suspense films,
- and featuring realistic portrayals of social issues.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of expanding religious programming such as Quran interpretation and stories of the prophets, alongside traditional Emirati "fawazeer" (puzzle shows). Other suggestions included encouraging collaboration with emerging talents to foster innovation and reduce commercialized content. Some even recommended postponing certain programs until after Ramadan, emphasizing its status as a month of worship.

In summary, the study reveals a shift in media consumption habits among Emirati university students. While reliance on digital platforms is increasing, traditional television still plays a role during Ramadan, with a slight rise in viewing hours and a sustained preference for local and culturally resonant content. These findings underscore the need for a more conscious and creative media production approach—one that fulfills audience expectations and balances entertainment with cultural preservation and social value.

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