

Chinese Older Adults' Motivations and Preferences for Television Watching During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous countries implemented lockdown measures, which significantly impacted individuals' mental well-being, particularly older adults. As a pervasive medium, television constitutes a vital resource upon which this demographic relies, and is posited to bolster their psychological health. Given the rapid growth of the aging population in China and the ongoing implementation of the Dynamic Covid-zero strategy, it becomes imperative to examine the preferences and motivations underlying television consumption amongst older adults during this era, an aspect often neglected in extant literature. In the present investigation, semi-structured interviews employing qualitative methodologies were conducted with a sample of 19 older adults, followed by tertiary coding utilizing NVivo software. The findings reveal a substantial increase in television viewership among older Chinese adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Key motivations underpinning their television consumption include recreation, information acquisition, social engagement, and educational purposes. Furthermore, their programmatic preferences encompass news, dramatic productions, variety programs, and sporting events.

Contribution/Originality: This study examines older Chinese adults' TV consumption preferences and motivations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It uncovers increased viewership driven by recreation, information, social engagement, and education, with preferences for news, dramas, variety programs, and sports. The findings contribute to understanding the media's role in supporting older adults' well-being.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has engendered profound global economic and health ramifications, with its far-reaching socioeconomic and healthcare consequences including economic downturns, travel limitations, business closures, social distancing mandates, isolation and quarantine measures, fears of essential commodity shortages,

and the pervasive escalation of mental health challenges (Ebrahim et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). Although social distancing has proven instrumental in mitigating the pandemic's spread, familial isolation may have intensified daily stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Huckins et al., 2020). Data procured from an interview survey reveal that over half of the respondents in China experienced moderate to severe psychological distress during the pandemic (Wang et al., 2020), attributable to apprehensions regarding viral contraction, the loss of loved ones, and social isolation or segregation (Ho et al., 2020). Concurrently, individuals encountered novel stressors, such as fear and anxiety for themselves or their loved ones, diminished physical and social activities due to isolation, and sudden, radical lifestyle alterations (Son et al., 2020).

While the majority of countries and regions have transitioned into the epidemic control phase, China adopted a novel "Dynamic Covid-zero" strategy in August 2021 (Liu et al., 2022), resulting in the sustained implementation of quarantine policies in various areas (Dyer, 2022).

The pandemic has underscored the importance of mental health among diverse affected populations. Older adults, as the primary demographic group impacted by COVID-19 and more susceptible to the virus, exhibit higher mortality rates (Guan et al., 2020). However, their mental well-being is often neglected (El Hayek et al., 2020), and addressing their mental health during the pandemic constitutes a societal imperative (Lee et al., 2020). Public health emergencies typically prompt individuals to utilize a range of communication channels to fulfill assorted needs (Wang, 2021). Leisure activities, including singing, dancing, playing chess, watching television, and engaging with the internet, are acknowledged to enhance older adults' overall health, life satisfaction, and well-being (Yang et al., 2022). Among all mass media, television can be used as an empowering tool for older people (Östlund, 2010). Furthermore, social lockdowns have curtailed older adults' daily activities and alternative leisure pursuits (Gan, 2022; Gonçalves et al., 2022), heightening television's significance for this demographic.

Numerous researchers have concentrated on media usage during the pandemic. For instance, Wang (2021) examined Chinese viewers' motivations for engaging with social media, while Ngien and Jiang (2021) investigated the influence of social media on young individuals' stress during the epidemic, discovering no direct impact. Gao et al. (2020) assessed the relationship between mental health during the pandemic and social media exposure, and Wang and Deng (2022) explored the association between social media and fatigue during the pandemic. Researchers have identified various motivations for employing social media during the pandemic, such as coping with social and physical isolation (Hussain, 2020), information access (Cuello-Garcia et al., 2020), and entertainment (Tkáčová et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, research remains scant regarding the relationship between television viewership among older adults and COVID-19, and the medium's potential to enhance their mental health during the pandemic has been inadequately examined. Comprehending older adults' preferences and motivations for television consumption during this period is vital for addressing their mental health needs. Despite the burgeoning aging population in China, few studies have explored their television viewing habits and preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study endeavors to bridge this research gap by scrutinizing the motivations and preferences of older Chinese adults concerning television viewership during the pandemic. Consequently, the following objectives guided this investigation:

- i. To examine older adults' motivations for television viewing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. To investigate older adults' television program preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study carries substantial implications for television broadcasters and policymakers in devising programs that cater to the mental health needs of older adults during public health crises. By offering a comprehensive understanding of older adults' television consumption motivations and preferences, this research can contribute to the development of targeted strategies and interventions to support the mental well-being of this vulnerable population during the ongoing pandemic and future public health emergencies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The motivations of older adults regarding TV watching

A common motivation for older adults to watch television is for companionship and to relieve loneliness. [Smith \(2012\)](#) found that older male adults relieved loneliness by watching baseball games on television. [Goll et al. \(2015\)](#) concluded that older adults relieved loneliness by watching television and listening to the radio. According to [Smith \(2012\)](#), older adults watch television during their leisure time when they feel lonely. [Luo and Waite \(2014\)](#) also found that watching television is one of the ways to relieve loneliness among elderly Chinese people. Some elderly people feel that television keeps them connected to the outside world and informs them of recent events ([Nitipaiboon et al., 2015](#)). According to [O'Rourke et al. \(2015\)](#), older adults living in the community feel connected to others by watching television.

Another motivation for older adults to watch television is for relaxation and leisure. According to [Wang et al. \(2006\)](#), watching television is the main form of leisure for older adults in China. [Chory-Assad and Yanen \(2005\)](#) found that older adults watch television to escape reality. Older adults in the United States reported watching television as a way to relax and unwind after a busy day. Since some elderly people cannot get out and about, watching television is one of the best ways to relax ([Nitipaiboon et al., 2015](#)).

Overall, the literature suggests that older adults have a range of motivations for watching television, including social connection and companionship, relaxation and leisure, and access to information. Further research is needed to understand how these motivations change in specific contexts, such as isolation due to pandemics.

2.2. The preferences of older adults regarding TV watching

Regarding the television program preferences of older adults, one common preference among is for news and current affairs programming. Older adults watching news programs more frequently than other types of programming ([Purcell et al., 2010](#)). [Newman et al. \(2021\)](#) also found that older adults reported a preference for news and current affairs programming. Other studies have compared the preferences of older and younger people for television and found that older people preferred television news over other age groups ([Mares & Woodard, 2006](#); [Van der Goot, 2009](#)).

TV dramas are another type of programming preferred by older adults, and according to [Robinson et al. \(2004\)](#), older Japanese women ranked drama as their third favorite programming type. To a large extent, TV dramas have been integrated into the daily lives of older adults ([Seiter et al., 2013](#)).

Programs about health and wellness are also particularly popular among older adults. Television programs are the main source of health information for older adults ([Medlock et al., 2015](#)). According to [Paek et al. \(2017\)](#), health television programs in Korea provide much health information for older adults.

This literature shows that older adults have different preferences for television content, including news and current affairs, dramas, and health programs. Further research is needed to understand how these preferences change with specific contexts and the television program preferences of older adults during the pandemic.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research method was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. This study was approved by the University of Malaya (UM) Ethics Committee (TNC2/UMREC_1840). All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and signed a consent form, we ensured the confidentiality of the participants by using pseudonyms in the research report. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 older Chinese adults from September 8 to 18, 2022, to obtain data and explore the research objectives.

3.1. Sample

From September 1 to September 6, 2022, researchers contacted residential communities and aging activity centers, and other organizations in Hunan, Gansu, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Shandong, Hubei, and Guizhou. With the cooperation of the managers of these institutions, the researchers posted participant recruitment information in their WeChat groups. WeChat is the most popular social media in China, with 1.24 billion monthly active users ([Song et al., 2021](#)). By September 6, 2022, 32 older adults had applied to interview.

In addition to the respondents meeting the age criterion of 60 or older and being isolated at home, we tried to achieve diversity in the respondents' backgrounds in selecting the sample. According to [Francis et al. \(2010\)](#), data saturation was reached for all their pre-determined theoretical structures at the time of the 17th interview. Therefore, the enrollees were screened according to their gender, age, occupation, and region, and 19 participants were finally identified. The respondents' demographic information is shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Demographic information of interviewees

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Region
Interviewee 1	Female	62	Businessperson	Changsha
Interviewee 2	Male	63	Businessperson	Ningxiang
Interviewee 3	Male	76	Teacher	Guangzhou
Interviewee 4	Male	62	Building worker	Ningxiang
Interviewee 5	Male	63	Civil servant	Changsha

Interviewee 6	Female	65	Housewife	Xiangtan
Interviewee 7	Male	62	Business staff	Changsha
Interviewee 8	Female	61	Business staff	Nanchang
Interviewee 9	Female	65	Businessperson	Nanchang
Interviewee 10	Male	64	Businessperson	Changsha
Interviewee 11	Male	69	Business staff	Yichang
Interviewee 12	Female	64	Teacher	Jining
Interviewee 13	Female	67	Housewife	Nanchang
Interviewee 14	Female	74	Teacher	Lanzhou
Interviewee 15	Male	76	Farmer	Lanzhou
Interviewee 16	Female	74	Farmer	Lanzhou
Interviewee 17	Female	66	Lecturer	Guangzhou
Interviewee 18	Male	61	Civil servant	Guiyang
Interviewee 19	Male	66	Physician	Wuhan

3.2. Data Collection

After the interviewees were identified and the interview structure, the interview arrangements and methods were determined with the interviewees in turn. Due to the epidemic and quarantine, the researcher could not conduct face-to-face interviews with participants in China; therefore, an online format was used via WeChat. Respondents' family members assisted participants who were not proficient with the Internet.

From September 8 to 18, 2022, the researcher interviewed 19 older Chinese adults. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, partly using the local language and partly in Mandarin. Consent was obtained from the interviewees before each interview. The interviewer recorded the entire interview with the interviewees' consent. The final interview recordings totaled 6 hours and 2 minutes.

3.3. Data Analysis

After the interviews, the researcher converted the recordings into text and sent them to the interviewees to confirm their accuracy (Mabuza et al., 2014). After the quality of the transcripts was verified, the text was recorded in NVivo software (12th version) for coding.

Bottom-up deductive coding was used (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The coding process followed four steps. First, open coding was used to identify recurring concepts as well as meaningful text (sub-nodes in NVivo). Second, the text units were developed into different codes. Then, the codes were classified into broader themes (sub-nodes in NVivo). Finally, the themes were interpreted (Luo & Ren, 2020). Data analysis was conducted in Chinese to retain subtleties in language, and selected quotes were translated into English by the authors. The following statement is an example:

I've been watching Parental Love recently. It is about a family where a rich girl, a capitalist lady, marries a soldier from a low-income family. They do not match in class, but then they break through many obstacles to get together and have five children, raise them until they grow up, and have grandchildren. The two of them quarreled and fought, and that was a lifetime. I think this kind of drama is closer to ordinary people's lives

and is really similar to our life. It makes me feel relaxed and comfortable.
(Interviewee 1)

In the open coding step, this text was labeled “likes dramas with family life themes,” the primary axis coding was summarized as “preference TV series,” and the selective coding was summarized as “preference for TV programs.”

4. Findings

The researcher conducted a content analysis of the text using Nvivo software (12th version) and categorized the findings as the motivations and preferences of older Chinese adults for watching television. Table 2 and Table 3 show the details of the codes and categories.

Table 2: Motivations of Older Chinese Adults for Watching TV

Motivations (Frequency)	Salient points (Frequency)	Sources
Leisure and entertainment (13)	Can replace outdoor leisure activities (4)	Interviewees 4, 5, 6, 7
	It is a hobby (2)	Interviewees 3, 4, 18
	Can forget the reality of worries (3)	Interviewees 6, 14, 19
	Can reduce loneliness and fear (9)	Interviewees 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12
	Can relax the body and brain (3)	Interviewees 5, 9, 13
Passing the time (15)	Can pass the time (15)	Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19
Get Information (17)	Get information about COVID-19 (14)	Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18
	Get other news and current affairs (14)	Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19
	TV is more powerful and provides more accurate information than cell phones (3)	Interviewees 2, 4, 15
Interpersonal (11)	Can have common topics with friends (7)	Interviewees 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 17
	Keeping families alive (3)	Interviewees 8, 11, 12
	Can watch with family members (5)	Interviewees 3, 4, 9, 13, 19
Education (5)	Exercising the brain (2)	Interviewee 6, 7
	Gaining knowledge (5)	Interviewees 6, 7, 8, 10, 15

Table 3: Chinese Older Adults' TV Program Preferences

Preference (Frequency)	Salient points (Frequency)	Sources
TV series (19)	Prefer historical themes (6)	Interviewees 5, 6, 14, 15, 18, 19
	Prefer palace themes (2)	Interviewees 8, 12

	Prefer youth themes (2)	Interviewees 1, 12
	Prefer family life themes (13)	Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19
	Prefer war themes (10)	Interviewees 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18
	Prefer old classic dramas (6)	Interviewees 5, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16
News (18)	Prefer political topics (2)	Interviewees 2, 18
	Focus on international news (7)	Interviewees 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 18, 19
	Focus on Chinese news (11)	Interviewees 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19
	Focus on local news (13)	Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19
	Focus on COVID-19 (13)	Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19
Sports (3)	Prefer sports programs (3)	Interviewees 1, 3, 8
TV variety shows (16)	Prefer family life-themed programs (8)	Interviewees 1, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19
	Prefer challenging programs (2)	Interviewees 5, 16
	Prefer funny programs (5)	Interviewees 1, 8, 9, 14, 16
	Prefer chess programs (9)	Interviewees 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13
	Prefer music programs (8)	Interviewees 3, 4, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19
	Prefer travel programs (4)	Interviewees 8, 9, 13, 19

4.1. Motivations of older adults for watching TV

The interviews revealed that older Chinese adults watched TV almost daily during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased the number of hours they watched compared to the pre-pandemic period. Their motivations for watching TV during the pandemic were mainly for entertainment, passing time, access to information, socialization, and education. [Table 2](#) presents a summary of the salient points for each motivation and the frequency (i.e., the number of interviewees who mentioned each item).

4.1.1. Passing the time

In the interviews, 17 participants reported watching television daily during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese government implemented a strict policy that restricted people's movement to their homes once cases arose in their cities. Many interviewees said that before the pandemic they usually watched TV in the evening, from 6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. (Interviewees 1 and 8). However, their viewing hours increased significantly during the control period, and they watched TV during the day (Interviewees 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12). Interviewee 1 stated:

During the control period, I watched TV during the day because I was not allowed to go out . . . In my usual leisure activities, TV is not the main thing; I usually play cards and go shopping, and usually only watch it at night, and only during the epidemic, when I was banned from [leaving my] home, I watch it during the day.

Interviewee 4 said, "Now, I watch TV more often than before because it is not suitable to go outside during the Covid 19 pandemic, so I have to sit at home and watch TV." Interviewee 8 stated:

After the COVID-19 outbreak, I watched TV more than usual. Now, I watch it even during the day, especially when I am isolated at home. Now I watch more TV series when I have nothing to do at home, but I used to watch more at night.

Interviewee 2 said, "[During quarantine], I watched more TV than usual, mainly COVID-19-related information, the speed of the spread, and already the impact on various industries."

4.1.2. Leisure and entertainment

According to most of the respondents, watching TV was a recreational activity for older adults, and it was a way for them to reduce stress and relax during the pandemic. After the outbreak of COVID-19, they are forced to stay at home. TV, therefore, became their most important means of recreation, it can reduce their loneliness and fear. Interviewee 5 said, "Because I do not have any other activities, I don't play cards, and I don't dance, so watching TV is a basic activity, and I usually turn it on every day." Interviewee 9 stated, "Watching TV can make me relax when I am in a bad mood and fear of COVID-19."

Although smartphones are popular, and people can use them for leisure and entertainment, TV still has advantages for older adults. For example, Interviewee 11 said that the screen of a cell phone is too small to see and that the TV screen is clearer. Interviewee 7 also thought that watching the news on TV is better than on the cell phone, and for older adults, TV does not hurt their eyes. The screen of the cell phone is too small, and Interviewees 8 and 17 thought that watching programs on TV would be more comfortable for the eyes and that cell phones are too small and affect eyesight.

In addition, due to the impact of COVID-19, the outdoor activities of older adults were restricted. Television replaced outdoor recreational activities. Interviewee 7 stated:

I watched "I'm a Big Winner" on the entertainment channel every day. It is a TV show about chess in which viewers can play chess games. I would play cards occasionally, but I couldn't go out during the epidemic, so I could watch this show to have fun.

Interviewer 13 said:

I like to travel and go out to play. If I watch this program, I can feel like I'm there. Maybe I cannot travel, but it's nice to see the scenery. But now, I cannot go out even more because of the epidemic.

4.1.3. Getting information.

Most of the respondents said that they wanted to get information of COVID-19 through TV. Although smartphones are trendy, and some older people watch videos or get information through their cell phones, as Interviewees 2 and 4 stated, the Chinese

government manages TV stations. The information they release is strictly censored and official, so it is more authoritative and credible. Interviewee 2 said, *“I trust the news of the pandemic on TV more than the Internet media. They are more accurate, they are government units, and they are more authoritative than information on the Internet, which anyone can write.”* Interviewee 4 stated, *“I usually learn about COVID-19 through TV news. I also use my cell phone, but some of the news is too fake; it looks like news, but it’s actually rumors.”*

Older adults follow Chinese and international news, as well as local news, on TV. During the pandemic, COVID-19-related information, pension policies, and benefits became the information older adults wanted on TV. Interviewee 9 said, *“I am more interested in the local events that are happening around me. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I could see the news of the epidemic in Nanchang, which is relevant to my own life.”*

4.1.4. Socialization

During the interviews, we found that older adult’s motivations for watching television included spending time with family and reducing the loneliness of not seeing friends and family. Interviewee 3 stated:

My friend and I often discuss TV content, and if there are good TV shows, we discuss them. Now that we are isolated at home, we occasionally talk on the phone and will share the content of the latest TV drama we watched.

Interviewee 11 said, *“During this time of isolation, we would always turn on the TV every day, not always to watch it, but to be livelier and to relieve our loneliness and fear.”* Interviewee 13 stated:

I watch TV with her [granddaughter]. Xixi likes to watch variety shows, so I watch the show . . . with her, like Hunan TV’s ‘Life to Live.’ She is only 10 years old, but she knows she can’t go to school now because of the pandemic, and she can’t play with her friends. Sometimes she gets very worried. Anyway, I am watching TV to keep her company. Watching TV can make her feel a little better, which makes me feel better too.

4.1.5. Education

Watching TV is also a way for older adults to receive education. They learn knowledge through TV, acquire historical knowledge, and exercise their brains. For example, Interviewee 7 stated that watching TV exercises the brain and prevents them from developing Alzheimer’s disease. Interviewee 6 said:

Watching TV can give me some knowledge of how to protect against COVID-19. Hunan City Channel has a program that introduces some medical knowledge every day, I think it is very useful. It helps me lose some of the worries about the pandemic. But there are very few programs like this in.

4.2. Older adults' TV program preferences

After analyzing the text, we found that Chinese older adults preferred news, TV dramas, variety shows, and Sports during the pandemic. [Table 3](#) presents a summary of the findings.

4.2.1. News

In the interviews, all respondents indicated a preference for watching the news. Older adults had a wide range of news viewing preferences, including international news, Chinese news, local news, and COVID-19-related news policies related to senior care. Interviewee 12 stated:

I like to watch international and Chinese news because it's a national issue, so I need to keep up with what's going on in the country and what is happening abroad. Now, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I must pay attention to everything and read about it.

Interviewee 14 said:

I sometimes watch Lanzhou News; I can't go out, only watch TV to be updated about what is happening in our city. Sometimes look at the CCTV news. Is the COVID-19 more serious this year? What is the current pandemic abroad? I can learn about current affairs related to the pandemic.

Interviewee 3 said:

Sometimes I wonder about the reality of TV news. I always use Douyin (The Chinese version of TikTok), but the news on Douyin about Covid-19 abroad differs from what I saw on CCTV, which described Covid-19 as terrible.

4.2.2. TV dramas

All respondents stated that they preferred to watch TV series during the pandemic. Most mentioned TV dramas on war, family life themes. Interviewee 12 said, "During this time, I've been watching the TV drama "Human World" every day, and I thought of my parents, who are in the countryside, but I can't visit them because of the pandemic." Interviewee 15 stated, "I like to watch historical dramas, such as 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms,' so I can watch them repeatedly to see the historical plot and learn about history." Interviewee 7 said, "Because people of our age still like to watch the war because we cannot forget the history of the past. Both we and our future generations should remember history."

Interviewee 13 said:

I can forget a lot of my worries and stress when I am mopping and watching TV at the same time. The stories in the dramas are beautiful in the end, despite the difficulties of our real lives. For example, a drama I watched some time ago was about the fight against Covid-19. I can see

the strength and optimism of people in this drama, and it will make me less afraid of it.

4.2.3. Variety Shows

Sixteen older adults said they liked to watch TV variety shows, with chess and card shows cited by nine. Older adults also preferred life and music programs. Most responded that they preferred emotional and quiet variety shows. These variety shows make them feel relaxed or entertained. However, they also thought that most of the current variety shows are too noisy, and the performers are young, which is unsuitable for older adults. Interviewee 19 thought that the current variety shows are too noisy and without culture and depth:

I like to watch the "Life to Live" that Huang Lei participated in. It is not the kind of competition. There is no competition, and then, it is not the kind of very noisy and noisy. The program is tranquil; we are gathered in a kind of small rural house inside cooking and living, and the pace is very slow. It makes you so peaceful. After the pandemic is over, I'm going to travel to a place like this to enjoy such a life. While watching this program, sometimes I forget some of the worries and anxieties that come with the pandemic

Interviewee 7 said:

There is also "The Search for Love," which I also like to watch. I like to watch this kind of program because it is about some real-life families and life's trivialities, which is more realistic. Family matters, interpersonal relationships, family life, etc., happen around you.

Interviewee 5 stated:

I like to watch the show about playing cards on the entertainment channel. I watch it for an hour every day, and I watch that show at dinnertime in the evening. This show is usually enjoyed by the whole family watching it together. Last year when COVID-19 wasn't so serious, we could play poker with friends daily, but now we can only watch TV for fun.

4.2.4. Sports programs

In addition to the four types of TV programs above, several older adults cited sports programs. Interviewee 3 stated, "I usually like to watch sports on CCTV5, such as Olympics. I watch all the Chinese and international ones. I am a person who likes to exercise, often go to the park to exercise ah." Interviewee 1 said:

I also watch swimming and badminton on CCTV sports channel. Badminton is my favorite sport and I used to go to Lieshi Park every week to play with my friends. After the quarantine is over, I'm going to play!

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected people's mental health worldwide, especially the elderly, who are at higher risk of developing severe illness and isolation. With the implementation of embargo policies in some countries, social distancing measures, and quarantine requirements, many older adults have turned to television as a source of entertainment, information, and companionship (Ekoh et al., 2021; Farhang et al., 2022). In this study, we aimed to explore the motivations and preferences of Chinese older adults for television viewing during the pandemic.

The first objective of this study was to explore the motivations of Chinese older adults to watch television during the pandemic. The study revealed that the motivations for television viewing among older Chinese adults during the pandemic were diverse. These motivations included entertainment, obtaining information, socializing, and receiving education. This is generally consistent with the results of other researchers that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people used media to get information (Cuello-Garcia et al., 2020) and entertainment (Tkáčová et al., 2021), stress relief and socializing (Jarzyna, 2021).

Our findings suggest that television played a crucial role in the lives of Chinese older adults during the pandemic, providing them with a sense of relaxation and a way to eliminate negative emotions. The participants reported spending significantly more time watching television than before the pandemic, indicating that it had become a crucial coping mechanism for them. Consistent with previous studies, television can be an effective way to improve the mental health of older adults by relaxing and reducing the negative emotions that come with social isolation (Coelho et al., 2017; Ryu & Heo, 2016). In line with Casero-Ripollés (2020) findings, traditional media (especially television) have received renewed attention during the epidemic. Some participants stated that they were unfamiliar with or disliked using Internet media, and that television became their primary way of accessing outside information during the pandemic.

Findings also suggest that socialization was another important motivation for older Chinese adults to watch television during the epidemic. Participants reported that watching television helped them feel connected to the outside world and others by taking measures of social distance and limiting physical interactions. This is consistent with previous research that social isolation and loneliness are important risk factors for mental health problems in older adults during a pandemic (Wu, 2020). During this time, people seem to rely more than ever on social media and binge-watching streaming series to make themselves feel connected to others (Jarzyna, 2021).

Interestingly, our study revealed that some older adults used television as a way to receive education. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of health education, and participants reported watching programs that provided information about the virus and ways to prevent infection. This finding suggests that television can play an essential role in promoting health literacy and education among older adults.

The second objective of this study was to explore Chinese older adults' TV program preferences during the pandemic. The findings of this study indicate that news, dramas, variety shows, and sports were the preferred TV program types among Chinese older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chinese older adults may prefer news programs because they need updated information about the pandemic. Participants reported that they trusted TV news programs to stay abreast of the latest developments related to the virus and to inform government policies and regulations. This finding is consistent with previous studies where people pay highly attention to relevant news during a pandemic (Moghanibashi-Mansourieh, 2020) and trust news from traditional media (television and newspapers) more because they exhibit a lower index of disinformation (Ferreira & Borges, 2020). As found by Liu (2022), official Chinese media information quality is more authoritative, comprehensive, timely, and useful, positively influencing the public's risk perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drama programs are another preferred type among Chinese older adults. Participants reported that they enjoyed watching dramas because they provided escapism and helped them relax. Consistent with the findings of Boursier et al. (2021), watching a TV drama seems to bring a different world to the viewer's mind, thus distracting people from the pandemic's troubles and possibly reducing their mental stress.

Variety shows and sports programs were also popular among the participants in this study because they provided entertainment and a relaxing. This finding is consistent with previous research that viewing television variety shows may be relaxing (Curtin & Shattuc, 2017), entertaining (Hill, 2018), and exciting (Esslin, 2017).

The participants in this study indicated that watching sports programs could be a substitute for outdoor leisure activities. According to Ryu and Heo (2016), watching television allows people to escape boredom as well as enjoy relaxation, and sports programs can be used as leisure activities to help older adults relax and maintain social interactions.

In conclusion, this study provides insights into the motivations and preferences of Chinese older adults for television viewing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings suggest that television played a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being among older adults during the pandemic. Television stations should take into account the preferences and motivations of older adults and develop programming that caters to their needs. Policymakers should also consider the impact of lockdown policies on older adults' mental health and promote initiatives that address their social isolation and provide them with alternative means of socialization.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors, and the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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