

# The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Future of Young People's Lifestyles and Media Consumption

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**Abstract.** The COVID-19 pandemic triggered significant shifts in lifestyle and media consumption among individuals aged 20-25 in the UK. This study investigates the pandemic's impact on their lifestyles and explores post-pandemic adjustments. Additionally, it examines the interplay between media consumption, specifically radio, and the evolving lives of young adults. Through qualitative analysis, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with UK-based young adults who experienced the pandemic. Utilizing the uses and gratification theory, the study reveals motivations behind media consumption, exploring links between media engagement and lifestyle changes. Findings indicate a shift toward positive attitudes about COVID-19, with a growing inclination for personal freedom. Young adults exhibit altered lifestyle patterns, including increased outdoor engagement and social interaction. Radio consumption reflects diverse music preferences and a strong affinity for news content. Notably, DAB radio emerges as the preferred platform among young listeners. Influencing factors encompass convenience, presenter style, content flexibility, and seamless advertisement integration. This research sheds light on how the pandemic reshaped young adults' lives, impacting media choices, and suggests potential future trajectories.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Pandemic; Young Adults; Lifestyle Changes; Media Consumption; Radio Habits.

## 1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lifestyle habits, which has further caused a shift in their media consumption patterns. In this context, this study aims to examine how the lifestyles of young persons (aged 20-25 years) in the UK have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and to further explore how young people's lifestyles may change or maintain in the future when COVID-19 is no longer an existential threat. After identifying young individuals' lifestyle characteristics in the post-pandemic stage, the connection between lifestyle and media consumption of young people is analysed. Further, the factors that affect young people's radio listening habits are investigated.

After gaining a basic understanding of the research context through secondary research, this study uses qualitative analysis to conduct in-depth interviews with 14 young people aged 20-25, who had experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK and planned to live in the UK in the future. The new uses and gratification theory (U&G) applied to mass media consumption is utilised as a basic framework to investigate young people's media consumption. On this basis, it proceeds to explore the links between young people's media consumption and their lifestyles.

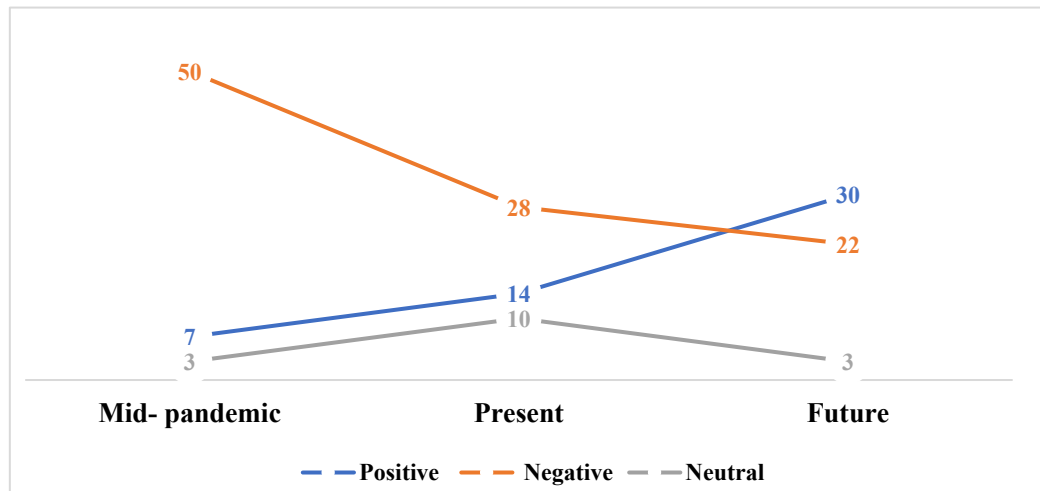
The aim of this research is to explore meaningful insights that reflect the perceptions of young people who are aged between 20-25 in the UK—about how their lifestyles and media consumption, particularly radio, have changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and what they plan to do when the threat of COVID-19 pandemic begins to recede.

## 2. Attitudes Towards COVID-19 among Young Adults

The first part of the in-depth interviews focuses on 20–25-year-olds' attitudes toward the coronavirus pandemic in the mid, present, and future phases. The transcribed contents are automatically coded



through ATLAS.ti for sentiment analysis and manually coded for review. Ultimately, three affective codes were extracted regarding young people's attitudes towards COVID-19, including positive, negative and neutral, which are listed below (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Number of sentiment codes

The number of extracted sentiment codes and trend of change could reflect respondents' sentiment about the coronavirus. It implies when it gradually subsides, youngsters' negative attitudes diminish while positive ones increase. In the next sections, detailed analyses of young people's attitudes toward the COVID-19 pandemic are offered.

### 2.1. Attitudes Toward COVID-19 at the Current Stage

Compared to the pandemic era, young people currently tend to feel significantly fewer negative sentiments about the COVID-19 pandemic, with most reporting less anxiety and even considering it no longer an important event.

Interviewee 1: Things will get better, be the same as pre-pending levels in our pre-2020.

Interviewee 7: It seems that everyone's moved on, so I'm not worried.

Nevertheless, negative feelings about the coronavirus pandemic currently still exist among the young generation and even seem to outweigh the positive ones. Concerns about infectious diseases, personal health, the loss of convenience, and other long-term impacts caused by the coronavirus pandemic are expressed frequently.

*Interviewee 4: There's still the fear of the virus, and it will always be there for probably the next few years.*

*Interviewee 6: ...Worry about the inconvenience. It's not necessarily a worry about being ill. ...being inside the room for several days during the lockdown, but I like to go out and run. So, for me, if the pandemic keeps going. I am worried about the long-term impact on my life.*

### 2.2. Attitudes Toward COVID-19 in the Future

Concerning the future, it suggests that the younger generation has a more positive outlook on the coronavirus pandemic and is significantly less negative. There is a possibility that youngsters are increasingly willing to pursue freedom, enjoy life and follow their pursuits as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Interviewee 10: So, my attitude right now is like if I wanna do something I wanna do it now and do it. I had enough of it and I wish everything could just move on.

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on young people's lives may continue in the future.

Interviewee 5: I don't think it will ever go away. I think it'll stay around.

interviewee 6: So, although in some ways it will become less of a thing. It's still a bit more of a worry about proximity, public transport and the effects that could have.

### **3. Lifestyles Affected by the Coronavirus**

This study examines changes in the lifestyle habits of young people aged 20-25 years under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on five themes: time spent indoors and outdoors, work or study patterns, travel patterns, exercise, and cooking. In addition, speculation about the future lifestyles of young people will be raised when the pandemic is in recession.

#### **3.1. Time Spent Indoors and Outdoors**

During the coronavirus post-pandemic stage, young adults are more likely to engage in outdoor activities, particularly on weekends. with more than half of those interviewed mentioning it.

Interviewee 10: So I feel like me, my friends and people around me, they all wanted to do more things and go out more...right now is more things are happening outside as well ... So I feel like more excuses for me to go out as well.

Besides, the young appear to use fewer interactive media such as social media and engage in more interpersonal communication when outdoors.

Interviewee 1: I tend to use less on my phone and generally would prefer interaction with people rather than using any social media.

As coronavirus has become less life-threatening, the proportion of time young people spends indoors and outdoors has changed. This lifestyle trend is likely to continue, which may have an impact on media consumption. Young persons' increased time spent outdoors in the post-pandemic era may result in less attention on interactive media.

Interviewee 5: I spend more time outside because it is more to do, meet people more **socialise**. I feel like a lot even though that time spent inside might not change as much before the pandemic.

#### **3.2. Work and Study Patterns**

##### **3.2.1. Work Patterns**

Youngsters believe the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed individuals to experience how remote work operates. The young population are inclined to hybrid working or teleworking, with nearly all of them preferring these working modes in the post-pandemic stage and expressing willingness to continue working in this manner in the future.

Interviewee 1: I think more and more jobs will offer the opportunity and the flexibility of being able to work from home.

Interviewee 2: I hope walking home from home will become normal stuff or maybe hybrid stuff. You can choose to work from home or work in the company here.

Meanwhile, young person looking for work are more likely to look for companies that allow them to work from home.

Interviewee 4: I think the pandemic change the way how people think about work that can be done remotely and it will affect their priorities when searching for a new job, including me.

##### **3.2.2. Study Patterns**

The students interviewed thought the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to experience online learning. In the post-pandemic era, a minority of young students would still be willing to a combination of online and offline learning modes, and this trend is expected to continue.

Interviewee 6: I think it would be good to have a mix where there are still lectures because to me, I felt like I got much more out of them, but I hope there is access to recordings of those live lectures because live lectures I think are really great.

However, the online study does not appear to be popular with most students. Even though a blended mode of teaching is available, 7 out of 10 students preferred face-to-face learning in the post-pandemic era, because it provides a real sense of social interaction and a higher level of self-control.

Interviewee 5: Now most people are on campus, so it is easier to meet up with people and especially when you get to know them actually being in-person lectures. It's a lot easier to create that kind of study and relationship with them than it would have been online.

Interviewee 13: I just feel when you study at home, self-control is really important. But I don't have that.... I think it's better if we do everything in real life a force you to study.

### **3.3. Travel Patterns**

In the post-pandemic stage, young people are more open to public transportation and coronaviruses may no longer affect young people's transportation choices.

Interviewee 5: I have no problem taking public transport now feel more comfortable. I'm happy to travel long distances. I can take the train now and then, whereas I also feel like it's a lot more a bit worrying taking for transport during covid because getting cancelled. Now I've not worried about that.

The young might consider the means of travel based on practical needs such as location, distance and convenience, etc. in the post-pandemic era.

Interviewee 10: On weekdays I would take the bus mainly, but I do drive sometimes, but because the parking in school is slightly difficult so I take the bus most of the time.

Interviewee 6: So transport using it much more and feeling more comfortable. Public transport using that. More like buses sort of stuff. ... Whereas now as there are reasons to go places like places further away or use my car.

### **3.4. Exercise**

As mentioned in 2.1, young people are less likely to stay indoors in the post-pandemic stage. One of the reasons why the younger generation spends more time outside appears to be exercise. In comparison to the mid-pandemic period, 8 out of 14 young people appear to do more outdoor exercise or return to the gym. This pattern is likely to maintain in the future, as coronaviruses may no longer have an impact on exercise.

Interviewee 10: I feel right now it's just it makes me feel safer to actually go into the gym and there are other people in it.

Interviewee 12: I can go outside and run if I want without people looking at me like I'm a threat ... All the gyms are open, I can go into the gym.... In the future, I think things will just go back to normal. Most people just go to the gym.

A small number of young people believed the coronavirus would make them take their health more seriously, resulting in increased physical activity.

Interviewee 10: Because of the pandemic people have more fear in their health conditions. I feel like overall, that kind of encouragement for me at least to stay and just be healthy.

### **3.5. Cooking**

In the post-pandemic era, the coronavirus seems to no longer influence young individuals' meal choices. Even though there are more meal options in the post-pandemic era, most young students (80%) may still prefer to cook their meals.

Interviewee 10: I do my meal mostly by myself. I would pack lunch if I go to school and I prefer cooked dinner at home ...If I do have plans, I like to go on a weekend, but if not, I prefer to have home-cooked meals.

When cooking, young people, particularly students, are more likely to refer to recipes from the media.

Interviewee 8: I used the HelloFresh app. When I cook food because it gives me instructions and it has a timer on it and you can pick the food that you want.

Interviewee 10: I prefer to watch YouTube videos when I cook especially contends-related recipes.

In addition, only half of the working young people interviewed seemed to cook for themselves.

Interviewee 1: A working lifestyle, a lot of fast food, a lot of takeaways. That's really unhealthy. So I don't really do that much cooking.

## **4. Media Consumption and Lifestyle**

This section explains young adults' media consumption behaviour using the uses and gratification theory, which has four main themes: social interaction gratification, cognitive gratification, convenience gratification and affective gratification. Based on gratifications, the link between young people's media consumption and lifestyle habits will be explored.

### **4.1. Social Interaction Gratification**

Maintaining friendships or meeting new people to form interactive connections are manifestations of social interaction. (Tanta et al., 2014). Half of the participants mentioned using media for social interaction. For radio consumption, listening to the discussion gives young people a sense of engagement.

*Interviewee 10: I would like to listen to just people chatting. Just talk about things and what's on the news and what are people eating, what they do. You know some interactions between people.*

Aside from radio, the need for social interaction could explain other media consumption. Interviewee 12 mentioned "I play games with my friends...We talk about games. Most of the time watching movies on YouTube." Besides, media tools, such as instant messaging applications, social interaction turns into the main purpose of use. Interviewee 14 said "And Snapchat as well. So, it replied to my friends."

The study found that there appears to be a link between lifestyle changes and media consumption. In the post-pandemic stage, young people seem to spend more time outdoors. In this case, they may have more offline gatherings and less online media consumption.

Interviewee 5: Definitely watch less TV at the time. when I'm out or do more stuff that doesn't involve looking at the screen. probably do consume fewer media because I was on that all the time. Now we're not in the pandemic, not looking at the screen and speaking to people and socializing with friends.

### **4.2. Cognitive Gratification**

Cognitive gratification refers to a sense of content fulfilment (Tanta et al., 2014). Almost all interviewees indicated gaining cognitive gratification might be a reason for using the media. Specifically, it could be categorised as information fulfilment and knowledge fulfilment.

The majority of the young interviewees mentioned using media to find information. The media serves three main functions for them:

- ⑩ Catch up with the latest trend, such as news (Interviewees 1,2,4,5,6,7,14) and the latest songs (Interviewees 7,13)
- ⑩ Check information about social connections (Interviewee 5)

#### ⑩ View information about everyday life (Interviewees 9, 10, 11)

This research finds that young people's seeking for information may be linked to their lifestyles. Young people, for example, seem to be used to listening to traffic and news on the radio while driving.

Interviewee 1: If I'm driving a car, I would definitely have the radio on because I would hear someone, the news... traffic alert from the radio.

In addition to information fulfilment, 71% of young respondents indicate they use media to gain knowledge. Unlike information requiring, knowledge is not as up-to-date as information, but it can lead to a new understanding and perception of things (Zagzebski, 2017). Young people may use the media as a tool to gain knowledge that they are not previously familiar with.

Interviewee 12: I want to move to another country. So I'll try to consume more information about that. So that's kind of what I'm doing on Instagram. I'll just follow a few things related to that country and just consume that media, like tourist locations or food kind of logs, or even pets.

The need to acquire knowledge among young people may be linked to some lifestyle habits. For example, young people learn recipes through the media when cooking.

Interviewee 8: A few weeks ago I started doing HelloFresh so I used the HelloFresh app. When I cook food because it gives me instructions and it has a timer on it and you can pick the food that you want.

### 4.3. Convenience Gratification

Convenience utility provides something effective to the individual. (Whiting and Williams, 2013). 6 of the samples mentioned their media consumption involved convenience of use in certain scenarios, which implies the need for convenience may be related to lifestyles.

When young people travel by car, the radio appears to be a popular form of media. Research shows three main explanations for this. Firstly, the radio's aural style of communication compensates for visual media. As driving requires visual concentration, radio facilitates media consumption. Secondly, Radio takes less attention, so listeners could multitask. For example, radio listeners can obtain information while driving. Especially when commuting by car, listening to the radio could save young people time. Furthermore, radio does not require listeners to actively filter information, making it ideal for those who lack the time or extra energy to sort through detailed content.

Interviewee 5: I like radio because I don't have to pay attention to every bit of it especially **when I'm driving**.... It is that easy to listen to music on the radio just relax, not pay full attention.

When travelling by public transport, young people tend to browse social media. Public transportation requires less attention on the road, thus media users could actively choose and filter content. In this instance, it's probably more efficient and convenient to pick flexible, aggregated, fast-updating social media.

Interviewee 4: The tram or Uber. Maybe take the bus. If I'm not in a rush...When **travelling**, I use social media news most of the time it's easily accessible.

### 4.4. Affective Gratification:

Affective gratification contains five emotional experiences: relaxation/ escape, pass time, accompany, pleasure and excitement. (Tanta et al., 2014; Whiting and Williams, 2013).

#### 4.4.1. Relaxation/ Escape

This theme of gratification means alleviating the pressure of daily life and focusing on more pleasurable matters. (Whiting and Williams, 2013; Tanta et al., 2014). 4 of the samples mentioned their media consumption is for relaxation, which is related to certain lifestyle habits. Some younger

generations are used to using media to relax before sleep. Radio could fulfil the media attribute of not needing to filter content and reading, which helps young people relax.

Interviewee 3: I listened to the radio before bedtime and I can go sleep very well, especially when I listen to the story that can be automated or replacement from for the reading books so that you don't have to read, you just listen to the audio sound that makes you relax.

Online music is one way that young people relieve stress, especially when at home. In this sort of media, users could choose their preferred music to relax without reading or thinking deeply.

Interviewee 12: If I just sit back and sit around and just relax on my bed, I'll listen to Spotify.

Young people choose media types that require less consumer engagement to ease tension and empty their minds, such as television. The autonomous programming of television could save young people's energy and provide a relaxing break from work and study.

Interviewee 10: If you're working on a regular 5 tonight basis is just that's time for you to actually sit down to watch TV. You got emotional hours a day.

#### **4.4.2. Pass Time.**

This concept of satisfaction can be defined as killing time and relieving boredom. (Whiting and Williams, 2013). Media used to relieve boredom is mentioned in 8 of 14 samples.

The demand of young people to pass the time is possibly related to their lifestyle habits. In their free time, especially on weekends, young people are more prone to use online media, especially online videos, which may be a time-consuming distraction.

Interviewee 1: A weekend that is kind of boring, to be honest. Obviously, perhaps some online videos, online streaming later on in the evening.

Some young drivers, especially passengers, might use the sounds of the radio to relieve boredom.

Interviewee 5: Listen to the **radio** in the car not only when I'm driving, but when with passengers in the car to make things interesting. Quite boring if it happens, this goes the same route each week.

#### **4.4.3. Accompany.**

This type of utility refers to the sense of companionship gained through media consumption. (Rubin, 1981). 6 out of 14 samples mentioned the accompanying function of online music or radio.

Young people may feel the need for company in certain circumstances and this has probably led them to form certain lifestyle habits, such as cooking alone, driving alone, studying alone, etc. The sound of music and radio might help to relieve the loneliness. Music and radio can be used to select the channel or list to be played and to provide background noise to make the surroundings less quiet.

Interviewee 9: **When I am cooking,.....**I'll use Spotify as music, just the atmosphere.

#### **4.4.4. Pleasure.**

This sort of gratification is characterised by the acquisition of delight and entertainment. (Whiting and Williams, 2013). 5 of the samples mentioned they used the media for entertainment to get pleasure. The desire for pleasure is linked to one's lifestyle.

Online media gives viewers more freedom over how long they spend viewing and what they choose to watch based on their interests, making it a popular choice among young viewers. When young people have free time indoors, they tend to use online media, particularly online videos, for entertainment.

Interviewee 9: Inside it's just easy to sit down and have a bit of out an hour or so free. So that's when I would watch something on Netflix.

#### **4.4.5. Excitement.**

This gratification involves the establishment of an environment of conflict or tension to generate excitement. (Tanta et al., 2014) 6 of the samples mentioned the habit of listening to online music in scenarios where motivation is needed. Young people, especially when engaged in physically demanding or monotonous activities such as exercising may benefit from upbeat, uplifting music. The personalised playlist feature of online music media provides an exciting background to keep young people motivated and uplifted.

Interviewee 12: **When exercising**, I use Spotify playlist which is a list of songs. And I have a lot of workout-related songs. I just listen to those.

### **5. Radio Consumption**

Four factors may influence young adults' radio listening. The first factor is convenience. 6 young persons indicate radio platforms tend to be obsolete.

Interviewee 6: Lots of radio stations are pretty general, broad. Unlike Spotify, where you can search for a genre you like. It's a bit harder to find that because you try and search for a show based on genre and you're not gonna get anything.

Secondly, it is the tone of the presenters. Four respondents said the radio presenters' tone of voice may influence the listening decision.

Interviewee 6: You turn to the radio not just for the music, but also because you wanna hear a presenter you like.

Interviewee 8: If I like the presenter and I found the presenter entertaining, I would wanna listen to it more.

Furthermore, young persons claim the fixed nature of radio content makes it less impossible to personalise.

Interviewee 3: Radio Just provide what program they provide and you just figure out what you like you to find which program on the radio that you want to choose so that is the short back of the radio.

Interviewee 14: I like playing my preferred music playlist for long. I thought the radio doesn't really give you that freedom of choice.

Finally, inappropriate advertisement insertion may bother young adults.

Interviewee 1: Ads on the radio promoting different things could be annoying to listen to.

Interviewee 4: I prefer to listen to music without interruptions from advertisements or without having to listen to the news out of nowhere or without sports news.

### **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the post-pandemic era, young people tend to have a more positive attitude towards coronavirus. Most felt that life would return to normal, and that the coronavirus would no longer pose a threat to their lives. However, there are still part of young individuals who seem to believe that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and that its effect on their lives would always be present. In the future, while concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic might persist, young people are likely to be increasingly willing to pursue freedom and enjoy life.

The research focuses on possible changes in lifestyle habits among the 20-25 young generation in the context of the coronavirus, including time spent indoors and outdoors, work or study patterns, travel patterns, exercise as well as cooking among the 20-25 young generation. The interviews revealed that young people tend to spend more time outdoors when COVID-19 is no longer a threat. When outdoors,

young people try more real social activities, which may have led to a decrease in the use of interactive media and this lifestyle habit is likely to continue in the future.

The in-depth interview features with radio listening generates several major findings. First, young people, like the general public, are most likely to listen to music on the radio, but they are more interested in the news than the general public. It's also worth noting that some young people's taste in music is not always fixed to pop or rock. Secondly, there is a strong relationship between radio content selection and the usage scenario/time of a day. Moreover, young people's preferences regarding radio platforms are different from those of the general public. In contrast to FM, DAB is the dominant channel that is popular with young people. Finally, in respect of factors influencing radio listening consumption, respondents mentioned several aspects, including convenience of use, presenters' tone of voice, flexibility of content and advertisement insertion.

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