

Culture and literature: Public interest and habits reviewed

This final report on *Information International's* survey of Lebanon's cultural habits presents a comparison and summary of the most significant results collected. The full survey had gathered basic information on understanding the public interest in cultural activities relating to music, theater, cinema, television and radio, as well as reading habits and visits to exhibitions, archeological sites and the National Museum. A sample of 600 people in Greater Beirut was interviewed, with a gender distribution of 58.5% males and 41.5% females.

Patterns of activity

The research has provided important information on the degree to which people are engaged in arts and culture. Respondents were asked to identify the range of activities they participate in and, as shown in [Graph 1](#) on the following page, the audio-visual media was the most popular. Watching TV and tuning in to the radio were the most common activities, while reading was the next most widespread preference. Going to see a film at a cinema represented a lower proportion, and going to exhibitions and the theater showed a big drop in participation.

Gender

Participation rates varied according to the type of activity, with marked differences appearing in the categories of movie and theater-going. The survey also showed a larger proportion of women than men going to the movies and the theater. In terms of reading, the total percentage of male readers was higher, but penetration was higher among females (i.e., there are more women who read than women who don't read and vice versa for men).

Age

There was a clear association between age and participation in terms of cinema and theater attendance. A study of cinema-going habits showed that penetration was highest within the 18 to 24 age bracket (see [Graph 2](#)), decreasing progressively with age. As for theater-going, the older bracket of 45 to 54 year-olds was highest and there was much less interest in the younger age groups. In contrast, the other activities did not show significant differences in penetration by age groups. The highest penetration for TV viewing was in the 55–64 age group, while for exhibition and museum attendance, it was in the 45–54 bracket.

Education

According to the survey, readership diminished at lower education levels and university graduates made up the greatest proportion of readers. Education was also a significant factor in terms of theater-going with the highest penetration detected in respondents with a Master's, followed by those with a Bachelor's degree and declining progressively at lower levels of education.

Reading

The following data on reading can be singled out:

- 36.7% of respondents read nothing and the core of regular readers is composed of university graduates and those between 15 and 24 years of age.

- Average spending on reading materials was less than LL 10,000 per month according to 43.2% of respondents, between LL 10,000–LL 20,000 for 35% of respondents and between LL 26,000–LL 50,000 for 12.4% of those polled.

- The preferred literary media consisted of:

- **Newspapers:** 35.3% of readers said they read newspapers, but only 38.4% said they read daily, while 34.3% claimed to read them three to five times per week and 27.3% read them only once or twice per week.

- **Magazines:** 34% of readers said they read magazines. The most popular were social magazines (19.4%), followed by art magazines (17%), political publications (14.7%) and health-related publications (10.4%).

- **Books:** 30.7% of readers said they read books, but estimates sizing up the number of serious readers of books reaches a mere 14% of the population.

TV viewing habits

Regarding viewing and listening habits, the following points can be made:

- 99% of respondents have a TV in their home and 79% have a satellite connection.

- The persons who spend more time in front of the TV set are those between 55 and 64 years of age.

- Movies are the number one attraction, followed by the news and regular series such as soap operas.

- There is more satisfaction with foreign films than with Arabic films.

Radio listening habits

As far as radio is concerned, the following was revealed:

- 92.5% of those polled have a radio in their home and radio listeners represented 77% of the sample.

- The majority of listeners (70.8%) tune in to the radio from their homes, their cars (53.7%) and from the workplace (20.8%).

- Listener preferences were mainly music (82.3%), news (43.9%),

religious programs (12.8%), political programs (12.3%) and sports broadcasts (7.6%).*

- Listeners preferred Arabic music (96.1%) to Western tunes (48.8%) and in both cases contemporary music was favored over songs from the past.*

Cinema Attendance

The most significant data concerning cinema was:

- Only 30% of those interviewed go to the movies and women are more likely to go than men.

- The frequency of cinema attendance is an average of 24 times per year, and the highest cinema attendance is observed among young people between the ages of 18 to 24.

- Romantic and sentimental films were the most popular category, followed by action movies, comedies and science fiction productions.

Theater-going habits

Concerning theater, it can be stated that:

- Almost 90% of those polled never go to the theater.
- The highest penetration is in the 45 to 54 year-old bracket and audiences are made up of more women than men.
- 55% of theater-goers said they attend one show per month.

Museum and exhibition attendance

The following points can be made:

- 76.3% of those surveyed never attend exhibitions, and only 31.5% of respondents have visited the National Museum, as shown in [Graph 3](#).

- In terms of exhibition attendance, penetration was highest in the eldest age bracket of 65 and above, followed by the 45–54 bracket, and attendance within the female category was higher than that among males.

- Painting exhibitions were the most popular among respondents, followed by handicraft shows and photography exhibits.

- Regarding museum attendance, penetration was highest in the 45–54 age bracket and the majority of visitors were from the Beirut area, followed by residents of Baabda, Metn and Aley.

* Percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could mention more than one activity. ■

