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### ► To cite this version:

Didier Courbet, Marie-Pierre Fourquet-Courbet, Évi Basile-Commaille, Pascal Bernard, Céline Pascual-Espuny, et al.. Media as A Source of Coping and Social, Psychological and Hedonic Well-being: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Media Psychology*, 2023, 26 (3), pp.306-335. 10.1080/15213269.2022.2142244 . hal-04085047

**HAL Id: hal-04085047**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04085047v1>**

Submitted on 28 Apr 2023

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Source: Didier Courbet, Marie-Pierre Fourquet-Courbet, Évi Basile-Commaille, Pascal Bernard, Céline Pascual-Espuny, Pemon Kouadio & Tracy Klein (2023) Media as A Source of Coping and Social, Psychological and Hedonic Well-being: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study during the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Media Psychology*, 26:3, 306-335, DOI: [10.1080/15213269.2022.2142244](https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2022.2142244)

*The present version of the manuscript is almost the published version*

**Media as a Source of Coping and Social, Psychological and Hedonic Well-being: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have provided an unprecedented opportunity to better understand the processes by which media are used to improve coping and alter wellbeing. Despite the important health issues at stake, the overall dynamic of media-based coping strategies (MBCS), their evolution over time according to their perceived efficacy, and their link with social well-being are poorly understood. The present longitudinal qualitative study, conducted in seven phases of interviews over a period of 36 weeks among a diverse population experiencing lockdown, lifting of lockdown, and then a second lockdown (N= 31; total duration 192 hours), shows how individuals implemented eight families of MBCS on two interdependent levels. On the first level, two families of MBCS developed “micro” and “macro” social processes, contributing to social wellbeing. Social media satisfied social needs usually satisfied offline. Two other families also improved psychological and hedonic well-being. Among these MBCS, the hedonic strategies in particular were perceived as being ineffective after about a month of confinement. Four families of second-level MBCS were then implemented and were perceived as effective in both the short and long term. Limitations and new perspectives opened by the results are discussed.

**Keywords.** Media reception, media use, lockdown, emotional regulation, media-based coping

**Media as a Source of Coping and Social, Psychological and Hedonic Well-being: A  
Longitudinal Qualitative Study during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, a large part of the world's inhabitants have experienced unprecedented situations in the context of major health risks, lockdowns, uncertainty about the future, social distancing, etc. The experience considerably altered peoples' well-being and it was necessary to adapt quickly. In addition, many activities that usually improve well-being could not be carried out due to the closure of artistic and cultural organizations, sports clubs or restaurants.

In many countries there was an increase in the amount of time people spent using the media (television and internet), notably in France (National Audiovisual Institute, 2020). In this context, research has shown that the media enabled coping: media were used to adapt to the aversive situation and increase overall well-being, known as media-based coping. Thus, people implement media-based coping strategies (MBCS) (Eden et al., 2020; Grady et al., 2022; Nabi et al., 2022).

However, two important aspects remain unknown and have been investigated in this study. Firstly, adapting to new health problems generating negative affect and evolving over a period of several months, is probably not done immediately. Adaptation requires numerous trials with coping methods that are either new or already experienced, adjustments and readjustments, depending in particular on their perceived efficacy over time (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). We first address two sets of research objectives in this regard. (1) Gaining a better understanding of the MBCS implemented, their overall operating processes and their perceived efficacy on well-being. (2) As time went by, the aim is to better understand how did MBCS and their perceived efficacy change. These questions are important to gain insight into the processes involved when media are used as a coping strategy and to improve well-being, both in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and more generally.

Secondly, as the period of social distancing and lockdowns was long, a third set of research objectives (3) seeks to determine, on the one hand, whether media have helped to satisfy other more basic social needs usually satisfied face-to-face. On the other hand, to what extent could social media,<sup>1</sup> such as social networks and digital audiovisual communication platforms (e.g., Skype), used extensively during lockdowns, improve another important type of well-being—social well-being (Keyes, 1998). This third set of research objectives is important because social well-being is a fundamental component of overall well-being in both the short and long term.

By implementing a longitudinal methodology and a qualitative survey with semi-structured interviews, this research aims to achieve these three sets of objectives. These objectives are important beyond the specific case of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this unprecedented situation presented the opportunity to understand better how and by what processes the media and their contents are used to adapt in the long term to a context of health risk alternating periods of lockdown and lifting of lockdown, and to improve one's well-being, notably social well-being. Achieving these objectives can also lead to a better understanding of other related cases such as those of people who are sick or elderly, who have to stay at home or are socially isolated.

This paper is organized as follows. The theoretical context is first outlined, along with the research questions and method. These are followed by the results and discussion, including the limitations of the research and avenues for future research.

### **Theoretical Background and Research Questions**

The COVID-19 pandemic was marked by, on the one hand, an increase in negative affect and an alteration in well-being, and, on the other hand, a context of unprecedented health risks and a succession of lockdown, lifting of lockdown, back into lockdown, over a fairly long period (nine months in France). In this context, two traditional research streams in

communication sciences and media psychology can help to gain insight into the processes involved in media use regarding well-being (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021).

### **Media Use and Coping**

The first of these research streams pertains to media-based coping . According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “coping is defined as ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific (external and/or internal) demands that are deemed to be taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual”. This theoretical context is particularly pertinent in the stressful and anxiety-provoking situation elicited by the COVID-19 pandemic, because coping strategies aim to help an individual both better adapt to risks and better control or tolerate a threatening situation and reduce its negative effects on mental health and well-being (Eden et al., 2020).

Several categorizations of coping have been proposed. For example, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) mainly distinguished three families of coping strategies: (1) problem-focused coping, aimed at reducing the demands of the situation and/or increasing one’s own resources to cope with it; (2) emotion-focused coping, wherein the individual seeks to regulate the emotional tensions induced by the situation; and (3) seeking social support to obtain sympathy or help from others, for example. In Skinner et al.’s (2003) categorization of all families of coping, the authors indicate that five are essential: problem solving, support seeking, avoidance, distraction, and positive cognitive restructuring.

In this context, one can differentiate two main functions of media (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Media use is considered as either a specific coping strategy, distinct from other non-media strategies (Chen & Kennedy, 2005), or as a means to facilitate the implementation of strategies that can also be carried out without media: for example, we can express our emotions by posting on social networks sites (SNSs) or by talking to someone face-to-face (Van Ingen et al., 2016). In this last perspective, Wolfers and Schneider (2021)

specify that it is necessary to distinguish the objectives of coping from the multiple means (tools), media or not, to achieve the objectives. The present research further develops this conception.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Eden et al. (2020) found that five families of MBCS were particularly implemented: (1) problem-focused media coping, wherein media are used either as instrumental support or to plan action strategies; (2) avoidant media coping, wherein media are used either to deny reality or to disengage behaviorally; (3) reframing (i.e., attempting to see things in a different, more positive light); (4) humor-based coping; (5) escapist coping (distracting oneself to escape unpleasant feelings or to feel better).

While coping strategies based on cognitive reframing and humor were associated with globally beneficial outcomes for well-being, those based on escapism and avoidance were associated with globally negative outcomes. In fact, in general and in the more or less long term, coping strategies focused on emotions such as escapism or avoidance can be perceived as being non-effective or even harmful. However, this is not always the case (see Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Some studies show that escapist media use can be a functional coping strategy (Halfmann & Reinecke, 2021). In another study conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Grady et al. (2022) showed that users increased television viewing and computer-mediated interpersonal communication early in the pandemic and overwhelmingly avoided the news at the onset of social distancing. In terms of affective responses, participants reported mixed experiences with social media, some platforms being associated with positive affect (TikTok, YouTube) while others were generally a source of stress (Facebook, news content). Self-management and regulation through media may be particularly relevant in stressful situations where individuals have little control over the source of the stress (as is the case in a pandemic) and problem-focused coping strategies are therefore perceived as less viable alternatives.

Nabi et al. (2022) showed that only TV/movie and music consumption emerged as a significant mediator between stress and coping efficacy, which, in turn, was significantly associated with likelihood of social distancing. Watching TV or movies does not simply serve as an escape or a remedy for mood disturbances. Rather, it can enhance perceptions of one's ability to cope with a crisis, which can, in turn, boost productive coping behaviors.

However, methodologically, the studies by Eden et al. (2020), Grady et al. (2022), and Nabi et al. (2022) either used standardized survey instruments or did not follow the same population by interviewing them multiple times. Thus, they could not know whether people used new types of MBCS during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns; nor could they study in detail the temporal dynamics and changes of MBCS. Nevertheless, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that the coping strategies used are always specific to the situation at hand. Similarly, over a period of several months and in the context of health risks, the pandemic crisis led individuals to adapt to new and changing environments (e.g., over the course of lockdown, lifting of lockdown, re-instatement of lockdown obliging people to remain at home once again, etc.). In such contexts, it is probably difficult to find immediately effective coping strategies. Indeed, individuals must evolve their coping strategy over time, depending in particular on its perceived efficacy (Folkman, 2008). For example, meaning-focused coping, linked to existential goals and values, is often only implemented once the individual has realized that none of the coping strategies he or she usually uses has been effective in adapting to the situation (Folkman, 2008). This is why the present study uses a qualitative and longitudinal methodology, essentially based on seven phases of interviews over a period of 36 weeks.

### **Media Use and Well-Being**

The second research stream concerns the links between media use and well-being.

Firstly, studies have been conducted on the links between media use and hedonic well-being, which describes the emotional state in which a maximum of positive emotions and a minimum of negative emotions are experienced (Diener, 2000). For instance, Zillmann's (1988) mood management theory explains how individuals use the media to increase their positive mood and decrease their negative mood. Individuals regulate their emotion and mood through media—for example, through entertaining TV movies. Many works have empirically validated this theory (see Nabi & Prestin, 2017).

Secondly, other studies have investigated the links between media use and psychological well-being (see Reinecke & Oliver, 2017). Psychological well-being is not directly based on short-term affect, as is the case for hedonic well-being. Several conceptions of psychological well-being have been proposed. For example, in an often cited theory (Ryff, 1989), it is composed of six dimensions: self-acceptance (liking most parts of one's personality); personal growth (challenged to be or become a better person); purpose in life (a sense that one's life has direction and meaning); environmental mastery (feeling capable of managing the responsibilities of life); autonomy (feeling confident to think and express one's own ideas, opinions, and values); and positive relations with others (having, or able to form, warm and trusting personal relationships).

To increase psychological well-being through media use, two main avenues are especially explored. The first concerns seeking meaning for one's life in accordance with one's values (Oliver & Raney, 2011). The second concerns heightening one's sense of personal growth, such as skills or knowledge (Wirth et al., 2012). In some research on social media use (e.g., Meier & Reinecke, 2021), particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grady et al., 2022), the accumulation of social resources such as social capital or social support has been associated with the concept of psychological well-being. However, for Keyes (1998, 2005), the concepts of psychological well-being and hedonic well-being do not

take sufficient account of the social nature of human beings and their social needs. Keyes therefore proposed a third type of well-being: social well-being. Based on individuals' perceptions, five dimensions make up social well-being (Keyes, 1998): social acceptance (holding a positive attitude towards other people); social growth (feeling that 'we'—groups, institutions, society—are challenged to be better people); social contribution (seeing one's own daily activities as useful to and valued by society and others); social coherence (being able to make sense of what is happening in the community, workplace, or society); and social integration (having a sense of belonging to, and deriving comfort and support from, a community). Furthermore, when extraordinary social events such as the Covid-19 pandemic occur, Courbet et al. (2015) show that social media, especially SNSs, act as a "digital collective consciousness" role by regulating major collective emotions and improving collective well-being.

The conception of these three types of well-being—hedonic, psychological, and social—has received empirical support, notably through confirmatory factor analyses (Gallagher et al., 2009; Joshanloo et al., 2016). In keeping with Keyes' (2005) model, the present study focused on these three types of well-being, placing greater emphasis on social well-being than previous studies of media use, for several reasons. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced social distancing and lockdowns. It is likely that many individuals have not been able to satisfy certain social needs and have had their social well-being altered. However, SNSs and audiovisual communication platforms have provided a unique opportunity to establish social interactions with, for example, physically distant people (family and friends), and to exchange easily with a multitude of other people, social groups, and large communities speaking the same language in one's country and even beyond. These actions can improve social well-being (Haslam et al., 2018). However, in the context of social distancing and

lockdowns, the extent to which unmet social needs can be satisfied online and the processes involved are not yet well known.

Bridging the two research streams on media use in relation to coping and well-being, this research is based on the notion that in the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown situations, media uses aimed both at coping better and improving well-being. This is why these two types of use are grouped under the term MBCS. MBCS regulate not only stress, but also emotions, mood (Stevens & Dillman Carpentier, 2017), and well-being. In the present research, in the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown context, MBCS are defined in a broad sense as strategies<sup>2</sup> involving the use of media (and their content) in order (a) to adapt better to the context of risk and the aversive situation and (b) to improve possibly impaired hedonic, psychological, and social well-being.

As with coping in general, people are expected to assess perceived MBCS' efficacy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Perceived efficacy refers to the user's perception that the strategy significantly contributes to better coping in the context of the pandemic and lockdowns by improving hedonic, psychological, and social well-being.

Depending on their perception, users should modify their MBCS to further improve their adaptation and well-being. Indeed, adaptation is a progressive and dynamic process often requiring changes over time (Folkman, 2008). Furthermore, changes in context over a period of several months (lockdown, lifting of lockdown, going back into lockdown) required the implementation of a longitudinal study to understand the dynamics and temporal processes of MBCS better.

Employing a qualitative and longitudinal method, the survey aimed to address three sets of research questions. In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, the first set of research questions asked: Considering offline and online media, which MBCS were implemented?

What were the overall operating processes of the MBCS? What was the perceived efficacy on hedonic, psychological, and social well-being ?

The second set of research questions asked: How did MBCS and their perceived efficacy change as the pandemic evolved over time (e.g., lockdown, lifting of lockdown, going back into lockdown)?

During social distancing and the lockdown periods, face-to-face interactions decreased for a long period of time. However, the satisfaction of social needs and social well-being are important components of overall well-being. The use of audiovisual communication platforms (e.g., Skype) and SNSs to interact with a multitude of other people and social groups increased significantly. The third set of research questions asked: Involved in MBCS, what roles have digital media played in satisfying basic social needs (usually satisfied face-to-face) and improving social well-being?

### **Methods**

A qualitative methodology was most suitable to explore these research questions. Thus, adopting a phenomenological perspective (Husserl, 1970), a longitudinal qualitative survey was conducted among a population of 31 people living in France over the course of a period of lockdown, lifting of lockdown, and then a second lockdown. A second method was used in addition: guided introspection.

#### **Longitudinal Survey and Semi-Structured Interviews**

Seven phases of semi-structured interviews were conducted via video calls over a period of 36 weeks (a total of 205 semi-structured interviews, or 190 hours of recording; average interview length 55 mins). The interviewers were the authors of this article but also student assistants trained in the method and the theoretical context. Before each phase, a meeting was organized with all the interviewers to convey specific instructions. Regarding the duration of the study, there was an initial pre-structured plan until the lifting of lockdown (the

phases were adapted according to the dynamic of the pandemic, the evolution of the communication, and government and health authorities' decisions). The plan was then extended due to the second lockdown in the fall of 2020 (phase 7).

- Phase 1: 10th day of the first lockdown (LD1+10: 03/27/20–03/29/20)
- Phase 2: 20th day of the first lockdown (LD1+20: 04/05/20–04/07/20)
- Phase 3: 30th day of the first lockdown (LD1+30: 04/15/20–04/17/20)
- Phase 4: 40th day of the first lockdown (LD1+40: 04/25/20–04/28/20)
- Phase 5: 55th day of the first lockdown, two to three days before lifting of the lockdown (Lifted LD1-2: 05/08/20–05/10/20)
- Phase 6: Two to three weeks after the first lockdown (Lifted LD1+14: 05/25/20–06/01/20)
- Phase 7: 21st–35th days of the second lockdown (back into lockdown; LD2+21: 11/20/20–12/05/20)

The interview guide was designed according to the theoretical context and the research objectives (see Supplemental online material 1 [SOM 1]). Open-ended questions were asked about subjective well-being in general and since the last interview, the uses (particularly perceived goals, processes, perceived effects, and efficacy) of the main media (television, social media, printed press, radio...), and content (news, public service announcements (PSA),<sup>3</sup> entertainment...) in relation to well-being, psychological spheres (cognitive, affective, behavioral), and psychosocial aspects (relationships with others, etc.). One of the main objectives was to collect verbatim and meanings concerning, firstly, media uses and especially how these may have changed in relation to the period preceding the pandemic and the lockdowns and on in relation to the previous phases of interviews conducted. Secondly, it was a matter of collecting verbatim and meanings in terms of MBCS and media uses aimed at improving the different types of well-being. During the interviews, many reminders were

given about changes in media use and MBCS, especially those which may have appeared since the beginning of the pandemic and lockdowns, as well as their perceived links with well-being.

### **Population**

The seven phases of interviews were conducted among the same population of 31 individuals residing in France and diversified according to seven criteria (age, gender, region, lockdown circumstances: entourage/home, profession, education level; see SOM 2). To reduce the risk of losing subjects due to the longitudinal nature of the survey, the six interviewers interviewed people from their own networks of acquaintances but not from their immediate environment.

### **Content Analysis**

After each phase, thematic content analysis (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012) was conducted. This was first undertaken individually by each of the interviewers (thematic intra-interview and inter-interview analyses, first phase-by-phase, then between phases). In a second step, a joint analysis was carried out among all the interviewers in order to find elements which were common to the interviewees. These analyses enabled “meanings to emerge by relating events and contexts” and “to retain distance from the strict content of the speech” (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012, pp. 349–350) so as to derive a more theoretical approach to the material. The analysis focused mainly on MBCS. Each phase focused on changes in strategies involving media uses (and their content) with the stated goals of improving the three types of well-being (hedonic, psychological, and social), so as to adapt better to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

Following an iterative hermeneutic process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the categorization (theme, sub-themes, etc.) was done according to a double criterion (Hammedi et al., 2021): (1) according to the functions attributed by the interviewees to

their new media uses; and (2) according to the theoretical context. The final decision on categorization was made unanimously by the analysts following discussions. Discussions between analysts enabled shared meanings and elements identified in the media uses and MBCS to emerge, both within the same phase and in the temporal changes between phases. Content analyses were systematically contextualized and related back to the changing health and lockdown situations.

To ensure the validity of the survey, four criteria were considered. Firstly, the saturation point (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was consistently reached between the 22nd and 26th interviews, depending on the phase, which indicates that the number of interviewees was sufficient. This number was determined by discussions between interviewers after each phase. In addition, saturation was assessed according to the answers given to the research questions. Secondly, the longitudinal nature of the study made it possible to achieve good validity. The interviewee first answered questions on a particular topic. Then, the interviewer presented a summary (e.g., in LD1+20) of what the interviewee had said in the previous phase (e.g., in LD1+10) to these same questions, asking if this summary was correct. This approach made it possible in particular to ensure the correct correspondence between the points of view of the interviewee and the representations that the interviewer had of them (credibility criteria set out by Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thirdly, the longitudinal aspect of the study provided good validity through temporal triangulation by capturing chronological changes in meanings and behaviors (confirmation criteria according to Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fourthly, the work of collecting and analyzing the verbatim scripts, carried out by seven observers, each having different scientific skills, resulted in the same overall interpretation of the results, thus reducing subjectivity and ensuring satisfactory validity of the results by triangulation among observers (Denzin, 1970). Any discrepancies between analysts were resolved in discussion.

To deepen our understanding of the phenomena under study and further increase the scientific validity of the survey, a second research method was used: guided introspection, drawn from ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). As the people carrying out the study were themselves experiencing the same lockdown situation, they also self-observed and analyzed themselves as objects (Mucchielli, 1996). In a longitudinal perspective, they questioned their own representations and feelings in relation to the themes of the interview guide. They regularly filled out a notebook for this purpose, analyses of which were carried out using thematic methodology. The results were directly added to those of the interviews, but without giving them the same epistemological status.

### **Results**

The results of this longitudinal survey show two categories of very diverse MBCS,<sup>4</sup> each more or less actively implemented and triggered at two different times. From the first days of the first lockdown, the interviewees said they developed an initial category, which we refer to herein as first-level, comprising four families of MBCS. From the fourth week of the lockdown period, and due to interviewees' perceptions that some of the MBCS were not effective, a new second-level category comprising four new families of MBCS was implemented. An overview of the results is presented in Figure 1. As the methodology is qualitative, drawing on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and in order to provide meaning, the results are presented and discussed in the same section with reference to the theoretical context. When verbatims are taken from notebooks filled out by guided introspection, this is indicated. The main contributions of the present research to the literature are then set out.

[Figure 1 near here]

#### **Four Families of First-level Media-Based Coping Strategies (1. in Table 1)**

The results highlight four families of first-level MBCS implemented from the beginning of the first lockdown and affecting the three types of well-being (see Table 1). The first two families of MBCS concern social well-being, but the “levels” of the social entities involved in the interviewees’ perceptions are different. The first family is more concerned with interpersonal and group aspects (“microsocial”). The second family concerns more macroscopic aspects (“macrosocial”), such as the country or the culture (in this case, French) as a whole. It is important to note that if the perceived source of connectedness is either at a micro or at a macro social level, in both cases the positive outcome is within the individual being interviewed. The third and fourth families concern, respectively, psychological and hedonic well-being.

[Insert table 1 here]

***“Microsocial” Media-Based Coping Strategies focused on Social Needs related to Social Well-Being (1.1. in Table 1)***

Associated with social well-being, this family of MBCS is more focused on the satisfaction of social needs or goals through either active or passive use of media and SNSs. This family is essentially related to three dimensions of social well-being: social integration, social coherence, and social acceptance (Keyes, 1998).

**Active social media use and social satisfaction (1.1.1.)** The first active use is audiovisual communication to continue relationships with family and friends (1.1.1.1.). Digital audiovisual communication platforms were considered the most functional means of communicating at a distance with people to whom the interviewees were affectively attached and who they could no longer meet face-to-face (e.g., a “Skype party” with the family). Particularly appreciated, these uses improved well-being by both reducing negative affect linked to distance and the fear of seeing one’s loved ones in poor health, and by generating

positive satisfaction: “It was reassuring to see that my parents were well, to be able to speak to them and see them” (Gabrielle, LD1+10).

The second active use was participating in digital groups and co-producing social values, meanings, and identities (1.1.1.2.). Via SNSs, a large proportion of interviewees sought either to be a part of new digital groups formed as a result of the pandemic or to increase their participation in digital groups formed before the pandemic (e.g., on WhatsApp). Varying in size, degree of formality, and frequency of exchanges, these groups contributed to establishing or reaffirming the social identities of each individual (e.g., “I am a funny person”). Individuals then felt socially legitimized and did not hesitate to post messages where they affirmed their values and beliefs more than they would do outside these groups. They then talked more about themselves, a process which in itself is associated with lower stress (Zhang, 2017): “When I saw that my friends were sending dark jokes, I let myself go. If I have to be funny, I might as well do a good job of it” (Christophe, LD1+30).

Within these digital groups, we observed the emergence of phenomena classically observed in offline groups: the creation of stereotypes, stigmatization, and rejection of people belonging to an out-group (Stürmer & Snyder, 2009) whose values were opposed to those of the in-group. For example, on the 20th day, we saw the emergence of a phenomenon of stigmatization of individuals whose behaviors were deemed “unconscious” and “dangerous” to public health and social life: “I wrote that it was driving me crazy because [the day before the lockdown] people were trying to go away on vacation. It was disrespectful” (Victoire, LD1+20).

Rejection and condemnation within the SNSs and digital groups were part of the development of simplified and stereotyped social representations and social values: for example, the good guys—the interviewee being one of these—and the bad guys who did not

respect the lockdown. This provided a grid for interpretation, facilitating peoples' understanding of the social world beyond their homes.

While the interviewees said that the duration of their use of SNSs had increased at the beginning of the lockdown, the results from phase 2 onwards also highlighted an active search for peaceful communication, notably marked by avoidance, both in production and reception, of messages likely to provoke negative emotions or to disturb the feeling of social belonging to digital groups: “[On Facebook] I post about more lighthearted, ironic things, without going into my emotions. It avoids misunderstandings or difficult messages” (Kyllian, Lifted LD1-2).

The results therefore showed how within these digital groups, processes of co-production of a micro-culture, shared values, and social identity took place. These groups also seemed to satisfy needs of belonging, social cohesion, and collective production of meaning. The longitudinal follow-up of the survey over 36 weeks also showed the perceived efficacy of these MBCS in improving social well-being, acting favorably on social integration and social coherence (Keyes, 1998).

#### **Passive use of SNSs, sources of comparison, and beneficial social learning (1.1.2).**

An unusual increase in passive use of SNSs (mainly Facebook and Instagram) was observed, which consisted mainly of observing what was presented about the lives of one's online friends without directly interacting with them (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Research on this kind of use not specific to the context of lockdown has shown that it is associated with intense social comparisons, particularly via photographs. As these are often carefully constructed and selected to enhance the image of the person posting them, social comparisons are often unfavorable to the observer (Festinger, 1954). Indeed, the observer processes information in a biased way and, as a result, tends to think that other people's lives, especially their social lives, are better than their own, which sometimes leads to envy and jealousy (Verduyn et al., 2017). When excessive, passive use is also associated with anxiety and depressive disorders

(Fourquet-Courbet & Courbet, 2017). However, the results of this study have shown the opposite to be true, since passive use was perceived as generating satisfaction.

The results also showed that SNSs were sources of comparison and social learning perceived as beneficial for four reasons. Firstly, comparison was beneficial because the lives of others also in lockdown were no longer a source of envy and jealousy. Secondly, fear of missing out, one of the explanatory factors for alterations in well-being outside of the pandemic context (Baker et al., 2016), had ceased to exist. Indeed, as everyone was forced to stay at home, the fear of missing out on collective events, like parties, had virtually disappeared. Thirdly, social comparisons were not bottom-up, disadvantaging observers, but rather confirmed the normative nature of the participants' own reactions, all of which generated a positive sense of social integration and belonging, a significant dimension of social well-being (Keyes, 1998). At the end of the lockdown and during the lifting of lockdown, for example, many people said they were happy to see that others had the same concerns they did, a mixture of fear and contentment. SNSs enabled people to see others' happiness and how they, too, were enjoying the return to freedom. The social acceptance dimension of social well-being (Keyes, 1998) was thus improved. Fourthly and finally, SNSs were used as sources of social learning by providing valued social role models: "I saw that a friend on Facebook was trying to present to his children the image of a calm and psychologically sound father. I wanted to do the same" (David, LD1+10).

Previous studies have shown how SNSs (Facebook) can provide perceived social support (Nabi et al., 2013). The present study confirmed these findings and went a step further by explaining other "microsocial" processes involved in audiovisual communication platforms and SNS use. These are tools that can satisfy social needs which are usually satisfied by offline social interactions, generating social satisfaction and thus improving social well-being by acting favorably on social integration, social coherence, and social acceptance

dimensions. The results are in line with the proposals of Wolfers & Schneider (2021) which suggest better differentiating between objectives and means (tools) in research on coping. The interviewees choose to use certain media applications because they believed that these were, among a set of other possible tools, the most suitable tools to achieve their objectives of adaptation and/or improvement of well-being.

***“Macrosocial” Media-Based Coping Strategies focused on Social Needs related to Social Well-Being (1.2.)***

Compared to the previous family of MBCS, the social entities to which respondents referred were more “macroscopic”. The results showed that SNSs (especially Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) provided an experience that gave the individual a deep sense of cultural integration whereby everyone in the country was sharing the same life experiences. On SNSs, other people were often perceived as belonging to a united nation facing the same problems. Within this collective, interviewees felt that everyone understood each other with a strong sense of brotherhood. Three types of MBCS improved social well-being (Keyes, 1998) through the contribution of SNSs.

**Support perceived through social connectedness via SNSs (1.2.1).** The perceived social connectedness provided via SNSs reinforced the interviewees’ sense of anthropological connection with members of the same French culture, experiencing as they did the same upsetting event and socially sharing identical emotions. This feeling reassured interviewees by reducing negative emotions, but not only at the individual level. Interviewees perceived these beneficial effects of SNSs to be collective. In offline settings, several health psychology research studies have shown that feelings of connectedness to, and social cohesion with, a large community reduce negative emotions and are generally beneficial for social well-being (Haslam et al., 2018). The results showed that this process also appeared to be observed in interactions with SNSs in the context of health risks: “It was better when I told myself that I

was not alone but in contact with this great whole that are all the connected French people” (Caroline, LD1+20).

### **Improving well-being by undertaking collective actions and rites (1.2.2).**

Undertaking collective actions, akin to what De Heusch (1971) calls occasional rites, can provide protection in the face of historical disruption of the collective and cyclical order. From the beginning of the first lockdown in France, many messages relayed on SNSs called for daily applause at 8pm for health workers from windows and balconies and to post videos of the participants. This action, which was cited by the majority of interviewees, may encourage the development of social values, as well as feelings of social contribution and social growth (Keyes, 1998). This is evident, for example, in the evolution of Louis' written discourse in extracts from his introspection notebook: “I feel a bit useless socially” (LD1+1); “Since I saw on SNSs all the people encouraging clapping and posting pictures of the clapping, I do the same. With these common actions that honor those who help society, I feel a little less useless” (LD1+15).

**Collective production of meaning via SNSs (1.2.3).** The collective production of meaning via messages and collective actions allowed the co-production of social meanings of events on a large scale, even nationwide, contributing in particular toward increasing social coherence (Keyes, 1998): “With the debates on SNSs, it allows everyone to become aware that our civilization has messed up nature. The SNSs encourage us to think together about a new model of society” (Christophe, LD1+30).

These three types of MBCS, perceived by the interviewees as being effective, can be interpreted in the light of previous studies which have explored SNSs as media for a “digital collective consciousness” (Courbet et al., 2015). Durkheim (1912) argued that people rarely manage to deal with, and make sense of, important social and dramatic events on their own. They feel a fundamental anthropological need to communicate with others, to experience their

emotions collectively, and above all, to refer to a supra-ordinate collective consciousness, which corresponds to an abstract collective entity which is “stronger than the individual”. SNSs have contributed to building a digital collective consciousness wherein people derive more social and cultural meaning in relation to the event, an increased sense of anthropological connection to a human community, and perceived social support; they are better able to manage collective emotions, and participate in collective actions and rituals. The results showed that these three types of MBCS seemed to have a positive effect on the five dimensions of social well-being (social acceptance, social growth, social contribution, social coherence, social integration; Keyes, 1998).

### ***Media-Based Coping Strategies related to Psychological Well-Being (1.3.)***

The results identified two types of MBCS which involved two major dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989): making sense of one’s life and contributing to personal growth.

#### **Media-Based Coping Strategies contributing to providing meaning of life (1.3.1.).**

Three subtypes were observed. These are directly related to the three dimensions from which, as Seligman (2011) showed, people typically seek meaning in their lives which is consistent with their values.

The first subtype was linked to the affective dimension, particularly through media use associated with the values of parenthood and the family (Schnell, 2009) (1.3.1.1.): “I set up regular dates where my wife and I would watch movies with our two children, so we felt very connected” (David, LD1+20).

The second was linked to the cognitive dimension, especially through media use which develops beliefs and spirituality (1.3.1.2.): “On social networks, we discussed religion. It increases my faith in the path I follow” (Ylies, Lifted LD1-2). Seeking to develop the

values of parenthood and family on the one hand, and spirituality on the other, are actions that allow one to effectively develop meaning of life (Schnell, 2009).

The third subtype was related to the behavioral dimension, particularly through media use which allowed the interviewee to actively transmit their social values to others (1.3.1.3.): “For me, LinkedIn is a new way to disseminate ecological values. To work on tomorrow’s world [...] we must make what is essential central in our priorities” (Caroline, LD1+30).

MBCS contributing to providing meaning of life is consistent with the work of Baumeister and Landau (2018), who firstly emphasized the collective nature of meaning: individuals actively seek to socially share their own meaning of existential events. Secondly, and more broadly, they indicated that existential meaning would decrease the perceived uncertainty associated with certain contexts. The results showed that interviewees developing meaning-focused coping reported becoming more serene in the face of situational uncertainty.

**Media-Based Coping Strategies contributing to personal growth (1.3.2).** During the lockdowns, some people developed new media uses which increased their need for personal growth, an important source of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), such as knowledge acquisition: “I watch documentaries on replay on *France 5*, about the brain, for example. It educates me and makes me think about the world” (Jérôme, Lifted LD1+14).

Previous studies have identified MBCS which aim to improve psychological well-being (Eden et al., 2020; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). The present results provide more detail on the processes involved in the context of COVID-19. The media were used in connection with two major determining factors of psychological well-being: the meaning of life and its three components (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) on the one hand, and personal growth on the other. In health psychology, in the revised model of coping, Folkman (2008) explains how an individual experiencing chronic stress or suffering from an alteration in their affective state may implement coping strategies focused on meaning and in relation to

the individual's existential goals and values, but only after implementing classic coping strategies and if the essential emotional outcomes of these are negative. However, the results showed that during the lockdowns and through media use, this type of coping strategies were implemented from the beginning, and not after negative consequences of first-level MBCS had been observed. Moreover, regarding the perceived efficacy of the coping strategies, the longitudinal follow-up over 36 weeks showed that they were seen as being functional from the beginning to the end of the survey. These results can be explained by the fact that people became accustomed to using media (movies, documentaries, SNSs, etc.) regularly in their daily lives, thus finding more meaning in their existence or contributing to a sense of personal growth (Fourquet-Courbet & Courbet, 2020). These MBCS are therefore highly available and psychologically accessible and salient (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021).

***Media-Based Coping Strategies focused on Individual Emotions related to Hedonic Well-Being (1.4.)***

Two types of MBCS improve hedonic well-being: escapist MBCS (i.e., distracting oneself to escape unpleasant feelings or to feel better; see Eden et al, 2020) and MBCS with social sharing of emotions.

**Escapist Media-Based Coping Strategies (1.4.1).** First of all, the results identified escapist MBCS using entertainment, some in a rather regressive mode: "I liked the 'Hotel Transylvania' cartoon. There is no reference to adult life: it is purely a return to childhood" (Gilles, LD1+40).

Other entertainment, such as funny movies, has been studied for its ability to provoke positive emotions and reduce negative emotions by decreasing intrusive and ruminative thoughts. "I watched all the films starring Louis de Funès showing on the television. It relaxes me and stops me from having intrusive thoughts" (Valérie, LD1+20).

While escapist MBCS were perceived to generate immediate positive effects, longitudinal follow-up over the 36-week survey showed that those who used them frequently suffered overall adjustment difficulties and mood alterations. These results were mainly observed from the 30th day of confinement among people who watched entertaining content (films or funny TV series, for example) longer than others with the declared aim only of being entertained. In connection with these uses, the interviewees spoke of "the feeling of not doing anything interesting in their lives", of "letting themselves go", of "procrastinating" (related to professional activity)—i.e., of a lack of meaning and self-efficacy: "Watching films on TV was good at first. But after a while you realize that you are wasting your time and that is annoying" (Valérie, LD1+30; for evolution, see LD+20 above).

Indeed, the perceived efficacy of escapist MBCS did not extend beyond the short term. The present results showed that after about 30 days, feelings of lack of meaning and self-efficacy began to appear. These results can possibly be interpreted as a lack of satisfaction of the needs necessary for psychological (Ryff, 1989) and social (Keyes, 1998) well-being. In addition, negative affect, such as guilt, was present. Taken together, these results probably explained the adjustment difficulties observed.

**Media-Based Coping Strategies with social sharing of emotions (1.4.2).** Two subtypes were observed.

MBCS linked to social sharing of emotions have been found to have good perceived efficacy in the short and longer term through viewing entertainment associated with social sharing of emotions as a couple or family (1.4.2.1.): "There are also pleasant moments that we share, like watching a series together, all the family" (Jérôme, LD1+10).

Interviewees used humor via SNSs to post or exchange jokes on the virus or the lockdown with others (1.4.2.2.): "I search on Twitter for posts that make me laugh about the

coronavirus. I send them on to my friends. It helps me to distance myself a bit from this virus” (Christophe, LD1+30).

Thus, the perceived efficacy of these two MBCS was probably due to the fact that they not only involved emotional regulation but also social relationships, with their beneficial effects on social well-being, including social support and strengthening of self-image and social identity (Fourquet-Courbet & Courbet, 2020). Furthermore, humorous messages about the health context often resulted in cognitive reframing of the situation, the usefulness of which is recognized (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Intensification of satisfaction from unchanged media habits (1.4.3.).** Other interviewees maintained their usual media practices, which became real MBCS resembling reassuring rituals, sources of “small pleasures” which they were nevertheless more aware of and enjoyed and appreciated more than before the lockdowns.

**Replacement of inhibited media habits by other media uses (1.4.4.).** The results also showed how media habits that were sources of positive emotions suppressed by the lockdowns were replaced by other practices with the same objectives: “As I can’t read the newspaper while I have breakfast in my usual bar, I read the news on the internet instead” (Christophe, LD1+10).

#### **Four Families of Second-level Media-Based Coping Strategies (2. In Table 1)**

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns lasted longer than expected and required longer-term adaptation and regulation of well-being. The results showed the emergence around the fourth week of lockdown of four new MBCS families, herein referred to as second-level MBCS (see Table 1). The first family consists of a cognitive reframing and an acceptance of uncertainty via the media. The three other families involve changes in media use. Longitudinal follow-up showed that these four MBCS families had good perceived

efficacy in increasing well-being in the short and longer term, still observable in the 36th and last week of the study.

### *Cognitive Reframing and Acceptance of Uncertainty via the media (2.1.)*

At the beginning of the lockdown, many people were uncomfortable with the idea of having to live in a world perceived as being “uncertain”. This uncertainty about the social and health environment initially generated negative affect, especially prompting people to engage in information-seeking behaviors to manage and reduce the uncertainty. Neither PSA, often perceived as “unclear”, “lacking in transparency”, and “contradictory”, nor the news (despite the fact that it was largely devoted to the subject of COVID-19) seemed to provide the information people needed to be able to manage the perceived uncertainty. However, around the fourth week of lockdown—notably when messages on TV from French governing bodies openly recognized for the first time that there was a lack of scientific knowledge about the virus and the consequences of the pandemic<sup>5</sup>—the results showed a change in people’s perceptions of the social and health environment. Just over half of the interviewees began to accept its uncertain nature and the absence of certain information more easily: “The media and the people need certainties. But now I know that there are no certainties” (Benoît, Lifted LD1-2).

This change was underpinned by coping strategies based on a cognitive reframing of problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While Eden et al. (2020) also found this to be true for the COVID-19 context, the present result further clarifies these outcomes. People reported that they had experienced significantly fewer negative emotion and that they had significantly reduced their search for media information about health risks and the health context. This can be seen, for example, in the evolution of Caroline’s speech: “The fact of not being able to control anything, it makes you panic [...] I watch the news a lot on television to find out what

will happen” (LD1+10); “On television, they don’t know any more than we do. So, I learned to live from day to day. Since, I am more Zen” (LD1+30).

These results are consistent with Brashers’ (2001) uncertainty management theory, which purports that when uncertainty is considered a fact of life, it is no longer necessarily associated with negative affect. The televised news and PSA thus played a major role in helping to make the uncertainty acceptable. Accepting the uncertainty was perceived as being one of the most effective MBCS for improving well-being.

### ***Reduction in Exposure to Televised News and Public Service Announcements (2.2.)***

At the beginning of the lockdown, interviewees exposed themselves heavily to the media, especially to public communication and television news. “I watch television and TV news a lot more than I did before. I want to be informed about what is happening” (Jeanne, LD1+10).

As the weeks went by, a large majority of interviewees felt stressed by the excess of information they received on the health crisis, which did not provide the answers they expected. Implementing an avoidance strategy (Skinner et al., 2003), about a third of interviewees adopted the MBCS that consisted of reducing exposure to this content, but without accepting the uncertainty principle, unlike the previous MBCS: “I don’t really watch the news anymore. I’m just saturated” (Claudie, LD1+40).

These MBCS were perceived as being effective as it gave people the sense of reducing the perceived seriousness of the situation, thus also reducing the negative emotions associated with this perception. However, a longer study period would have been necessary to determine the perceived effectiveness over the longer term.

***Change in Media chosen for Receiving Information and Entertainment (2.3.)***

Two types of MBCS involved the use of a medium other than television when the person wanted to be informed or when the emotions caused by too much television news became difficult for them to bear.

**Improved control of exposure to news through the internet (2.3.1.).** For example, some interviewees no longer wanted to endure the news on television. In order to increase their sense of control, the first type of MBCS led them to search for information themselves on the internet, choosing more of the kind of information they were willing to receive. “I don’t watch anymore, I read articles on the France Info or Médiapart sites” (Christophe, LD1+30).

**Alternate TV news and internet entertainment (2.3.2.).** The second type of MBCS consisted of alternating short periods of time spent on SNSs or on entertainment platforms to relax when television news had provoked an excess of unpleasant reactions. This shows, more widely, the possibility for one medium to be used to counterbalance the harmful effects of another.

***Change in Types of Leisure Pursued (2.4.)***

This family of coping mechanisms was based on a change in the type of leisure activities pursued. Two main reasons related to the long duration of the pandemic and lockdowns seem to have led to the development of this coping. (1) Firstly, about half of the interviewees who had initially developed mainly escape MBCS gradually perceived them as being ineffective and reduced them significantly. They made changes to their leisure activities.

(2) Secondly, the results showed the intensification or appearance of needs more related to psychological well-being as the weeks went by. New activities or media uses became necessary to satisfy these needs. This change was much less noticeable among those

who had already implemented MBCS related to psychological well-being, which were perceived as being effective in the short and long term.

While television was frequently watched at the beginning of the lockdown, other entertainment activities—media or other—constituted new sources of hedonic and psychological well-being. With regard to hedonic well-being, leisure activities which immediately generate positive emotions (games, puzzles, listening to music, reading books) were initially observed. Hobbies involving either manual, creative, or artistic skills (drawing, painting, filming/video editing, singing, dancing, do-it-yourself, decorating, gardening) or physical activity were also observed. Longitudinal follow-up showed this type of recreation promoted feelings of increased personal growth and psychological well-being, consistent with Ryff's model (1989). Take, for example, Jeanne, who changed from "I watch TV a lot more" (LD1+10) to "I hardly watch TV anymore [...]. With YouTube tutorials, I learned a lot about interior design. I'm changing the way I decorate my house now. I like it, it's constructive for me" (LD1+40).

The processes involved in these four families of second-level MBCS were different. The first family "cognitive reframing and acceptance of uncertainty via the media" (2.1. in table 1) was cognitive and problem-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Focused on emotions, the two families of MBCS "reduction in exposure to televised news and public service announcements" (2.2.) and "change in media chosen for receiving information and entertainment" (2.3.) were intended to diminish the negative emotional effects of a medium (television), effectively improving hedonic well-being. They allowed better control of the information received, inducing emotions (Zillmann, 1988). Interviewees implemented behaviors concerning either cessation or reduction of exposure to a particular content (television news), or media modulation, inducing positive emotions immediately after the appearance of negative emotions. Thus, while some MBCS developed essentially an

avoidance strategy (2.2), others developed essentially a proactive strategy (2.3.2.) and others, finally, developed a strategy that was partly avoidant and partly proactive (2.3.1.) (Skinner et al., 2003). While the fourth family (2.4.) improved hedonic well-being in the short term, its main result was to improve psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) in the long term.

### **Discussion**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, media use played a major role in the development of strategies to adapt better to the aversive situation (coping) in order to improve well-being. The results are consistent with those of Eden et al. (2020), Grady et al. (2022), and Nabi et al. (2022). The longitudinal qualitative survey carried out in seven phases in France among a diverse population who all experienced lockdown, lifting of lockdown, and a second lockdown period makes four new contributions to the literature on media-based coping in the context of health risks, and, more generally, on the links between media use and well-being.

(1) The first contribution is that it offers a better global understanding of strategies involving the use of media (and their content) to adapt to a threatening and aversive situation, to regulate the affective sphere, and, more generally, to improve impaired well-being. The results revealed how individuals actively used the media to ultimately develop eight families of MBCS, implemented on two interdependent levels, demonstrating great diversity.

The survey has also contributed to a better understanding of the dynamics of media-based coping processes, their evolution over time, and their perceived efficacy regarding the users' well-being, analyzed through the users' verbatim statements. On the first level, four families of strategies affecting the three types of well-being—two more social and two more individual—were identified as follows: (1) “microsocial”, with active and passive social media use (audiovisual communication platforms and SNSs) and focused on social needs (essentially social integration, social coherence, and social acceptance) related to social well-being (Keyes, 1998); (2) “macrosocial” focused on the five dimensions of social well-being

(Keyes, 1998); (3) related to psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) and focused on meaning of life and one's sense of personal growth; and (4) focused on individual emotions related to hedonic well-being.

Around the fourth week of lockdown, when the first-level MBCS were perceived as being ineffective, four new families of second-level MBCS were implemented. The first family consisted of a cognitive reframing of problems which helped the individual to accept the uncertainty; the second involved a reduction of exposure to televised news and PSA; the third involved changes in the media chosen for receiving information and entertainment; and the fourth involved changes in the types of leisure pursued.

Mainly focused on emotions (Zillmann, 1988), the last three MBCS involved behaviors either of cessation of exposure to a particular content (television news) or of media modulation, implemented primarily to diminish certain negative emotional effects of the television media. Second-level MBCS have, then, effectively contributed toward improving individuals' emotional state and well-being and in a durable way—i.e., the effect was still observable in the 36th and last week of the study. Longitudinal follow-up showed that, unlike all other strategies, which were perceived to be effective in the short and longer term, first-level MBCS which focused solely on individual emotions (e.g., escapist MBCS) were considered ineffective in the long term.

While, overall, the majority of MBCS were planned to improve well-being, this intentionality seemed more pronounced in the second level. However, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the intentions which motivate media use.

The results are consistent with those of Grady et al. (2022), who observed a decrease in news consumption, a regulation of emotions via the media, and a search for social connection with the SNSs during the COVID-19 epidemic. The present findings provide a broader context for interpretation within a two-level dynamic process of adaptation.

(2) Secondly, even when MBCS have social components, such as the development of perceived social support, the literature has often analyzed them in relation to psychological well-being, particularly the dimension of positive relationships with others (Eden et al., 2020; Grady et al., 2022; Nabi & Prestin, 2017; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). While the present research confirms these results, it proposes to go a step further, deepening the study of social aspects by making a link with social well-being (Keyes, 1998). For the first time in the literature, the present research highlights other “microsocial” and “macrosocial” processes involved in the use of audiovisual communication platforms and SNSs. These processes provide tools to meet social needs which are usually satisfied through offline social interactions, thus provoking social satisfaction, leading to increased social well-being in the context of COVID-19.

Longitudinal observation has shown how these MBCS were perceived by interviewees to be effective right up to the end of the investigation, especially in contributing to social well-being, although interactions with other types of well-being were also observed. Indeed, during lockdown, SNSs and audiovisual communication platforms were notably used to satisfy social needs that could likely not have been met by other media, nor even probably by non-media means. The results firstly revealed “microsocial” MBCS focused on social needs, which were themselves divided into two types. The first type included active use of media, with the use of audiovisual communication platforms (e.g., Skype) to communicate with friends and family on the one hand, and participation in digital groups on the other, contributing to co-producing values, meanings, and social identities. The second type included passive use of SNSs, sources of comparison, and beneficial social learning. Three dimensions of social well-being were improved (social integration, social acceptance, and social coherence). Secondly, the results highlighted “macrosocial” MBCS, where three types of use of SNSs, considered together, contributed to improving social well-being through

social support, co-producing collective meaning, increasing the sense of cultural integration and the sense of connection to a nation, and managing major collective emotions, notably through collective digital consciousness and participation in collective actions and rites (Courbet et al., 2015). The five dimensions of social well-being (social acceptance, social growth, social contribution, social coherence, social integration; Keyes, 1998) were improved.

(3) The third contribution concerns the identification of early-implemented MBCS focused on the meaning of life and its cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, as well as personal growth in relation to psychological well-being. Unlike Folkman's (2008) revised model of coping, in lockdowns, the MBCS contributing to providing meaning of life were not implemented in a second stage following a perceived negative outcome of first-level coping, but before it. As found by Folkman (2008), their perceived efficacy was satisfactory in both the short and long term. Thus, MBCS implemented with the aim of enhancing social well-being had more important functions than those so far identified in the literature on MBCS (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). It can also be observed that among MBCS aimed primarily at regulating the affective sphere, MBCS involving the satisfaction of social needs or cognitive reframing of the problem were the only ones proven to be effective in the longer term.

(4) The fourth contribution is the identification of three meta-cognitive features of MBCS. The first feature concerns the strong reflexivity associated with most of these MBCS. Indeed, the majority of the interviewees spontaneously developed elaborate verbatims about them, their functions, certain determining factors, and their perceived efficacy. The second feature is the MBCS' relative flexibility (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Indeed, although interviewees each preferred to use the same few strategies within the same level, they quite easily switched from first-level to second-level MBCS depending mainly on the perceived efficacy. Second-level MBCS did not inhibit first-level MBCS. Nevertheless, further research is needed to better understand how experiences with MBCS at one level influence MBCS at

the other level. The third metacognitive feature concerns MBCS' management. Over the course of the nine-month study, the interviewees learned new types of MBCS but also new ways of managing the strategies, presumably as a result of their experience. Indeed, in the second lockdown, the interviewees had acquired experience of the functionalities or dysfunctionalities of the various coping mechanisms experienced during the first lockdown. Several of them therefore seemed more able to modify their media use (type of content and media, duration of exposure) quickly according to their well-being.

The main limitations of this study are methodological. One limitation relates to the fact that the interviews, being repetitive, may have been tiresome, leading interviewees to shorten their responses in the latter phases. Another limitation is the population interviewed: although diversified according to several criteria, it was not representative of the general French population. Thus, while the theoretical saturation point seems to have been reached, care must be taken in considering the degree of transferability and generalizability of the results. Another limitation concerns the methodology employed for the interviews, which involved studying uses and processes through social representations. When the content analyses showed, for example, the deliberate way in which MBCS were implemented (e.g., with the aim of improving well-being) or their effectiveness, this was done via the representations and perceptions of the interviewees. Moreover, as with coping in general (Skinner et al., 2003), the categorization of some MBCS may be questionable. For example, due to the lack of theoretical clarity on one dimension of well-being (Gallagher et al., 2009), "microsocial" MBCS, categorized in relation to social well-being (Keyes, 1998), could also concern the positive relationship dimension of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Finally, it was difficult to understand the dynamics between the MBCS, which seemed to be interdependent, and between the two levels of MBCS. For example, it was not possible to

determine whether watching entertaining movies on television (Nabi et al., 2022) provided resources for better adaptation in the longer term.

### **Conclusion**

Through the case study of the COVID-19 pandemic, the present longitudinal qualitative survey provides a better global understanding of strategies involving the use of media to adapt to a threatening and aversive situation and to improve impaired hedonic, psychological, and social well-being. More research is needed, however, to better understand the links between media use, especially social media, and social well-being, particularly by looking at interactions between individuals and more “macroscopic” entities such as large groups or the nation. Indeed, the psychosocial processes and effects would be different than in relationships with a few people.

More generally, it would be interesting to establish a categorization specific to MBCS and a global operating model. Recent syntheses show that the media allow the implementation of novel and effective strategies to improve well-being and overall mental health (Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Schneider et al., 2021). As in the hierarchical taxonomy proposed by Meier and Reinecke (2021), a large number of theories and a large set of interacting variables such as type of media, type of content (e.g., this research shows that entertaining content on the internet could decrease negative emotions triggered by television news), or duration of exposure, type of use (e.g., passive vs. active; Valkenburg et al., 2021) should be integrated. Further research is also needed to gain an understanding of the dynamics between MBCS within the same level, the ways in which they are managed, and the transition from one to the other. For example, why did some individuals not evolve their first-level strategies? What are the roles of situational, media (channel, content...), and individual variables such as flexibility in managing strategies (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021)? These new perspectives would also contribute to a better understanding of media uses in relation to well-being outside the case of

the COVID-19 health crisis—for example, for people who have to stay at home, socially isolated, and those whose well-being is impaired in the long term.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Social media is made up of various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience. It is essentially a digital space created by the people and for the people, and it provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana et al., 2018). In this study and in a broad sense, we consider social media to include, among others, social networking sites (SNS; e.g., Facebook, Instagram) and audiovisual communication platforms (e.g., Skype). SNS are networked communication platforms in which participants (a) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; (b) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (c) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). On the Internet, an audiovisual communication platform is a technical device allowing audiovisual communication between users.

<sup>2</sup> "Strategies" is plural because, in the present study, it has been difficult to strictly isolate strategies: there are often small variations, for example, in their concrete implementation, either between people or in the same person depending on the moment and the context.

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, we include under this term presidential, governmental, and health authorities' communications (Directorate General of Health (*Direction Générale de la Santé*), Public Health France (*Santé Publique France*), and the COVID-19 Scientific Council (*Conseil Scientifique COVID-19*)).

<sup>4</sup> Due to lack of space, the results do not address media coping concerning protection measures against COVID-19, such as barrier gestures.

<sup>5</sup> In his speech on 13 April 2020, the President of the French Republic admitted that political leaders did not have all the answers and that "this virus is unknown and is still very mysterious to us today" (Présidence de la République Française, 2020).

**Funding Details**

This work was supported by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique under Grant ANR-20-COV3-0003-01, France; and the Excellence Initiative of Aix-Marseille University - A\*MIDEX, a French “Investissements d’Avenir” program under Grant InCIAM - AMX-19-IET-005.

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Cécile Savin, Agathe Bérard, Romane Cottreau, Bérengère Delavacquerie, and Joonggun An for conducting the semi-structured interviews.

**Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Data Deposition**

The authors are willing to share their data, analytics methods, and study materials with other researchers. The material is available upon request.

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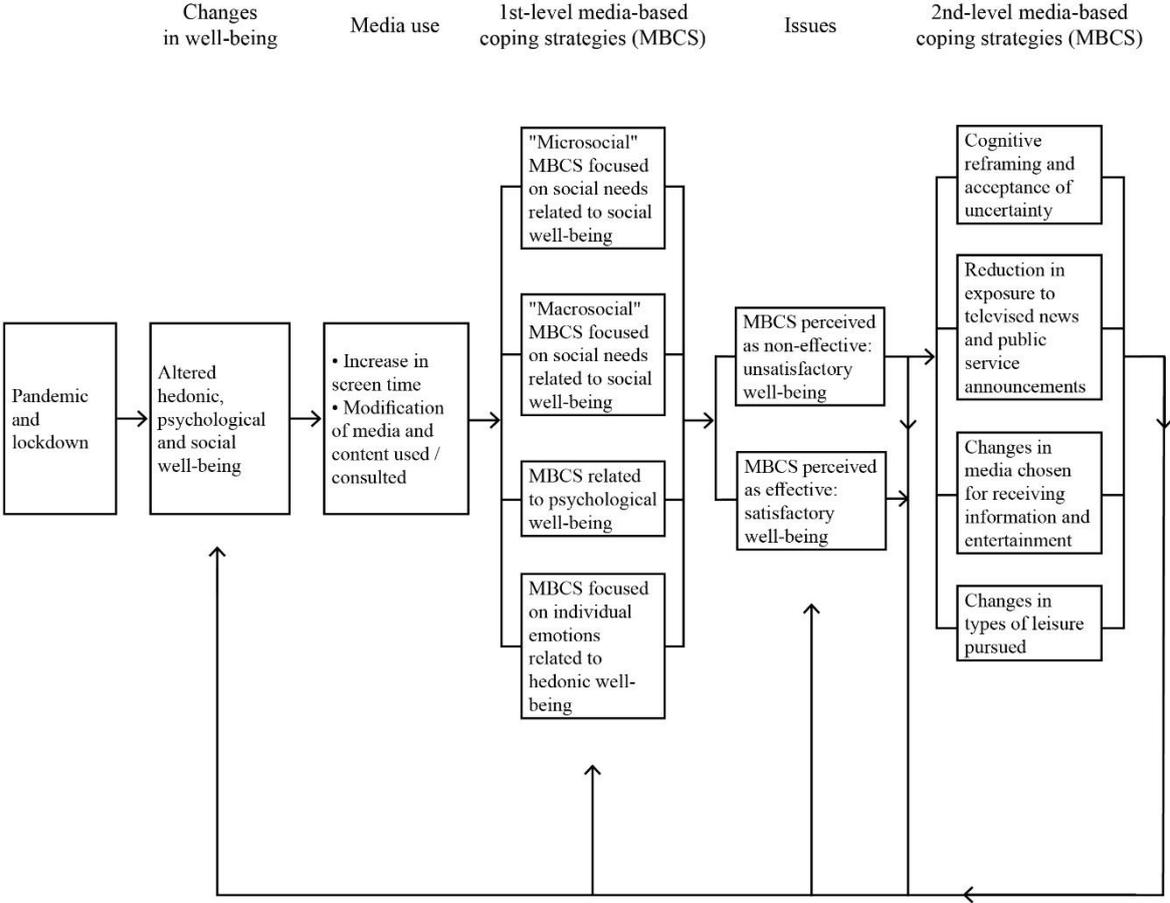
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**Figure 1.** Global process of media-based coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns

**Table 1.** Main first- and second-level media-based coping strategies observed

**1. First-level media-based coping strategies**

1.1. “Microsocial” media-based coping strategies focused on social needs related to social well-being

1.1.1. Active social media use and social satisfaction

1.1.1.1. Audiovisual communication to continue relationships with relatives

1.1.1.2. Participating in digital groups and co-producing social values, meanings, and identities

1.1.2. Passive uses of SNSs, sources of comparison, and beneficial social learning

1.2. “Macrosocial” media-based coping strategies focused on social needs related to social well-being

1.2.1. Support perceived through social connectedness via SNSs

1.2.2. Improving well-being by undertaking collective actions and rites

1.2.3. Collective production of meaning via SNSs

1.3. Media-based coping strategies (MBCS) related to psychological well-being

1.3.1. MBCS contributing to providing meaning of life

1.3.1.1. MBCS contributing meaning of life in an affective dimension

1.3.1.2. MBCS contributing meaning of life in a cognitive dimension

1.3.1.3. MBCS contributing meaning of life in a behavioral dimension

1.3.2. MBCS contributing to personal growth

1.4. Media-based coping strategies focused on individual emotions related to hedonic well-being

1.4.1. Escapist MBCS

1.4.2. MBCS with social sharing of emotions

1.4.2.1. Viewing entertainment as a couple or a family

1.4.2.2. Humor via SNSs

1.4.3. Intensification of satisfaction from unchanged media habits/rituals

1.4.4. Replacement of inhibited media habits by other media uses

**2. Second-level media-based coping strategies**

2.1. Cognitive reframing and acceptance of uncertainty via the media

2.2. Reduction in exposure to televised news and public service announcements

2.3. Change in media chosen for receiving information and entertainment

2.3.1. Improved control of exposure to news through the internet

2.3.2. Alternate TV news and internet entertainment

2.4. Change in Types of Leisure Pursued

**Supplemental Online Material 1: Interview Guide (simplified version)**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using this interview guide, which changed slightly over the phases, particularly in response to changes in the health context and political events. The main themes addressed were the following.

- General and emotional state (e.g. How are you since the previous interview?). Evaluate the frequency of the emotions they are talking about.

Satisfaction with their current life

- Feelings/state of mind/thoughts after X days of lockdown/lifting of lockdown (First lockdown: Phases 1 to 4, with the prospect of lifting lockdown in Phase 5 and actual lifting of lockdown in Phase 6 / Second lockdown: Phase 7) in relation to the pandemic, the lockdown itself (intensity, valence of negative/positive affect and emotions, cognitions, etc.). Changes since the previous phase(s).
- How are the negative (stress, anxiety, fear...) and/or positive feelings and emotions of people managed in lockdown/lifting of lockdown situations, especially with traditional/digital media and the context of such use: television (content: news/debates, films/series, entertainment, etc.), SNS (Which platforms? Time of use? Types of use? Types and tone of communication—humorous, dramatic, empathetic? With whom—contact with relatives, new contacts? How do you perceive what is happening on SNS during the lockdown—positive or negative feelings?), radio, press, other media? Changes since the previous phase.
- Uses of the different media in relation to before the lockdown: content sought, avoided, new uses, usual uses? Why? Emotions, well-being, values, links to others, rituals, etc. sought? What is the perceived efficacy of such use? If weak, what adjustments should be made? What changes are perceived over time? Consequences of media use for

emotions, thoughts, behaviors, wellbeing: perceived positive or negative consequences, adjustments—if so, which adjustments? Did they work? If they didn't work, which further adjustments? Perceived changes over time?

- “Public service announcements”: which messages are viewed and remembered? Reactions? Needs for information? Expected messages? General feeling? Which society after the Covid crisis?
- Evaluation of the level of fear associated with covid for oneself, for one's relatives, for society in general? Person affected by COVID-19 in the entourage? Political position (before the crisis then evolution during the crisis)

[Systematically check conditions of lockdown (entourage, home, work activity) and changes since the previous phase.

Systematically ask for examples and clarifications. Systematically ask about any changes compared to before the lockdown and compared to the previous phase(s) of interviews.]

**Supplemental Online Material 2: Characteristics of the Interviewees**

Age	18–30	7
	31–50	9
	51–65	8
	65+	7
Gender	Female	16
	Male	15
Region	Most affected by COVID-19 at LD+10 (+50 cases/100,000 inhabitants): Greater Paris (Ile-de-France); Grand-Est; Bourgogne Franche-Comté; Corsica	11
	Least affected by COVID-19 at LD+10 (-50 cases/100,000 inhabitants): Other regions of France	20
Lockdown circumstances: entourage	Alone	11
	In a couple	9
	With family	11
Lockdown circumstances: Home	Apartment	16
	House	15

Profession	Not/no longer in work	14
	Teleworking	12
	Designated place of work	5
Education level	High school diploma or below (secondary education)	7
	Graduate degree	24