

# **SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS OVER 65 DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

A Master's Thesis

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Ankara

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SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS  
OVER 65 DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
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by

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ANKARA

September 2022

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS OVER 65 DURING COVID-19  
PANDEMIC

By Başak Bozoğlu

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS OVER 65 DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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September 2022

The aim of the thesis is to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the social media experiences of individuals over 65. The thesis focuses on digital media literacy as explanatory literature to unpack people's social media behaviors. For this aim, the thesis demonstrates the division between digital immigrants and digital natives to analyze the concerning generation's skills and experiences while using social media. To answer the research question qualitatively, semi-structured interviews were employed with 15 participants whose ages range from 66 to 76 and who reside in Turkey in the cities of Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa, and Muğla. The analyses of the interviews reveal eight common themes: access, connectedness, reasons behind using social media, need for support, anxiety, adaptation, the impact of COVID-19, and further desire to advance social media practice. The thesis ultimately demonstrates how these frames are related to each other and how they inform the research on digital media literacy. In the end, the research demonstrates that COVID-19 seems to have significantly transformed digital immigrants' willingness to engage with social media more than ever.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Digital Immigrants, Digital Media Literacy, Social Media.

## ÖZET

### COVID-19 PANDEMİSİ SIRASINDA 65 YAŞ ÜSTÜ YETİŞKİMLERİN SOSYAL MEDYA DENEYİMLERİ

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Bu tezin amacı, COVID-19 pandemi döneminin 65 yaş üstü bireylerde sosyal medya deneyimlerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir. Tez, insanların sosyal medya davranışlarını aydınlatmak için açıklayıcı literatür olarak dijital medya okuryazarlığına odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaçla, ilgili kuşağın sosyal medyayı kullanırkenki beceri ve deneyimlerini analiz etmek için dijital göçmenler ve dijital yerliler arasındaki ayrımı göstermektedir. Araştırma sorusunu yanıtlamak için, Türkiye'de (Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa, Muğla) yaşları 66 ile 76 arasında değişen 15 katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemiyle nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Görüşmeler sonrasında erişim, bağlılık, sosyal medyayı kullanma nedenleri, destek ihtiyacı, kaygı, adaptasyon, COVID-19'un etkisi ve sosyal medyayı öğrenme isteği olmak üzere sekiz ortak tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Dolayısıyla tez, bu temaların birbiriyle nasıl ilişkili olduğunu ve dijital medya okuryazarlığı üzerine yapılan araştırmalara katkısını ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak araştırma, COVID-19'un dijital göçmenlerin sosyal medya ile her zamankinden daha fazla etkileşim kurma istekliliğini önemli ölçüde dönüştürdüğünü göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** COVID-19, Dijital Göçmenler, Dijital Medya Okuryazarlığı, Sosyal Medya.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	vi
ÖZET .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	x
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Relevant Work .....	6
1.2 Plan of the Thesis .....	9
CHAPTER 2 .....	11
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	11
2.1 Defining Literacy .....	12
2.2 Media Literacy .....	15
2.3 Digital Literacy .....	19
2.4 Digital Media Literacy .....	21
2.5 Digital Immigrants .....	23
2.5.1 Digital Immigrants' Media Use .....	27
2.5.2 Digital Immigrants' Media Use During COVID-19 .....	28
2.5.3 Digital Immigrants' Social Media Usage .....	31
2.6 Current Study .....	34
CHAPTER 3 .....	38
METHODOLOGY .....	38

3.1 Participants .....	41
3.1.1 Characteristics of Participants.....	42
3.2 Development of the Interview Instruments .....	44
3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview Procedure .....	46
3.3 Analytical Strategy .....	48
CHAPTER 4 .....	49
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	49
4.1 Frames Emerging from the Main Findings.....	65
4.1.1 Learned Helplessness .....	65
4.2 Acceptance of Digital Immigrant Status.....	67
4.3 Sticking with One's Comfort Zone .....	70
4.4 COVID-19: Game Changer .....	72
CHAPTER 5 .....	76
CONCLUSION.....	76
5.1 Review of the Argument and Findings .....	76
5.2 Limitations .....	78
5.3 Further Studies.....	79
5.4. Concluding Remarks .....	81
REFERENCES .....	82
APPENDICES .....	89
APPENDIX A: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM .....	90
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	95
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	97

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1: General Information about Participants' Characteristics .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Table 2: Information About Social Media Access Tools and Internet Access Quality .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Table 3: Interview Questions.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Table 4: Themes, Sub-Themes, and Relevance to Social Media.....</b>	<b>49</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1: Learning Methods.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 2: Sources of Help.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 3: Social Media Confidence (Before COVID-19).....</b>	<b>63</b>

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As our daily lives have started to change with the development of media, individuals' media habits have also begun to change in one way or another. Introducing not only the texts but also visual and written content to the digital environment with new technologies has started to change the concept of literacy. Media literacy has become a new concept that has been around and studied since the 90s after the traditional concept of literacy i.e. books, newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. As traditional media become widespread in society, the need for people to access, understand and question media content has also increased. For this reason, when the concept of literacy split, in the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy in 1993, media literacy was defined as the "ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6).

Media literacy is crucial for people to benefit from the media and prevent them from being harmed. After all, the ability to analyze content makes way to understand the

cause and effect relationship, recognize the historical, political, economic, or aesthetic concerns, and realize the purpose of the given messages in the written texts is crucial for media users (Hobbs, 1997). Likewise, under the umbrella of media literacy the fundamental key question that people of all genders and age groups should be aware of when accessing media content include (Thomas & Jolls, 2004) but are not limited to who created a message; what creative techniques are used to attract people's attention; how different people might understand media messages differently; what lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from the media message; why is this message being sent?

Although these questions persist over time, their scope has begun to change in increasing digital environments with the developing technology. With the introduction of the Internet to information and communication technologies, the diversification of media has become unavoidable. Over time, media literacy has become inadequate to cover both traditional media and new media that depend on the Internet and telecommunication tools. Accordingly, digital literacy emerged with the change in the media environment without changing the fundamental questions of media literacy. Digital literacy is the ability to find, use, understand, analyze, and share information acquired from digital devices, smartphones, computers, and tablets (Bawden, 2008; Koltay, 2011). Digital literacy includes Internet searching, visual searching, and hyper textuality, which is the combination of the written, visual, and auditory components in the content. In digital literacy, the user starts to become not only a user but also a participant in the media. Put simply, the digital media environment grants people the potential to share their thoughts and comments with their network of acquaintances,

strangers and even those that are worldwide celebrities or foreign country leaders.

Likewise, compared to the media literacy, digital literacy involves a dynamic relationship between the users and the content creators. This situation creates new requirements because basic reading and writing skills are accompanied with computer and smartphone skills. In other words, the ability to read and write using digital features becomes a crucial necessity, which is the reason behind this study's use of the term *digital media literacy*.

In today's circumstances, separating media and digital literacy from each other becomes unfunctional as people live in a digital environment that combines practices ranging from using social media to using digital fingerprints for ID cards. This research uses digital media literacy to identify the ability to reach, understand, analyze, share content, and find, control, and solve problems in digital environments. While the digital environment includes social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter), digital platforms (e.g., Spotify, Netflix, and Disney Plus), and online shopping applications (e.g., Hepsiburada, Trendyol, Migros Sanal Market), the current research focuses only on social media in order to narrow the subject and concerning investigation.

Social media are parts of the digital environment and continuously introduce new platforms as sources of entertainment, information, and connection (Cho et al., 2022). But the question is whether all individuals have the same experiences learning and enjoying them. While looking at digital media literacy, one should not ignore its impact



on different generations because they unsurprisingly end up engaging differently in digital media usage (Schreurs et al., 2017). Some researchers divide technology users into categories of digital natives and digital immigrants. If a person is born into a digital environment and raised with smart devices, they are called a digital native. If a person learns about the Internet and relevant tools and technologies later in their life, i.e., after their teenage years and later, it is called a digital immigrant (Wang et al., 2013).

Literature has many studies on the media literacy of digital natives because it is expectedly crucial for children to use the media correctly and not be harmed by it, in addition to the aim of educating young people for high awareness about the media they engage with. Likewise, as far as the study of the digital environment and digital media literacy, young generations seem to come to minds before other age groups.

On the contrary, the current research focuses on people over 65 who constitute digital immigrants. The reason is that older people have a place in society's online and offline social communities. Digital immigrant's mental and physical conditions seem to affect their digital media skills, habits, behaviors, and requirements; therefore, digital immigrants have a place to investigate in the literature in different countries such as Germany and United States (Schreurs & Quan-Haase, 2017; Vroman et al., 2015). The current research focuses on digital immigrants' social media experiences in Turkey to contribute to the literature. In Turkey, almost eight million people are over 65 with 27.1% of all Internet users being between the ages of 65 and 74 as of 2020 –five times more than in 2018 (TUIK, 2020). Government studies show that the elderly population in Turkey will reach 19 million in 2050 (TUIK, 2013). The world's elderly population

will double by 2050 and it is expected to reach 1.5 billion, so one in every six people in the world will be 65 years or older (World Population Ageing, 2019). This situation creates a great potential for studying the digital experiences of older people in Turkey with an understanding of their digital media literacy especially as it pertains to using social media.

Moreover, the recent COVID-19 pandemic makes it even more interesting given the increased presence of information and communication technologies in people's lives of all ages. After all, the pandemic period forced people to stay at home and severely limit communicating with other face-to-face in most countries. In Turkey particularly, people over 65 faced extra restrictions that required them to stay at home more than other age groups (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Bilgi Teknolojileri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2020) leaving them no choice but to use information and communication technologies more than before.

This has attracted recent scholarly interest in the older people's experiences as in Binark's (2020) study which focuses on older people's media repertoires and the way of access the information during pre-COVID-19 and after the corona period in Turkey. To this, the current thesis suggests that the limited number of studies focusing on this emerging phenomenon of digital immigrants' social media experiences during COVID-19 constitute a gap in the literature on media literacy. Likewise, it focuses on how the COVID-19 period shapes the actions, attitudes, digital skills, and experiences of people over 65 compared to the pre-pandemic period. The main research question this dissertation tackle concerns *how COVID-19 has influenced the social media experiences of individuals over 65, with an emphasis on these individuals' perceived digital media*

*literacy*. Likewise, it specifically focuses on three questions: 1) How do older adults over 65 perceive their digital media literacy? 2) What are the challenges, coping mechanisms, and sources of support that older adults over 65 face when using social media? 3) What is the impact of Covid-19 on the social media experience of older adults over 65.

## **1.1 Relevant Work**

Digital immigrants face three generations of media; non-digital applications, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Internet applications. Non-digital media applications are letters, postcards, TV, and radio; 1<sup>st</sup> generation of media started to use e-mail; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation is social networking sites and blogs. The COVID-19 has introduced a time interruption to digital immigrants' digital media experiences. This is in line with the study demonstrating a strong relationship between older people's social media usage and their social well-being in relation to continuing their social relations after chronic diseases, retirement, moving to another country, or the death of a spouse (Quinn, 2019). Kortay (2011) contributes to the literature by explaining new circumstances influence people's perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and habits about media to continue their social well-being. Digital immigrants' social well-being related problems including loneliness, lack of social connectedness, and diminishing social interactions may alter their connection to their circle through social media before and after the COVID-19 period. The study is crucial to highlight that it is essential for people over 65 to connect with their environment after a major crisis period such as a pandemic although the way of maintaining contact with others has changed over time. In the literature, many studies

show that if there are major changes external circumstances, people inevitably adapt their actions and skills (Boyd, 2007; Cho,2022; Choi, 2020, Hill, 2015). Therefore, it is of great importance to investigate the ways in which people over 65 continue their social well-being under the impact of a new crisis and their actions and behaviors on social media.

In the literacy scholarship, most research studies focus on education systems in countries through empirical inquiries. The fundamental reason is that literacy studies mostly aim to engage with the young generation' media use for their education. For instance, Jang et al. (2021) examine 194 Korean and 192 Finnish primary school-age children to investigate how digital literacy helps children in their digital-assisted learning activities. Some studies also focus on why media literacy is a necessity as a part of the education system in the countries and show that media literacy essentially is a part of children's education (Kinsella, 2012). Another research area under this concept concerns gender-based media usage and the variety of needs of different genders on their media preferences. Sobieraj and Krämer (2020) study 148 people in Germany to demonstrate the gender effect of using media and the different needs to use media literacy for different genders through quantitative research. Further, others focus on people's reasons for preferences for media content and why young people accept some content and reject others within the framework of media literacy (Schreurs, Quan-Haase, & Martin, 2017). In short, most studies focus on the importance of media literacy in youth education and understanding the reasons for media use by young people.

On the other hand, studies focusing on older people's experiences take into account

issues like aging problems, difficulty remembering, physical slowdowns, and emotional loneliness. Researchers demonstrate that people's social environment significantly decreases with aging, and older people have a smaller social network (Quinn, 2019; Cornwell et al., 2008). While these studies point to the need for digitalization and media use in older people's daily routines, the age-related physical and psychological changes constitute a major study area for investigating older people's need for media literacy. Chaffin & Harlow (2005) suggest that older people tend to learn media-related topics step by step and create a connection with previous information because of their slowed cognitive and psychological activities. Another survey, which is done with 198 people over 65 in United States, shows that older people's psychological situations, such as anxiety, decrease their new media usage, such as social media blogs and social networking sites (Vroman et al., 2015). Studies like these make a substantive contribution to the literacy scholarship and fundamentally demonstrate the relevance of media literacy in older individuals' overall digital experience.

However, in media research concerning the Turkish context, there is still sample room in investigating people over 65 especially with respect to the social media usage. In this regard, COVID-19 constitute a crucial time interruption with its impact on digital immigrants' social media experiences creating a new gap in the literature. Accordingly, the main motive of this research is to contribute to the understanding on how people over 65 have used social media with the addition of COVID-19 to our lives with a particular emphasis on whether and how the pandemic shaped behaviors and attitudes.

Using media interactively and in ways that get quite embedded in daily routines are no doubt novel for digital immigrants as opposed to digital natives. Therefore, understanding motivations and reasons behind using social media, and thoughts around getting help to solve problems is essential to unpack older individuals' digital experiences. To explore these dynamics in a qualitative way, I listen to the experiences of 15 elderly people via the semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, the study contributes to the growing interest in older people's media experiences within digital media literacy scholarship.

## **1.2 Plan of the Thesis**

**Chapter 2** outlines the theoretical framework and explains the foundations leading up to the research question. The aim is to demonstrate the primary works published so far, ranging from literacy studies in general to media literacy and digital literacy, and explain how I define digital media literacy. The chapter also reviews works on digital natives and digital immigrants' characteristics of media usage with a special focus on digital immigrants' media experience in relation to key concepts such as digitalization, vulnerability, quality of life, and misinformation. In addition, I explain the rationales behind limiting the study on social media within the framework of digital media literacy as well as the COVID-19 period as experienced in Turkey

**Chapter 3** describes the whole empirical process I went through to address my research question. In this section, I discuss why and how I employ interviews as a qualitative research method, what I did during the interview process, and how I applied grounded

theory into my analysis. Then, I explain how I selected the participants, their characteristics as well as the questions I used in my interviews.

**Chapter 4** starts with the main findings emerging from the interviews. I suggest the common concepts I observed by analyzing the interviews as well as how I see them relating to one another. Furthermore, I discuss the overarching frames these concepts reveal, i.e., learned helplessness, acceptance of digital immigrant status, sticking with the comfort zone, and how COVID-19 served as a game changer for digital immigrants' social media experiences.

**Chapter 5** is the concluding part of the thesis, in which the aim is to explain how the existing literature and the current findings come together. I briefly summarize the current research, the major contributions it makes to the literature, the study limitations, as well as the key theoretical and practical implications.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The primary question in the current research is why people use social media. There are various motivations behind using social media. Before understanding people's skills and experiences on social media, it may be helpful to underline why people use social media in the first place. Heinonen (2011) demonstrates three primary reasons to motivate people to use social media: entertainment, social connection, and information. First, the research shows that entertainment allows people to escape reality and relax. Secondly, the motivation behind using social media for social connection depends mostly on social surveillance, sharing, and experiences with others rather than their close circle. Thirdly, the need for information depends on retrieving product information, content, and news and collecting factual information. These all allow people to feel they belong, manage their mood, be inspired by others, be up-to-date on the latest, and share and access knowledge. Moreover, studies demonstrate that motivations behind using social media may vary according to people's age group, gender, education level, economic status



(Cho, 2022; Choi et al., 2020). According to these studies, media user's actions in social media that is in dynamic relation with their choices of social media platforms, contents, and their networks. Here, the question one should ask is whether people are literate enough to experience social media in line with their intended purposes. Along similar lines, understanding literacy is crucial for unpacking how individuals use social media effectively vis-a-vis their varying motivations.

## **2.1 Defining Literacy**

Although different areas of research have addressed various questions to acquire common knowledge for the definition of literacy, literacy is still not a straightforward term to analyze and understand in the first place. Scholars accept various definitions with the changes in social conditions over time. The general and acceptable definition of literacy depends on the process of reading, writing, and using oral language through texts to understand the meaning in the context as a social practice (Frankel et al., 2016; Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Pearson & Tierney, 1984). This definition provides the information that literacy is a learned skill and can develop later in people's lives. It is based on reading and discovering the semantic symbols in the content. The fundamental point in the definition of literacy is to focus on being aware of the different message layers in the written text, its meaning, value, connections, connotations, and criticism. The ability to analyze contents makes way to understand the cause and effect relationship, recognize the historical, political, economic, or aesthetic concerns, and realize the purpose of the given messages in the written texts (Hobbs, 1997). Analyzing messages allows people to link other features because literacy starts with the connection

between the creator of the content as a writer and the consumer of the content as a reader.

Another widely accepted and shared definition of literacy depends on the set of social practices essential to understanding today's concept of literacy. Barton and Hamilton (1998) claim that literacy is an activity and exists between the people's thoughts and a text. The given definition of literacy is not only a person's mental process but also a social phenomenon. It is socially accepted; therefore, literacy is learned, and as social beings, people can learn and develop those skills with interaction with others (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). In everyday life, literacy is analyzed according to people's interaction areas such as school, work, and home, where social institutions and power relationships impact people's everyday practices (Mackey, 2002). The reason is that generally, literacy begins at the age of elementary school, and the children learn the skills start to learn as part of daily life. People can develop literacy with the help of environmental influence and social interaction at different ages. Therefore, literacy shapes with the new formats and different understandings within the context of social dynamics.

Over time, with technological and social developments, literacy has become not related to only printed books, magazines, and newspapers but to be intertwined and embedded with different practices and social goals (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). When traditional media varies with new media, which spreads through computers, Internet access, and digitalization, literacy has changed people's perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and daily habits (Koltay, 2011; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Therefore, scholars have divided literacy into various forms and created different definitions. The definition of literacy expands its

limits and connects with new concepts by creating various connotations and interpretations with another discipline. More than ten types of literacy work straightforwardly in the different cross-disciplinary environments such as visual, information, media, digital, critical, data, health and financial, multicultural, and cultural literacy (Livingstone, 2004). However, the distinctions between the types of literacy are unclear. Besides the ambiguity of definitions, analyzing distinctions between definitions of literacies make a valuable contribution to developing people's understanding and awareness of their needs through literacy (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). Distinguishing traditional literacy from new types of literacies helps to investigate concepts of the current situations. As the most popular media tools changed, the problems began to change according to needs, so conceptual analysis expanded its literacy spectrum. In this scope, this research focuses on media literacy with new dimensions in the digital environment to show how visual, written, and verbal contents change after traditional literacy.

Before focusing on media literacy, it will be useful to mention visual literacy as well. Visual literacy emerged as part of understanding works of art at the time, but it has come to the point where it can be studied as a part of media literacy. Visual literacy is significant for conceptualizing media literacy that includes visual communication. Recently, visual literacy is the set of abilities that can help people find, understand, interpret, evaluate and use images in visual media (Koltay, 2021). Visual literacy provides the ability to help people to interpret visual content's meanings and connections that creates achieving more visualized information for people in their education, business, or personal life (Welsh & Wright, 2010). People's media experiences shift

from written to visual in the digital era, and visual literacy has an essential role in media literacy. Visually literate people become more conscious about using and reading visual elements such as pictures, charts, photos, graphics, or emojis. Significantly since social media have increased its influence worldwide, social media platforms, including magazines, newspapers, have become more integrated with visual components (Caple, 2019). In this sense, people's reading process turns into more image-centric. For instance, during daily communication, people start to use emojis, avatars, and GIFs that are integrated with daily questions or situations in everyday life (Siever, 2019). The significant part is that a media user needs to be aware and recognize how language and images are combined for messages. Therefore, visual literacy impacts people's media experiences, such as reading habits, the speed of access to information with visual elements, understanding the purpose of creative symbols and objects in the content.

## **2.2 Media Literacy**

Over time, branches of traditional media, newspapers, magazines, television, and radio have expanded their influence on people with social media and digital platforms. New media experiences increase the necessity of media literacy to understand people's new habits and needs. In 1993, the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy was held in the USA with 25 representatives who are experts in the field of media. After the national media literacy conference, media literacy was defined as the "ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6). This is the most widely accepted definition of media literacy over decades. Moreover, to determine the definition of media literacy, people construct the five

principles of media literacy. According to principles, media are constructed and also construct the reality, at the same time, media have commercial, ideological, and political implications, each media content has a unique aesthetic, codes, and conventions, and media users negotiate the given meaning in media (Aufderheide, 1993). The concept of media literacy has transformed over time, but most media literacy studies collaborate with this definition.

Most scholars still use Aufderheide's definition from 1993 because media literacy is not limited to one medium, and the definition does not focus on specific types of media tools. Media literacy has various mediums such as websites, social networking sites, blogs, photo, and video sharing platforms in addition to print newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasting, and television (Welsh & Wright, 2010). With the varying media and communication tools, the necessary skills started to diversify and change; therefore, accessing the digital network and related skills requirements contains multi-dimensionality in everyday life (Choi et al., 2020). Besides the currency of media literacy definition, we need to expand the scope of media literacy to understand people's media experiences within the various media features. Media literacy now has a broader spectrum with a combination of written, visual, verbal, and coded that lead people to be both producers, editors, and audiences via smart devices (Caple, 2019). It causes textuality and a complex relationship between people's literacy customs and the necessity of understanding multimedia. Thus, new experiences with required skills impact people's perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes from a new angle (Koltay, 2011). Therefore, media literacy became the umbrella of the new understanding of literacy by researchers because media literacy contains different implications and purposes of many

literacies such as visual, data, information, digital literacy.

While discussing media literacy, it is essential to explain why media literacy often works in a comprehensive manner. One of the valuable works among media literacy studies explains that media literacy opens a new door for people to play an active role in their media experiences. Especially with the introduction of media platforms with the increasing variety of content, people have new experiences and practices in their daily lives. Media literacy can provide people with asking questions, expressing their concerns with live chats, sharing the news with other people via social media, commenting on any content, demonstrating their perspective, and developing their digital abilities. Potter (2004) introduces personal focus as a new term to describe how people are active during their media experiences. In this view, people have more options to elaborate messages when they receive the content. This feature shows how widely media literacy can be used. It is the way of being controlled and conscious while consuming media. Media literacy can provide people to have the ability to understand media messages, process information, control the content selections with awareness. From the point of personal locus, media literacy leads people to make better choices in terms of their requirements, and it provides individual control in their actions with the ability to decide for problem-solving. In this way, people's motivation and confidence increase in their actions and choices when facing different and complex media literacy tasks. Therefore, media literacy finds as the way of processing, access, and evaluating knowledge with visual, written, coded features with other types of literacies.

Thoman and Jolls (2004) identify five key questions to understand the characteristics of

a media literate, which are still valid today. With these questions, Thoman and Jolls (2004) aim to understand people's improvement of awareness and their ability to turn into conscious, practical, reasonable skills in their media information process. The first question is who created a message. The reason is that whole media forms are designed and constructed by someone to capture people's attention, whether it be a tv series, blog post, or advertisement. When people become more knowledgeable and suspicious about their media consumption, they can be more careful about their choices and actions after filtering received information in their minds. The second question is what creative techniques are used to attract people's attention. One video, verbal, non-verbal, written, or visual content consists of many components such as color, words, music, or movement in any media form. If people can be aware of these elements, they can understand the content's creativity, metaphors, or possible manipulations. The third question is how different people might understand media messages differently. People's mindsets, ways of thinking, learned facts, cognition, and emotional levels are different from each other. Therefore, even people read the same digital magazine column or watch the documentary, getting the information differently. The way of thinking and personal backgrounds causes another question in media literacy. The fourth question is what lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from the media message. The reason is that the message that the media wants to give or what people believe in the content may be different from each other because of dissimilar gender, education, socio-economic background, country of residence, and culture. The fifth question is why this message is being sent. Any media message is created for a reason, whether entertainment or informative. It is significant to consider the message's aim if it can cause conspiracy, false news, misleading information, or showing positively or

negatively biased content. The ability to analyze the reason behind the messages given in a specific way for various purposes in society can prevent danger, such as avoiding spreading false news and being scammed. These five questions construct why people need to be media literate in many ways and are used fundamentally in relevant research endeavors.

### **2.3 Digital Literacy**

Over the years, media have started to expand its limits with the digital environment. With the digital environment, the concept of literacy fundamentally transformed because the way of transforming information and its channels are changed. Digital literacy depends on the ability to use and understand information that is acquired from digital sources without hesitations from internet searching, hypertext navigation, knowledge assembly, content evaluation (Bawden, 2008; Koltay, 2011). These four competence points construct the necessities of digital literacy while distinguishing from media literacy. Thus, before digitalization, the media affected people in one direction, people were watching, reading, hearing but could not participate (Cho et al., 2022). Digital literacy began to change the influence of media in a multidirectional way. The digital environment leads people to change their reading skills in the dynamic and non-sequential hypertext environment; therefore, it can confuse them (Bawden, 2001). When one becomes digitally literate, they can understand, analyze and evaluate digital sources, and one could not need to consider how they can find the information, the meaning of a button, or the meaning of a GIF (Koltay, 2011). That is why digital literacy is an essential concept to understand the use of literacy with technology, various usage areas,



and people's behavior in the digital age with hypertexts, multiple platforms, new searching engines, and applications. Digital literacy is different from other types of literacy with its updating and personalization qualities.

Digital literacy consists of the dynamic relationship between the user and the reader with the multimedia flow and hyper textuality. People's demands, awareness, skills, and abilities to use digital tools have changed people's daily lives and benefit from these features. The significant point in digital literacy is that people's ability to read and write has been replaced with computer skills connected and associated with images and sounds in hypertexts. Thus, people have the awareness to understand the challenges they face during the new experiences in the digital environment. In digital literacy, the significant issue is the requirement of the ability to catch updated digital tools and increase their computer skills. Deursen & Van Dijk (2016) examine digital literacy as a new approach to show multi-dimensionality for identifying, managing, synthesizing, and creating media expression and communication with others in the given context compared to the traditional literacy process. In the general understanding of literacy, when the reader reads the book, one can understand the reason behind the book, why the book is written, what the target audience is, what interest behind the book is. However, the digital environment is constantly changing due to its nature. People need to update their skills and follow the recent developments to continue their requirements.

Furthermore, the digital environment extends its limits with personalized information. Park (2013) argues that digital literacy supports encourages and empowers people to control their digital identities, understands data flow, and leads people to act according to implicit rules in the digital environment. Online digital platforms have created new

features to keep people's information and choices during an online transaction. In this way, people have an option to use different platforms for diversified purposes, whether work-related or personal requirements, quickly. Over the years, people started to adopt digital literacy to use several services to require their daily needs, such as financial services, official forms, job and career opportunities, and gaining benefits from digital technologies (Ragnedda et al. 2020; Hargittai, 2005). One of the studies shows that people use digital media to obtain information while solving their daily problems, such as using the online card for shopping; finding event information for movies or concerts; searching political events; attending children's activities; listening to online music (Hargittai, 2005). For this purpose, the digital environment shapes people's online decisions with different search engines, various classifications, and personalized content. Despite a previous understanding of literacy types, digital literacy can keep people's actions and preferences in the system and help people in their online web activities.

## **2.4 Digital Media Literacy**

Media and digital literacy cannot be separated easily in today's conditions because almost all media features also became digitalized with hypertext in a digital environment. As technological developments increase, the new media environment enriches variety and choice. People have too many alternatives to do the same purposes; therefore, it becomes difficult for people to decide on their online actions. The new features such as recommendation systems, suggestions based on previous activities, data analysis, live chats, personalization in new media aim to provide better experiences. Besides the definitions of visual, media, and digital literacy, this research uses digital

media literacy to identify the ability to understand, reach, control, and solve problems in the digital environment, including social media, digital platforms, and applications following today's conditions.

Moreover, the features of digital media literacy consist of socio-demographic and socio-economic impacts such as age, education, sociability, economic level, and gender (Ragnedda et al., 2019). In a study which is conducted in Germany, 148 people were asked questions with a test technique to investigate the capacity differences of gender in technological activities, and the gender-based effects of using digital literacy in line with the needs of people were examined (Sobieraj & Krämer, 2020). In another empirical study, 194 Korean and 192 Finnish youth were selected for the comparative study to focus on the difference in participants' digital literacy-assisted learning activities (Jang et al., 2021). The findings show that 71% of participants use digital technologies for the purpose of learning, and participants have positive performance expectancy. This research examines the difference between habits and the frequency of using digital platforms during learning. Therefore, most studies investigate the place of media literacy and digital literacy in the education system. Some research focuses on why media literacy is a requirement in the education systems of countries like Ireland (Kinsella, 2012). The research demonstrates that when students learn media literacy with digitalization, they act more participative, courageous to think, and critical in their media usage. Another focus is on media literacy education in the courses and its negative and positive influences on children's education (Karaduman, 2013). Among these, all studies have addressed different factors in digital literacy, but this research focuses on age as a fundamental factor for understanding the technological habits and capacities for digital

media literacy.

Age comes up as an essential notion for investigating the concept of digital media literacy. The reason is that digital media literacy has been set out for educational purposes and implications that preschool children, school-age children, and teenagers become more conscious media users. It is significant to ask how young people and older media users experience it when they accept or reject the media content (Schreurs, Quan-Haase, & Martin, 2017). Researchers ask to what extent people have to control their personal information, whether they are afraid to share their information, how much time they spend on the Internet, how they find the information they are looking for, whether they are aware of fake news and misinformation (Park, 2013; Hargittai, 2005). One empirical research demonstrates that different age groups have a difference in terms of anxiety level, self-efficiency, attitude, and behavioral intentions while engaging in digital tools and technological communication devices (Tyler et al., 2020). These examples are crucial to understanding older people's behaviors under digital media literacy. In this sense, the research will discuss digital media literacy with older people.

## **2.5 Digital Immigrants**

The generational difference has attracted the attention of many academics. Schreurs et al. (2017) argue that different generations engage differently in their media usage, and generations' digital skills, learning process, adaptation process, and reactions are different from each other. Media scholars and sociologists generally separate different generations into two categories; digital natives and digital immigrants (Yoon et al.,

2009; Boyd, 2014). When people expose to the Internet in childhood, they are to be called 'digital natives' who grow up with the Internet and communicational technology; people who were born after 1980 and exposed to the Internet later in life is to be called 'digital immigrants' (Wang et al., 2013). Digital immigrants born before 1980 have lived their childhood, school age, teenage years without a digital environment, social media, Internet, and technology as an information product, for instance, computer or smartphone. The young generation mainly grows up with tablets, computers, internet café', in the technological school environment, friends, and all of them adopt young people digital world unwillingly. Although digital natives adapt and grow in the digital domain, digital immigrants' perceptions and experiences with digital technology are different from young people.

The main challenge for digital immigrants in digital media literacy is environmental because the learning process, improving skills, and adaptation to new technologies are mainly connected with the environment. Access relates to the environment when people start to consume information technologies because, generally, digital natives mostly adapt to changes with curiosity and asking questions to their friends (Wang et al., 2013). In the environment where they grow up, digital natives feel more accessible than digital immigrants while using interactive digital platforms and their information products such as reading materials on laptops, tablets, and smartphones (Tsai et al., 2017). Since digital natives were born into the digital environment and grew up with the Internet, they adapt more quickly to developments and innovations, and their tendency to adapt to technology is higher than older adults. Since digital natives are constantly exposed to technology and media, their learning processes often take place in their daily lives

without realizing it.

The older generation has more challenges than the younger generation. The first crucial struggle for older adults is environmental. Unlike digital natives, digital immigrants do not have constant observation opportunities when they mostly finish their school and business life environment. When digital immigrants cannot interact with others, their abilities and reflects cannot catch the developments and updates in digital media (Tsai et al., 2017). The social environment has an enormous impact on older adults' learning, communication, interaction, adaptation, and learning process in media literacy (Quinn, 2019). Older adults' network size decreases significantly, and they often have smaller social networks, so they have less frequent contact within their networks than digital natives (Cornwell et al., 2008). In a business environment, people's current employment status affects their digitalization because of the environment and requirements to fulfill the needs. In these cases, the general tendency is that digital immigrants might need children, grandchildren, or their friends after retirement when they have a question. Family or business life provides sociability and connection to other people when people need support to solve problems. Therefore, one of the struggles for digital immigrants is mostly their limited environment and access.

The second struggle is age-related physical and psychological changes. One of the reasons is that maintaining physical reflexes becomes slower in later life due to decreased physical mobility and the incidence of chronic disease, factors that occur at higher rates in the older adult population (Quinn, 2019). It is getting more complicated and puzzling for older people when they continue to maintain their actives to adapt

cognitive and psychological differences to the online environment (Chaffin & Harlow, 2005). Digital immigrants have more anxiety about websites, email, or social media usage, process information more slowly, focus on one thing at a time, and have an unwilling learning process. For instance, Vroman et al. (2015) conducted a survey study with 198 people over 65, and results show that neutral users (non-bias for technology) find it intimidating (%60) and anxiety-provoking (%40) for using technology for using technological activities. The problem with digital immigrants' experiences in digital media literacy depends on having less confidence in problem-solving. They generally struggle with what they want to do in media tools such as reading a newspaper, buying something in online shopping, or making a comment on a Facebook friend's wall. Schreurs and Quan-Haase (2017) researched the reason for digital immigrants' digital literacy problems with 21 interviews, and it shows that digital immigrants' fear of new technology depends on self-doubt. The research shows that older people have curiosity about new technology but think they have low digital skills.

On the other hand, a survey of 700 people and semi-structured interviews with 50 people show that %98 of young between 18- 29 years old have multiple social media platforms simultaneously because young people feel more confident about participating in the process without self-doubt or hesitation (Boczkowski et al., 2018). The research shows that young people perceive multimedia usage, using digital skills, participating in technological activities as a suitably created environment for various purposes with different types of information flow. Therefore, psychological and cognitive components also impact struggling digital immigrants' digital media experiences.

### **2.5.1 Digital Immigrants' Media Use**

Studies demonstrate that the generational difference between digital natives and digital immigrants depends on perceiving, learning, and using skills during media use in daily life (Lugano & Peltonen, 2016). Older adults have had different media use throughout their lives. New media entered their lives while using traditional media; therefore, they have various media use experiences. One empirical research represents four categories to investigate older adults' media use during interviews with digital immigrants and natives. These are non-digital applications such as letters, postcards, traditional mobile applications like phone television, radio, 1st generation of internet applications such as email and 2nd generation of internet applications social networking sites, blogs, social media accounts. Accordingly, immigrants find non-digital media use a more human way, warm and kind, argue that phone usage destroys the traditional language, and find a non-interactive way of communication while texting. Moreover, older adults who are 65 and over 73 mostly use the Internet for sending an email, general online searching, health information seeking, research a product among the survey with the general adult population in the research (Hunsader & Hargittai. 2018). Social media sites, on the other hand, entered the lives of the elderly quite later.

Since social networking sites increased the categorization and understanding, the use of media has become more complicated for standardization for research because social networking sites are connected with internet usage and the digital divide more than ever (Nam, 2019). However, older adults' use of media and quality-of-life became related over time. Because media literacy has social competencies, people, media has social



interaction with talking one's individual media-related experiences and asking people questions or worry about results of their actions in the society when others see or read their media actions (Festle, 2020). One survey, done with 65-74 years old and older than 75 years old, demonstrates that mediating media creates social support for older adults (Nam, 2019). Social support creates new alternatives to increase older adults' wellbeing and life satisfaction in various ways if digital immigrants adopt the new media. For instance, social media for following people, reading online news, following online broadcasting, reading alternative online books and newspapers, downloading and listening to online music, watching videos provide social connections to increase their entertainment, leisure time, and wellbeing in daily life (Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020). The survey studies show that when older increase the frequency of using communication tools and the Internet, they feel less loneliness, more life satisfaction, and fewer depression symptoms (Hajek & Koenig, 2021). Maintaining social connectedness is essential in older adults' quality of life. Studies show a positive relationship between being an active user in the second generation of internet applications and older adults' life satisfaction.

### **2.5.2 Digital Immigrants' Media Use During COVID-19**

In December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and enormously affected the whole world, and this situation created a change in everyone's lives. COVID-19 has caused many changes in media use and people's media experiences, creating both digital inequality and struggle. Before the COVID-19, people necessarily do not have to access the Internet or use social networking sites. This period caused serious changes and

difficulties, especially in the use of media by the elderly. Beaunoyer et al. (2020) demonstrate four impacts of digital inequality during COVID-19. The first one is technical limitations such as inequalities in personal technological devices or connection problems. The second impact is autonomy problems such as desired online activities but restricted by family members. The third impact is the lack of social support networks, such as technology use becoming more complicated by the lockdown period. The fourth impact of inequality is the necessity of experience, such as transferring physical or face-to-face actions to online environments like banking systems, grocery requirements (Beaunoyer et al., 2020). Digital immigrants who have low digital skills feel more loneliness and disconnection while problem-solving and learning new devices or applications in the social isolation in the pandemic period (Garcia et al., 2021). People over 65 engage in contact with friends and family via the Internet, and their employment status, health situation, living in the urban or rural areas, living alone or with family affect life satisfaction, loneliness, and media use (Hajek & König, 2021). Therefore, older adults had to learn new skills for getting help, keeping in touch with others, being remote in their requirements, participating in online activities, increasing awareness about misinformation, and willingness to develop digitally.

Digitalization is a significant example of older people's new skills and experiences. Before the pandemic, mostly older people used the Internet to communicate via social network sites and seek information for their accustomed purposes (Hill et al., 2015). However, during COVID-19 older people had to become more digitalized to protect themselves from diseases and the government's lockdown for people over 65 years old. For instance, a teacher who was not retired, giving face-to-face education, had to

provide online lessons via online platforms in addition to entering the student's scores on the computer. The person had to improve their computer and digital skills in the digital media environment because using the telephone and watching online videos become insufficient for their daily needs. Researchers conduct on 23,547,688 older adults to learn the rate of older adults learning new technologies during the pandemic period and the barriers to their learning (Li et al., 2021). The research shows that 60.2% of participants' technology usage increased during COVID-19 compared to the pre-COVID-19 period. The study demonstrates that using technology and its frequency increase for online shopping, contacting family with videos and applications, getting health information and services, and online group activities and online classes.

Another researcher conducted a study with 20 participants and answers gathered by semi-structured interviews among older people in use (McKinlay et al., 2021). The study shows that most participants shopped online, which they had never done before, with the help of their spouse, children, or friends to solve their food problem during the lockdown period. However, these studies also show that an absolute majority feel fear and vulnerability in their online activities. When people use digital platforms or social networking sites, people use their own filters to select the information, facts, and news and create their digital environment with perceptions through their own selective criticality (Schwarzenegger, 2020). Sometimes this situation may cause misinformation, fact-checking and vulnerability problems among older people because the combination of limited digital skills with selective perception and information. Entering credit card information into the system for online shopping and entering ID card information into the app to book a vaccination appointment creates fear and feeling of doing wrong. This

situation causes the spread of misinformation between older people and a decrease in learning digital media experiences. A study states that during the COVID-19 era, the elderly had more misperceptions and knowledge and spread the adverse side effects of vaccines, anti-vaccine news, and vaccine-related conspiracy theories among their families and friends through social networking sites (Chia et al., 2021). The survey was conducted with 402 elderly participants, family, and friends, and the results indicate that as the frequency of meeting with the elderly increases, family members and friends are more exposed to misinformation. When health-related misinformation increases, its popularity among people become more attractive in digital media. One study shows that people tend to share misinformation without fact-checking and turn rumors into conspiracy theories that increase mistrust, anxiety, and fear about health-related information (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, older people's digital media usage and experiences are significant for studying during the COVID-19 period.

### **2.5.3 Digital Immigrants' Social Media Usage**

Digital media platforms contain many details and discussion topics, from online lectures to online shopping and digital banking applications. However, the recent COVID-19 may change the social media users' age range, preferences, and reasons for using in the first place. Social media experiences are required to investigate in the first place because social media are an online environment with both written, visual and auditory features, and social media are suitable for research under digital media literacy. Among the researchers, there is no certain accepted definition of social media because of containing multi-interdisciplinary research area. Social media's most commonly used definition is

"internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content" (Carr & Hayes, 2016, p.49). This definition has become the most frequently used definition of social media because it creates an integrative definition instead of making separate definitions for social media and social networking sites.

Before defining social media, researchers defined social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.211). However, nowadays, digitalization and social networking sites have become intertwined. Both social media and social networking sites do not have structures that do not change and do not develop. Social networking sites and social media cannot be separated. Researchers used social networking sites for generally referring connecting others, sharing emotions and creates profiles for themselves but now social media cover all social networking sites' features additional to connected via every smart device (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bayer et al., 2020). Since social media have become digital and connected via various smart devices for enormous contents, it enhances its range of availability. Also, social media have a fluid and fast-changing nature that influences users' perceptions and psychological processes (Bayer et al., 2020). In this research, social media are used as an informative, self-representative, flexible, interactive, and variable platform that allows people to connect, communicate and interact with an endless stream.

The ability to use social media contains the ability to observe the other' social media actives, choose what you want to share as a user identify one's perception and seek information, and develop personal skills with the experiences (Cho et al.,2022). Social media enter the lives of the elderly as they get older, so every activity takes the form of learning later on. During the learning process, the question of older adults' loneliness, being able to get support, and whether they prefer it or not become a considerable issue. During the COVID-19 period, older people become more open to using social media accounts to reach their family, follow the news, and watch live videos to reduce their loneliness while in mandatory quarantine (Hajeck & König, 2021). Social media have become a place where people seek support and try to eliminate their loneliness with their activities and responses from their networks (Bayer et al.,2020). However, social media has changeable features with the new developments or updates, and people may change their user preferences and have to learn most of the new features. Therefore, the fundamental component of digital media literacy can apply to social media and questioning older adults' social media skills, experiences, perceptions, feelings, and habits.

Social media are one of the most suitable environments for understanding digital media literacy because people connect via various smart devices, which will be ideal for narrowing the media usage areas of the elderly. A study indicates that older adults prefer to use social media more than before (Quinn, 2019). When the research mentions social media sites, it will only include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. The reason is that Turkey's social media usage report demonstrates that these are the five most used social media platforms by people over the age of 65 (Sosyal Ağ Kullanımı

Raporu, 2021). It is important to understand the influence of the COVID-19 period may lead many older adults to start to use social media or develop their social media skills. There are two significant points in the relation between social media and older adults during the COVID-19 period. Firstly, the older adults' skills and competencies to understand their awareness, the ability to problem-solve, access the solution, and question their actions are needed to investigate. Secondly, it is crucial to consider whether older adults prefer social media platforms during their quarantine days to understand their choices and feelings. After all, these points require investigating older adults' social media skills during the COVID-19 period because of understanding their ability, vulnerability, communication, and adaptation skills.

## **2.6 Current Study**

As a country with a socioeconomically diverse and elderly population, Turkey has attracted scholarly attention on the notion of media literacy of the elderly during the COVID-19 period. Digital immigrants increasingly constitute a larger share of the population, and their digital skills, understanding of the media, and digital environment potentially exert social, cultural, and organizational impact on society. Older people are significant to study because they do not grow by learning digital media experiences from birth in the digital environment like young people. According to the data of TUIK, the elderly population rate has increased by 22.5 percent in the last five years in Turkey, and the number of older people who are over 65 registered at the address reached 7 million 953 thousand 555 in 2020. In Turkey, 27.1% of Internet users are aged 65-74 (TUIK, 2020). The elderly population over 65 will increase to 19.5 million in 2050 and 24.7

million in 2075. The ratio of older adults to the total population will increase to 10.2% in 2023, 20.8% in 2050, and 27.7% in 2075 (TUIK, 2013). Therefore, Turkey has an important place to research digital immigrants' digital media experiences.

During the COVID-19-time, people over 65 are restricted to go outside by government authorities. Binark et al. (2020) ask their socio-demographic characteristics; what is different in media repertoires before and after the pandemic; the way of their access to information; pre and post epidemic news and information preferences and practices of receiving; their knowledge of the virus; level of trust in their resources. COVID-19 forces older people to use digital media to meet their requirements and continue social connections in their everyday routine. People over 65 had to deal with many of their necessities online, including shopping, banking, health care, vaccination appointments, talking to family members, and paying their bills. The pandemic creates more challenges for digital immigrants, such as limited online access, low digital literacy knowledge, and the feeling of being a target for fraud (Moore & Hancock, 2020). Semi-structured interview research done in Ankara demonstrates that although people over 65 use both traditional media (tv and radio) and social media (WhatsApp and Facebook), they have a distance from using digital media to reach information and provide their requirements (Kılıç et al., 2021). The interview responses also show that older people have hesitation, suspicious and anxious feelings about getting information through social media and using digital tools. This situation creates more questions, and older people need help from their children or others. When these challenges increase in the pandemic disease period, older people's environmental and psychological limitations also increase. Previous studies greatly contribute to digital immigrants' media experiences in various



ways. Various disciplines work media literacy, from medical to behavioral sciences. However, there is a gap in investing in whether individuals over 65 gain new social media experiences, why they start to use social media in COVID-19, and how they find a solution when they do not know they need to do so.

Fundamentally research firstly focuses on the distinction between digital immigrants and the digital immigrant's skills and benefits from the new media environment, gender, cultural and economic components for investigating digital immigrants' social media abilities. Recently, In Turkey, academics have also contributed to media literacy to highlight older adults' preferences and the way of joining the online environment. Since Turkey is a place where the diversity of digital media experience of the elderly population over 65 years of age is very variable, Turkey should be examined separately in this regard. However, this study focusses on digital immigrants' social media experiences in Turkey and regarding their concept of digital media literacy. The struggles, problems, and benefits of the pandemic period for older adults need to be investigated with their way of thinking for social media skills, awareness, and experiences. Therefore, this research asks how has COVID-19 influenced the social media skills of individuals over 65. This research will focus on how older adults advance the social media practices during COVID-19, what type of struggles they lived, whether they know how to solve their problems on social media and whether they feel comfortable with their social media skills.

Research will ask;

Q 1) How do older adults over 65 perceive their digital media literacy?

Q 2) What are the challenges, coping mechanisms, and sources of support that older adults over 65 face when using social media?

Q 3) What are the impacts of COVID-19 on the social media experience of older adults over 65?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this thesis, the qualitative research method is adopted to answer the research question, given it focuses on individuals' subjective experiences and behavior as "a form of research in which the researcher or a designated coresearcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.26). Likewise, it allows a flexible, evolving, and dynamic contact with the study material.

Given the main objective of the current research is to address how COVID-19 has influenced the social media experiences of individuals over 65, qualitative methodology is more appropriate as opposed to the quantitative methodology for several reasons (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). First, the qualitative methodology will allow me to better understand participants' inner experiences, ways of thinking, emotions, and reactions to their COVID-19 social media experiences. Secondly, it will make exploring a specific

area that has not completely worked on manageable (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this work, I focus on older adults' social media experiences during COVID-19— a subject that has not been thoroughly researched given its recency. Considering that my research question is related to people's experiences, I need to identify meanings embedded in their answers and the relevant processes of transformation. By using qualitative methods, I can study how meanings are created, transformed, and employed and thus come up with a bird's eye view of wider relevant concepts.

In light of these benefits of embracing a qualitative approach, I employ interviews as the main research method. Qualitative interviews offer a standard structure for each question: asking the interviewee a question, allowing the interviewee to evaluate, think about, and answer the question, receiving the answer from the interviewee, considering the interviewee's response, and analyzing the collected information by the researcher (Brinkman, 2014). The reason why interviews are preferable is often the need to figure out people's inner world. "Interviewing also provides to learn what people think, how they represent themselves, how they feel, act in their daily lives and recent decades, such *knowledge-producing conversations* have been refined and discussed as qualitative interviews" (Brinkmann, 2014). Accordingly, the interview is an appropriate method to satisfy my curiosity about people's way of thinking and interpretations in light of carefully constructed interview questions.

In order to understand older individuals' reasons, excuses, emotions, and ideas about social media use in time of a global crisis, and I have decided to conduct interviews in a semi-structured format which comes with various advantages (Brinkmann, 2014). Semi-

structured interviews help update the interview questions and open new subjects when necessary under the same research topic to collect more interesting and detailed data (Lareau, 2021). By conducting semi-structured interviews, I can extend the topic, change the direction of the responses, and use follow-up questions whenever necessary. In other words, this format allows me to extract more knowledge during the interviews.

Additionally, since the questions are pre-prepared, participants feel more comfortable when they realize they are being listened to and asked coherent and relevant questions with a certain structure and flow along with the colloquial follow-up questions.

Upon deciding on employing qualitative methodology and conducting semi-structured interviews, it is necessary to have a clearer understanding of how to collect and analyze data during the study. For the current research, I adopt a grounded theory which "is a form of qualitative research developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.28). The critical point of the grounded theory is that it allows the researcher to analyze general concepts and develop new explanations with the experiences during the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Instead of analyzing particular words, sentences, and keywords, concepts related to the study are based on the individuals' answers in a more comprehensive way. The grounded theory provides flexible and open working opportunities while simultaneously doing semi-structured interviews rather than doing interviews and then analyzing all of them after every interview was done. When employing grounded theory, I do not have a pre-identified, deductively created list of concepts before conducting the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This way, the grounded theory method exhibits various benefits for the research at hand. First, it offers a process of working as a whole and

working simultaneously with the semi-structured interview results. While collecting data, concepts related to media literacy were generated during the research process; therefore, research analysis and data collection were simultaneous during the study, not *post factum*. Corbin & Strauss (2015) call this situation *constant comparisons*, which is used to explain the data collection and analysis process throughout the research as a continuous ongoing cycle. Secondly, the grounded theory allows for digging hidden knowledge from the interviewee in a manner without making it obvious to the individuals participating in the study. Instead of asking people directly whether they are comfortable with using social media, the grounded theory makes me use the transcript of one interview to be used for preparing the following interviews. In this way, I enjoy the opportunity of adapting the way of asking questions and encourage participants to be more talkative when constructing the general research framework (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

### **3.1 Participants**

There were two criteria for ensuring participation eligibility. The first was that the person should be over 65 years old. During the research, people were chosen 67 years old and above because the worldwide pandemic started in 2020, and people who were 65 at the time were subject to quarantine practices during COVID-19. The second criteria are that participants have any social media accounts to understand the interviewees' social media experiences. Finally, people who want to experience this research but live outside the city will be able to deal with setting up Zoom, or there must be someone around who can set up Zoom. This research requires 15 individuals whose ages ranged

from 66 to 76 were recruited among a total of 22 people who expressed an interest in being a part of the research but changed their minds afterward. Among those who ended up not participating, three people stated that they did not want the conversation to be recorded, two people did not want to set up Zoom, a communication application, on their devices, and one did not want to help research conducted in relation to their age group, and one stated that they could not participate because they were uncomfortable with the idea of talking about the research topic. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, which is a type of convenience sampling practice (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Interviews were held with people from the circle of relatives of my own family and friends as well as their acquaintances, with some of them participating from other cities in Turkey. This resulted in the semi-structured interviews being held face-to-face with four interviewees, while the video communication app Zoom was used to speak with the remaining eleven interviewees.

### **3.1.1 Characteristics of Participants**

Seven of the fifteen interviewed individuals were female. The oldest participant was 76-year-old and the youngest 66 (Median: 70). All participants belong to the middle and upper-middle economic class and can afford a smart device. Participants were residents of İzmir, Ankara, Bursa, and İstanbul, all big cities of Turkey. Their professions consisted of a retired banker, pharmacist, teacher, journalist, accountant, psychologist, health worker, housewife, architect, and farmer. Considering their age group, four of them stated that they continue to work despite being retired. Overall, the majority of the interviewees exhibited enthusiasm for being a part of my interview study, while others

were relatively more reluctant to elaborate their answers.

**Table 1: General Information about Participants' Characteristics**

<b>General Information</b>	<b>Total (N=15)</b>	<b>Men (N=9)</b>	<b>Women (N=6)</b>
Age	71,53 ± 3,93	72,56 ± 4,03	70 ± 3,52
Married	11	8	3
Single	4	1	3
Living with Spouse	11	8	3
Living with Someone Else	4	1	3
<b>Education Level</b>			
Master Degree	2	0	2
Bachelor Degree	9	7	2
High School	3	1	2
Primary school	1	1	0
<b>Working Status</b>			
Employed	5	4	1
Retired	10	5	5

**Table 2: Information About Social Media Access Tools and Internet Access Quality**

<b>Social Media Access Tools</b>	<b>Total (N=15)</b>	<b>Men (N=9)</b>	<b>Women (N=6)</b>
Cell Phone	15	9	6
Tablet	5	2	3
Desktop Computer	3	2	1
Laptop	6	3	3
<b>Internet Access Quality</b>			
Good	11	5	6
Moderate	2	2	0
Poor	2	2	0

Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrate that majority of respondents are married, not living alone, and retired. The average age is 71.5 years, 72 years for men, and 70 years for women. It is significant to demonstrate the characteristics of participants because of



understanding the participants' responses. Since the participants lived through the quarantine period due to their age, they are suitable people to convey the social media experiences before the worldwide pandemic and had to go through COVID-19.

### **3.2 Development of the Interview Instruments**

In order to collect data, I focused on the main research question and identified simple and specific questions as the first step of preparing semi-structured interview questions (Laure, 2021). During this process, while I was preparing the questions, doing pilot interviews helped me decide what kind of questions I should ask. Among the interview questions, eight of twenty questions were prepared for collecting demographic data from the interviewee and preparing the individual to speak more during the interview (Hill, 1997). At the end of the writing questions process, the research has approximately twenty questions with various probing questions to access more information. The following questions were asked to all participants regardless of probing questions which have basically the same purpose but vary depending on the events described by the respondents. The probing questions asked during the interviews were not initially listed under the interview instruments. The questions stemmed from the use of grounded theory practice and thus varied for each participant based on the answers they provided (Appendix C). All questions were asked in Turkish and then translated into English for writing purposes.

**Table 3: Interview Questions**

<b>Number of Questions</b>	<b>Demographic Questions</b>
1	How old are you?
2	What is your marital status?
3	With whom do you share your living space?
4	What is your education level?
5	Do you work?
6	Where do you live?
7	Which device or devices do you use to access the Internet? Adapted from Binark (2020)
8	Do you have any problems with your Internet speed in general?
	<b>Fundamental Questions</b>
	<b>Initial Questions</b>
1	Do you use social media in your daily life?
2	How did you decide to use social media, and why did you want to start?
3	Did you find it difficult when you started using social media?
4	Are you currently able to do everything you want to do on social media? Adapted from Van Dijk (2003)
5	Thinking about the activities that you do on social media; do you generally feel the need for approval? If so, for which activities does this apply more? Adapted from Sobieraj and Krämer (2020)
	<b>Pre-COVID-19 Questions</b>
6	How often do you use social media?
7	Why and for what purposes do you use social media?
8	Which social media platform do you use the most?
9	Which social media platform is easier for you to use in your daily routine?
10	Do you want to try the new features in the social media apps you use right away?
	<b>COVID-19 Period</b>
11	How has your social media usage changed with COVID-19? Were there any social media applications that you did not feel the need to use before, but you felt the need to use during the pandemic?
12	Has there been an increase in the time you spend on social media during COVID-19? Adapted from Chia et al. (2021)

13	Considering your previous usage habits, have you experienced different challenges in using social media during the COVID-19 period that you have not encountered before?
14	Have you experienced social media during COVID-19 outside of your previous habits? Adapted from Hajek and König (2021)
15	Has there been a change in your news following habits during the COVID-19 period? Have you started to follow more news on social media?
16	Did social media advertisements and people promoting products on social media change your shopping habits during the COVID-19 period?
17	How do you think your social media skills have improved during the COVID-19 period? Do you feel more capable now? Adapted from Garcia et al. (2021)
18	How do you feel about continuing the habits you had to learn during COVID-19 for the rest of your life?
19	After COVID-19, did you feel the desire to learn new things on social media on your own?
20	Do you think people in your age group should make an effort to improve their social media skills?
21	Is there anything else you would like to add?

The next step was to prepare a consent form to inform individuals prior to the interviews. The document contains the subject of the thesis, the purpose of the study, the registration conditions during this interview, the rights of the people before and after the interview, and how data information will be stored. Bilkent University Ethics Committee approved the application finding it appropriate to conduct the current a study on individuals' experiences.

### **3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview Procedure**

In the current study, the video communication application Zoom used to record the interviews safely and use a uniform format. Participants who live outside of Ankara received their informed consent forms in paper format via mail. I helped participants

who were using Zoom for the first time how to install the application on their phones.

For the face-to-face semi-structured interviews, four interviewees participate from one's residential blog in Ankara which helped to achieve multiple convenient respondents who have online and offline connections in the same environment. Interviews with these four people took place face-to-face format. Five of the interviewees participated in the study by giving references to each other in the circle of one relative's mutual friends in Izmir. Other participants joined the interview with my personal networks in different cities. All interviews with these eleven people conducted through Zoom. Most participants stated that they were installing Zoom communication application for the first time in their lives. During the interviews it seems that people were more prejudices in face-to-face interviews than in the interviews made over Zoom, and the interviews may not feel comfortable at the beginning, as people may thought that they would be put to the exam. Also, based on my observations as the interviewer, the age difference between myself and the participants did not seem to initially make them feel comfortable at the beginning and seem like a potential problem for the research. Still, this possibility considerably decreased with the conversations before and after the interview. During the interviews, it seems that once they realized that there was someone who did not stop them and was listening to their conversation, they seem more open to talking about the interview or not. The first interview for snowball sampling started with Z.D who is a distant relative on 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2022, and the last interview conducted on 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022. At the time of the interview, lockdowns were completely removed for people aged 65 and over. Although this age group had been subjected to serious restrictions during the COVID-19 period, the bans were lifted during the interview. However, many were

still nervous about meeting face-to-face, and about using public transportation to conduct interviews outside. As a result, the duration of the interviews was the shortest at 14 minutes and the longest at 58 minutes, but the average interview time was 21 minutes.

### **3.3 Analytical Strategy**

Prior to data analysis, I transcribed all interviews using the Word processor. While transcribing the interviews, I read the whole transcripts, and identified seven distinct concepts: access, connectedness, the reason behind using social media, need for support, anxiety, adaptation, and impact of COVID-19. These concepts emerged from the initial rounds of reviewing of the transcripts and particular memos involving my interpretations. After determining the initial themes, I went over the memos to create a diagram of the connections between the participants' answers. Strauss and Corbin (2015) argue that one of the most significant points in qualitative analysis is getting memos and diagrams. "Memo is a written record of analysis, and diagrams are visual devices that depict relationships between analytic concepts" (2015, p.122). Eventually, I used Word to transcribe interviews and Excel to show open data descriptions by themes. The primary purpose of memos was to see how the participant answers go under the main themes which then ensured the identification of sub-themes as well as the relationships in between. Moreover, the diagrams helped visually explain to the reader the connections between the themes helping to identify the frames emerging from the interviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the findings are based on the notes and diagrams suggested by the analytical tools of grounded theory. Based on the interview memos suggested by grounded theory, distinct themes, sub-themes and their connections emerged during and after the interviews. Grounded theory gives the opportunity to determine the categories and sub-categories during the interviews and after the transcripts process. After all, eight main categories and eleven sub-categories were generated based on fifteen interviews.

**Table 4: Themes, Sub-Themes, and Relevance to Social Media**

	Themes		Sub-Themes		Features
<b>I.</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>A.</b>	Access to the Internet	1.	The need to use smart devices
				2.	Fear of device breakdown
				3.	The need to solve the problem of internet speed and problems with internet companies

		B.	Access to Information	1.	Want to learn daily news, especially about finance and politics
				2.	Want to see what's going on in the world
				3.	Want to receive daily information about what is going on in their children's countries who live far away.
				4.	Desire to reach the municipality and instant city news from authorized institutions
		C.	Access to unfamiliar people/society	1.	Curious about people they do not know directly
				2.	The desire to learn about their children, people whom they knew before and with whom they are not very close now, and what other people from their hometowns are doing
				3.	Monitoring and following activities that they cannot go to due to transportation and physical difficulties because of health problems
				4.	The desire of people who do not have a working life to tell about and show themselves to others, what they do, what they like, and their hobbies and daily activities.
II.	Connectedness	A.	Connection with the Family and Friends	1.	People can connect with each other immediately on days such as birthdays, illnesses, and funerals.

				2.	Keeping in touch while their children are living abroad, going out of town, or at work
				3.	Not to stay away from the conversation in the circle of friends.
				4.	Solving problems without waiting for their children to come to them
				5.	to continue in friendship environments remotely from military, high school, and university years
		B.	Connection with the Work and Hobby	1.	To ensure the communication of people who continue to work after retirement with their colleagues through social media.
				2.	Promoting their work (promoting books, knitting)
				3.	About all the hobbies they have acquired, meeting new people, following the activities, continuing to do their hobbies actively, and sharing the results with people.
III.	Reasons Behind Using Social Media	A.	Getting started with social media with the influence of their environments	1.	Joining your friends' Facebook and WhatsApp groups after persuasion of their peers
				2.	Starting by joining mandatory workgroups to stay in touch at work
		B.	Starting social media on their own because of their curiosity and necessity	1.	Having to try to communicate through social media under pressure from their children
				2.	Start by seeing and hearing social media and wondering what it is



<b>IV.</b>	<b>Need for Support</b>			1.	Not knowing how to react to on-screen notifications.
				2.	Having a strong desire to do social media posts when someone is with them
				3.	Fear of sharing something wrong/afraid of misunderstanding
				4.	The hesitation of causing the computer to break down because of their actions
				5.	Think that their children better them / feeling inadequate about social media
				6.	Just repeating the actions, they know so they do not step out of their comfort zone.
<b>V.</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>			1.	Anxiety about being disgraced
				2.	Anxiety about breaking something
				3.	The anxiety of being addicted to social media
				4.	The anxiety of having their information stolen /anxiety of hackers
				5.	The anxiety of sharing containing false information
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Adaptation</b>			1.	Adapt over time when they learn something
				2.	Wanting to continue using it the way they know
				3.	Accept that they cannot use it like teenagers because of the speed of change.
				4.	Tendency to forget new information about social media.
				5.	Think that they cannot use it fully, no matter what they do, because they learned it very late in their lives.
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Impact of COVID-19</b>	A.	Increase in Time	1.	Spend more time on social media
				2.	Using features, they have not tried before

				3.	Feel more prone to social media
		B.	Help Need	1.	The need to reach people to whom they will ask their questions through social media
				2.	Desire to self-resolving
				3.	Asking for their children's help more often
VIII.	Further Desire to Advance Social Media Practice	A.	Attending a course, event, or seminar and wanting to learn about social media	1.	Not being afraid to try new things and thinking that the information they will learn will be useful.
		B.	Not wanting to learn more about social media.	1.	Finding their actions on social media sufficient, not wanting to learn more and spend time
				2.	The thought that learning new things will be confusing and increase the need for support

In the table, there are eight primary themes; these are access, connectedness, reasons behind using social media, need for support, anxiety, adaptation, impact of COVID-19 and further desire to advance social media practice. Anxiety, need for support, and adaptation concerns individuals' psychological states. Some themes, such as access, connectedness, and further desire to advance social media practice, are about digital media usage. Lastly, the themes such as the impact of COVID-19 and further desire to advance social media practice are conditional behaviors that concern people's social media practices.

The first category, i.e. access, demonstrates how older people accessed social media in their daily lives before the COVID-19 period. It is one of the most important components of one's social media experiences, especially for digital immigrants. This is

mainly because access is often directly related to having skills and capacity to find what people want, the opportunity to complete the intention to perform an action, and the ability to having digital fluency which is defined as "the ability to reformulate knowledge to express oneself creatively and appropriately, and to produce and generate information rather than simply to comprehend it" (National Research Council 1999, p. viii). In this sense, access is a crucial feature of older people's use of social media. According to participants' responses, access has its essential sub-themes because the first step for using social media are related to using smart devices; therefore, accessing the Internet is the first subcategory. Older people need to use smart devices with an Internet connection. Still, the Internet speed and quality can influence their thought and behavior in using social media in the first place.

Interviewees I talked to says that:

"I do not have home internet in my own home, and I use the internet of my own mobile phone," A.Z.Y. (67).

"I have a problem with the Internet. I am using telecom infrastructure, and I am not satisfied. It affects my usage. It is slow because there is a problem with the Internet, my Internet capacity is bad, I usually use my mobile Internet," S.B.T. (74).

It seems that Internet connection affect older people's desire to use social media. Thus, older people argue that access to the Internet creates the opportunity to access information (i.e finance, politics, health, cooking recipes) and access unfamiliar people and society through social media because, for many, accessing the Internet already means accessing social media.

Other participants argue that:

"Being aware of the latest updates more quickly is great. I see every post on social media as news. Daily events and current events are shared instantly," M.T. (72) said.

"Sure, accessing the people is a great convenience. I am not driving a car. I do not use public transport. I go to all book fairs with social media. My friend filmed the interview and sent it, and I was very happy. It was not live, and I was not there, but I looked it up on WhatsApp," H.K. (72) said.

Interviewees have a common idea that if they can connect the Internet, they can access to information and people. Among the participants, H.K (72) clearly explain that daily problems in the older ages reduce with access to people via digital media platforms.

The second category is connectedness because, for older people, the most important thing is to connect with their children and family whenever they want. According to Cornwell et al. (2008), an increased need for connectedness as a consequence of old age is a universal phenomenon according to studies, and overcoming the lack of social connectedness has a positive impact on people's quality of life. Life cycle factors have different implications for different forms of social connectedness, with transitions such as retirement, bereavement, separation from children, and divorce, at some older ages leading to a greater need for connectedness. Therefore, participants state that the most fundamental thing before and after COVID-19 is to be connected to their family and friends; connect work and hobby.

"I have a son who lives in Australia. I'm following it. I follow everything about Australia for my son. I see the weather, the way of life, the school of the children, and the work of the children, and they share it with me on video. It is very useful and very beautiful," C.Ş (69) said.

"I did not know about YouTube, when my friends said watch this, look at that, I was interested. I discover that I can learn many things about astrology which is my new hobby. I have never been interested in YouTube before for this kind of issue. I mean, I have heard of it but did not realize it was this common. Astrology training is usually highly paid, but I started to participate in free training. I get information from there, and I like it very much. I do not have to go abroad for a training program, and I can spend time on it whenever I want" F.A (68).

Five of the fifteen people such as F.A (68) continue to earn their living by turning their hobbies into financial gain, working in charities, or doing their own jobs. In particular, these people stated that they were connected to their work environment and colleagues at work through social media.

The significance of the third category depends on the idea of older people's reasons behind using social media. The main goal is to learn these people's basic desires, needs, and thoughts about why they use social media. Uses and gratification (U&G) is an approach to understanding one's motivation, desire, the intensity of use, and one's purpose spends time on a social media platform (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Uses and gratification demonstrate various fundamental components of users' motivations. For instance, one can fulfill their needs while using social media for different reasons such as their interests, and family needs, business requirements. Therefore, people's expectations from social media become different from each other with their content selections and choosing platforms and reasons to keep continue to use. Also, in terms of the uses and gratification approach, social media users can judge the quality of social media for different reasons (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). B.S. (76) claims that there is no need to have a Twitter because it is useless and not necessary. There is so much inappropriate and harmful content on Twitter. In light of participants' responses, there

are two motivations behind examining digital immigrants' reasons for using social media. One of them is getting started with social media with the influence of their environments. Others are starting social media of their own interest, curiosity, and necessity in their personal lives. At the end of the interviews, eleven of the fifteen people participated in social media under the influence, insistence, or coercion of others and the demand of their circle.

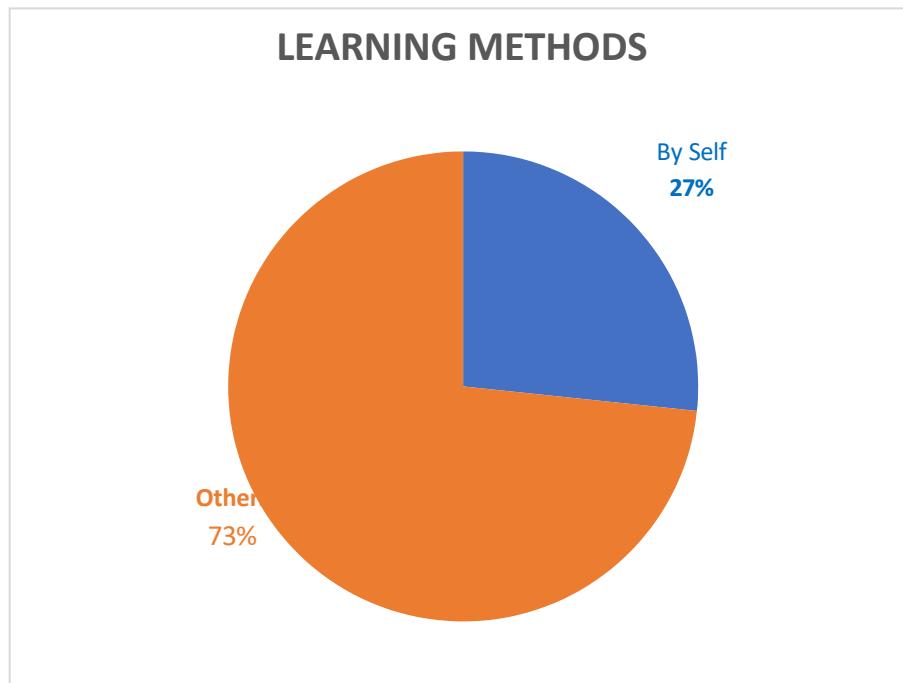
One participant argues:

“Since the children were using it, they wanted us to join them. Since we are old, when they said it, we said ok and wanted to join. Of course, we use it as much as we can, but we are not like them. Of course, we liked it after a while when it started with their forces" R.Ü (70).

Others who learn by themselves started to use it because it was needed at work or because they heard it and wondered about it like F.A (68).

"We used social media at work at the beginning because it was a quick and easy way to reach colleagues both at work and after work." F.A. (68).

**Figure 1: Learning Methods**



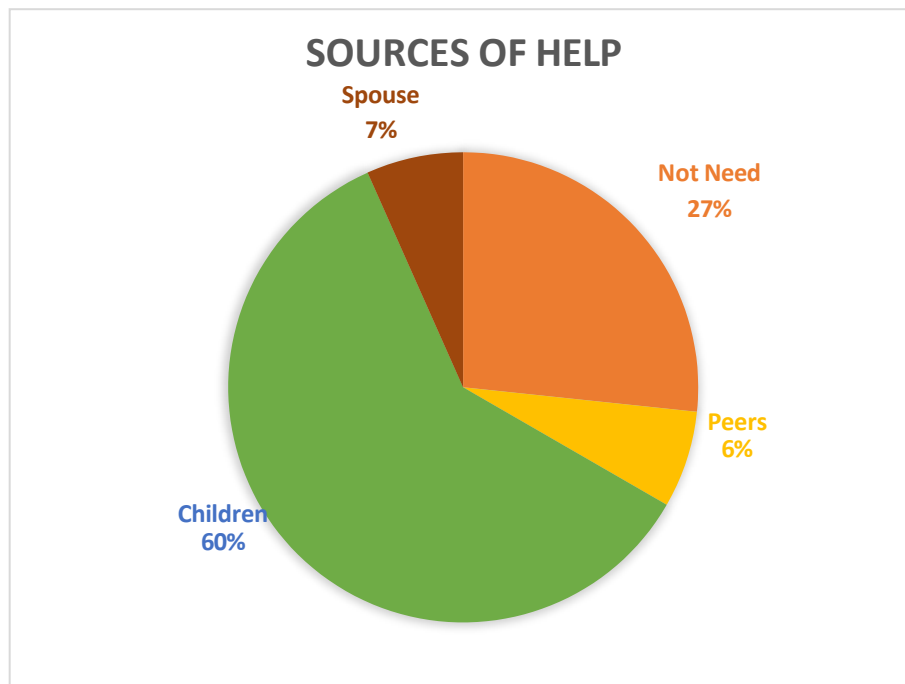
The most prominent features among the answers of the participants are: starting to use social media by being invited to Facebook and WhatsApp groups of their friends, starting to use social media out of obligation for work, starting to use social media at the insistence of their children, and starting to use social media on their own will by seeing and hearing from others.

The need for support is one of the most important concepts that come up during the interviews. At the same time, as older people use social media and want to be more active, their concerns and questions increase. In those times, generally, participants claim that they do not know how to react to on-screen notifications because of the language or symbols. Also, when they want to be active in their social media accounts,

this desire increases to share and publish a post, story, or photograph when someone is with them. However, older people have a fear of sharing something wrong, and something can be misunderstood. In this case, they need support. Generally, older people think that their children better them, and nine out of fifteen respondents ask their child for help with social media. Among the interviewees, S.B.T (74) talked about how he gets help from children.

“When there is a challenging situation for me, I call my children, I inform them, and they reach me. For my other questions, we already get together every few months, and they make the settings then” S.B.T. (74).

**Figure 2: Sources of Help**



During the interviews, four participants stated they did not need any support, and one said they consulted their spouse, and one indicated they preferred to ask their friends.



"I do not ask for help from anyone. I research and figure it out on my own. I learn in a puzzled way, and I lose, I find, I search, then I find the answer by trying and trying" C.Ş (69).

It seems that the way to get help varies among the older population. Still, even though their source of support becomes different, their need for social media does not change among the participants in the study.

Moreover, anxiety is another challenge while older people's social media experiences. Anxiety is a common phenomenon when discussing digital immigrants' social media usage. Bergman & Bodner (2022) present the phenomenon of aging anxiety as a multidimensional construct that includes concerns about physical and mental aging, as mentioned by Lasher and Faulkender in 1993. For example, changes in physical appearance, psychological concerns such as addiction and self-esteem issues, and social problems and concerns, such as social losses, increased help-seeking and social support received, and transpersonal fears include anxieties such as fear of facing death and difficulty in finding purpose in life. When anxiety becomes related to social media, older people tend to have hesitation stemming from fear, a lack of motivation and interest to struggle with the problem, and fear of addiction (Vroman et al., 2015). Likewise, there are various reasons for anxiety among older people during their social media usage in this research. Older adults have both physical and psychological anxiety. Some are afraid of damaging the computer or device, suffering financial loss, being scammed, and having their information stolen, while others are afraid of being embarrassed and addicted to social media.

For instance,

"There are so many scams out there; when people of our age get involved, some get scammed. I have not been scammed, but I have heard of a lot of people who have been scammed, and I realized that hackers also reached out to me to scam me" B.S. (76).

It seems to be anxiety have a crucial impact of older adult's social media practice and may increase their need for help. For instance, among the participants, B.S (76) explain they were worried and hesitant about whether they should do it or not, whether it was right, whether it would be misunderstood or not, and whether it was necessary to say yes to this notification. Anxiety, therefore, has an important place in discussing older adults' social media actions, as anxiety creates hesitation in actions that need to be decided on social media and need the approval of others to ensure they are done correctly.

The sixth concept is adaptation which is a process of adjusting to changing conditions, frequently switching from one goal to another, and being active while adapting to current conditions (Nikitin & Freund, 2019). Digital immigrants are people who have made the transition from traditional media to social media later in their lives and are, therefore, a generation that has experienced a process of adaptation to social media, its concepts, and practices (Schreurs et al., 2017). Participants' responses demonstrate that older adults adapt over a more extended time period when they learn something.

One of the interviewees says that:

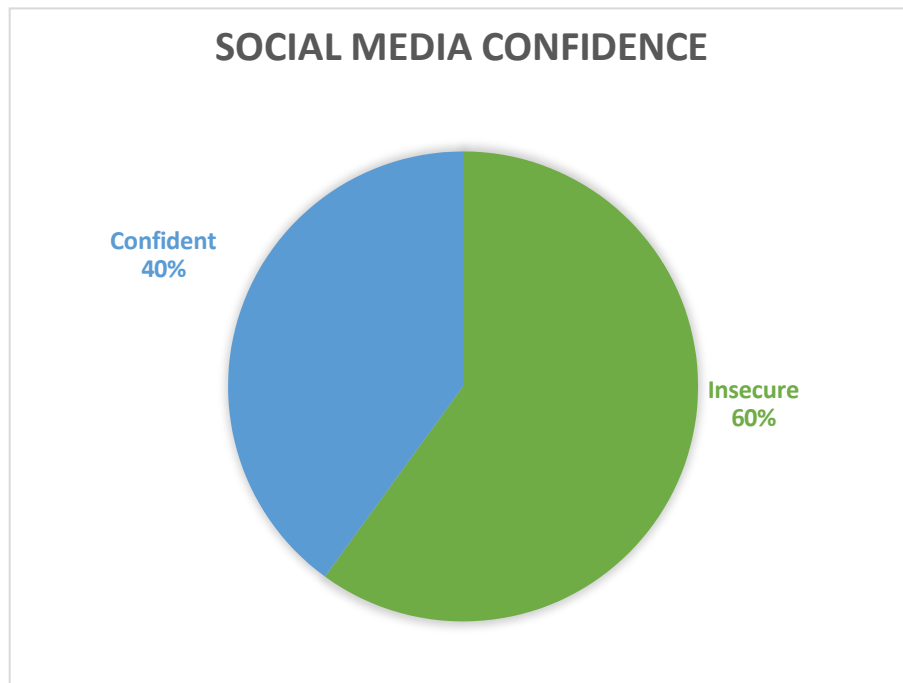
"I tried to learn Facebook and WhatsApp. I made an effort. I have benefited a lot from it until today, and now we are still using it slowly, but we forget some applications after a certain age, it is difficult to adapt to it, but when it is old used things, it is more memorable. It is easier to use the things we know from the past" I.G (66).

Also, older people's adaptation process to social media consists of the idea of incapability, willingness to continue using old knowledge, and maintenance of habits.

These conditions can be caused by the mental or physical condition of the person's aging (Nikitin & Freund, 2019). For instance, Y.S. (76) said I used to use social media a little more frequently, but now there is a decrease. I mean, I probably encountered some problems brought on by aging. This may also have an effect. Now I have a cataract problem. I do not want to do it right away like I used to. Therefore, digital immigrants can need a slower adaptation process than young people in order to feel comfortable and confident using social media.

COVID-19 has a massive influence on users' social media experiences which causes them to spend more time on social media and increases to need for support. COVID-19 has a significant impact on older adults' social media usage because they have to use different social media applications which have not tried before to see their children, family, and relatives. Moreover, since over 65 lives quarantine time more than younger people, they need to reach people to whom they will ask their questions through social media. In the research, nine out of fifteen respondents did not feel confident on social media, while six said they felt comfortable using it.

**Figure 3: Social Media Confidence (Before COVID-19)**



However, when I asked the participants if they felt more confident after COVID-19, thirteen out of fifteen said they felt more in control. This was because they used much more during the day, used features they had not used before, and reinforced their actions because they repeated them frequently.

One of the participants says that:

“Before the pandemic, I was not video chatting on WhatsApp, but in the pandemic, I had to. We needed it in the 65 years of age confinement. I needed it because there was no other option, and we were relaxing by connecting with children according to our age” S.B.T. (74).

S.B.T (74) is an example that has been chosen from among all the participants and reflects their views. Since people over 65 had to spend more time in their home, their social media usage increased and it seems that they started to use new features willingly

or unwillingly. This situation, like in S.B.T's (74) lives, may cause to results of reaching their children. COVID-19 has become an experience changer for older people because it impacted the duration of social media usage and the diversity of users' needs.

Lastly, I focus on older people's further desire to advance social media practice, especially when older people spend much more time during the worldwide pandemic. Participants' responses are categorized under two categories: willingness to attend a course, event, or seminar, and want to learn about social media, and not wanting to learn more about social media. In this case, the participants' answers come together under the umbrella of sticking with their comfort zone and willingness to learn. Vroman et al. (2015) demonstrate that older people's willingness to spend time trying new experiences declines with age. Older people with aversion argues that they find their social media actions sufficient, and they do not want to learn more and increase time spent on social media. On the other hand, the minority in the research considers that they are not afraid to try new things and are open to learning more information that will be useful. For example, I was asked if she would like to learn new social media features after COVID-19.

One of the participants who is closed to learning replied:

"No way! I mean, I do not spend that much time, there is a person my age who still spends hours and still spends time like a young person. I am not a teenager; my way of usage is enough" H.T. (72).

When older people stick with their comfort zone, they also become closed to learning. In those cases, older people's willingness can decrease, and the need for connectedness can increase.

## **4.1 Frames Emerging from the Main Findings**

The most crucial aim of this study is to examine the social media experiences of older people during the COVID-19 period, and the data analysis part has tried to demonstrate this in the previous section. Four frames which are thinking patterns of people over 65, emerged from the main findings with the grounded theory during the interviews. The fundamental point is to interpret how these themes have frames and relation to each other. The most crucial issue is the concepts the participants did not express explicitly but emerged from all participants after an in-depth analysis of the memos and responses. The concepts that actually emerged through the implicit answers of the interviewee demonstrate the contribution that the study is trying to offer.

### **4.1.1 Learned Helplessness**

Learned helplessness is defined as when people limit future learning experiences, which occurs in their motivational, mental, and psychological conditions by ignoring potential positive outcomes (Maier & Seligman, 1976). People over 65 begin to live their lives with the mental and physical conditions brought about by aging that has positive and adverse conditions. However, according to participants' responses in this thesis, learned helplessness is a motivational and psychological limitation that depends on the habituation processes and is based on the feedback they receive from people. Strong motivation can decrease older people's anxieties; to want to learn how to develop computer skills and communicate with their grandchildren through social media (Chaffin & Harlo, 2005). The adaptation processes in Table 4 essentially connect with

older people's learned helpfulness. According to interview memos, adaptation is a slow process for older adults, changes in the current social media landscape are moving too fast for them to keep up, learn, reuse, and do it independently. Therefore, adaptation becomes a self-limitation for digital immigrants that creates learned helplessness, which depends on a lack of motivation. For instance, one participant argues that the changes become difficult and challenging.

"We were not born with computers. I had a hard time switching to social media because, in the past, there were no cell phones, smart devices, connections, or Internet. Later on, since we did not have computers, we had the problem of using computers rather than using social media. I remember the first thing before smartphones came out, texting started. Before that, there were pagers. I saw the alert and found a phone and called who called me. I guess we are open to innovations as a family. I guess I wanted to try it out. It was also a necessity for work, but I am one of those who bought a cell phone late. It was like getting off a donkey and getting on a horse. In that sense, then I saw the benefit of it. Of course, if it was not for the smartphone for social media, I think social media would have been more difficult" L.T. (69).

Another participant said:

I were born again, I would learn the computer and smartphone very well from the very beginning. The world is at our fingertips, but we only use a small part of it. I am aware of its importance, I am aware of its value, but I cannot use it fully M.T. (72).

Since they do not feel that they have control over not only social media but also technology and the tools it brings, they limit their own use of social media. Also, learned helplessness is related to the problem of forgetting that comes with age, as well as the speed of change. In particular, older people who are retired do not want more social media experience, feeling that they do not need to learn more and that the amount of use their children have taught them, their environment, or themselves is enough because of

forgetfulness. During the adaptation process, older people need to repeatedly do what they want to avoid forgetting how that action is complete. Participants have a common answer that they need to do the action repeatedly to continue to experience social media. For instance, a seventy-six-year-old retired teacher said:

If I am learning a new feature, I want to get technical support for it to avoid making mistakes, but once I learn it, I want to use it every day, so I do not forget it. Because of my age, I do not want to make mistakes because we are at a dangerous age. If I make a mistake, I cannot get out of it. (Z.D.)

Moreover, if social media applications change the symbols, the design, and the location of the items, digital immigrants are unable to repeat the action over and over again, which leads to forgetting, becoming disenchanted, or being unwilling to use that app.

Seventy-year-old R.Ü argues that:

“It would be better if the signs were more vivid and easy to understand. Colors affect the fonts of the signs. It is better if they are a little bigger and more apparent. Signs are confusing when they change again and again. After entering something, I get confused about which sign I need to send and whether I am pressing something wrong.”

Therefore, adaptation becomes a limitation for older adults because change is faster than adaptation processes, and a forgetting problem comes with age creating learned helplessness while using social media.

#### **4.2 Acceptance of Digital Immigrant Status**

Anxiety and need for support are two different categories but researchers united under the umbrella of the acceptance of digital immigrant status by older people. Since older



people's transition process from traditional media to social media are quite fast, older people have to learn both smart devices and social media at the same time (Schreurs & Quan-Haase, 2017). Many participants argue that the struggle of using social media start with the challenge of using computers and cell phones. Therefore, older people's anxiety plays a key role in their lack of digital media literacy knowledge because of fear of hackers stumping and breaking the device. One participant said:

"Usually unwanted links are shared with me. I think it could be a hacker. I do not want to get into it before I know it well. Hackers can steal your Facebook or Instagram accounts, and then all your information will be stolen. I do not know if it is really my friend or a hacker. I see that the person who has been my friend for years is sending me friendship again. There are a lot of situations like that because I always act with the thought that either his Facebook or Instagram has been stolen. I try to be a little more careful" I.G (66).

Another interviewee mentioned that she could not use social media comfortably because she was afraid of breaking her device and causing damage because it is too expensive to buy a new device economically.

"I do not want to be harmed. I do not want to lose what I have. I want to use it properly. I want to talk to those around me, not through social media, but I want to be informed. If I press everything just like that, I will lose the opportunities I have. It is not an easy life for us, it is difficult for us to retire and start again after such an age, and it is difficult for us to try to rebuild financially. I am very careful not to lose what I have" H.K. (66).

Users' motivations to use social media applications consist of their content choices in the first place, this situation shapes the function of the self on social media (Cho et al., 2022). The research shows that older people do not have a motivation problem, their problems start with the lack of knowledge of the functions and features of what they use.

If they have a knowledge of which actions can cause stumped or pressing a button cannot use their computers, they can use social media more beneficially. In this way, their need for support can reduce over time.

Digital immigrants have lack of competence in their skills and confidence when they feel out of control (Schwarzenegger, 2020). This research demonstrates that digital immigrants lack confidence in social media because their children and friends solve their social media problem solves instantly, but none of them mention that their support does not contain the logic of the process, why they click that button, or how they fix the problem. For instance, one participant argues:

"I get help from my daughter. I usually ask her first on the phone and then by video call and show the screen. She tells me to do this and that. If it does not work, she can enter my computer with a remote connection and use my screen directly, and she connects to my computer and cell phone remotely. She solves the problem for me" M.A. (76).

This is just one example to show that digital immigrants do not have knowledge of the logic of using social media. Therefore, digital immigrants accept the idea that young people are better and capable of using social media.

"I cannot say I get upset when I ask my children questions about WhatsApp and Facebook. I tolerate myself because I do not understand, and they know better. I say even this much is good, and I have some friends who can never do any of this" S.E. (76).

If older people learn the fundamental information about social media, such as sharing one thing with someone, posting what they want, watching live videos, writing a

comment, or the following somebody, they can adapt slowly over time, but they can use it more confidently. People over 65 may realize that, in fact, most social media applications have a common use, that the symbols have the same meanings and familiar usage, and that it is not as easy as they thought to break the computer.

#### **4.3 Sticking with One's Comfort Zone**

As people get older, their living habits, daily routines, and favorite and non-favorite activities usually become more conservative and pickier comparing to younger generation (Chen et al.,2021). However, the nature of social media is dynamic, changeable, and constantly updated. When the researcher asked the participants whether they would like to master social media more and whether they would like to learn new things, ten out of fifteen participants stated that they were satisfied with what they use and that they were not interested in acquiring new knowledge and experience. Therefore, older people have a great tendency to avoid changing their comfort zone and avoid learning constantly updated social media information about posting, sharing, and following:

Seventy-six-year-old Y.S said that "we are no longer asked to do this or that on WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram. The spring of our life is gone. We are going downhill now. After this hour, I do not care if I learn something new on WhatsApp" Y.S. (76).

Another interviewee claimed:

"Of course, if a new different application comes out, but I have no desire to use WhatsApp and YouTube more effectively" M.A. (76).

As in these examples, digital immigrants do not want to give up their comfort zones, the activities and practices they are used to engaging in. Older adults gain fewer experiences in their online activities compared to digital natives, so older adults do not feel comfortable and develop their social media skills (Schreurs & Quan-Haase, 2017). This research demonstrates that not only fewer experiences but also new applications and information potentially increase the need for support for older people. Older people do not diversify their social media activities because they will potentially need to ask more questions, and their problems will increase. Rather than asking too many questions and trying to adapt new features to social media, people over 65 prefer to continue their nostalgic daily routines. For instance, one argues that

"I really do not want to learn new things. These applications, topics are very good in terms of innovation, in terms of following, but we are happier to spend our time alone with nature at this age, with our grandchildren and our peers" A.Z.Y (67).

When the number of features increases, the feeling of confusion, anxiety, and need for support also will increase for digital immigrants. Older people think they have a lifetime experience and want to keep their social media experiences as simple and easy as possible. In this research, digital immigrants think that they sufficiently use social media and are satisfied with what they use. Even if some participants would like want to learn more, they do not desire to learn new things and do practice using these in their social media accounts exactly. Therefore, older adults do not have the desire to learn more, experience more, and stay in their comfort area in their social media activities.

#### **4.4 COVID-19: Game Changer**

COVID-19 has caused outbreaks all over the world, causing people to stay in home quarantine. However, in this time period, people over the age of 65 were exposed to a lockdown for months, which had a major impact on their daily habits. With the different governmental implications, people over 65 stay in quarantine for more than one year with restrictions (2021, April 16). This situation has a crucial impact on older adults' social media experiences, according to interview participants' responses.

First of all, with COVID-19, people over the age of 65 have experienced a serious time interruption in their habits such as physical socialization, spending time with their family, and getting face-to-face help from their children. Among these changes, older adults' social media experiences also become dissimilar. Under the impact of COVID-19, older people tell that they spend more time on social media and have an increased need for support about it. With the increasing time spent, participants said that their way of following news changed through T.V. and radio to social media, which is mostly WhatsApp and Facebook. For instance, one participant said:

"The COVID-19 era started to get more news. I mean, against my will, everyone first denied everything about COVID-19, then I asked a neurologist relative of ours, a professor doctor, what do you say about this and that, and I found out. He is a professor of medicine, and his evaluation is valuable. Afterward, everyone was constantly sharing posts about COVID-19, we looked at them and followed them" M.A. (76).

Over time, the elderly has made a habit of following vaccines, symptoms, and everything about the disease from social media platforms.

“During the COVID-19 period, there were vaccination periods, and I followed those periods on social media. I learned how to make an appointment and how to get vaccinated on WhatsApp. I looked at what was happening on Facebook. I commented on the posts shared with me on health issues. I have also shared the news I read about health with my family and friends” Z.D (76).

The important point at this stage is that they do not check whether the information they get from social media is true or false and that they easily share WhatsApp messages that they share with themselves in their own circles, which actually shows their lack of digital media literacy.

Secondly, older people have to learn and try new features of their social media platforms to connect to their circle. Older people have turned their traditional socializing into digital socializing, especially through WhatsApp, which gives an opportunity to exchange people's emotions, information, events, and activities through video, photograph, audio, and face-to-face communication during a worldwide pandemic (Özgür, 2021). In this way, people are monitoring others and surveillance their close circle.

“Of course, what happened was that we got more connected to the computer during COVID-19 because we had the chance to video chat with our friends, so we used it more. Now when we went out, I was working at the time, and I quit my job in the meantime, I did not go to work, so of course, when that happened, we had very little opportunity to go out socially. There was the problem of not being able to move around, so we had to turn to the computer and social media more. We concentrated more on communicating with each other, seeing what was going on, and watching what was happening, which was not the case before because I did not have time because I was outside” F.A (68).

For surveillance of others and the connecting majority of participants state that they have to learn online video chat through WhatsApp.

Before the pandemic, I was never calling or video chatting on WhatsApp before the pandemic, and it was convenient to see the people I was not able to see during the pandemic on WhatsApp. S.E. (76).

During COVID-19, of course, longing has increased a lot, and video chatting brings people closer. Video chatting increased even more as time progressed in that period. But we have never cut off communication from our friends, our family, and our environment, but the pleasure of meeting face to face is different. I.G (66).

For example, before the pandemic, I was not video chatting on WhatsApp, but I had to during the pandemic because we needed it during the 65 years of age confinement. We needed it because there was no other option, we were relaxing by connecting with children according to our age. S.B.T (74).

In these senses, older peoples' media dependencies change during the pandemic period. Media system dependency theory states that a person becomes more dependent on the media to satisfy various needs, the media becomes more important for that individual, and this will have a much greater impact and power on that individual's cognition, emotions, and behavior (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Also, the crises in the society in which people live, people's need for access to media content, and the impact of that message causes cognitive affective and behavioral changes (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In the thesis, the results of the semi-structured interview demonstrate that older people become more dependent on social media during COVID-19 because of a desire to maintain their connectedness and satisfy their need for information in their daily lives.

“We followed the surveys about corona virus, and we received news from

Twitter and Facebook before that I was watching TV. More doctors and health people entered our lives, and we corresponded with them, we followed them every day. We followed the Ministry of Health on Twitter, which I think is a great injustice for those over 65. I also followed things about health problems on Twitter, for example, I don't follow it now. We had a constant flow of information on social media” L.T. (69).

“I tried to follow every day, what is going on, what is happening about this corona, we looked at the posts of people who shared abroad. Because in the first place, when this coronavirus first came out in March 2020, everyone was very anxious and did not have much information about this issue, so we were content with watching the videos shared by people living abroad. We got the news from the videos, some of which fell on social media, some of which came to us through the WhatsApp channel of familiar friends. Someone sent it to him, and he sent it to us on WhatsApp. We tried to get information” İ.G (66).

COVID-19, actually, is a motivational force for digital immigrants to learn new features, apply them and increase social media dependency in a different way. Even repeating the same activity more frequently comparing the pre-pandemic period, their adaptation time accelerated, and they started to feel more capable. While some participants use social media as a source of news and share it with their circle, others use it to keep continue to live their social life in a digital environment. According to participants, their ability of social media usage increased during the COVID-19 period. In this way, their digital media literacy on social media increased, and they gained new experiences during the pandemic period. Therefore, people over 65 state that they feel more comfortable with social media. They stated that they want to continue with their new habits after COVID-19 because of their aging, difficulty going out in old age, and physical discomforts. Nevertheless, despite all this, there is a fact for the elderly that the pleasure of meeting face to face, of being outside, is never something that can be achieved with social media.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Review of the Argument and Findings**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the social media experiences of people over the age of 65 during the COVID-19 pandemic via an exploratory investigation of older people's habits, skill experiences, thoughts, and behaviors about social media during COVID-19 under digital media literacy. COVID-19 is a significant time interruption and source of motivation that encouraged, if not forced, people to use social media, but in the literature, there is not enough studies yet given this crisis' recency.

To address the posed research question, I selected 15 participants aged between 66 to 76 with snowball sampling in my environment. I chose the semi-structured interview method to highlight people's thoughts and experiences more detailed way. Also, I used grounded theory to allow me to create an open working and flexible environment rather

than using the pre-identified concept. I want to learn the concept from each participant and benefit from one participant's answer to develop others. With the help of grounded theory, I identify eight categories of the interviews: access, connectedness, reasons behind using social media, need for support, anxiety, adaptation, the impact of COVID-19, and desire to learn social media. These categories constitute foundations of the overarching frames emerging from the interviews.

During the semi-structured interviews, I have primarily seen that there has been an increase in the pandemic-era social media use of older people compared to their lives before COVID-19. Participants argue that they primarily use social media to access information, unfamiliar people/society, connect with family and friends, and connect with their work and hobbies. Participants' responses show that they had to use social media more frequently because of connecting with their family and getting health-related information in the first place. However, since participants declare that they are anxious about being addicted to social media, the anxiety of hackers, and information being stolen, their need for support increased during the COVID-19 period. The participants argue that they adapt new features on social media over time. COVID-19 does not give that adaptation time period to them to adapt to use new features such as video calling on WhatsApp, watching live concerts on Instagram, and following the specific information sharing sites on Facebook. Therefore, older people in this study claim that they need to reach people to help them to ask their questions through social media and ask questions more often, especially their children.

With the primary research question, the research demonstrates the theoretical and

practical gap in the older population's social media experiences. Firstly, the study demonstrates that the lack of digital media literacy may essentially lead people to have anxiety and increases the need for help. The interview notes show that older adults do not fully understand how to achieve their goals on social media, the meaning of symbols, and the logic of social media platforms, indicating that they have incomplete knowledge of which social media platforms are set up for what purpose. The aim of digital media literacy gives the ability to reach, understand, analyze, share content, and find, control, and solve problems in the digital environment. According to interviews, older people do not solve their problems because they lack knowledge in analyzing the content and recognizing the problem.

Therefore, four frames emerge from the main findings that may cause of low digital media literacy. These are learned helplessness, acceptance of digital immigrant status, sticking with the comfort zone, and the impact of COVID-19. I argue that these frames point to the importance of digital literacy on older people's social media experiences. At the end of the research, I highlight the significance of digital media literacy in the theoretical and practical implementation of digital immigrants' social media experiences and skills.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Interviewing, listening, and talking to the participants during the research was a brand-new experience and very enjoyable, but there were, of course, some constraints and difficulties. First, the study was limited to 15 participants whose are selected from my

network and relatives. The study was conducted with people at a particular middle and upper middle economic level. Although the resulting fifteen participants were selected from different occupational groups and provinces and findings are not generalizable to the overall population over 65.

The second and most considerable difficulty was that the older people did not want face-to-face interviews because this study was carried out during and after the COVID-19 period. However, some participants may not feel comfortable speaking via Zoom. People who had never set up and used Zoom communication application before complete this process over the phone. These people may have difficulty and may decreased desire to speak. Finding people over 65 who want to carry out this process has been a compelling situation during the COVID-19 period.

Also, the high age difference seems to affect participants and made them hesitant and reduced their willingness to speak about difficulties on social media they have. However, as an exploratory study, the research contributes to hypothesis generation about literacy scholarship on older people's social media experiences.

### **5.3 Further Studies**

Older people's common knowledge of digital media literacy can diminish in theoretical and practical ways. First, social media studies primarily focus on digital natives in the literature. However, digital immigrants have a place in young generations' lives, and reducing the frequency of asking questions to young people would benefit both digital

natives and digital immigrants as social media users. Older people are also social media users in the digital media environment, which may increase the use in crises such as COVID-19. The studies conducted with digital natives provide comparative research in the literacy studies, but digital immigrants' digital media literacy studies of older people may not constitute a wide scope.

In further studies, especially in Turkey, older people's social media experiences can investigate with different methodologies, allowing researchers comparative studies. Further studies may be conducted with a survey with large samples, and general trends may be observable. In future studies, survey methodology may be used with hundreds of people from different regions of Turkey and various socio-economic groups to organize a working group. With the increasingly digital media literacy studies, future studies ensure to expand interdisciplinary studies, and the literature gap may diminish in Turkey.

This current research demonstrates the significance of older people's hesitations, need for support, and confidence in their social media practices. In future studies, these questions may be asked to digital immigrants periodically to explore how aging affects their social media experiences. Also, the interview questions in this research can be used to investigate whether there is a difference in social media experiences of older people with different purchasing power. In addition, whether the frames that emerged after the interviews constitute a linear relationship with each other can be examined in future studies. Therefore, the interview questions and results are important in terms shedding light on further studies focusing on digital media literacy.

After all, theoretical studies enhance the practices in social media platforms, corporations, and the media sector. If the awareness of older people's place in social media increases, social media platforms may create practical ways to diminish older people's adaptation time process by creating short, clear, and explanatory information sections for frequently asked questions for older people. Older people may have a different version of their social media accounts, and they may practice more easily in their social media activities. Therefore, older people may find and learn about their problems, solve themselves, and become more digitally media literate persons.

#### **5.4. Concluding Remarks**

When one thinks of social media, it is not surprising to picture younger individuals before the elderly since social media is one of the buzzwords that is often assumed to primarily belong to young people. But social media are actually place where the elderly are also present. Just as the media use of young people is significant, the presence of the elderly in the digital media world is just as important from a scholarly perspective. Older people are engaged in their own activities in this rapidly changing world, and they are experiencing these activities in this aging process, which has both physical and emotional challenges. This study ultimately aimed to reveal social media's positive and negative contributions to older people's daily lives with the hope that the today's young social media users can have smoother experiences when they get older and face information and communication technologies that are novel to them as well.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM



**Bilkent Üniversitesi**  
Akademik İşler Rektör Yardımcılığı

**Tarih** : 25 Nisan 2022  
**Gönderilen** : Başak Bozoğlu  
**Tez Danışmanı** : Ayşenur Dal Tokdemir  
**Gönderen** : H. Altay Güvenir  
İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanı  
**Konu** : "Social media ..." çalışması etik kurul onayı

Üniversitemiz İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu, 25 Nisan 2022 tarihli görüşme sonucu, "Social media experiences of adults over 65 during COVID-19 pandemic." isimli çalışmanız kapsamında yapmayı önerdiğiniz etkinlik için etik onay vermiş bulunmaktadır. Onay, ekte verilmiş olan çalışma önerisi, çalışma yürütücüleri ve bilgilendirme formu için geçerlidir.

Bu onay, yapmayı önerdiğiniz çalışmanın genel bilim etiği açısından bir değerlendirmedir. Çalışmanızda, kurumumuzun değerlendirmesi dışında kalabilen özel etik ve yasal sınırlamalara uymakla ayrıca yükümlüsünüz.

Kovid-19 salgını nedeniyle konulmuş olan kısıtlamaların yürürlükte olduğu süre içinde, tüm komite toplantıları elektronik ortamda yapılmaktadır; aşağıda isimleri bulunan Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu Üyeleri adına bu yazıyı imzalama yetkisi kurul başkanındadır.

Etik Kurul Üyeleri:

Ünvan / İsim	Bölüm / Uzmanlık	
Prof.Dr. H. Altay Güvenir	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Başkan
Prof.Dr. Erdal Onar	Hukuk	Üye
Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktas	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	Üye
Doç.Dr. Işık Yuluğ	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Burcu Ayşen Ürgen	Psikoloji	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Didem Özkul McGeoch	İletişim ve Tasarımı	Yedek Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Barış Özbilen	Hukuk	Yedek Üye

Kurul karar/toplantı No: 2022\_04\_25\_01



### **Bilkent Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Hakkında:**

- Kurul aşağıda ünvan, isim, uzmanlık alanı/bölümü belirtilen 5 asli ve 2 yedek üyeden oluşur:

Prof.Dr. H. Altay Güvenir (Başkan), Bilgisayar Mühendisliği

Prof.Dr. Erdal Onar, Hukuk

Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktaş, Elektrik ve Elektronik Mühendisliği

Doç.Dr. Işık Yuluğ, Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik

Dr.Öğr. Üyesi Burcu Ayşen Ürgen, Psikoloji

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Didem Özkul Mcgeoch (Yedek Üye), İletişim ve Tasarımı

Dr.Öğr. Üyesi Arif Barış Özbilen (Yedek Üye), Hukuk

- Kurul toplantılarına katılamayan asli üyelerin yerine yedek üyeler görevlendirilir.
- Kurul en az 3 üye ile toplanabilir.
- Bir başvurunun onay alması konusunda olumsuz oy kullanan üyeler bunu onay belgesindeki isimlerinin yanına muhalefet notu düşerek belirtirler.
- Bir başvurunun onay alabilmesi için en az 3 üyenin olumlu oy kullanması gerekir. Onay belgesinde isimlerinin yanına muhalefet notu bulunmaması, o üyelerin olumlu oy kullandıkları anlamına gelir.



(Form Student\_EN')

**Ethics form for graduate and undergraduate students - human participants**

Note - group projects fill in one copy with all your names on it. Consult your project supervisor for advice before filling in the form.

Your name(s): **Başak Bozoğlu**

Project Supervisor: **Asst. Prof. Ayşenur Dal Tokdemir**

- A. Write your name(s) and that of your supervisor above.
- B. Read section 2 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1. Discuss what you are going to put on the form with your project supervisor.
- C. Sign the form and get your project supervisor to complete section 2 and sign the form.

**1. Project Outline (to be completed by student(s))**

**(i) Full Title of Project:**

Social media experiences of adults over 65 during COVID-19 pandemic.

**(ii) Aims of project:**

The aim of the project is to investigate social media experiences of adults over 65 during COVID-19 pandemic with reference to their sense of efficacy, problem solving techniques, and overall digital literacy.

**(iii) What will the participants have to do? (brief outline of procedure; please draw attention to any manipulation that could possibly be judged as deception; for survey work, a copy of the survey should be attached to this form):**

Participants should answer 8 demographic questions and approximately 20 primary questions on their social media experiences, habits, and skills during Covid-19. During the semi-structured interview, participants talk about their social media experiences and the changes (if any) during the pandemic period. Participants will answer all questions within approximately 20-30 minutes. Interview questions do not contain any sensitive issues that may cause personal harm.

**(iv) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited? In the case of children state age range. (Any participant who has not lived through his/her 18th birthday is considered to be a child!)**

People aged 65 and over will participate. Participants will be recruited via snowball sampling starting with the researcher's immediate social circle.

*If you are testing children or other vulnerable individuals, state whether all applicants have CRB\*\* clearance*

**(v) What sort stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to? Tick the appropriate boxes and then explain the form that they take in the space below, please draw attention to any content that could conceivably upset your participants).**

Questionnaires[ ] ; Pictures[ ] ; Sounds [ ] ; Words[+ ] ; Caffeine[ ] ; Alcohol[ ] ; Other[ ] .

The interview will be done in the form of a face-to-face or video chat conversation. No additional materials will be provided to the participants.

\* Adapted from [www.york.ac.uk/depts/psych/www/research/ethics/HumanProjForm.doc](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/psych/www/research/ethics/HumanProjForm.doc)  
Criminal Records Bureau - Please attach relevant clearance documentation.

- (vi) **Consent** Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. The form should clearly state what they will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. It should be in language that the person signing it will understand. It should also state that they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. If children are recruited from schools you will require the permission of the head teacher, and of parents. Children over 14 years should also sign an individual consent form themselves. When testing children you will also need Criminal Records Bureau clearance. Testing to be carried out in any institution (prison, hospital, etc.) will require permission from the appropriate authority. (Please include documentation for such permission.)

**Who will you seek permission from?**

Adults over 65.

**Please attach the consent form you will use. Write the "brief description of study" in the words that you will use to inform the participants here.**

The study aims to examine the changes in the social media experiences of people over 65 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewer will ask eight general demographic questions and approximately 20 core study questions. Basic questions may include additional questions in order to understand the situation of the person's social media skills before and after Covid-19, to examine the person's approach to social media in detail.

- (vii) **Debriefing** - how and when will participants be informed about the experiment, and what information you intend to provide? If there is any chance that a participant will be 'upset' by taking part in the experiment what measures will you take to mitigate this?

Participants will be informed about the research before the interview and they will be informed that they can leave the study whenever they want. Participants will be informed that they can choose not to participate in the interview, and even if they choose to do so, they can leave at any time during the study. They will also be told that the information they provide will be removed from the study findings in case they are not comfortable with their answers being used in the study.

- (viii) **What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data?** Personal data (name, addresses etc.) should only be stored if absolutely necessary and then only in such a way that they cannot be associated with the participant's experimental data.

Names of the participants will not be included in the final interview records and the study data will be fully anonymized whenever necessary.

- (vii) **Give brief details of other special issues the ethics committee should be aware of.**

- (viii) **Tick any of the following that apply to your project**

- ☐ it uses Bilkent facilities;
- ☐ it uses stimuli designed to be emotive or aversive;
- ☐ it requires participants to ingest substances (e.g., alcohol);
- ☐ it requires participants to give information of a personal nature;
- ☐ it involves children or other vulnerable individuals;
- ☐ it could put you or someone else at risk of injury.

Student's signature: ..... *B. B. 11. 2022* ..... date: .... 15.04.2022.....  
(all students must sign if this is a group project, please initial all other pages)

The signatures here signify that researchers will conform to the accepted ethical principles endorsed by relevant professional bodies, in particular to

Declaration of Helsinki (WMA):  
<http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/index.html>

Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA):  
<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html>

Ethical Standards for Research with Children (SRCRD):  
<http://www.srcd.org/about-us/ethical-standards-research>

**2. Supervisor's assessment (supervisor to complete - circle yes or no)**

Yes/No - I confirm that I have secured the resources required by this project, including any workshop time, equipment, or space that are additional to those already allocated to me.

Yes/No - The design of this study ensures that the dignity, welfare and safety of the participants will be ensured and that if children or other vulnerable individuals are involved they will be afforded the necessary protection.

Yes/No - All statutory, legislative and other formal requirements of the research have been addressed (e.g., permissions, police checks)

Yes/No - I am confident that the participants will be provided with all necessary information before the study, in the consent form, and after the study in debriefing.

Yes/No - I am confident the participant's confidentiality will be preserved.

Yes/No - I confirm that students involved have sufficient professional competency for this project.

Yes/No - I consider that the risks involved to the student, the participants and any third party are insignificant and carry no special supervisory considerations. If you circle "no" please attach an explanatory note.

No/Yes - I would like the ethics committee to give this proposal particular attention. (Please state why below)

Supervisor's signature: ..... *[Signature]* ..... date: ...15.04.2022.....

**Please e-mail an electronic version of this word processed form (without signatures) along with other application material to the committee to start the evaluation process. Paper copies of all application material, (properly signed where indicated, and initialed on all other pages) should be sent after possible modifications suggested by the committee are finalized.**

Bilkent University does not allow the use of students of research investigators as participants. Students who have the potential of being graded by the investigators during or following the semester(s) in which the study is being carried out should not participate in the study. Students may not receive any credit for any university course, with the exception of the GE250/GE251 courses, for their participation. The GE250 and GE251 (Collegiate Activities I and II) courses include an optional activity which encompasses volunteering as a participant in a research project.

## **APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Research Project Title:** Social Media Experiences of Individuals Over 65 Years of Age

During the COVID-19

### **Interview Information Form**

Dear participant, you have been invited to the semi-structured interview format thesis of Başak Bozoğlu, a graduate student at Bilkent University, Department of Communication and Design. The aim of the study is to examine the social media experiences of people aged 65 and over and the change in their skills depending on the pandemic period conditions.

The interviewer will ask eight general demographic questions and around 20 primary study questions. The primary questions may include additional questions to understand the status of the person's social media skills before and after COVID-19, and to examine the person's approach to social media in detail.

Interview will take approximately 25-30 minutes to ask and answer the interview questions. Nothing that the participant says during the interview will be evaluated as true or false. During the interview, the participant's answers will be audio recorded and then transcribed and a transcript will be produced. The transcript of the interview will be made by the researcher personally. The actual audio recordings will be kept digitally until the end of the research period but will not be shared with third parties.

In accordance with Bilkent University's ethical guidelines, your responses will remain confidential, with your names removed from the transcripts and the final report. Your participation is completely voluntary. The researcher aims to ensure that each participant contributes to this study of his/her own free will and to learn about the different experiences and perspectives of the participants. You can choose not to participate in

the interview study and even if you choose to participate, you can leave at any time during the study. In addition, if you feel uncomfortable in any way, you can request that your information be removed from the study findings.

Full access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher Başak Bozoğlu and her supervisor Asst. Prof. Dr. Ayşenur Dal Tokdemir.

A copy of this information sheet and the consent form on the next page will be provided for you to keep. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact the Bilkent University Ethics Committee at etik@bilkent.edu.tr or Başak Bozoğlu, a graduate student in the Department of Communication and Design at Bilkent University, at basak.bozoglu@bilkent.edu.tr or by phone at 05342050747.

### **Informed Consent Form**

I understand the content and purpose of the study and agree to participate in the study in the light of the information I have received both verbally and in writing about the study conducted by Başak Bozoğlu. I am aware that I have the right not to answer questions before, during or after the interview interviews or to terminate my participation completely.

**Name of the Participant** : .....

**Participant's Signature** : .....

**Date (DD/AA/YY)** : .....

**Address of the Participant** : .....

.....

**Researcher** : Başak Bozoğlu.....

**Researcher's Signature** : .....

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Research Question:** How has COVID-19 influenced the social media experiences of individuals over 65 with an emphasis on these individuals perceived digital media literacy?

- 1) How do older adults over 65 perceive their digital media literacy?
- 2) What are the challenges, coping mechanisms, and sources of support that older adults over 65 face when using social media?
- 3) What is the impact of Covid-19 on the social media experience of older adults over 65.

### **Demographic Questions:**

- How old are you?
- What is your marital status?
- With whom do you share your living space?
- What is your education level?
- Do you work?
- Where do you live?
- Which device or devices do you use to access the Internet?
- Do you have any problems with your internet speed in general?

### **Essential Questions:**

- 1) Do you use social media in your daily life?
  - a) When did you start using social media?
- 2) How did you decide to use social media, why did you want to start?
  - a) Was your environment influential? Did you decide on your own?
- 3) Did you find it difficult when you started using social media?
  - a) Who did you get support from?
- 4) Are you currently able to do everything you want to do on social media?
  - a) What do you find the most difficult when using social media?
  - b)
- 5) Considering what you do on social media, do you generally feel the need for approval, and if so, for which activities is this mostly the case?

- a) Is there a difference between when you first started using social media and now?
  - b) From whom or from where do you learn the things you want to do on social media?
  - c) How do you feel when you ask for help when using social media?
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- 6) How often do you use social media?
  - 7) Why and for what purposes do you use social media?
    - a) Which social media platform do you use and for what purpose?
  - 8) Which social media platform do you use the most?
    - a) Does content or ease of use determine your frequency of use?
  - 9) Which social media platform is easier for you to use in your daily routine?
    - a) Why?
    - b) Do the design, fonts and colors make your social media experience easier or harder?
  - c) Is there a social media platform that you do not prefer to use for these reasons or is there a social media platform that you particularly prefer?
  - 10) Do you want to try new features in the social media apps you use right away?
    - a) Do you need support to try new features?
    - b) Does the need for support affect your experience of new features?
    - c) What do you do in such cases?
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- 11) How has your social media usage changed with COVID-19? Were there any social media applications that you didn't feel the need to use before, but that you felt the need to use during the pandemic?
  - a) Did you subscribe to new social media sites during COVID-19? Why?
  - b) Did your use of WhatsApp change during COVID-19? Did you use the application in a way you had not used it before?
- 12) Has there been an increase in the time you spend on social media during COVID-19?

- 13) Considering your previous usage habits, have you experienced different challenges in using social media during COVID-19 that you have not encountered before?
- a) What did you do when you needed help?
  - b) How was your problem usually solved?
  - c) Did you try to handle it yourself or did you ask for help?
  - d) From which source did you get help?
  - e) How did you feel when you received help?
  - f) Did you get enough help?
  - g) Was the help you received useful?
- 14) During COVID-19, have you experienced social media outside your previous habits?
- a) Do you use social media for new purposes? For following news and shopping?
- 15) Has there been a change in your news following habits during the COVID-19 period? Have you started to follow more news on social media?
- a) Which social media platforms did you follow the news on?
  - b) Did you share the news you read on social media?
  - c) Has there been a change in your sharing frequency?
- 16) Did social media advertisements and people promoting products on social media change your shopping habits during COVID-19?
- a) What do you think was the reason for this change?
- 17) In which aspect do you think your social media skills have improved during the COVID-19 period? Do you feel more capable now?
- 18) How do you feel about continuing the habits you had to learn during COVID-19 for the rest of your life?
- 19) After COVID-19, did you feel the desire to learn new things on social media on your own?



20) Do you think people in your age group should make an effort to improve their social media skills?

a) Would you like to attend a workshop, course, event, etc. on this subject?

b) What kind of training would you like to receive?

21) Is there anything else you would like to add?