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'Instagram affects everyone but me': A study on the social media mindset in western Türkiye

'Instagram herkesi etkiliyor ama beni değil': Batı Türkiye'de sosyal medya zihniyeti üzerine bir araştırma



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Abstract

This study, which is motivated by the figures that Türkiye exhibits the highest average daily usage of *Instagram* compared to all other countries, aims to understand and analyze *Instagram*'s mindset focusing on Postman's definition of media ecology which mentioned how the platform affects users' perception, understanding, feeling, values and chances of survival to be able to reach conclusions on social media mindset. The research part is a descriptive analysis of the social media mindset with a focus on media ecology and it is a qualitative one based on in-depth interviews. *Instagram* users who define them as regular users of social media were interviewed using the questions that were formed with regard to expert opinion and the data was analyzed using MAXQDA. The most striking result of the research was that users are quite aware of the effect of *Instagram* in relation to media ecology, but they consider themselves out of this ecosystem. This is what the authors call 'a media survival dichotomy.' although *Instagram* users accept that *Instagram* affects people's perception, understanding, feeling, values and chances of survival, they also think that they are not affected.

Öz

Instagram'ı en çok kullanan ülkeler arasında Türkiye'nin ortalama kullanım oranları verilerine göre birinci sırada olmasından yola çıkılarak tasarlanan bu çalışma, Postman'ın medya ekolojisi tanımına odaklanarak bir sosyal medya platformu olarak *Instagram*'ın kullanıcıların algısını, anlayışını, hissini, değerlerini ve hayatta kalma şanslarını nasıl etkilediğini analiz etmeyi ve bu veri üzerinden sosyal medya zihniyeti hakkında güncel sonuçlara ulaşmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın araştırma kısmı, sosyal medya zihniyetinin betimsel bir analizi olup medya ekolojisi kavramına odaklanarak oluşturulmuş ve uzman görüşü alınarak şekillendirilmiş derinlemesine görüşme sorularına dayanan nitel bir analizdir. Kendini düzenli *Instagram* kullanıcısı olarak tanımlayan kişilerle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiş ve görüşmeler deşifre edilerek MAXQDA programı aracılığıyla kodlanıp analiz edilmiştir. *Instagram*'ın insanların kendilerini ve hayatlarını olduğundan farklı gösterdiği gibi, sosyal medyaya dair güncel tespitlere ulaşan çalışmanın en dikkat çekici sonucu, kullanıcıların *Instagram*'ın medya ekolojisiyle ilişkisinin ve etkilerinin farkında olmalarına rağmen kendilerini bu ekosistemin dışında görmeleri ve bu farkındalığın getirdiği bilinçle sosyal medyadan etkilenmediklerini düşünmeleridir. Yazarların 'medyada hayatta kalma ikilemi' olarak adlandırdığı konu tam da budur: *Instagram* kullanıcıları, *Instagram*'ın insanların algısını, anlayışını, hissini, değerlerini ve hayatta kalma şanslarını etkilediğini kabul etmelerine rağmen, kendilerinin diğer insanlardan farklı olarak bu olgudan etkilenmediklerini düşünmektedir.

Keywords

Social media · social media mindset · media ecology · *Instagram* · Türkiye

Anahtar Kelimeler

Sosyal medya · sosyal medya zihniyeti · medya ekolojisi · *Instagram* · Türkiye



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'Instagram affects everyone but me': A study on the social media mindset in western Türkiye

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, and individuals are gradually becoming more and more exposed to social media content. As the prominent media for us, social media is a complex and multi-faceted topic that requires careful consideration and analysis. Due to its recentness and complexity, holistic concepts such as social media mindset and media ecology are needed to detangle an intricate concept like social media. Such a study helps us understand how different forms of media shape individuals' worldviews, influence their behaviors, and contribute to the broader social, cultural, and political landscape.

This study is motivated by the figures that Türkiye exhibits the highest average daily usage of *Instagram* compared to all other countries. In Türkiye, the average *Instagram* user spends 21.4 hours per month on the platform's Android app according to statistics dated January 2023. The following countries are Argentina (17h), Brazil (15.9h), Indonesia (15.4h), and India (14.9) (We are Social, 2023, p.246). Türkiye uses *Instagram* the longest compared to any other country that is included in the research. *Instagram* is also the most preferred social media platform for nearly 45% of Internet users aged 16 to 64. The following are *WhatsApp* (19.8%), *Twitter* (9.2%), and *Facebook* (8.4%) (We are Social, 2022, p. 54). According to the 2024 data, Türkiye, with 60.38 million users, ranks as the 5th country with the highest number of *Instagram* users worldwide. The top four countries are India (362.9 million), the United States (169.65 million), Brazil (113.5 million), and Indonesia (96.25 million). Despite having a relatively smaller population of 85 million compared to highly populous countries like India and Indonesia, Türkiye's high *Instagram* usage rate is particularly noteworthy (Statista, 2024). Thus, *Instagram* is both the most popular and the most time-spent application among other social media tools in Türkiye.

The usage of *Instagram* in Türkiye has previously been examined in relation to its impact on scholastic achievement (Pekpazar et al., 2021), instances of problematic usage (Balta et al., 2020; Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019), gendered body (Kavasoglu & Koca, 2022), Influencers (Zeren & Gokdagli, 2020), social media fatigue and privacy concerns (Nicola, 2022) and its role in shaping political narratives (Melek & Muyesseroglu, 2021). Despite the fact that *Instagram* has been studied quite a lot, a comprehensive investigation encompassing the entirety of the *Instagram* ecosystem to understand the social media mindset with regard to media ecology remains absent from the existing body of literature. This study focuses on *Instagram* as a social media tool that is to be figured out since it not only affects but also is affected by ongoing interaction with its environment. This is what makes *Instagram* a good example to comprehend the complex configuration of the social media mindset in Türkiye. The research is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the key elements of the social media mindset in relation to media ecology. The second part, the research part, is a descriptive analysis of the social media mindset with a focus on media ecology. The data collection and analysis is qualitative since it is based on in-depth interviews. *Instagram* users were interviewed using the questions that were formed regarding expert opinion and the data was analyzed using MAXQDA. In the third part, the research findings are presented and the last part provides an overall conclusion with discussion.

Understanding the social media mindset and media ecology

The concept of mindset refers to a set of beliefs, attitudes, and thought patterns that shape an individual's perception, behavior, and decision-making (Dweck, 2006). Dweck considers the mindset as a lens through which people see the world. Prior to that, Bandura (1997) showed that mindsets, which are ways of seeing

and learning, can have a significant impact on various aspects of life, including motivation, self-efficacy, and performance. Accordingly, the social media mindset describes the collection of attitudes, behaviors, and expectations that individuals develop as constant users of social media platforms. It is a way of thinking shaped by the inherent structures and affordances of these platforms, influencing how individuals communicate, process information, form opinions, and even perceive ourselves and others. Lee and Hancock (2024) claim that the mindsets people have about social media may guide them to respond to social media experiences in different ways, with some responses being more adaptive than others. They also stated that there is a relationship between the social media mindset and psychological well-being. In another study about social media mindset, the importance of marketing strategies was examined and it was concluded that marketers need to implement strategies to reduce the risk in order to enhance the adoption of social network sites as a communication tool and to overcome the fast changing social media mindset tendencies (Mishra & Tyagi, 2015). Colicev et al. (2018) took consumer mindset metrics into account and analyzed them within the framework of marketing. Looking at the recent literature (Wulan & Curnia, 2021; Ernala et al., 2022; Yoo & Park, 2023), the authors have seen a scarcity in evaluating social media mindset as a wholistic term and linking it to media ecology.

Media ecology provides a crucial lens for understanding the social media mindset by analyzing how communication technologies shape human interaction, perception, and culture. Social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *X (Twitter)*, and *Instagram* are more than just tools; they are environments that actively influence how users think, communicate, and relate to one another. This aligns with the media ecology perspective that the characteristics of a medium significantly affect the society in which it operates.

Media ecology is a wholistic field of research that studies how media technologies shape individuals' perceptions of the world and looks into ways of better understanding different types of media environments. The concept, which has always been considered quite complex, was first developed by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s (1962, 1994), and it has since been mentioned by several scholars, including Neil Postman (1985; 2011), Harold Innis (2008; 2022) and Lance Strate (2004). Postman (1970, p. 161) summarizes the definition of the concept:

Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with the media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people.

Postman sees media ecology as an interdisciplinary branch of study that examines the complex interactions between media and the environments in which they are used, as well as how these interactions affect human perception, cognition, and behavior. The main goal here is to comprehend how media, in all of its forms and technology, affects how individuals connect with the outside world and how these changes affect society.

The design and algorithms of social media platforms encourage behaviors like constant connectivity, instant feedback, and curated self-presentation, which cultivate a mindset focused on human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; i.e. terms that are underlined in the definition of media ecology. By examining social media through the principles of media ecology, we can see how these digital environments reconfigure social norms, alter attention spans, and reshape concepts of identity and community. This analysis highlights the profound impact that the mediums of social media have on the mindset, resulting in a social media mindset that reflects and reshapes people's worldview.

Media ecology examines how individuals' perceptions, emotions, and values are shaped by media environments (Postman, 2000). However, this framework does not exclude individual experiences; rather, it provides a foundation for understanding the impact of media systems on individuals. In this study, the theoretical framework of media ecology is integrated with the media mindset to bridge the gap between systemic influences and individual perceptions. Thus, the interviews conducted in this research aim to explore how media ecology is internalized at the individual level, using the media mindset as a complementary analytical tool.

Aim and methodology

Using a qualitative, descriptive approach centered on media ecology, this research analyzes social media mindsets based on in-depth interviews with *Instagram* users. Detailed interviews with *Instagram* users were conducted using questions guided by expert advice, and MAXQDA was used to analyze the findings.

Aim

This study aims to understand the social media mindset in relation to media ecology; hence, the following research questions are formed:

RQ1: How do *Instagram* users in Türkiye experience *Instagram*?

RQ2: Why do users spend extensive time on *Instagram*?

Depending on the purpose of the study and the quality of the data, qualitative researchers can choose from a number of methodological approaches (Lindgren et al., 2020, p.2), and this study employed content analysis to address the above-mentioned research questions. Qualitative content analysis is appropriate for a wide range of data sources, including interviews, observational protocols, literature reviews, diaries, websites, and medical records, among others (Schreier, 2012).

To be able to seek answers to the main research questions, two sets of questions were formed: (1) questions about *Instagram* as a microcosm of media ecology and exemplary of social media mindset (e.g. How does *Instagram* affect your understanding, such as what you know about people, our world, and all things in it—like truth versus falsity, ideas versus impressions, etc. And how does *Instagram* affect your feelings?), (2) questions related to the extensive usage of *Instagram* and its reasons (e.g. How would you explain the extensive usage of *Instagram* by people in Türkiye?).

Method

This study is a descriptive analysis of the media mindset within the framework of media ecology and takes *Instagram* as its focus as an exemplary microcosm. The study is a qualitative one based on in-depth interviews. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Uskudar University (dated 12/2024 with the number 61351342/020-771) and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki. Since the most complicated part of the research was to form the right questions that would give insight into *Instagram* and its media ecology, the authors first consulted with two scholars of media ecology who are members of the Media Ecology Association. Based on their suggestions, a set of in-depth interview questions was formed and applied as a pilot study. The authors then concluded that the questions did not provide insight into the holistic character of media ecology. As the second pilot study, the authors conducted linguistic research to dismantle the concept of media ecology into components that are meaningful yet distinguishable. For the second attempt of the pilot study, the authors worked with a linguistics expert and formed a new set of questions. The answers given to this new set of questions by the interviewees provided insight.

Participants and data collection

The sample size saturation has been an issue for qualitative research. Saturation is a valid indicator that a sample is adequate for the phenomenon under study—that the data collected has captured the diversity, depth, and nuances of the issues under consideration—and thus shows content validity (Francis et al., 2010). A study confirmed that even with small sample sizes, qualitative studies can reach saturation. The study identified 23 articles to assess saturation, and the studies reached saturation within a narrow range of interviews. Results show 9-17 interviews reached saturation for qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This study's sample size ($n=15$) included users who declared that they spent time on *Instagram* on a daily basis. Considering individuals' interest in *Instagram* ecology, recruiting was primarily based on being an active *Instagram* user. The participants' daily usage of social media platforms exhibited a range from 30 to 240 minutes ($M=106$). In addition to *Instagram*, the participants utilized various other applications including *Twitter*, *Snapchat*, *Discord*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube*. Both female ($n=7$) and male participants ($n=8$) are recruited by the snowball sampling technique. The snowball sampling technique typically begins with a person who possesses the desired characteristics and then uses that person's personal connection to recruit other people who share those characteristics (Sadler et al., 2010). This technique helps to eliminate people who do not want to share their views and to reach people who are willing to share their ideas on the topic. The participants have diverse educational backgrounds, including high school, college, university, master's degree and doctorate graduates. This could be considered a limitation of the study because the authors were not able to reach any primary school or middle school graduates via snowball sampling. All 15 participants were located in western Türkiye. All interviews were conducted between January 2023 and April 2023 and they lasted about 30 min to 45 min. Interviews were conducted by both authors in Turkish both face-to-face and online due to timing and location issues (Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc.).

Participants verbally consented to participate and were informed that their participation was voluntary, and all participants were anonymous. They were aware of their right to refuse participation. Hence, in order to protect respondents' anonymity, quotes from participants with limited descriptors will be used in this study.

Operation and data analysis

The interviews were transcribed for textual analysis using the Microsoft Office 365 'dictate' feature. Any discrepancies between the transcription and the audio recording were resolved by conducting a full review of the audio recordings, thereby mitigating the risk of lexical and semantic errors in the transcriptions.

MAXQDA (2018) was employed for the textual analysis. To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the data were crosscoded and analyzed by the two authors. To validate the findings, proper identification of themes was achieved after the second round of analysis. Any discrepancies required a third round of analysis until the two researchers were unanimous.

Content analysis is the sorting of text into groups of related categories while taking into account both the participant and the context in order to identify similarities and differences, patterns, and associations, both on the surface and implied within (Julien, 2008). For the study at hand, repeating patterns were followed and common themes emerging in the responses were identified.

Communication researchers often use methods that are based on word frequencies, and a wide range of programs exist to handle tasks like processing text files and counting word frequencies (Trilling & Jonkman, 2018, pp. 160, 169). To ensure the validity of word frequency counts, content analysts must establish their relevance to the meaning of the text within a specific context (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 197). In this study, the

frequency of words used in the transcriptions indicates a common thread among the participants' perceptions, understandings, and feelings regarding *Instagram*.

Findings

Table 1 is generated from MAXQDA and presents the predominant lexicon employed by the respondents to articulate their perspectives on the *Instagram* ecosystem.

Table 1

Frequency of the words

Phrases	Frequency
1. social	73
2. affecting	70
3. time	63
4. follow	48
5. real	47
6. media	39
7. important	39
8. life	36
9. value	34
10. period of time	34
11. has changed	31
12. different	30
13. day	30
14. <i>Twitter</i>	29
15. everyone	28
16. same	25
17. make it easier	24
18. reality	23
19. fake	23
20. data	21
21. beautiful	21
22. hours	20
23. share	19
24. minute	18
25. now	18

Table 1 provides insight into how participants in the study perceived *Instagram*, highlighting their associations with concepts such as reality falsity, change, influence, and facilitation. The frequent occurrence of temporal words such as time, minute, day, and hours also underscores the significance of time investment on *Instagram*. Although the inclusion of the word 'beautiful' in the list can be inferred to indicate the ideal bodies imposed on *Instagram*, finding that a word occurs with a particular frequency is not enough to draw an abductive conclusion.

Regarding RQ 1, which was interested in how people experienced the ecology of *Instagram*, a range of different themes were identified according to the interviews.

The falsehood

The participants in this study perceived *Instagram* as a platform that promotes inauthenticity and deception. Respondents used terms such as 'fake world,' 'show centre,' and 'society of spectacle' to describe the represented world on *Instagram*.

I think it's an artificial life, a show centre. I mean, it's a quite different, much smoother life than it actually is. Everyone is happy, everything is sauced with happiness, the decorations are arranged. Let's say, if even a dining table is to be shot, they offer us an artificial living space accompanied by an extra decor by adjusting everything from the cup, coffee, glass to the time. (P8)

It is also noteworthy that regarding the changing concept of photos, multiple interviewees noted that travel culture has been adapted to accommodate *Instagram*'s influence, particularly in the case of Cappadocia, which is regarded as an 'Instaworthy' destination. "Now all everyone cares about is going to the balloons in Cappadocia." (P1)

Travel culture is a case that explains the changes in visual culture and ways of looking. With a social media tool like *Instagram* (i.e., based on visuals), the way individuals see and expose themselves has changed. The interviewees have mentioned this many times with a focus on 'better looking' or 'best looking versions of people:' "Everyone is trying to share the best moments or the best-looking moments possible in their life." (P7)

Pretending is another prominent concept. The participants of the study mostly hold the belief that the artificiality of *Instagram* provides people with the opportunity to assume a false identity. According to what they see on their feed, individuals encountered on *Instagram* often exhibit disparities between their online persona and their real-life appearance and demeanour. "*Instagram* is actually kind of fake. It's like people are wearing a mask or something, pretending to be happier than they really are. Most people there act like they're living their best life all the time, but it's not always true." (P2)

Specifically, participants reported that *Instagram* users tended to re-create themselves as personas associated with a higher social status than their own, feigning wealth, happiness, and leisure activities. "I can somewhat guess that they go and show things they have seen, even if they cannot do them themselves, as if they could." (P1)

Changing values

The interviewees articulated the concept of changing values on consumption, whereby *Instagram* posts function as catalysts for consumption. The widespread acceptance among participants that conspicuous displays of luxury and ostentation serve as stimuli for consumption is notable.

I think *Instagram* makes people spend too much money. Like, they see someone with a fancy watch or a nice car and they want to show off too. But then they end up buying stuff they can't really afford and have to pay for it for years and years. It's crazy! (P8)

As per participant accounts, the pressure to share content on *Instagram* impedes individuals' ability to live in the moment, thus inhibiting the capacity for quality time spent in the moment. They have noted the shift in socialization processes from self-directed to externally oriented, whereby individuals curate organized and aesthetically pleasing encounters for public consumption, as opposed to spontaneous forms

of socializing. Analysis revealed that escapism, spatial presence, and co-presence were all involved in the indirect association between problematic *Instagram* use.

In the past, the enjoyment of good food and conversation was valued as a means of fostering social bonds, but contemporary trends suggest that the act of meeting itself has become a primary objective, superseding the sensory qualities or aesthetic appeal of food and beverage items, as well as the quality of interpersonal interactions. (P3)

Despite these concerns, some participants noted that *Instagram* has also had gains in intercultural understanding and social tolerance. For instance, the platform has facilitated the spread of diverse cultural expressions and viewpoints, which can increase the awareness and appreciation of different ways of life. Additionally, by exposing users to a wider range of perspectives and experiences, *Instagram* can promote openness and empathy towards others such as LGBTQ communities. Individuals may be able to broaden their value systems and exhibit increased tolerance towards issues they were once prejudiced against.

In the past, issues related to LGBTQ individuals, such as homosexuality, were widely viewed as shameful and stigmatized. However, in recent years, social media platforms like *Instagram* have helped to increase the visibility and awareness of these issues. While there are still significant challenges facing the LGBTQ community, the increased visibility and representation on *Instagram* should be seen as a positive development. (P5)

Feelings

The authors argue that evaluating individuals' affective reactions to *Instagram* is vital for fulfilling the aims of this research, particularly with respect to their sentiments towards individuals who enjoy a more privileged lifestyle. The emotions of participants towards users who share their privileged lives on *Instagram* are characterized by curiosity, jealousy, and disturbing emotions. The experience of witnessing the lives of high-status influencers or users through an application elicits unwelcome emotions in participants, with social comparison appearing to be their primary source. "There is necessarily wannabism, so you see. How would it be if I did it, would I have fun like them, would I reach somewhere if I strive, what am I missing?" (P10). While all participants acknowledged the unrealistic nature of *Instagram*, they reported not being affected by it.

Denial reflex

The results of this research revealed an unexpected finding: 11 out of 15 respondents reported a belief in their exemption from unrealistic portrayals on *Instagram*. The participants accept that *Instagram* creates a fictitious world for all users are at odds with their position that they themselves remain unaffected by this artificiality. This inconsistency suggests a potential cognitive dissonance among the participants, wherein they may hold conflicting beliefs or attitudes regarding their use and perceptions of *Instagram*. "Not changed. Let me put it this way, as I said, it's just sports. *Instagram* had no effect on my judgments about the world since I followed it only for basketball, football, or games." (P1)

Well, to be honest, as someone who shares content on *Instagram* frequently, I don't think I am affected that much. I think it is the people who stay as viewers there who are more affected. Because I post my video and then leave. Occasionally, I check my feed. I don't think it affects me that much, to be honest. (P13)

Another denial is about values. Participants noted that they believe that *Instagram* changes the values in society. A minority of participants reported that their use of *Instagram* did not impact any of their values. These responses were classified as 'denial' due to their inconsistency with the perception that *Instagram* has significant effects and changes on other users. "*Instagram* has no power to alter the things that I hold dear, and I am impervious to its influence." (P2)

The participants exhibited a pronounced inclination toward falsehood and values, while manifesting ambivalent affective responses to the role of *Instagram* in shaping their feelings. None of the participants directly denied the influence of *Instagram* on their feelings. The analysis of the sample in this study implies that *Instagram* has a predominantly unwanted impact on feelings. Nonetheless, a minority of participants expressed apathy towards the opulent lifestyles and conspicuous consumption portrayed on the platform.

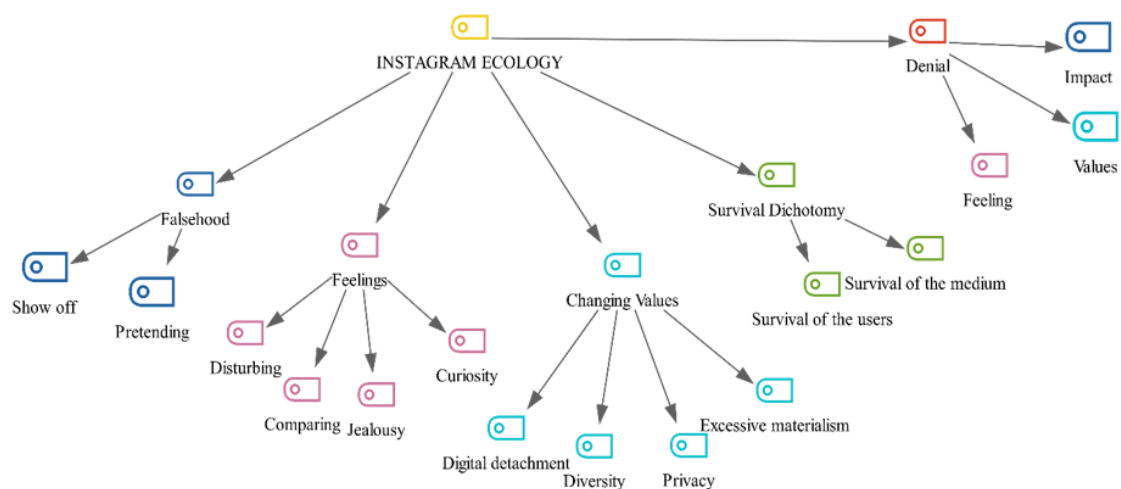
Survival dichotomy

When I follow an account related to healthy eating and sports, I find it helpful when the platform suggests content that is directly relevant to my interests, such as pages dedicated to sports and health, cooking videos, and recipes. At work, we also share practical business videos with each other from time to time. (P3)

The potential impact of *Instagram* on individuals' survival has been examined primarily in the context of natural disasters. Responses to this question have cited examples such as using *Instagram* to make calls for assistance with regard to nutrition and shelter during the February 6th, 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, as well as disseminating information about the locations of individuals trapped under the rubble. Additionally, the significance of the #GlobalCall hashtag and *Instagram* posts in facilitating calls for help during forest fires has been underscored. In addition to natural disasters, *Instagram*-based fundraising campaigns have been found to have a direct, life-saving impact on infants with terminal muscle disease known as SMA. "Of course, *Instagram* is effective in saving lives. We have already seen this for the earthquake region at the time of the earthquake. On 6 February, friends were sharing each other's locations on *Instagram*." (P12)

Regarding RQ1, an explanatory map of *Instagram* is as follows:

Figure 1
Media mindset of *Instagram*



In essence, *Instagram* is construed as a locus for conspicuous display. While acknowledging its influence on emotions and values, the prevailing sentiment among the majority is that they remain impervious to such effects.

Instagram as a refuge

Having aimed to comprehend the *Instagram* ecology among users, the RQ2 was pursued by exploring the factors that contributed to the extended duration of *Instagram* usage and its reasons in Türkiye.

The primary finding reflected the participants' perception of *Instagram* as a tool for distraction, with individuals in Türkiye utilizing the platform during their leisure time due to the limited availability of entertainment options resulting from economic constraints. The accessibility and zero-cost nature of *Instagram* have become pivotal factors in the current context.

I think that people use *Instagram* as a tool for relaxation, to escape from their daily routine, and for entertainment. This may be especially prevalent in Türkiye, where there may be a greater need to escape from daily life. However, I believe that this desire to seek respite from daily life is not unique to Türkiye and is also present in other less developed countries. (P2)

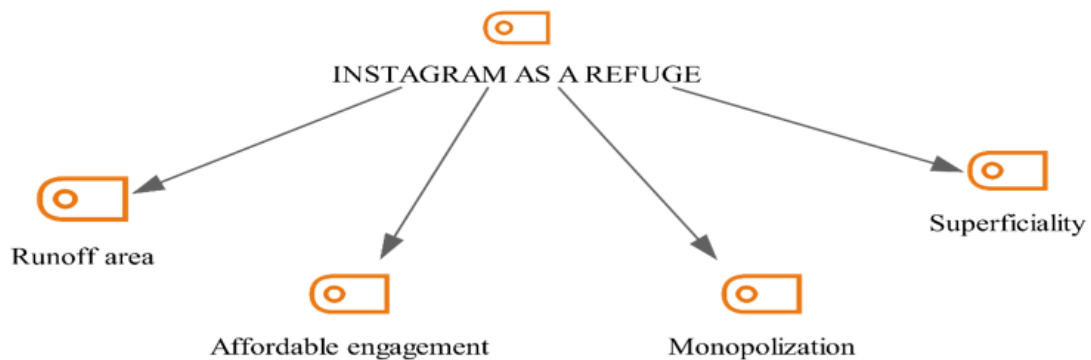
"I believe that our society has a tendency to show off, and this may be the reason why *Instagram* has become popular." (P8)

"I attribute this trend to the fact that we live in an increasingly visual world, where the visual aspect is becoming more and more important." (P15)

Regarding RQ2, the reasons behind the extensive usage of *Instagram* are as follows:

Figure 2

Factors contributing to the extensive usage of Instagram



Taken together, *Instagram* is commonly perceived as a coping mechanism for individuals seeking respite from the exigencies of their quotidian routines, while concurrently serving as a mirror reflecting the shallowness and surface-level manifestations prevalent within contemporary cultural paradigms.

Discussion and conclusion

Following the main themes detected in the interviews, the first theme is falsehood. This study's sample reflected on the disparity between real life and the content displayed on *Instagram*, noting that users tend to exaggerate their experiences rather than accurately represent them. This perspective aligns with Guy Debord's seminal work *Society of Spectacle*, which posits that direct experience has been replaced by representation (2005, p. 7). Furthermore, *Instagram* users were found to prioritize showcasing the positive

aspects of their lives, resulting in idealized and filtered portrayals of reality. Studies have shown that people tend to pick the best photo out of dozens they take (Bell, 2019) or use filters to enhance their photos (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

The interviewees mentioned traveling quite a lot in the interviews. They reported observing that travel is increasingly motivated by the desire to present visually appealing content on *Instagram*, rather than by cultural or touristic interests. *Instagram* has emerged as a potent instrument for shaping tourist preferences and determining destination choices (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). The interviews also recurrently drew attention to 'best versions of people,' which can be linked to the concept of persona. The persona is defined by Jung as "an arbitrary segment of the collective psyche" (1966, p.157). Studies revealed that *Instagram* is a convenient application to create new personas (Yang, 2023; Leban et al. 2020; Sylvester, 2019), and this study was in line with them.

The second theme inferred from the interviews is changing values. *Instagram* has exerted transformative influences on various facets of quotidian existence, encompassing domains such as education, nutrition, and healthcare etc. (Carpenter et al., 2020; Haenlein et al., 2020; Kamel Boulos et al., 2016). Furthermore, values are an essential determinant of social media mindset and media ecology, as they shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards media consumption and production. The interviewees pointed to various themes. They contend that the pervasive sharing of personal moments on *Instagram* constitutes a reconfiguration of the notion of privacy. It was a noteworthy observation that users exhibited a willingness to disclose intimate aspects of their domestic space on *Instagram* to accrue more social validation. *Instagram* users accept the loss of privacy as a necessary trade-off for a free service even if they are aware of the potential uses of their data (Serafinelli & Cox, 2019). Privacy is sometimes sacrificed to normalise values that are considered marginal. For instance, the purposes of breastfeeding-related *Instagram* posts fluctuate between freezing a moment in time and generating public discourses using designated hashtags, such as normalizing public breastfeeding or providing alternative forms of support (Locatelli, 2017).

Scholars have established that *Instagram* serves as a marketing space for both luxury brands (Khan, 2018), who employ influencer collaborations to develop sales strategies (Jin & Ryu, 2020), and non-luxury brands (Lavoie, 2015; Barry et al., 2018; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016), who benefit from its favorable marketing conditions. *Instagram* has become a platform for conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2005), whereby the display of material wealth serves as a signal of one's economic status. Participants in this study reported that *Instagram*'s feature of enhancing consumption leads to the emergence of negative values, such as superficiality.

Through co-presence and escapism, liking and commenting on other people's posts were both directly and indirectly related to problematic *Instagram* use. The interactions between co-presence, problematic *Instagram* use, and social and spatial presence were mediated by escapism (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019), which is a frequent theme that came up during this research.

Media ecologists investigate the ways in which communication media, technology, techniques, and processes intersect with human emotions (Nystrom, 1973:3). Negative experiences on *Instagram* are related to appearance comparison and jealousy (Ruensuk et al., 2022). Another study posit that *Instagram*-based social comparison serves as a mediator in the association between contingent self-worth and self-esteem (Stapleton et al., 2017). Individuals appear to replicate each other's behaviors through their interactions on the *Instagram* platform. For instance, an individual might exhibit the action of content sharing due to being motivated by the actions of another user. This phenomenon is a form of social contagion (Valente et al., 2022, p. 2). Nearly all the participants in this study confessed to mixed feelings: They reported that they

witnessed some people's privileged lives, and it may produce some negative feelings whereas they were not a part of this vicious cycle. This led us to create another term as the denial reflex.

During the interview process, respondents who claimed no impact on their values from *Instagram* use were repeatedly questioned in various formats. Despite occasional indications that *Instagram* could in fact influence their values, some participants remained steadfast in their initial assertion of no effect. This behavior may be a form of cognitive dissonance resulting from the guilt associated with excessive *Instagram* usage. Individuals who spend prolonged periods of time on *Instagram* may engage in continued binge-watching behaviors, despite negative affective responses to this behavior (Shim et al., 2018). Participants may encounter resistance in acknowledging the impact of a practice that they perceive as insincere and artificial on their values and beliefs.

This observation is particularly notable in light of this survey's attempt to measure the amount of time participants spent using this platform, with an average of 106 minutes per day. Prior research has identified the impact of extended exposure to various forms of media in diverse domains, including but not limited to mental health (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019), body image (Prichard et al., 2020), sleep patterns (Cellini et al., 2020), depressive symptoms (Twenge et al., 2018), and political attitudes (Lippman, 2004).

Another theme mentioned in the study is the survival dichotomy. The term 'survival' holds a significant place in media ecology, much like perception, feelings, and values. Despite its initial metaphorical connotation, it actually refers to the literal survival of a medium. Failure to adapt to the changing conditions of the media ecology will inevitably result in the medium's disappearance (Scolari, 2012). In contrast to an individual struggle for survival, the development of a medium is shaped by various actors, including consumers, producers, political institutions, economic groups, and technology companies (Scolari, 2013). Postman (1970, p.161) posits that the notion of survival pertains to their interaction with the media. He expresses this idea as follows: "Media ecology looks into ... how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival." This study yielded distinct outcomes for each of the perspectives examined.

The foremost interpretation that arises from this study highlights that *Instagram*'s informative and life-facilitating features will continue to captivate users for a considerable time so that the platform will survive for a long time. Participants expressed the belief that *Instagram*'s longevity hinges on its ability to enhance users' well-being. Their contributions to the lives of fellow *Instagram* users encompass a range of categories, such as accounts dedicated to promoting solidarity, generating high-quality content, disseminating scientific knowledge, advocating for healthy lifestyles and physical activity, offering educational resources, providing life hacks, and sharing experiences related to motherhood and childcare. Research on user-generated content pertaining to education (Douglas et al., 2019), nutrition (Phua et al., 2020; Pilař et al., 2021), lifestyle experiences (Han & Lee, 2021), and community engagement (Gatti & Procentese, 2020) has demonstrated the utility of *Instagram* for users.

The analysis of the interviews also led the authors to come up with the theme of *Instagram* as a Refuge. Adorno (1991, p.158-171) posits that the media is accessible by virtue of the embedded frames of reference within its content, which engender relatable stereotypes in the audience, referred to as "socio-psychological implications." The philosopher contends that these implications can potentially have a deleterious impact on society, since they may not only obscure true insights into reality but also dull individuals' capacity for lived experience through the constant adoption of blue and pink spectacles. The preference of individuals to allocate their leisure time towards *Instagram* is attributed to economic factors, particularly the high costs associated with pursuing recreational activities and the prevalence of unemployment.

Furthermore, it can be posited that the monopolization of the media industry drives individuals to seek alternative content towards *Instagram*. *Instagram* exhibits promising upward potential, especially in the

realm of ephemeral news production, wherein its content is becoming progressively more sophisticated and distinct (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019). Regarding the prolonged usage of *Instagram*, users attributed it to the cultural traits of show-off, attention-seeking, and superficiality in society. Notably, the long-term use of the platform was linked to the adoption of inferior values.

Baudrillard (2006) argues that contemporary society is characterized by a dichotomy between the represented and the real, or between the sign and the referent. Disneyland serves as an exemplary of Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum. Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum is highly relevant to the phenomenon of photo manipulation or retouching, which constitutes a widespread means of generating simulacra through photographic software (Borges-Rey, 2015). The availability of filters that enable users to present idealized versions of themselves to others, as well as the capacity to construct new personas, contributes to the pleasurable experience of immersing oneself in this hyperreal realm. In this sense, *Instagram* represents the role of digital Disneyland.

To conclude, this study aimed to examine *Instagram*'s mindset focusing on Postman's definition of media ecology, which mentioned how the platform affects users' perception, understanding, feeling, values and chances of survival to be able to reach conclusions on social media mindset. The results show that *Instagram* has significant effects on people. However, the results also indicate what the authors call 'a media survival dichotomy:' although the users accept that *Instagram* affects people's perception, understanding, feeling, values and chances of survival, *Instagram* users think they are not affected themselves.

There is a questionable (or even pseudo) awareness regarding *Instagram* effects: the authors could identify the media mindset of *Instagram* and could make some solid remarks on understanding social media mindset yet some facts remain in mystery. A more psychologically founded study or more innovative research techniques could show why people are reluctant to accept the fact that they are indeed a part of the media mindset of *Instagram* and being affected by it is a natural result.

This research is subject to certain constraints. The impact of media ecology on the relationship between media and society (with regard to perception, understanding, values, feelings, and even survival) is partially analyzed as a first step, but its reach extends even further. Analyzing the ecological dynamics and mindset of *Instagram* through a diverse array of viewpoints promises enhanced insights. Such an endeavor could be facilitated by forthcoming scholarly inquiries. Further studies can take the concept of mindset as the focus and aim to reach a better understanding of media ecology, or categorize *Instagram* users according to their educational background or socio-economic status.



Ethics Committee	The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Uskudar University (dated 12/2024 with the number 61351342/020-771) and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki.
Informed Consent	Informed consent was obtained from the participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
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