

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCERS' EXPERIENCES OF  
INSTAGRAM

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INSTAGRAM**

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## ABSTRACT

### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCERS' EXPERIENCES OF INSTAGRAM

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With the changing world order, the widespread use of social media and the resulting concept of being an influencer have various impacts on people's lives. For this reason, this study aims to obtain insight into the experiences and relationships of influencers, who are the groups that create this huge impact, on social media in the context of Instagram. The study focuses mainly on understanding the meaning of the concept of being an influencer and how influencers interpret these experiences. Following this purpose, six participants were contacted through the purposive sampling technique and a total of eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with these participants. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used for analyzing the data. As a result of this study, three superordinate themes emerged. These themes are (1) Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career, (2) Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer, and (3) The Reverse Side of the Coin: Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience. The emerging themes are discussed in the context of the relevant literature and the clinical contributions of this study to the literature are described.

**Keywords:** Influencer, Instagram Usage, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, New Psychic Economy, Lacanian Approach



## ÖZ

### INFLUENCER’LARIN INSTAGRAM DENEYİMLERİNİN NİTEL ANALİZİ

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Değişen dünya düzeniyle birlikte, sosyal medya kullanımının yaygınlaşması ve bunun sonucunda ortaya çıkan “influencer”lık kavramı insanların hayatlarında çeşitli etkiler yaratmaktadır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, bu etkiyi yaratan grup olan influencerların sosyal medyadaki deneyimlerine ve ilişkilerine dair içgörüyü Instagram bağlamında elde etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma temel olarak influencer olma kavramının ne anlama geldiğini ve influencerların bu deneyimleri nasıl yorumladıklarını anlamaya odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, amaca yönelik oluşturulan örnekleme tekniği ile altı katılımcıya ulaşılmış ve bu katılımcılarla toplamda on bir yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma sonucunda üç ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır; bu temalar (1) İn-Flu Olmak: Kariyerin Başlangıcında Diğer Influencer’ları İdolleştirmek ve Taklit Etmek, (2) Influencer Olmak İçin Motivasyon Kaynağı ve Pekiştireçler ve (3) Madalyonun Öteki Yüzü: Sosyal Medya Deneyimine İlişkin Duyulan Rahatsızlıklar ve Bu Deneyimle İlgili Bilinmeyenler. Ortaya çıkan temalar ilgili literatür bağlamında tartışılmış ve çalışmanın literatüre yapmış olduğu klinik katkılar da dahil edilerek açıklanmıştır.



**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Influencer, Instagram Kullanımı, Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik  
Analiz, Yeni Ruhsal Yapılanmalar, Lacanyen Yaklaşım





*To my family*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background and Conceptualization**

##### **1.1.1. The History and Conceptualization of Social Media Usage**

The Internet is one of the results of the last century's advances in communication and information technologies (Glowniak, 1998). With the inclusion of the Internet into our lives, significant developments have been made in information sharing, and the importance of geographical location has decreased (Franzen, 2000). It is a widespread information dissemination and interaction tool actively used worldwide (Leiner et al., 1997). This widespread use of the Internet has not only several advantages, such as ease of access to information and telecommunication between cultures but also some sociological and psychological side effects for human beings (Aboujaoude, 2010; Glowniak, 1998). According to Franzen (2000), internet usage is a factor that debars people from sociability and makes them lonely because it is a more practical and preferred alternative to real social interactions. Due to excessive and uncontrolled internet use, people neglect their essential physical needs, responsibilities, and social relationships (Spada, 2014). Additionally, Weinstein and Lejoyeux (2010) assert that with the spread of the internet, excessive and problematic usage of it escalates, and that provokes the expansion of problematic internet addiction.

Social media, which is a web-based communication platform, is one of the areas where the Internet is utilized. Social media in today's sense originated with the establishment of Open Diary, a social media sharing site founded by Bruce and Susan Abelson, in the 70s and has become widespread (Aktaş, & Ulutaş, 2010, as cited in Çalışkan, & Mencik, 2015). Statistics show that over 5 billion people, which

corresponds to about 63 percent of the population of the world, have used social media until April 2024 (Kapios, 2024). Also, each social media user spends approximately two and a half hours a day on social media platforms and the usage of social media is increasing with each passing day (Kemp, 2024).

The motivations for such widespread use of this field are also among the topics of studies in the literature and it is concluded that people mostly use social media platforms to interact with each other and share information and interests (Berryman et al., 2018; O'Day, & Heimberg, 2021). For instance, Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) conducted a study using both qualitative and quantitative methods to reveal the reason why people use social media platforms. The results show that the most important reasons are getting in contact with new people (31%), keeping in touch with friends (21%), and socializing (14%). In other words, the most significant reasons for social media usage are reported as interaction and communication-based circumstances. Another study, interpreted through content analysis, reported people's reasons for using social media as the search for information and inspiration, the desire for social interaction, the beat of boredom and pastimes, and the search for positive emotions and escaping negative emotions (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). As exemplified in the studies, although the reasons for using social media are generally seen as relation-based and about well-being, there are also different purposes and dimensions of social media, such as business and marketing. Following its exponential development, social media has also encouraged companies to use it and provided a marketplace where brands can promote themselves, their products, and their services (Rugova, & Prenaj, 2016). In a research conducted by Wigmo and Wikström (2010), the reasons for companies to use social media were pointed out. These were to increase brand awareness and reputation, to ensure communication between the business and the consumer, to control communication among customers and potential customers, and to measure return on investment.

Overall, the literature has explored many reasons and motivations underlying the widespread use of social media, such as communication, marketing, sociological, and psychological motivations. In the following subsections, the use of social media will be examined in these contexts in detail.

#### **1.1.1.1. Social Media Usage in the Context of Communication**

Social media, which has a widespread usage area and user network, can be associated with many different fields. One of the fields that social media affects and is associated with is communication. Social media is used for purposes such as entertainment, leisure time utilization, and information sharing, as well as for interpersonal interaction and communication, especially among young generations (Çömlekçi, & Başol, 2019). A study by Sponcil and Gitimu (2013) involving college students indicates that the primary reason young people use social media is to connect with family and friends. According to the literature, social media platforms have experienced significant growth as preferred communication tools, as they allow individuals to communicate and stay connected with multiple people simultaneously, thus saving time (Subramanian, 2017). Furthermore, because social media enables interactions without face-to-face contact, it plays a crucial role in enhancing the communication skills of individuals who struggle with interpersonal communication (Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007). In a related study (Ghaisani et al., 2017) that supports these findings, researchers examined the motivations behind users' social media posts. The study revealed that people's primary reasons for sharing personal content are to sustain their friendships and social connections, as well as to develop new relationships. It is emphasized that participants' motivation was more about connecting with others than personal satisfaction. They further explained that this motivation stems from a general desire to assist others, suggesting that sharing impressions and information helps prevent others from being misinformed.

While many studies highlight users' motivations and the positive impacts of social media use in the context of communication, findings also suggest that it can have negative effects on interpersonal interactions. For instance, a study in the literature indicates that while increased social media use can help individuals express themselves more effectively online, it may simultaneously decrease communication within families (Demir, 2016). In other words, it is concluded that spending longer time on social media and the internet has a negative impact on family relationships and that those who spend less time on social media spend more quality time with their families (Demir, 2016). Additionally, studies show that alongside reductions in

family interaction and face-to-face communication, social media usage can increase feelings of loneliness, depression, and stress by reducing people's engagement with their broader social environment (Kraut et al., 2002). This trend particularly impacts young people who use social media intensively, weakening their social and interpersonal communication skills (Turkle, 2011). In other words, social media use can directly isolate individuals by distancing them from their social environment. This effect is particularly evident when social media use reaches an addictive level, characterized by excessive engagement (Savci, & Aysan, 2016). On the other hand, published studies highlight a positive correlation between loneliness and social media addiction, showing that individuals with higher levels of loneliness and lower social support tend to have higher social media addiction scores (Uyaroglu et al., 2022). These results show that there is a circular relationship between social media use and loneliness.

#### **1.1.1.2. Social Media Usage in the Contexts of Marketing and Advertising**

Marketing and advertising are other areas where social media is widely used by companies and firms. Social media platforms are instruments that facilitate reaching large masses. For this reason, through social media, enterprises can reach large masses with lower costs and strengthen customer interaction. Therefore, social media has become a tool in the field of marketing, which provides an environment where brands and companies can advertise and promote their products (Rugov, & Prenaj, 2016). The reason for this is that firms need to develop strategies to survive, just like people do. According to Multilevel Selection (MLS) theory, which is a new evolutionary approach that says natural selection exists along many dimensions, natural selection exists not only at the level of life, but also at the economic and organizational levels. In other words, Multilevel Selection (MLS) theory emphasizes that not only humans have to be better and compete in order to survive, but also companies and economic organizations have to be more fit than others in order to survive (Johnson et al, 2013).

Influencer marketing, which is a way that offers enterprises the opportunity to advertise their products through social media, is an effective technique used in

marketing and advertising in order to increase the permanence of the firms in the market (De Veirman et al., 2019). Literature on influencer marketing mainly focuses on how the effectiveness of it can be increased for the firms' benefit. Bakker (2018) identified one of the most important factors for increasing the effectiveness of influencer marketing as consumers' trust in influencers. The trustworthiness and authenticity of influencers increases trust in the brand and thus increases the sales effect. Another study in the literature reveals that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is highly dependent on consumer perceptions of genuineness and relatability, and that influencers are able to influence consumer decisions through their perceived expertise and credibility in a significant way (Vrontis et al., 2021). Therefore, social media strengthens communication by acting as a bridge between brands and customers through influencers, and increases trust and loyalty to brands through this interaction (Sajid, 2016). In other words, thanks to the bridge role of social media through influencer marketing, brands and customers can interact directly. The network of feedback provided by direct communication enables the brand to make improvements to the product and itself. These situations have a positive effect on the customer's satisfaction with the brand and the product, and positively affect the loyalty of the customer (Sajid, 2016).

Another main reason why social media platforms and influencers are preferred in marketing is that social media is a visual and image-based platform. In other words, social media marketing is a market based on image and visuality and there are several studies emphasizing the importance of visuality and image for marketing and sales in social media in the literature. According to the results of the study conducted by Tuluk (2021), visual aesthetics is an important factor in marketing and has a direct impact on customer loyalty to the brand and sales rate. Stated differently, visual aesthetics positively affect the customer's purchasing behavior. For that matter, in the area of marketing, Instagram is one of the most preferred social media platforms due to its visual convenience for marketing (Huey, & Yazdanifard, 2014; Mattern, 2016).

#### **1.1.1.3. Social Media Usage in the Context of Sociology**

Social media, whose effects on human and society are frequently discussed and researched in the literature, shows its presence in the field of sociology as well as its

impact and use in the fields of communication and marketing. With the introduction of social media into social life, interaction between individuals and societies has accelerated. Since the interaction of people is fast and direct as a result of an experienced event, social media has led the society to a more active situation in the face of events. In other words, due to social media, the feedback of people in response to events affecting the society becomes more active and it becomes easier to catch the date (Güzel, 2020).

Social media not only captures current events but also influences shifts in societal norms, often creating new standards. Research highlights the role of public information sharing in shifting social norms (Arias, 2019). For instance, Hynes and Wilson's (2016) meta-analysis suggests that social media is particularly valuable for promoting health-related social norms, such as healthy eating habits, physical activity, and preventing substance abuse, among young people. Their findings indicate that platforms encourage interaction, which can help reshape norms around health behaviors. The rapid dissemination of content means that popular perceptions can quickly spread, impacting public attitudes on various issues (Hynes, & Wilson, 2016).

Beyond health behaviors, social media shapes perceptions in broader social contexts. For example, Åberg (2020) explored the impact of appearance-related commenting norms on social media, finding that while peers often expect such interactions, they can have long-term psychological effects. Specifically, reinforcing beauty standards through appearance-focused comments can lead to body dissatisfaction, particularly among young women. Consequently, while social media-fueled norms have the potential to empower, they also carry complex social and psychological effects, reinforcing both positive and restrictive thought patterns.

#### **1.1.1.4. Social Media Usage in the Context of Psychology**

Social media, which is an intensively used medium, is present in every aspect of human life from communication to marketing and has both positive and negative impacts on many areas of human existence (Bashir, & Bhat, 2017). First of all,

positive effects of social media use on human life have been determined by several studies in the literature. For instance, Ostic and colleagues (2021) studied the effects of social media on communication and well-being. The results show that social media has been a valuable vehicle for removing the obstacles to interaction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because using social media enhances social association, the relaxation rates of the users increased while the depression rates decreased. Therefore, the results of the study encourage the positive effects of social media use on the well-being of the users in terms of social interaction (Ostic et al., 2021). In line with the results of the previous research, the findings of the study of Zang and colleagues (2023) support a positive correlation between social media usage, well-being, and self-esteem. They concluded that online social support mediates this correlation (Zhang et al., 2023). Also, in Quinn's study (2018), it was indicated that social media positively affects people's cognitive abilities as well as their well-being. The results of the study (Quinn, 2018) showed that using social media enhances the function of inhibitory control, the ability to process information, and cognitive functioning.

In contrast to the researchers who studied the positive effects of social media, some researchers thought that social media may have negative effects on people and conducted their studies in this direction. In their study, Ostic and colleagues (2021) reported that social media usage and social isolation are positively correlated with each other, and social media usage negatively impacts the users' well-being. From a similar perspective, O'Reilly and colleagues (2018) conducted a qualitative study to investigate how social media appeared from the adolescents' perspective. Adolescents emphasized the negative impacts of social media on mood and defined social media usage as a risk for mental well-being. The participants of that study associated social media usage with stress, low self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideas. In addition, they mentioned that excessive and compulsive use of social media could lead to addictive behaviors. In other words, participants of that study identified social media as an online drug because of the fact that people cannot live without their phones (O'Reilly et al., 2018). In addition, in their study investigating the reasons for the addictive features of social media, Bilgin et al. (2020) proceeded with the theory that social media is not addictive for everyone and examined the factors

that make social media addictive. In their studies with adolescents, the researchers associated this behavior with escape and listed the factors that direct adolescents to social media addiction. They reported that as the level of stress in the family increases due to factors such as conflict, dissatisfaction, and poor relationships with parents, adolescents' dependence on social media also increases (Bilgin et al., 2020).

Moreover, studies in psychology literature not only focus on the effects of social media on well-being and communication, but also on emotional state and identity development. A meta-analysis study, conducted by Ward in 2017, addresses the role of social media use in young people's discovery of identity, self-expression, self-confidence and belonging. According to the results of this study, especially young people are emotionally invested in the feedback they receive from social media and this investment has a great impact on young people's identity development. In addition, the results of the study show that young people create an ideal self and display it to people in order to present themselves well, receive positive feedback and be liked. Although this situation temporarily increases the self-confidence of young people due to the praise they receive for their ideal identity, it causes them to experience confusion about their own identity in the long run.

Sharing in the digital world also constitutes an example of this. Users try to reach the expected and desired aesthetic form by filtering their own photos and videos. In this way, users try to create an ideal identity for themselves in the virtual world (Zhakin, 2023). Social media users can direct themselves in line with the norms, ideals and expectations set by society; this is called 'social highlighting'. Social media projects idealized lifestyles to users. Users who try to adopt this idealized lifestyle may perceive reality differently and feel pressure to conform to certain standards (Zhakin, 2023). This leads people to imitate these lives. In addition, some studies in the literature have concluded that these posts made for the purpose of getting likes are related to social acceptance or approval behavior (Nash et al., 2019). In other words, the findings show that when individuals with high narcissistic traits receive likes on social media, their emotional stress due to exclusion decreases. The findings of the study reveal that narcissistic individuals may use social media approval as a coping tool and that the approval seeking of these individuals plays an important role in their



psychological processes. The research also suggests that narcissists feel more vulnerable to social exclusion and try to alleviate this emotional impact through approval seeking (Nash et al., 2019). The literature confirms the direct relationship of approval seeking behavior and fear of exclusion with problematic use of social media or social media addiction (Casale et al., 2018).

#### **1.1.1.4.1. Social Media Addiction**

Addiction is defined as a powerful desire to use a substance or to perform a behavior and the inability to control that situation. It is called Substance Use Disorder in the 5th edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). From the psychoanalytic perspective, addiction was described as a stimulant or escape that people used to alleviate their distress and mental state. On the other hand, the fact that people first turn to different addictive substances (such as heroin and cocaine) and then to different types of addiction (such as food addiction and shopping addiction) raises the question that this is not a physical condition but a condition of another kind. Therefore, this leads to the need for the existence of various theories to explain addiction (Dodes, 2019).

Freud described masturbation as primary addiction and that other forms of addiction are merely substitutes for masturbation (Freud, 1954). Because both addiction and masturbation share the commonality of experiencing pleasure independently of others and away from socialization (Loose, 2002). Lacanian theory deals with addiction in the context of loss and relation with the Other. Addiction is considered as the subject's reaction to loss and is interpreted in the context of the subject's rejection of sociality and the desire to return to a state of limitless jouissance by isolating himself from the symbolic order and law (Laurita, 2010). In other words, addiction is interpreted as a reflection of the longing for the continuity of the state of unity with the mother that existed before the castration period and the desire to return there.

With the inclusion of technology and social media in our lives in parallel with the changing world order, social media addiction is nowadays at the forefront as a new

kind of addiction. In the literature, social media addiction can be described as the excessive and compulsive checking of social media, where frequent use interferes with other daily responsibilities and activities (Zivnuska et al., 2019). In a study by Aktaş (2021), which tried to understand the experiences of people who defined themselves as social media addicts, participants reported that they saw social media as a way to escape from academic and social responsibilities. Participants also mentioned the lack of time control and the lack of limits they imposed on themselves in terms of social media use. In addition, these individuals defined social media as a platform that makes them feel empowered and unlimited. For example, the participants stated that they could create an ideal image on social media and that they could receive likes and followers with this expected image. They stated that these likes and followers brought them popularity and power. According to another qualitative study conducted by Aksoy (2018), the use of social media is an activity that people resort to due to deficiencies in their social circles and friends. In other words, social media is initially seen by users as a necessity to create a social environment and not to miss events. On the other hand, after starting usage, social media addiction turns into a phenomenon that people who define themselves as addicted cannot live without and lose control (Aktaş, 2021).

### **1.1.2. Conceptualization and History of Instagram**

One of the most popular social media platforms frequently used and preferred is Instagram, which was founded in 2010 (Mou, 2020). While there are many social media platforms, Instagram is preferred because it is visually suitable for marketing, easy to communicate, and free of charge (Huey, & Yazdanifard, 2014; Mattern, 2016).

Instagram is a platform where people share photos and videos, and it is used mostly for communication purposes (Mattern, 2016). According to statistics (Zote, 2024), the number of users on Instagram is 2 billion people per month and the average daily Instagram usage of adults in the U.S. is 33 minutes. The majority of Instagram users are male and between the ages of 18-34. The usage rate of Instagram is positively affected by factors such as its ease of use and the pleasure it provides to users in

interaction and entertainment, as well as job opportunities (Hwang & Cho, 2018). Instagram is described as a unique platform because of its visually-oriented characteristics and is used for the motivations of self-expression, self-presentation, and impression management (Jun, 2022). According to the results of the study conducted by Romero Soletti and colleagues (2022), there are several motives that enable people to use Instagram. The participants of the study reported that obtaining gratification, establishing social interactions with others, curiosity and desire to know about what other people are doing, documentation of their memories, and entertainment motivated them to use Instagram. To be more specific, participants first expressed that they use Instagram as a means of self-expression and with the motivation of immortalizing and documenting moments that are important to them. Participants also said that they are curious about what other people are doing and that they use social media to learn about it; however, this leads them to compare themselves with others. In other words, users reported feeling pressured to present idealized versions of themselves, which led to feelings of inadequacy when they compared their lives to others' idealized or seemingly different posts. That is, while Instagram encourages creativity and self-expression, it also intensifies social pressures and mental health issues related to self-image and approval.

The fact that a platform with such intensive use has effects on its users is also an undeniable fact, especially on image because of its vision-oriented property. A qualitative study, conducted by Baker and co-workers (2019) tries to explore the impacts of Instagram on the body image of college students. Participants reported the negative impacts of Instagram on their perception of their bodies and images. First of all, in the first theme, responding to beauty ideals, they mentioned that there are ideal images they are exposed to on Instagram. They admire those unrealistic and heavily edited images, strive to be like them, and even harmfully push themselves for that. Secondly, these ideal images lead users to compare themselves with others. Participants indicated that they are comparing themselves with other accounts on likes and comments on Instagram, and this situation makes them vulnerable to feel dissatisfied with themselves. Furthermore, Instagram has a huge influence on the appearances of users. Participants expressed that they felt terrible about their appearance due to the perfect images on Instagram and they wanted to change their

appearance for this reason. The researchers interpreted these changes in terms of participants' desire for gaining validation and approval.

### **1.1.3. Social Media Influencers**

Influencers, also known as content producers whose presence is identified with Instagram, are people who have created a following on social media. They are sharing their daily life experiences, lives, and the content they create via social media platforms. They have a significant impact on the audience or followers by sharing their ideas through blogging, vlogging, and content production and leading in line with these ideas (Freberg et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2022). Influencers constitute their personage and create their content to get attention by being the voice of their mass and to build social capital (Gómez, 2019). Ryan (2014) defined influencers as leaders or “virtual ears of online mass” who have an extensive effect on the daily lives, routines, habits, and behaviors of their social circle of audiences because of the trust of the audiences in their judgments. Social media influencers and their followers have a non-reciprocal and one-way relationship. However, followers perceive this relationship as two-way, just like a relationship with a celebrity. This type of relationship is called a parasocial relationship and is an important concept to explain being influenced by influencers (Horton, & Wohl, 1956, as cited in Hartmann, & Goldhoorn, 2011; Lou, & Kim, 2019). It was found by the researchers that there is a correlation between parasocial relationships and perceived trust; that is, when parasocial relationships increase, perceived trust towards the influencers also increases. Additionally, because credibility is seen as related to the trustworthiness of the influencers, parasocial interaction automatically leads to people being influenced by influencers and their affiliated brands (Lin et al., 2021). The studies investigating the impact of influencers on followers in the literature have categorized this influence into two categories: positive and negative (Movaghar et al., 2023). Studies have mentioned the positive effects of influencers on their followers, such as gaining emotional support, having pleasurable experiences, feeling empathy, and creating a good mindset. In contrast, the negative effects on followers are reported as mental disorders, such as anxiety, dissatisfaction with body image and social comparison (Movaghar et al., 2023). These effects cause users to feel inadequate due to the

perfect images reflected in social media, to experience distortions in their perception of personality, to feel the obligation to have those images and to feel envy.

The impact of not only social media platforms but also influencers in shaping people's lives and decisions has become an issue in the literature. Keskiner (2021) emphasizes that influencers are recognized by society as role models and expert witnesses and that they have the power to stimulate society by means of this perception. Chee and colleagues (2024) conducted a study through surveys to obtain qualitative data to explore the effects of interacting with social media influencers on mothers or expectant mothers. Participants mentioned that influencers have a significant impact on every aspect of their lives, such as decisions, opinions, purchases, and even the well-being. There are five superordinate themes that emerged in this study and the first one is comparison of the self. It is mentioned that influencers project an ideal expectation and image of motherhood. Participants reported that they compare themselves to influencers and that their well-being is negatively affected when they fail to meet expectations. On the other hand, belonging to a group, having social support and sharing information about their experiences reduces their feeling of loneliness, and this positively affects their well-being.

As mentioned above, although there are many studies on influencers' social media posts and their effects on users, there has not been encountered a study in the literature that turns its perspective to influencers and investigates their experiences and looks at the experience from their perspective. This study, in which we emphasize the influencer perspective, which is a field that has not been studied in the literature, and investigate the experiences of influencers, makes a unique contribution to the literature in this context. In the literature, there are theorists and approaches that deal with the new world order that has emerged as a result of the spread of technology and social media and the changes that this order has caused in people and society from a psychoanalytic framework. It will be beneficial to review these approaches in order to facilitate the conceptualisation of the influencers' experience and the meaning they attribute to this experience.

## **1.2. An Exploration of Psychoanalytic Theory**

### **1.2.1. Lacanian Psychoanalytic Theory**

Although the existence of social media is not very old, the existence of today's social media dates back to the 70s (Aktaş, & Ulutaş, 2010, as cited in Çalışkan, & Mencik, 2015). In this context, although Lacan and other psychoanalysts do not refer to social media in their theories, there are theorists who interpret the changing of the new world order with social media in a Lacanian sense. Charles Melman, a famous psychoanalyst, discusses the changes in society caused by the new world order created as a result of the expansion of social media and the internet from a Lacanian perspective. He mentioned that in the 21st century, as a result of the development of technology and the introduction of social media into people's lives, limits and prohibitions have begun to disappear. Together with the loss of the Other<sup>1</sup>'s legislative function, the society has entered into an effort to gain unlimited enjoyment (Melman, 2010; Özkan, 2020). The study conducted by Aktaş and colleagues (2022) to understand the experiences of social media addicts in relation to rules and limits also supports Melman's theory. In the study of Aktaş and colleagues (2022), as a result of the interviews conducted with 6 participants who declared that they use social media excessively and the analysis of these interviews with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method, two themes commonly emphasized by the participants are stated. The first theme, social media as a field of unlimitedness, reflects the participants' definition of social media as an omnipotent and unlimited medium. In this regard, the results indicate that social media is perceived as a field of unlimited jouissance<sup>2</sup> that eliminates lack. The second theme, positioning according to authority figures, shows the participants' relationship with authority figures. In this relationship, it is concluded that the participants have an attitude that opposes and tries to break the law.

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<sup>1</sup> The Other is the radical otherness that can never be incorporated into the subject and constitutes the unconscious, it is the symbolic order that reflects the society we are in, the rules, it is language (Homer, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Jouissance, a French term which comes from the word *jouir* (joy), is defined as extreme enjoyment which consists also of pain. Jouissance tends to transcend the law of pleasure and is thus defined as beyond the pleasure principle (Homer, 2016).

In addition to the desire of obtaining unlimited jouissance and the loss of Other's function, Baştürk (2016) identified social media as a field of representation where people make themselves visible/ audible by reflecting themselves through images. The screen is a reflective interface that is the space of images presented to the gaze. The point at which these images appeal to the unconscious is the identification between the image and the viewer. Baştürk (2016) analogized the screen to a mirror, which is the reflective surface that a baby needs to prove its existence. In this respect, some concepts, such as new psychic economy, mirror stage, and gaze belonging to Lacanian theory can be useful to explain understanding the social media experience.

#### **1.2.1.1. New Psychic Economy**

Lacan developed two concepts in his theory: the big Other, which is denoted by a capital letter, and the small other, which is denoted by a lowercase letter. The big Other is registered in the symbolic order, identified with language and law. The Other is radically Other and subjects construct their relationship with the big Other on the vertical axis. The little other is in fact a reflection, a conjugate of the ego, which is not so alien to the subject and recorded in the imaginary order. Unlike the big Other, relations with the little others are established on a horizontal level (Dimitriadis, 2024; Evans, 2006). Recently there have been serious changes in social structure and culture and patriarchy, which are the reflections of the Other functioning as a regulator in society, has been questioned.

As a result of the developments in technology and the unlimited nature of it, people have started to have an impact on reality through technology, and the virtual has started to be preferred over the real (Dimitriadis, 2024; Gürsel, 2017; Özkan, 2020). Melman (2010) states that with the development of technology and social media, the signifier function of the image has been lost, and the image is positioned on showing and exhibiting. Also, the spread of social media leads to the gradual disappearance of limits. As a result of these changes in the social order, boundaries and the law are disappearing, and the authority has lost its legitimacy. That is, the legislative influence of the big Other is being foreclosed, and limitlessness is emerging. Because there is nothing left to be repressed, hidden, covered up, and society has become a

show-oriented society. In other words, the ideological and constitutive texts that had a regulatory effect on society and functioned as laws have lost their authority, and these texts have lost their legislative function (Melman, 2010; Özkan, 2020). Melman (2010) expresses this situation with the phrase, “The sky is empty!”. This situation has reduced the limitations imposed on society, and society has become focused on enjoyment and tends not to impose limits on jouissance. This lack of boundaries in consumer society leads society to seek more enjoyment, and the lack of boundaries and repression in enjoyment leads society to perversion. As a result, people place the other people in the position of an object in their relationships (Melman, 2010), and they strive to satisfy their enjoyment, whether legal or illegal (Dimitriadis, 2024). Dimitriadis (2024) stated that people have also formed an ideal of enjoyment in their minds, and because of this ideal, they believe that they never get as much enjoyment as they should, and they seek more and more enjoyment.

As a result of this situation, new psychic economies have emerged and the rates of depression, eating disorders, ADHD, and addictions have increased. In addition, with the widespread use of the internet and social media, what was attributed to the vertical relationship is now attributed to the others in the horizontal relationship, and the relationship is integrated into the inter-similar. This situation causes people to be stuck in their ideal ego, and the ego ideal loses its value (Dimitriadis, 2024; Gürsel, 2017; Melman, 2010; Özkan, 2020).

Moreover, the line between what is normal and what is considered perversion is becoming unclear. This is due to new norms created by the global world order, where the concept of the Other has become abstract and digital (Nobus, 2017). Social media and technology now dominate people’s lives, creating a system based on comparison. This system lowers self-esteem and creates a sense of meaninglessness (Becker, 2016). It makes people feel that their lives are dull and inferior to others, while also suggesting that unlimited pleasure is always possible. As a result, people deny their natural limits and constantly seek endless pleasure. In this context, the narcissistic culture and new psychic economies can be seen as ways people cope with feelings of insignificance and loss (Becker, 2016).



### 1.2.1.2. Mirror Stage

The mirror stage was first introduced by Lacan at the 14th International Congress of Psychoanalysis in 1936. It was his first major contribution to psychoanalysis. He emphasizes the nature of the mirror stage, which is observed during the child's development, and reveals the conflicted nature of the dyadic relationship (Evans, 2006). The imaginary, which belongs to the domain of the ego, is characterized by ego formation in the mirror stage by identification with the reflection, and alienation from the self. The image in the mirror is not an image constructed by the infant, rather it has a constitutive function and plays a major role in the formation of the ego. In other words, the constitution of the subject did not take place before the mirror stage and was formed as a result of it. Therefore, the dialectic of self and other is embedded in the mirror stage (Evans, 2006; Nobus, 2023; Yorulmaz, & Çorlu, 2022), and the organism establishes its relationship with its reality; that is, the relationship between the inner (innenwelt) and outer world (umwelt), through the mirror stage (Lacan, 1966/2022).

The mirror stage covers the 6-18 months of infancy and corresponds to Freud's primary narcissism stage (Homer, 2016). In this stage, the infant encounters his or her own image in the mirror for the first time. The infant who is captivated by the image in the mirror and fascinated by this image misunderstands this reflection as his or her image. The reason is that it is different from the fragmented body perception that he/she feels in himself or herself, it is whole (Özcan, 2023). In contrast to the uncoordinated, uncontrolled, and fragmented body perception that the subject experiences in his/her own body, there is a complete and inaccessible specular image in the mirror, one that is whole, in control of his/her own body, in command of his/her body movements. This wholeness also creates the perception that it has no demand and thereby no desire (Fink, 2022; Nobus, 2023). This image would play a decisive role in the characteristics of the subject regardless of its limitations (Lacan, 1966/2022). This perfect image that the subject wishes to possess for the rest of his or her life is the product of a fantasy that will never be realized. This image is defined as *Ideal-ego* (Evans, 2006; Nobus, 2023). The ideal ego, imposed on the infant from the outside world, is adopted by the child (Özcan, 2023). The infant takes

over this complete image, which is also fixed by the mother, internalizes and adopts this image as its own. This recognition of the child in this image is called *identification* (Evans, 2006).

Furthermore, the specular image has a reversionary reflection; that is, when looking in the mirror, the right side is perceived as the left side and the left side as the right side. The image is acquainted but at the same time a stranger, and it is a virtual image that has no existence outside the mirror (Nobus, 2023). The infant then attempts to identify with an image it sees in the mirror external to itself, which is a reflection of its own, but not exactly itself. Its next effort will be to overlap these two different realities. (Evans, 2006; Homer, 2016; Lacan, 1966/2022; Özcan, 2023). Therefore, the subject alienates himself by identifying with this imaginary conjugate that is seen in the mirror. *Alienation* is the inevitable result of ego construction and part of imaginary order (Evans, 2006). The image replaces the self, and the sense of ego is established at the expense of the self becoming another. The specular image will cause the subject to misunderstand his/her own reality and the subject will adopt the illusory features displayed by the specular image regardless of the subject's deficiencies and limitations (Homer, 2016; Lacan, 1966/2022).

On the other hand, the baby cannot resemble the specular image inwardly because of the conflict between its body perception and the image. It resembles the image to other people around it, such as his/her mother, father or siblings (Fink, 2022; Nobus, 2023). Since this image of wholeness is positioned in contrast to the subject's experience of fragmented body perception, the subject identifies this image as his rival, in addition to being fascinated. This situation prepares the ground for a primordial jealousy, causing the subject to establish a competitive effect by sensing an instinctive threat in object relations. This creates a conflict, and as a result of it, the rivalry between the subject and his/her image is transferred to the relations between the subject and others who are his/her conjugates. That is, the subject is both dependent on the image in the mirror for ego formation and at the same time in competition with that image (Homer, 2016; Lacan, 1966/2022). These others with whom the subject is in competition are referred to by the term *semblable*, and sibling rivalry is an example of this situation. In sibling rivalry, the child realizes that there

are individuals other than himself in the family, and due to their bodily similarities, he/she identifies with his/her siblings, who are the imaginary counterparts as in the specular image. However, this identification is followed by competition. This imaginary counterpart, the subject competes, is called “other” in Lacanian theory, which is denoted by “o” (Evans, 2006; Özcan, 2023).

Another thing that is also essential for the realization of the construction of the ego is the existence of an external entity that will fix the subject to the image through language. It is the existence of the Other that constructs the baby's external world, emphasizes that it has a complete self, creates and regulates the illusion of “self-image”, and leads to the construction of the ego (Lacan, 1966/2022). In the 11th Seminar, Lacan mentioned that the construction of the ego is achieved through the signifier and this signifier is submitted to the domain of the Other. In other words, the subject is defined as the result of a signifier, and so the subject of meaning is revealed (Lacan, 1966/2022). The mirror is a metaphor and is of secondary importance in the construction of the ego. Even in the absence of the mirror, the functioning of the ego construction is seen through the presence of the Other (Nobus, 2023). Therefore, there is also a mother who the child sees through the mirror, fixes the infant in the mirror, and tells the infant what it is. The presence of the mother who introduces the infant to itself and says, “This is you!” is important for ego formation. Because this labeling gives the child an identity and an idea of what it is in the eyes of the mother. Therefore, the child recognizes itself through the gaze of the mother, or the primary Other, and the next goal of the child would be trying to comprehend and decipher the answer to the question “What does the other want from me?”. The subject, who is obsessed with his mother's desire and has become the object of her desire, can only see him/herself through the gaze of the Other and therefore needs to be seen by the Other through life (Özcan, 2023). The subject designates the mirror image as his/her own image and turns his/her gaze to an adult, the representation of the Other, to have this image validated (Evans, 2006).

### **1.2.1.3. Gaze**

Lacan (1964/2019) discussed the concept of the gaze in his 11th seminar, *The Four Basic Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, published in 1964. In this seminar, he referred to

Jean-Paul Sartre's thoughts on the gaze (Evans, 2006). While gaze and vision are concepts that are usually addressed by the looking subject, Sartre addresses gaze from a different perspective. He emphasizes the intersubjectivity when the subject is considered as the one who looks and the one who is looked at (Sharma, & Barua, 2017). Sartre (1943/2011) mentioned that the subject needs an external subject who is looking from the outside toward the subject to grasp his/her existence. He mentioned being looked at by another being is significant for the subject's self-discovery. In other words, he refers to the subject as an object while emphasizing the subject's self-discovery through someone else's eyes (Sartre, 1943/2011).

From a similar perspective to Sartre's, Lacan said "I can see from one point, but in my existence, I am looked at from all directions." (Lacan, 1966/2022: 80). With this sentence, he emphasizes that the gaze is beyond the subject's vision and outside its sphere of dominance. The gaze has existed from the very beginning and has existed independently of the subject (Uçurum & Can, 2023). While the looking eye is from the eye of the subject, the gaze is on the side of the object, and Lacan mentions that the gaze is the gaze of the Other. Lacan emphasizes the impossibility of the two coinciding. The fact that vision and gaze do not coincide is the manifestation of the divided subject in the field of vision. The reason is that the consciousness under the illusion of seeing what it sees is predicated on the inverted structure of the gaze (Evans, 2006; Lacan, 1966/2022). The gaze is on the side of the Other and the subject is in the position of the being looked at. This situation positions the subject as an object and the subject is in the position of the object of the gaze (Uçurum, & Can, 2023). That brings to mind the focus of the infant, who builds its ego on the mother's presence, her discourses, and her gaze, on what the Other wants from it. In this way, the infant tries to question and read the desire of the Other and position itself as the object of the Other's desire. In this state, the infant persists in pursuing the mother's desire, adopting the point that she staples in the mirror, and needs to be seen by the mother to see itself (Özcan, 2023).

The gaze is outside the subject's sphere of dominance. In the dialectic between the eye and the gaze, there can be no coincidence, there can only be an illusion. This points to the incompleting and castrating function of the gaze (Lacan, 1919/1964).

Lacan (1919/1964) explains this situation with the phrase that “What is looked at is never what is wanted to be seen!” and exemplifies this with the phrase “You never look at me from where I see you!” in which he emphasizes the dissatisfaction in love. Lacan also says that “What fundamentally determines me is the gaze from the outside.” emphasizing the importance of the gaze of the Other in the formation of the ego and the subject's perception of itself.

On the other hand, social media has enabled people to share many posts about themselves with each other, which has made interactive interaction on social media possible. However, these posts also make it possible to be seen by people who are known or unknown on social media. For this reason, social media is also characterized as a form of modern-day voyeurism that is consensual and involves exhibitionism (Utma, 2023). The results of the study conducted by Mantymaki and Islam (2014), affirmed this assumption and indicated that the use of social media is significantly correlated with voyeurism and exhibitionism. In his chapter of *Three Essays on Sexuality* published in 1905, Freud considered voyeurism and exhibitionism at the same point. He explained exhibitionism and voyeurism with the term *scopophilia* and according to him, *scopophilia* reflects the pleasure derived from objectifying other people and watching them (Sharif, & Othman, 2023). He considered voyeurism as an active act and defined it as arousal arising from the act of looking, while he called exhibitionism a passive act and referred to the arousal from being looked at. However, although being watched and followed is evaluated in terms of the pleasure the subject receives, it also brings with it a sense of discomfort because of being watched by the unknown (Freud, 1919/1955). In this respect, it would be beneficial to understand the social media experiences of influencers from psychoanalytic theory, namely, with the concepts of exhibitionism and uncanny.

## **1.2.2. Other Psychoanalytic Concepts**

### **1.2.2.1. Exhibitionism**

In the first chapter of *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud discusses sexual aberrations. He defines one of the criteria for defining pleasure as an aberration as the

substitution of sexual purpose (Freud, 1905/2021). In other words, he considers the emphasis on activities in preparation for sexuality and the preponderance of these activities over sexual intercourse as perversion. Freud (1905/2021) defines the act of looking as an obsession or deviation when it replaces sexual purpose, and identifies seeing and being seen from the same point in the act of looking. In addition, although he defines erogenous zones as the mouth, anal area and genital area, he also defines the eye as an erogenous zone in exhibitionism and voyeurism.

In parallel with the erogenous zones, Lacan added two new drives to Freud's concept of the three drives: scopic and invocatory. The drives are outside of biology, and rather than being directed towards satiation, they continue their purpose by orbiting the object. In other words, the purpose of the drive is not to achieve satisfaction, but to continue the *jouissance* by repeatedly pursuing the object. Drives involve the *jouissance* dimension of sexuality rather than the reproductive function, and the goal of drives is to maintain *jouissance* in the act (Evan, 2016).

In Lacanian theory, the gaze becomes the object of the act of looking or the scopic drive. This means that the gaze and the drive are shaped in the field of the Other. In exhibitionism, the unconscious aim of the exhibitionist is to become the object of the Other's *jouissance* by capturing the watching eye of the Other and *jouissance* in the field of the Other through display. In other words, exhibitionism, a branch of perversion, aims to plug the Other's lack by exposing the gaze through display and to maintain the *jouissance* by moving around the gaze (Miller, 2006).

#### **1.2.2.2. The Uncanny**

Freud discussed the concept of uncanny for the first time in his article “The Uncanny - Unheimlich”. In this article, he interpreted Hoffman's story of The Sandman (Freud, 1919/1955; Kaya Erdem, 2019). He associated the concept of uncanny with things that are frightening and create terror (Freud, 1919/1955), but also with the feeling of uncertainty created by these frightening things (Royle, 2003). The German equivalent of the word “uncanny” is “unheimlich”. It was derived from the word “heimlich”, which means familiar and has been familiar for a long time. The word

“unheimlich” means “unfamiliar”. Heidegger explains the word *unheimlich* with the discomfort of our presence in the world. He interprets it as not being at home (unhomely), by referring to the womb (Windsor, 2019). However, Freud explains this concept as the feeling of returning to things that used to be known and familiar but repressed. In other words, he explains the feeling of uncanny as the return of the repressed, and anxiety-producing things and the fear this return generates (Freud, 1919/1955; Peel, 1980). Therefore, the component that constitutes the uncanny is not foreign. It is familiar to the individual in the unconscious, but it is alienated from the individual through repression. The feelings of uncanny are events that remind one of infancy and return one to the pre-castration period (Freud, 1919/1955; Peel, 1980). Peel (1980) asserted that this feeling of uncanny is the fear of punishment caused by the desire to return to the womb or to the pre-castration complex.

In addition to the return of the repressed, Freud (1919/1955) emphasizes that the feeling of uncanny also occurs in the case of encountering similar ones or “doubles”. According to Freud, the encounter with his/her own image reflected in the mirror, which the infant encounters in the process of ego formation, gives the feeling of challenging death at first. On the other hand, it brings to mind the perception of death. At the same time, it reminds the person of the ego formation period he/she experienced in infancy and repressed. Moreover, for the subject who is alienated from himself in the ego formation, it is a mystery whether the reflection he/she sees in the mirror is his/her own or someone else's. Therefore, as a result of this image that the subject identifies with, he/she doubts his/her own identity and self. This situation also creates a feeling of uncanny in the person.

Furthermore, Freud (1919/1955) also discussed another uncanny phenomenon as being followed by the evil eye. Freud describes this phenomenon as the fear of harm and the feeling of uncanny that one feels due to the feeling of jealousy that one's valuable and important things will create in someone else. According to Freud, through the gaze, people project onto the other person the feelings of jealousy and harm they would feel if they were in the other person's position. What is feared is the anxiety of being harmed, which originates from the intention to harm. According to Freud (1919/1955), this feeling matches the fear of being followed, watched and

harmful by people, and the uncertainty of the stalkers' intentions also causes fear and anxiety.

### **1.2.2.3. Paranoia**

Paranoia, which comes from the Greek word *paranoia*, is defined as one of the main indicators of psychosis (Lewis, 1970; Raihani, & Bell, 2019). Paranoia can be specified as the belief or fear that people will be harmed and projecting this intention of harm onto others in the outside world (Atmaca, 2016; Raihani, & Bell, 2019).

In his work “Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia”, Freud (1925) conceptualizes paranoia by analyzing it through the case of Schreber. Freud (1925) explains paranoia as the projection of unconscious aggressive desires and conflicts to the outside world in an effort for them to be resolved. According to Freud (1925), experiences in early childhood constitute an important basis for paranoia.

In a similar way to Freud's theory, Klein emphasizes that paranoia is rooted in the early stages of infancy and that paranoia is a reflection of the relationship the infant establishes with objects (Roth, 2001). According to Klein, in the paranoid-schizoid stage, which covers the first three months of infancy, the infant divides objects into good and bad. The good objects and feelings can be defined as what the infant perceives as his/her own, while the bad ones can be defined as the thoughts that the infant attributes to the outside world by trying to get rid of them. In other words, the infant splits the good and bad thoughts that he/she perceives through the outside world into two and projects the unbearable bad thoughts that exist in himself/herself to the outside world unconsciously (Roth, 2001).

Lacan, on the other hand, explains paranoia through the mirror stage and the concepts of identification and alienation (Erten et al., 2022). In the mirror stage, the infant is ecstatic with the dream of a perception of wholeness even though it cannot sustain itself and is not complete. In other words, the wholeness that the infant perceives is not in the infant itself but comes from the outside world and is therefore



under the threat of disappearing at any moment. (Erten et al., 2022; Özcan, 2023). For this reason, this complete and ideal image reflected from the outside and alienates the subject from itself poses a danger and therefore arouses hostility as well as admiration in the subject. In light of this information, Lacan states that in cases where new identifications cannot be established through socialization in the outside world and the symbolic order is not strengthened, the malevolent side of the ego comes into play, giving rise to the tendency to violence and paranoid outbursts are observed, especially when the ideal of perfection is encountered in reality. The reason is that the subject perceives itself through an omnipotent and ideal perception (Erten et al., 2022).

### **1.3. Research Statement and Research Questions**

The main purpose of the study is to explore the experience and meaning of being an influencer who shares their lives on social media platforms. My motivation for studying this subject stems from the significant impact that social media, driven by technological advancements, has on people's lives today. While much research focuses on social media's influence, there remains a gap in studies specifically examining influencers—individuals who use these platforms professionally and actively shape public opinion. This lack of research on influencers limits a full understanding of their role and impact, highlighting a notable deficiency in the literature that this study seeks to address. In pursuit of this intention, it is also aspired to investigate their relationship dynamics with their followers and other influencers. In this regard, it is aimed to conceptualize the social media usage experiences of influencers who post on Instagram, their relationships with their followers and other influencers, and what being an influencer means to them in the context of the literature by examining the participants' own perspectives and discourses.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, it will be explained why qualitative research, especially the interpretative phenomenological analysis method, was chosen. Also, information about participants and sampling methods was given. Afterwards, procedure of data collection and data analysis were explained, and lastly, trustworthiness of the study was described.

#### **2.1. Qualitative Research and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Qualitative research methods are methodologies that aim to provide depth knowledge and understanding about the experiences in the lives of human beings, including their behaviors and relations with their social environment (Fossey et al., 2002). After the 1970s, qualitative research methods became prominent in line with the need for a new dynamic, multi-perspective approach not easily apprehended by quantitative methods (Brinkmann et al., 2014). These methods are rated as useful especially for enlightening complex and poorly understood areas of human experience (Fossey et al., 2002). In other words, qualitative methods tend to be chosen when the matter is required to discuss comprehensively and there are no or limited adequate theories and information about it (Tavallaei, & Talib, 2010). Thus, qualitative methods focus on the experiences of individuals and how they interpret those experiences.

By contrast with the quantitative research methods, which aim to estimate specific parts of a research problem by conducting experiments and controlling a variety of factors to obtain objective results (Jackson et al., 2007), it is hard to approach qualitative methods by excluding the subjectivity of the individual from the analysis (Tanyaş, 2004). Especially in clinical psychology, which focuses on the unique

personal experiences and features of the individuals, qualitative methods have a substantial role to enlighten the content of a psychological problem and how people experience them (Gündüz-Maraş, 2022).

The aim of the qualitative research methods is an in-depth description, understanding, and exploration of human phenomena, experiences, interactions, and experiences in line with the discourse and sense-making of the individual (Lichtman, 2013; Mwita, 2022). That is to say, qualitative research methods allow researchers to acquire an understanding of the research question from the respondents' perspective, who live the experience (Mwita, 2022). In this study, it is aimed to have a deep understanding of the social media usage experiences of the influencers, their relations with their followers and other influencers, and their experiences of sharing their lives with other people, which psychology literature is not wide enough to cover yet, from the influencers' point of view.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, one of the qualitative methods, is first introduced to the literature by Smith (1996) and predicates its theory on what people experience in their daily lives, the ascribed meanings of the experiences, and the interpretations of them on people's individuality (Smith, 2011). For this reason, it is impossible to evaluate and conceptualize the experience as if the experience is independent of the individual who acquires it, the understanding and perspective of the individual (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Ar- Karcı, 2020). In other words, IPA seeks to understand the subjective world of the participants in detail rather than generalizing the findings. This reflects the idiographic structure of IPA (Özbek-Şimşek, 2022; Tuffour, 2017).

In addition to the perspective of individuals who live the experience, it is also impossible to deactivate the presence of the researcher as an interpreter. This implies that in the research process of qualitative study, the influence of the researcher on the sampling and analysis process and the fact that the researcher also has an individual and cultural history cannot be denied (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014). Therefore, studying IPA is a binary process that the researcher has also an effect on reaching the experience of the participants and the interpretation of the discourse of them through

his/her own subjectivity. In other words, upon the Husserl's approach of phenomenology, participants explain their experiences with their own words and within the framework of their world of meaning, and researchers interpret and analyze the experiences of the participants and their process of meaning through their mediation and experiences; this phenomenon is termed double hermeneutics (Smith, & Osborn, 2008, as cited in Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014; Smith, & Osborn, 2015; Tuffour, 2017). The process of passing through the researcher's world of meaning causes that different individuals or researchers might interpret the same data set in different ways; however, it enriches the literature by indicating the differences in reflexivity and incorporating them into the study (Yılmaz, 2018, as cited in Özbek-Şimşek, 2022). To accomplish this, reflexivity, which means that the researchers' return to their own inner world and reflect on how they have influenced the construction of the study, is of paramount importance (Fisher, 2009).

As a researcher and therapist, I have a psychoanalytic background, and I have studied Lacanian psychoanalysis during my education and practice. In Lacanian psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic approach, the importance of the language has been emphasized by psychoanalysts, and Lacan also underlined the function of language for discovering and studying unconsciousness and subjectivity (Homer, 2005/2016). In other words, as parallel to the advocated opinions of qualitative research, in psychoanalysis, it is also valued that the individuals explain their own experiences with their own words. In Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a qualitative research method, the importance of the experiences, the interpretation of the subjective experiences by the individual who experiences them (Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Ar- Karcı, 2020), and the role of the researcher (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014) in this process are emphasized. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to discover the subjective experiences of influencers through their own discourse and the way they interpret by conducting IPA.

To sum up, since IPA focuses on the subjective experience of the individuals and the subject of this study has not been discussed widely enough in psychology literature, using IPA as a research methodology was expected to provide a broad perspective.

## **2.2. Participants and Sampling Method**

With the changing world order and the introduction of technology into our lives, social media platforms and people's interest in these platforms are increasing daily. This situation causes the virtual world to expand its place in our lives and relationships to be revised by keeping the virtual world in step. Melman explains the change in world order in the contexts of the virtual in preference to the real, and the authority loses its legitimacy (Özkan, 2020). Being an influencer is a new concept that has been included in our lives with the changing world order and its impact on people has been revealed by studies. In the literature, the experiences of people who use social media platforms and follow influencers and their effects on them have been investigated (Åberg, 2020; Movaghar et al., 2023; Ward, 2017). However, the concept of influencers and the experiences of influencers have not been investigated in depth by researchers to the best of our knowledge, in spite of the fact that the experience of influencers is different from the audience and without understanding the experience of them, we cannot fully interpret the experiences of the audience. Therefore, this study was conducted to understand the experiences of influencers who are included in our lives with the new world order and have an impact on people. Furthermore, influencers who post on Instagram were selected as a sample for this study. The reason for this is that Instagram is a visual-oriented platform and has a large user network among other social media platforms (Zote, 2024).

In this study, as Smith and Osborn (2015) suggested, homogeneous and purposive sampling methods were adhered in accordance with IPA principles. Designated sampling methods allow researchers to obtain specified data more closely which are significantly concordant with the research question and reach cases that are diverse and deep in terms of knowledge (Patton, 2005; Smith, & Osborn, 2015). In other words, by forming a homogeneous sample, the researcher acquires an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of the participants by eliminating other confounding variables and focusing on pure experience (Alase, 2017). In this manner, three inclusion criteria were identified for the selection of the participants. The first inclusion criterion is determined by age range. The participants who are in the age range between 18-40 years were selected. The reason is that, in a research conducted

in the U.S., 64% of Instagram users are between the ages of 18-40 (32% between the ages of 18-29 and 32% between the ages of 30-39), and this age group has higher Instagram usage rates than other age groups. Additionally, worldwide, individuals over the age of 18 who use social media constitute 86% of the global population over the age of 18 (Kepios, 2024). Secondly, influencers who share their lives as “lifestyle” on Instagram were included in the study. The reason is that social media has several types of sharing accounts, and it is possible for the experiences of the individuals who make sharing in different areas to differentiate from each other. Thirdly, influencers who obtain financial income from social media were determined as an inclusion criterion in order to observe their experience when using social media as a business area. Furthermore, at the beginning of the study, the number of followers is designated as an inclusion criterion, and it is thought to include the influencers who have more than 100.000 followers in the study. However, during the pilot interviews, it was seen that the themes were not differentiated according to the number of followers, and the participants who had less than 100.000 were also included in the study.

In the sampling process, influencers who met the criteria were reached via direct message on Instagram and email. During the sampling process, messages and emails were sent to approximately a hundred influencers. Interviews were conducted with the participants who returned to the messages and the emails. When the interviews reached six participants, it was concluded that the themes were repeated and the interviews were ended with the belief that the data had reached saturation. The saturation point is defined as the point where the information obtained from the sample is repeated and sufficient findings are acquired, and researchers are advised to terminate the interviews when the findings reach this point (Onwuegbuzie, & Collins, 2007). The sample size of the current study is seen as appropriate for the implementation and analysis of the data in detail according to the IPA guidelines (Smith, 2004).

Six female influencers participated in the current study. The age range of the participants is mostly between 23-24 years, except for Ekin, who is 36 years old. Four of the participants have 10.000 to 60.000 followers, while one of them has

130.000 and one of them has 600.000 followers. The social media experiences of the participants as influencers range from 1 to 8 years. Socio-demographic information of the participants, including age, number of followers and yearly experiences in their career, were itemized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Information About Participants

Participants	Nickname	Age	Number of Followers	Influencer Experience
1	Pelin	24	About 20.000	7 years
2	Zeynep	24	About 600.000	8 years
3	Nilsu	23	About 40.000	3 years
4	Çağla	24	About 60.000	3 years
5	Yaren	23	About 10.000	1 year
6	Ekin	36	About 130.000	7 years

### 2.3. Procedure

Ethical approval was granted from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University. After the approval, individuals who met the criteria were invited to the study via direct message on Instagram and e-mail. Then, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants who returned to the messages and e-mails and wanted to participate in the study. At the beginning of the study, it was announced to the participants that the interviews might be conducted both as face-to-face in Middle East Technical University and online; however, because of the fact that most of the participants were living out of town, only one of the eleven interviews were conducted in Middle East Technical University and ten of them were conducted online. Then, the informed consent forms were sent to the participants and the meetings were organized. After they filled out the form and sent it to the researcher, the interviews were held. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), in order to analyze the research questions in depth, the numbers of the interviews and whether the issue is discussed in detail in interviews is a critical issue (Sarı, 2022). As a result of the analysis, 2 interviews were sufficient within the scope of the research question to obtain detailed information from the participants. Because of the fact that one of the participants could not be reached for the second interview, eleven

interviews were held in total. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to provide confidentiality. All of the data were collected in 14 months.

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

Ten of the meetings were conducted via the application of Skype and one of them was conducted in the AYNÄ Clinical Psychology Unit. The interviews were audio recorded. After each interview, the audio records were transcribed word for word and analyzed within themselves, and then the next participant was interviewed. The reason is that in IPA, after the interview and analysis of the participant is completed, the interview process of the next participant is started (Sarı, 2022). As it was suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), after the transcription, the transcripts were read again and again, the experiences and the interpretations of the participants were coded, and the codes were interpreted while the themes were being created. After that, the themes were clustered and gathered under a roof. After executing the same procedure for all of the interviews respectively, cross-case comparison between the analysis was performed, and superordinate and subordinate themes were created.

## **2.5. Trustworthiness of The Study**

Qualitative research rotates its focus on subjective experiences and the world of the human being reflected by the individual's own world of meaning (Ashworth, 2015). Consideration of the experience as if it were independent from the subject who lives the experiences is criticized by qualitative researchers (Tanyaş, 2014). Furthermore, to consider the data only from the participant's perspective would be to ignore the role of the researcher in identifying the topic because researcher is the one who conduct interviews and analyzes the data, as well as ignoring effect of the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Willig, 2008, as cited in Tanyaş, 2014). In this regard, reflexivity has a vital role in preventing the investment to the phenomenon of subjectivity from creating bias in the study and prompts the researcher to consider whether the processes in the study are influenced by him/her in the context of his/her own subjectivity (Tanyaş, 2014). Therefore, in qualitative studies, it is essential for the researchers to have insight into the impacts of their



individuality, such as their personal history and the contact with the topic, on the study and to consider them in their own analysis practice (Uyar Suiçmez, 2022). In this regard, reflexivity, the straightforward consideration of the researchers about their impacts and reactions, which are probably unconscious, on the study, is essential for the transparency of the research and for strengthening the foundations of the research (Finlay, 2015; Yardly, 2015).

The notion of reflexivity is considered under two sub-categories; the first is personal reflexivity, which is associated with self-awareness and explains the influence of the researcher's own personal wishes, thoughts and values on the study (Dowling, 2006, as cited in, Uyar Suiçmez, 2022). In this regard, my interest in this topic comes from my anxiety and thoughts that having a social media account can lead me to social media addiction and that my work will be disrupted because I am constantly on social media. When I was in secondary school, I had my first computer, and I first had my Facebook account. I remembered my interest in what others were doing and how others reacted to my sharings, which was very important. Therefore, I felt guilty about spending most of my time on social media, so I stopped using Facebook in high school. Later, I did not want an Instagram account until my university graduation and approval for a Master's program. Instantly, I have an Instagram account, and I am experiencing that social media draws me in; I am losing myself in the content on Instagram, especially when I am nervous, and writing my thesis is one of these times. To make a long story short, the reason that led me to study this topic is that there is a dimension in social media that leads people to addiction. However, this is a reciprocal and two-way relationship, and I thought it would be crucial to address the dimension of content producers or influencers on the sharing side. Furthermore, while social media is more of an endeavor that people turn to in order to escape or distract themselves, for example to get away from the stress of work or school, influencers have made a profession out of what other people do to distract themselves. In other words, the social media experience of influencers has a different purpose than that of other people. Therefore, it is aimed to enlighten the experiences of being an influencer, their motivations to practicing their motivation and the relationship between content producers and their followers in this current study. Furthermore, nowadays, with the introduction of technology into our lives, there are

changes in the social sphere compared to the past. Melman (2018) explained these changes as the preference for the virtual over the real, the decline of the Other and the disappearance of the law, and therefore the increasing importance of horizontal dialogues. As a result of these changes in the social structure, an increase in depression and addictions is also observed (Melman, 2018). Although I try to follow innovations by improving myself in using technological tools due to my education, learning or using more than necessary has always made me uncomfortable. Friendships established in social environments, books read online, and the fact that life is lived (pretending to be lived) on social media by avoiding the reality of life have also been things that have made me nervous. For this reason, even though I opened an account, I have always tried to keep my social media posts limited. However, nowadays, relationships and lives are lived on social media, and influencers are actually among the people who experience this the most. Therefore, my aim in studying this topic is to explore the experiences of the influencers who share their lives on social media as lifestyles and their relations through their followers and other influencers in order to enlighten the dynamics of the new technological world with a heartbeat on social media. In furtherance of providing the trustworthiness of the data, discussions were held with my co-advisor on themes and analysis to review my influence as a researcher in the analysis and theme generation. Furthermore, to develop self-awareness about my impacts on the research process and my interest in this topic, I talked in my own analysis about the thesis writing process.

The second sub-category of reflexivity is epistemological reflexivity, which involves questioning the findings of the research and whether these findings are influenced by the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017, as cited in Uyar Suiçmez, 2022). To prevent my perspective and interpretations as a researcher from directing the participants, as I discussed with my co-advisor, I first asked the participants what their experiences were as influencers, rather than my research questions, and in the first interviews, I generally proceeded through what they brought from their own personal meaning of being an influencer. Later, the second interviews were shaped in line with my research questions and what came from the participants.

Furthermore, bracketing is another concept that proposes to promote the research process and protect the data from bias, which is situated between researcher and participant (Tufford, & Newman, 2012). The way to strengthen bracketing and reduce the influence of the researcher in the study is to strengthen reflexivity and to exclude the researcher's own theoretical background as much as possible (Fisher, 2009). In this regard, I consulted with my co-advisor about the themes of the study that were determined during and after the analysis process. Moreover, to prevent bias and strengthen the bracketing, I negotiated my themes with my peers and an outsider to the research, who is an expert from different areas, as it was suggested (Rollsi, & Relf, 2006, as cited in Tufford, & Newman, 2012). Additionally, to prevent the theoretical background I was working with from interfering with the work and creating a bias, I analyzed the data, focusing on what the participants told me about their experiences to prevent the theoretical background I was working with from interfering with the study and bias.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

In the light of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), three superordinate themes emerged in the current study. The emanating superordinate themes are (1) *Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career*, (2) *Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer*, and (3) *The Reverse Side of the Coin: Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience*.

**Table 2.** The Superordinate and Subordinate Themes of Current Study

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1. Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career
2. Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer
a. Live Streaming from Life: On Enjoying Being in the Spotlight and Being Watched
b. The Power of Approval: How Likes and Validation Reinforces Influencers
c. “I Want to Be You”: Being a Role Model and Inspiring People
d. Touching The Lives and Leaving Marks on The Lives of Followers: “It has a much deeper meaning”
e. Being a Big Sister: Through Being Taken Seriously with the Price of Responsibility
3. The Reverse Side of the Coin: Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience
a. “Let's Focus on Ourselves, No Need to Spread Outward”: Discomfort of Being Watched by Outsiders from the Cocoon
b. Repelled by Competition, Yet Unable to Resist Comparison
c. Real or Fake? The Spurious World of Social Media
d. Selectivity in Sharing: On Hiding Negativities and Showing Positivities

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### 3.1. Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career

The first superordinate theme represents the influencers and contents that the participants were influenced and admired before and during their career processes. It also demonstrates participants' desire to be like other influencers as well as the importance of other influencers being role models for them at the start of their careers.

The majority of participants mentioned other influencers and accounts that they followed, idolized, and were influenced by. They underlined the similarities between their own accounts and posts and the accounts of the influencers they followed. When talking about the beginning of their careers as influencers or content producers, the participants mentioned other influencers they were influenced by and emphasized a dynamic based on imitation when producing their first content.

For instance, Zeynep said that she envied the life of the influencer she followed when she saw her videos, and explained this situation as follows:

Z: The reason I started YouTube when I was very young was because there was a girl named A. ... When I was little, I used to watch videos where I would say, “Oh, look at her life!” like the life that people watch me and envy me. Yes, especially the life of the girl I call A. For example, I would watch videos of her going to Coachella or doing something with her friends and say “waaauw” or something like that. But now, there are people whose lives I can actually envy and say, “Oh, what a nice trip she's having, what nice videos she's making.”.

*Original:*

Z: Çok küçükken Youtube'a başlama nedenim A. diye bir kız vardı ... İnsanların beni izleyip özendiği hayat gibi benim de özendiğim, “Off kızın hayatına bak!” dediğim videolar izliyordum küçükken. Evet özellikle A. dediğim kızın hayatı. Mesela işte Coachella'ya gittiği veya arkadaşlarıyla bir şeyler yaptığı videoları izleyip “waaauw” falan diyordum. Ama şimdi yine aslında hayatına özenebileceğim “Yaa ne güzel geziyor, ne güzel videolar çekiyor” diyebileceğim insanlar var.

She also expressed that she was impressed by the hair-coloring video of the influencer she mentioned above and said that she decided to upload a similar video.

Zeynep who stated that the kind of content she shared at that time was not very common on social media platforms in Turkey, also added that she aimed for people who wanted to try it to be able to do it by seeing it from her videos. She explained this situation with the following words.

Z: There was a girl named A. S. who dyed her hair abroad, in Tumblr times. At that time, I wanted to dye my hair too. I had learned how to make videos myself and I was making videos like clips. In fact, I was adding my own footage to the songs I liked and turning them into clips. Then one day I was going to dye all my hair pink. Before dyeing it, I did a research on the internet, how can I dye it at home etc. but there was not much content in Turkish. So I thought I would shoot a video of me dyeing my hair and upload it to YouTube. So that people who want to dye it can at least see how it is from me. That's how it started. Then I shared the video I uploaded at that time on Instagram, that I uploaded a video to YouTube. Then suddenly that video was watched a lot. After that, I continued shooting videos day by day that summer. I continued to shoot a video every day, and then suddenly, I think my videos started to be watched both because there was no one at that age like me in that year and because people liked them. So I kept going.

*Original:*

Z: Yurt dışında da saçlarını boyayan A. S. diye bir kız vardı, Tumblr zamanları. O zamanlar ben de saçımı boyamak istiyordum. Kendim video yapmayı öğrenmişim ve böyle klip gibi videolar yapıyordum. Aslında beğendiğim şarkılara kendi çektiğim görüntüleri ekleyip klip haline getiriyordum. Sonrasında bir gün saçımın tamamını pembeye boyayacaktım. Boyamadan önce de internette bir araştırma yapmışım nasıl boyayabilirim evde vs. ama Türkçe çok içerik yoktu. Ben de saçımı boyarken bir video çekeyim ve YouTube'a yükleyeyim dedim. İnsanlar hani boyamak isteyenler en azından nasıl olduğunu benden görebilsin falan diye. O şekilde başladı. Sonra o dönemde yüklediğim videoyu paylaştım Instagram'da, YouTube'a video attım diye. Sonra bir anda o video çok izlendi. Ondan sonra da video çekmeye gün be gün devam ettim o yaz. Her gün bir video çekmeye devam ettim ve sonrasında bir anda hem o yaşlarda benim gibi o yaşlarda olan biri olmadığı için o yılda sanırım hem de insanların hoşuna gittiği için galiba videolarım izlenmeye başladı. Ben de devam ettim.

From a similar point of view, Çağla stated that she idolized and was inspired by an influencer she used to follow, and shaped her career accordingly.

Ç: There was a travel promotion account. An account that traveled abroad a lot. She was even a lawyer at work. She resigned a year ago. I've been following her for a couple of years. She was actually my idol. She is always at the courthouse during the week. On the weekend, she was always going abroad on Friday and returning on Sunday evening. She always had such a

life. She combines every public holidays. Constant plane tickets and so on and so forth. But she was too much, I mean too much. She didn't have any free days. I liked her very much. Then she resigned. I still follow her. Then she started organizing tours. Actually, she inspired me from there. I told you, we organized a tour and made a deal. Now she even founded her own tour company. I admired her very much. She must be around 32-35 years old, single. A very free-spirited woman. She's really my idol.

*Original:*

*Ç: Gezi tanıtım vardı bir tane. Yurt dışında çok seyahatler yapan bir hesap. Hatta işte avukattı. İstifa etti bir yıl önce. Ben onu bayağıdır takip ediyorum birkaç senedir. Oydu aslında şeyim yani idolüm diyebilirim. O sürekli hafta içinde avukat adliye sarayında. Hafta sonu sürekli cumadan gidiyor yurt dışına pazar akşamı dönüyordu falan. Sürekli böyle bir hayat vardı. Her resmi tatili birleştiriyor. Sürekli uçak biletleri falan filan. Ama o aşırı yani böyle çok fazlaydı. Hiçbir boş günü yoktu. O çok hoşuma gidiyordu. Sonra işte istifa etti. Hala da takip ediyorum. Sonra turlar düzenlemeye başladı. Aslında oradan bana ilham oldu. Ben de dedim ya bir tur düzenledik anlaştık diye. Şimdi kendi tur şirketini kurdu hatta. Çok güzel takdir ettim onu da. 32-35 yaşlarında falan olması lazım. Bekar. Çok özgür ruhlu bir kadın. İdolüm gerçekten.*

She also reported that when she first opened her account, she was worried about whether she could be like the influencers she followed and idolized.

*Ç: Then I said I'll open my page. There were already influencers I was following at that time. I mean, I wonder if I can do this job like them. There will be advertisements. Can I turn it into a business? Of course I thought about it. I opened it by planning this, and then it slowly developed.*

*Original:*

*Ç: Sonra dedim ben sayfamı açayım. Zaten o zamanlarda takip ettiğim influencerlar vardı. Yani ben onlar gibi yapabilir miyim acaba bu işi? Reklamlar olur. İşe döndürür müyüm falan? Tabii ki bunu düşündüm yani. Bunu planlayarak açtım. Sonrasında yavaş yavaş gelişti.*

Furthermore, Pelin stated that she idolized and was influenced by other influencers and her routines are affected by them.

*P: I created these routines that I've created right now, I created everything by watching someone. Really, there are reasons why the makeup I wear every morning when I wake up is the makeup I wear.*

*Original:*

*P: Ben de şuanda yarattığım bu rutinlerimi her şeyimi birilerini izleyerek yarattım. Her sabah uyandığımda yaptığım makyajın o makyaj olmasının sebepleri var gerçekten.*

She mentioned the beginning of her career, influencers she followed and how she imitated them as follows.

P: While I was at university, I got into social media as a job a little bit with my undergraduate preparation. At that time, Youtube was more fashionable, so I started with it. I continued only on Youtube until the COVID. Then, with the COVID quarantine, Instagram got into the business a lot and with Tiktok getting involved, we all got addicted to social media ...

R: What was the process like, how did you decide?

P: When I was in high school, I was watching new Youtubers. At that time Youtube Turkey had just started. There was D. Ö., S. and so on. I was always imitating them while watching them. I was very curious about such things like beauty and care. I loved makeup and I wanted to open my own channel anyway. I started when I went to university.

*Original*

*P: Okuduğum sırada işte lisans hazırlıkla beraber sosyal medya işlerine biraz giretim. O zamanlar Youtube daha çok modaydı, onunla başladım. COVID zamanına kadar sadece Youtube'tan devam ettim. Sonra COVID karantinası ile birlikte Instagram işin içine çok girdi ve Tiktok'un işin içine karışmasıyla beraber hepimiz sosyal medyaya bağımlı olduk ...*

*A: Nasıl bir süreçti, nasıl karar vermiştiniz?*

*P: Lisedeyken yeni Youtuberları izliyordum. O zaman Youtube Türkiye yeni başlamıştı. D. Ö., S. falan vardı. Onları izlerken hep onları taklit ederdim. Bu tarz şeyler işte, güzelliştir bakımdır çok meraklıydım. Makyaj çok severdim ve kendi kanalımı açmak istiyordum zaten. Üniversiteye geçince başladım.*

Similarly, Nilsu addressed that she is influenced by some of the influencers in social media and their style of dressing. She defined it as being “in-flu” as if it is an infection.

N: There's a girl called E. I like E. very much, she says so herself. She travels abroad because she has high financial power, mostly due to her family. She can do everything. ... As I said, I like her more luxurious life. I look at him. The way I dress, for example, is very important to me. Sometimes, despite my excessive weight, I always wear a top with a belly like this. The way I'm dressed right now, for example, I'm sure I bought it by looking at it. Because if I saw this, I would call this outfit E. I'm actually being influenced by the way. I don't know if I'm comparing or being in-flu(enced).

*Original:*

*N: E. diye bir kız var. E.yi çok beğeniyorum. Onu kendisi de söylüyor zaten. Biraz da aileden dolayı maddi gücü yüksek olduğu için yurt dışında geziyor. Her şeyi yapabiliyor. ... Onun dediğim gibi onun biraz daha lüks hayatı*



*hoşuma gidiyor. Ona bakıyorum. Giyim tarzım mesela benim çok şeydir. Bazen aşırı kilolarıma rağmen üstüm hep böyle krop olur. Şu anda giyindiğim şekil mesela ona bakarak aldığıma eminim yani. Çünkü bunu görsem bu kombine E. derim. Ben de aslında influ oluyorum bu arada..*

In summary, participants inferred that there are accounts that they idolized and aspired to be like before starting their careers and during their career process. They also reported that the way they produce content and their lifestyles are influenced by these people. Moreover, they indicated the role of imitating and being influenced by other influencers in the stories of how they became an influencer. Some of the participants, like Çağla, also mentioned their concern about whether they accomplish their mission like other influencers. They also emphasized that the likes of their videos encouraged them to share more.

### **3.2. Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer**

The second superordinate theme portrays the aims and motivations of influencers to pursue their profession. In this regard, they mentioned the importance of the discourses of their followers and their own personal background as their source of motivation. The definition of the profession from the influencers' point of view and the moral satisfaction that this job provides them are also covered in this theme. The subordinate themes are (1) *Live Streaming from Life: On Enjoying Being in the Spotlight and Being Watched*, and (2) *The Power of Approval: How Likes and Validation Reinforces Influencers*, (3) *"I Want to Be You": Being a Role Model and Inspiring People*, (4) *Touching The Lives and Leaving Marks on The Lives of Followers: "It has a much deeper meaning"*, and (5) *Being a Big Sister; Through Being Taken Seriously with the Price of Responsibility*.

#### **3.2.1. Live Streaming from Life: On Enjoying Being in the Spotlight and Being Watched**

In the interviews, participants often highlighted that they share every aspect of their lives, describing their approach as a "lifestyle." The vast majority of participants explained their motivation of sharing with the need to be visible and/or to show their

lives. They also frequently reported that their frequency of sharing increases as people become curious and ask more questions. They kept continuing and could not set limits to their urge to share. Pelin emphasized her need to share every moment of her life and explained this with her need to show herself.

P: It's not just about following trends, it's actually a little bit related to the concept of my channel. Since I share my life, the need to share every minute of it, the need to show everything, the feeling of "Look, I'm doing this too, see this too" is always there...Actually, my goal was not to share every moment of my life, it was just to remember my memories. For example, when I look at my vlogs from six years ago, I was reliving that day again. This is exactly what I aimed for when I was doing this. But the more I shared, the more curious people became, the more questions they asked. And as I said, when that sincere communication was established, I think it has something to do with the fact that I am a person who cannot say no too much, the more I shared, the more I shared. I think it is necessary to know the limits of this. I think I have missed that setting a little bit in the past years. Because some things should not be shared.

*Original:*

*P: Sadece trendleri takip etmek değil, benim birazcık kanalımın konseptiyle alakalı bir şey aslında. Hayatımı paylaştığım için her dakikasını paylaşma ihtiyacı, her şeyi gösterme ihtiyacı, "Bakın ben bunu da yapıyorum, bunu da görün" hissi her zaman orada...Aslında hayatımın her anını paylaşmak değildi benim amacım, sadece anılarımı hatırlamaktı. Şu anda mesela altı yıl önceki vloglarıma baktığım zaman o günü tekrar yaşıyordum falan. Tam olarak bunu hedeflemiştim bunu yaparken. Ama paylaştıkça insanlar daha çok merak ettiler, daha çok soru sordular. Ve işte dedim ya o samimi iletişim kurulduğu zaman, benim de çok hayır diyemeyen bir insan olmamla alakalı bir şey sanırım, paylaştıkça daha çok paylaştım. Bunun sınırını bilmek gerekiyor bence. Ben o uyarı biraz kaçırdığımı düşünüyorum geçtiğimiz yıllarda. Çünkü bazı şeyler paylaşılmamalı.*

In addition, Nilsu stated that she likes to share her life and explained her desire to have every moment seen by people with her desire to be at the forefront.

N: I am a person who likes to be in the forefront and I am aware of that. You know, I like it very much when people watch me, see me. I like it when they see what I do, when I am happy. I like to share the things I shoot, whether it's a bag or a cat or a dog.

*Original:*

*N: Ben ön planda olmayı seven bir insanım ve bunun da farkındayım. Hani insanların beni izlemesi, görmesi çok hoşuma gidiyor. Neler yaptığımı, mutlu*

*olduğum anları görmeleri hoşuma gidiyor. Çektiğim şeyleri paylaşmak; bir çanta olsun, bir kedi köpek olsun paylaşmak çok hoşuma gidiyor.*

Ekin also said that she has loved being on stage since she was little and that is something that relaxes her. She added that she likes to do work where she is visible.

E: I've always been like this. I was like that when I was blogging. So now I see that even in the diaries I wrote when I was 15, I write to the crowd as “you”. There is no one in front of me. But I'm in my room alone. I have always written in a language that appeals to the crowd, as “you know”. Therefore, I love taking part in show business in my own way. After I produce something and shoot a video, I become the happiest person in the world when I finish it. It's like I let things out and relax. Even though I feel very bad, I feel very good at the end. I guess it's like art therapy for me. I always want to do such jobs anyway... I mean, I like to do jobs where I am visible like that.

*Original:*

*E: Ben hep böyleydım zaten. Blog yazarken de böyleydım. Yani şimdi bakıyorum 15 yaşında yazdığım günlüklerde bile “siz” diye kalabalığa yazıyorum. Kimse yok karşımda. Tek başıma odamdayım ama. Hep böyle “bilirsiniz” falan diye kalabalığa hitap eden bir dilde hep yazmışım. Dolayısıyla seviyorum kendimce bir show business'ta yer almayı. Bir şey üretilip bir video çektikten sonra dünyanın en mutlu insanı oluyorum bitirdiğimde. Sanki böyle bir şeyleri dışarı akıtıp rahatlıyorum. Çok kötü hissediyorsam da bitiminde çok iyi oluyorum falan. Böyle bir sanat terapisi gibi bir şey oluyor bana galiba. Zaten hep böyle meslekler yapmak istiyorum... Yani öyle görünür olduğum işler yapmayı seviyorum.*

When asked about her experience of sharing every moment of her life, Ekin highlighted the importance of having audiences. She emphasized that if she has an audience or being watched by someone, she remembers that experience much better. She said if there is no audience, some things feel like they didn't even happen.

E: I like doing work like this where I reach out to someone. I've always wanted to do something like this since I was a kid, I love the audience. If there is no audience, some things don't even feel like they happened. For example, I remember a trip abroad that I shot a video of, a vlog of, and a trip abroad that I didn't shoot completely differently in my own memories. I mean, if I shot it, I remember it much better, strangely. I don't know if I'm getting more into it. Even before there was such a thing as a vlog on this world, before there was YouTube, when I went on a student exchange to America, I was shooting a vlog with the name of today and putting it on Facebook. I was just posting it with 10 of my friends. But it felt very good,

like I'm shooting a short movie or something. So, I am practicing art in my own way. Because it's not art, but it feels good for me.

*Original:*

*E: Seviyorum böyle birilerine ulaştığım işler yapmayı. Çocukluktan beri hep böyle şeyler yapmak istiyordum. Seyirci seviyorum yani. Seyirci yoksa bazı şeyler yaşanmamış gibi bile geliyor yani. Mesela videosunu çektiğim, vlogunu çektiğim bir yurt dışı seyahatimle çekmediğim bir yurt dışı seyahatimi kendi anılarımda bambaşka hatırlıyorum. Yani onu çektiysem çok daha güzel hatırlıyorum, garip bir şekilde. Daha mı içine giriyorum bilmiyorum. Daha vlog diye bir şey yokken bile bu dünyanın üzerinde, YouTube yokken, Amerika'ya öğrenci değişimine gittiğimde şu anın ismiyle vlog çekip Facebook'a koyuyordum hani. 10 tane arkadaşım ile açıyordum sadece. Ama bana kendimi çok iyi hissettiriyordu. Sanki kısa film çekiyor gibi falan. Yani böyle bir kendi çapımda bir sanat icra ediyorum. Çünkü de bu sanat değil ama bana iyi geliyor yani.*

In summary, participants equated sharing every moment of their lives with being on the spotlight (or on the stage) and enjoyment of being watched. They mentioned that they have an effort to be visible and that they like to show their lives. Participants finally emphasized how, in a scenario where no one is watching or noticing, their experiences lose importance and meaning, making them feel as if they never happened.

### **3.2.2. The Power of Approval: How Likes and Validation Reinforces Influencers**

When talking about the sources of motivation and reinforcements on the journey to be an influencer, one of the aspects frequently emphasized in the interviews was the participants' desire to gain the approval and admiration of their followers. Additionally, participants added the positive shaping effect of being liked and approved as well as the motivating effect on their lives.

For example, Pelin mentioned that she enjoys the compliments and admirations, and receiving appreciation from her followers makes her life better. She added that this is due to her need for approval from her relationship with her mother because of her mother's perfectionistic personality.

P: Hearing people's opinions at that time shaped me and my life a lot. Of course, some of the things I did were congratulated and I liked those

greetings. ... Life gets better a little bit, no lie. It's a very nice feeling to be recognized. Of course it's a very personal thing, we've been talking all morning about my need for approval. It's nice to be recognized, to be liked, to be appreciated ... I was young. I think the things that people like are related to the need for approval, and the more I got approval, the more it was reinforced. When I thought about it, I realized that yes, I've always had that need for approval. I think it's something that comes a little bit from my mother. My mom is a perfectionist and I always had a feeling that I had to be perfect. This need for approval fed my perfectionism a lot.

*Original:*

*P: O dönemlerde insanların fikirlerini duymak beni ve hayatımı çok şekillendirdi. Tabi ki yaptığım bazı şeyler tebrik ediliyordu bu tebrikler hoşuma gitti. ... Hayat güzelleşiyor birazcık yalan yok. Tanınmak çok güzel bir his. Tabi ki bu çok kişisel bir şey. Sabahtan beri onay ihtiyacımdan bahsediyoruz. Tanınmak, beğenilmek, takdir görmek güzel şeyler ... Yaşım küçüktü. İnsanların beğendiği şeyler, onay alma ihtiyacı ile alakalı sanırım, onay aldıkça daha çok pekişti. Düşününce fark ettim ki evet, o onay ihtiyacı bende her zaman varmış. Birazcık annemden gelen bir şey diye düşünüyorum. Annem çok mükemmeliyetçi bir insandır ve benim de hep mükemmel olmam gerektiği gibi bi his vardı içimde. Bu onay alma ihtiyacı benim mükemmeliyetçiliğimi çok besliyordu.*

Similarly, Zeynep also emphasized the importance of getting approval for her posts and stated that she first shares her posts with her circle of people whom she calls “similar to her followers”. She called the people she consults before sharing her posts as her closest contacts.

Z: That's why I was motivated by getting approval or being liked for something I did. For example, before I shared a video, I would immediately show it to my friends. How do you think it turned out? And they would say I think it's very good. Because the audience I address is people like my environment, because of their lifestyle. At first, the approval of my closest people made me happy. Especially my sister's approval is always very important to me.

*Original:*

*Z: O yüzden hani onay almak ya da yaptığım bir şeyin beğenilmesi beni motive ediyordu. Bir videoyu paylaşmadan önce arkadaşlarıma hemen izletirdim mesela. Sizce nasıl olmuş falan diye. Onlar da bence çok iyi olmuş derdi. Çünkü hitap ettiğim kitle de benim çevrem gibi insanlar olduğu için, hayat tarzından dolayı. İlk başta en yakınlarımla onayı beni mutlu ediyordu. Özellikle ablamın onayı çok önemli her zaman benim için.*

Zeynep also pointed out her feelings and thoughts of receiving likes in social media and its connection with gaining approval.

Z: That's why the part that makes me happiest about the numbers, especially the likes, is that my work is liked. It gives me a positive feeling when, for example, a video that I edited gets a lot of likes, not a photo that I shared myself. I always say that it means I have done something good, I get approval.

*Original:*

*Z: O yüzden sayının, özellikle beğenin beni en mutlu eden kısmı yaptığım işin sevilmesi oluyor. Özellikle kendi paylaştığım bir fotoğraf değil ama mesela kendi kurguladığım bir videonun çok beğeni alıyor olması bana pozitif bir his veriyor. Hep diyorum ki güzel bir şey yapmışım demek ki, onay alıyorum.*

In summary, many participants talked about being approved in their relationships with their followers. They mentioned that being approved by followers motivates them to continue what they do.

### **3.2.3. “I Want to Be You”: Being a Role Model and Inspiring People**

Another emerging theme related to influencers’ motivations to share was about being a role model, an inspiration, or even an idol. The participants defined being an influencer with the phrases influencing people and playing a role in the lives and preferences of the audience. They explained influencing people as being related to people who want to be like them and emulating the life they live. Some participants also emphasized that they influence people in their daily lives in other relationships and that they are not unfamiliar with this concept outside their careers.

Zeynep is one of the participants who explains being an influencer in the context of having an impact on people’s lives and explains this issue in the context of her relationship with her followers as follows:

Z: These have always been the biggest comments I have received from my own life. What I call the biggest is a comment I hear very often and hear hundreds of times every year. I want to be you. I want to live your life. I want to live like you. There are always comments like "I'll be you when I grow up" etc. I think I really influence people in terms of lifestyle. Here is a house with such a view. It's that color car. This kind of dog. Friends like this. Such a life. The moments I truly live and share, they say, yes, I want this group of friends too. I want to go to Erasmus too. I really think that I influence people more in

terms of lifestyle. Rather than buying a certain specific product or category. Yes, I guess this is being an influencer for me.

*Original:*

*Z: Kendi hayatımdan da benim böyle bana gelen hep en büyük yorumlar şey oldu. En büyük dediğim çok sık duyduğum ve her yıl yüzlerce kez duyduğum bir yorum. Sen olmak istiyorum. Senin hayatını yaşamak istiyorum. Senin gibi yaşamak istiyorum. Büyüyünce sen olacağım falan hep böyle yorumlar oluyor. Ben biraz daha sanırım insanları gerçekten lifestyle olarak etkiliyorum. İşte böyle manzaralı bir ev. O renk bir araba. Bu tarz bir köpek. Böyle arkadaşlar. Böyle bir hayat. Benim gerçekten yaşadığım, paylaştığım anların onlar da diyor ki evet bu arkadaş grubunu ben de istiyorum. Ben de Erasmus'a gitmek istiyorum. Gerçekten biraz daha hayat tarzı olarak etkilediğimi düşünüyorum insanları. Belli bir spesifik ürünü aldirmaktan veya kategoridense. Evet influencer olmak bu benim için herhalde.*

Ekin also defined being an influencer in terms of playing a role in people's life preferences and choices, and mentioned that it has the function of encouraging people.

E: For those who are doing it properly, I think influencer-ing is being able to play a role in people's preferences, I mean, it can be their life choices. For example, after me, there were a lot of people who were inspired after the videos about studying at university after the age of 30 and went back to university. Or there are some people who feel that they are too late, even at the age of 25, to change their major. There were people who were inspired about these issues. In other words, I guess the person who can influence all kinds of preferences in life choices or shampoo, clothing, cellulite cream preferences.

*Original:*

*E: Doğru düzgün bu işi yapanlar için influencer'lık bence insanların tercihleri üzerinde rol oynayabilmek, yani bu hayat tercihleri olabilir. Mesela benden sonra böyle 30 yaşından sonra üniversite okumak videolarından sonra gaza gelip yeniden üniversite okuyan çok oldu. Ya da işte kendini geç kalmış hissederken, 25 yaşında bile geç kalmış hisseden var bölüm değiştirmek için. İşte bu konularda ilham alan oldu. Yani hayat tercihlerinde ya da işte şampuan, giyim, selülit kremi tercihlerinde her türlü tercihini etkileyebilen insan herhalde.*

Yaren also defined being an influencer as influencing people and emphasized the trust relationship with her followers in her definition. She also mentioned that being an influencer is nothing entirely unfamiliar for her. She stated that she influences the people around her in her personal life and plays a role in their choices.

Y: So being able to influence people, that what you do affects them and they want to do it, without breaking their trust in you.

R: What is it like to be influencing people? How do you experience it?

Y: I mean, there was nothing really different about it. Because in my normal life, I was always influencing people around me unintentionally. That's why only people I don't know, people from the virtual world are interested in it now. Apart from that, it's not a different experience for me because it's already happening in my own life.

*Original:*

*Y: Yani insanları etkileyebilmek, onların size olan güvenini sarsmadan yaptığınız şeyin onları etkilemesi ve onların da bunu yapmayı istemesi gibi.*

*A: İnsanları etkiliyor olmak nasıl bir şey? Siz nasıl deneyimliyorsunuz bunu?*

*Y: Yani bu konuda da aslında farklı olan bir şey olmadı. Çünkü normal kendi yaşantımda da etrafımdaki insanları sürekli influence ediyordum aslında istemeden. O yüzden sadece tanımadığım, sanal dünyadan olan insanların ilgisini çekiyor şu an. Onun dışında kendi hayatımda da zaten olduğu için farklı bir deneyim değil aslında benim için.*

Like Yaren, Çağla described the significance of having an impact on people's lives in her own experience of being an influencer and her personal life. She mentioned that being a role model makes her feel good and that it is a situation she has been in since she was a child.

Ç: This is how I feel happy when people say that I went here and I was satisfied. People take me as a role model, they apply the things I share. I like that.

R: What is it like for you to be taken as a role model?

Ç: It is nice. It is a nice feeling.

R: Can you explain a bit, how do you experience it?

Ç: Well, actually, yes, it makes you happy. There is also something like this, but not everyone may do it or not everyone may like it. When I was a student, even in primary school, for example, I was always the class president, I was always in a role, I was a role model. You know, maybe there is something that comes from that. Maybe I don't know about others now, but this is something that came to my mind as soon as you asked me. Maybe that also has an effect. I mean, people taking it as an example, the desire to be a leader personality may also be related to this.

*Original:*

*Ç: İşte ben de buraya gittim, memnun kaldım deyince ben böyle mutlu oluyorum. İnsanlar beni örnek alıyorlar, benim paylaştığım şeyleri uyguluyorlar. Hoşuma gidiyor.*



*R: Rol model olarak alınmak sizin için nasıl bir duygu?*

*Ç: Güzel bir şey. Güzel bir duygu.*

*R: Biraz açıklayabilir misiniz, nasıl deneyimliyorsunuz?*

*Ç: Yani aslında şöyle, evet insanı mutlu ediyor. Şöyle bir şey de var ama bunu mesela herkes yapmayabilir veya herkesin hoşuna gitmeyebilir. Ben ilk öğrencilik zamanlarımda, ilkokulda bile mesela hep sınıf başkanıydım. Böyle hep roldüm, rol modeldim aslında. Hani belki de ondan gelen bir şey var. Belki de şimdi başkalarını bilmiyorum ama belki onun da etkisi vardır. Yani insanların örnek alması, lider kişilik olma isteği belki de bununla da alakalı olabilir.*

In a similar vein, Nilsu mentioned being considered as a role model by the younger generations and her response to the situation in the following way:

*N: You know, it was a very normal day. And when someone came and took a picture with me, it was a little girl. And I liked it. She idolized me a little bit. She too, because liked taking photos a lot. I immediately followed her, for example. When she asks something, I answer her right away. I like to guide her.*

*Original:*

*N: Hani çok normal bir gündü. Ve biri gelip benimle fotoğraf çekildiğinde küçük bir kızdı daha doğrusu. Ve hoşuma gitti. Biraz da idol olarak görüyordu. O da çünkü fotoğraf çekmeyi çok seviyormuş. Bir şey sorduğunda hemen cevap vermeyi falan cevaplıyorum. Yol göstermeyi seviyorum.*

Consequently, participants defined being an influencer or content creator as being a role model or being an inspiration or an idol. All participants described being a role model and influencing people's lives as a positive phenomenon, which they aimed at while being an influencer.

### **3.2.4. Touching The Lives and Leaving Marks on The Lives of Followers: “It has a much deeper meaning”**

Participants talked about how important it is to be watched and seen in terms of their motivation to become an influencer. They also touched on the motivating effect of receiving approval and likes. In addition to all these, another point that reinforced their desire to share and influenced their motivation was to do work that reaches people and to touch someone's life, which we will discuss in this theme.

All participants highlighted touching the lives of their followers, leaving traces in their lives, and healing their lives for the better in their expressions. They mentioned this as their purpose and motivation to continue this career. They described being an influencer and its meaning as being characterized by touching the lives of others and being a role model for them. Participants also frequently emphasized leaving marks on people and being a source of motivation for them provides moral satisfaction. Pelin referred to touching people's lives as a deep meaning hidden out being an influencer and this is motivating her to continue sharing, as follows:

P: I can tell you for sure that being an influencer has a much deeper meaning than I can say. Because you do not know whose lives I have actually touched, what messages, e-mails, letters I received. I realized how people embraced me there and that's when I realized how deep that meaning is. Nowadays, when we look at it more superficially, maybe influencing is showing people a product and getting them to buy it, affecting people's product choices, but it has a much deeper meaning than that.

*Original:*

*P: Influencer olmanın söyleyeceğimden çok daha derin bir anlamı olduğunu çok kesin söylerim size. Çünkü aslında kimlerin hayatlarına dokundum bilemezsiniz, ne mesajlar ne e-mailler, ne mektuplar aldım. İnsanlar nasıl sarıldılar bana orada anladım yani o anlamın ne kadar derin olduğunu. Günümüzde daha yüzeysel baktığımız zaman influence etmek belki insanlara bir ürününü göstermek ve onu aldirmek, insanların ürün seçimlerini etkilemek ama bundan çok daha derin bir anlamı var.*

In addition, Pelin expressed that the feedback she received from people that she touched their lives are also contributory to the continuation of her sharings.

P: That's why when I share it with people, I always get feedback like “You motivated me for this, you got me up for that, you got me started for that.” So I guess I'm a little bit addicted to sharing. It's a little bit related to being a people pleaser, to be honest.

*Original:*

*P: O yüzden bunu insanlarla paylaştığım zaman hep "Bana şu konuda motivasyon oldun, beni şu konuda ayağa kaldırdın, beni şuna başlattın." gibisinden geri dönüşler alıyorum. O yüzden sanırım paylaşmaya biraz da bağımlı oldum. Biraz people pleaserlikle da alakalı bu durum açıkçası.*

Zeynep also talked about her place in people's lives, how people's childhoods were filled with her contents and the impact of her on people's lives.

Z: I really feel like I touched everyone's childhood for a while. Sometimes they see me and say: "I'm just watching you. I grew up with you. "I grew up on your videos." I've been getting a lot of "I grew up with you" messages lately. They influence like this or say something like this: "Thanks to your study vlogs, I was able to study too. Watching them, I was turning on the computer and working with you. Your such and such ideas and these steps caused me to do such things in life. Thank you." When I receive messages like this, I feel like I have touched someone's life in some way.

*Original:*

Z: Gerçekten bir dönem herkesin çocukluğuna dokundum gibi hissediyorum. Bazen beni görüp şey diyorlar: "Ben sadece seni izliyorum. Seninle büyüdüm. Senin videolarında büyüdüm". Ben seninle büyüdüm mesajları çok alıyorum son dönemlerde. Onlar böyle etkiliyor ya da mesela şey diyorlar: "İşte senin ders çalışma vlogların sayesinde ben de ders çalışabildim. Onları izleyerek bilgisayarı açıyordum ve seninle beraber çalışıyordum. İşte senin şu şu fikirlerin şu şu adımların hayattaki benim de şöyle şeyleri yapmama neden oldu. Teşekkür ederim." gibi mesajlar alınca birilerinin hayatına bir şekilde dokunmuşum diyorum.

Ekin also stated that having an impact on people's lives and the feedback she received from people provides her with spiritual satisfaction. In the following statement, she said that this makes her feel as if she left a mark on people's lives:

E: So it feels like you're leaving your own little mark on the world. It's like your own life story becomes something. I'm not writing a book. Maybe there will be no books or films I have left behind for future generations, but people say to me now, "Ekin, I was in high school when I started watching you." "Now I have graduated, become a lawyer, and you have a great influence on my thinking, in my relationships, in my career choices." Such discourses of women who stand on their own feet and are a little more free. So this is a beautiful thing. I like that I have this effect on them. For example, I am happiest when I hear this when I go to interviews. In other words, "There is a lot of influence on me. You know, I've learned a lot from your videos over the years," etc. That sounds good to me. It also provides spiritual satisfaction.

*Original*

E: Yani dünyada kendi çapında minik bir iz bırakıyorsun gibi hissettiriyor. Sanki kendi hayat hikayen bir şeye dönüşüyor. Ben kitap yazmıyorum. Benden geriye gelecek nesillere belki kitaplar ya da çektiğim filmler kalmayacak ama insanların mesela şimdi bana işte "Ekin seni izlemeye başladığımda lisedeydim. Şu an mezun oldum, avukat oldum ve hem ilişkilerde hem kariyer seçimlerimde, benim düşünce sistemimde senin etkin çok büyük." Böyle daha kendi ayakları üzerinde duran, biraz daha özgür kadın söylemleri. Benim hoşuma gidiyor böyle bir etkim olması. Mesela söyleşilere gittiğimde falan en

*çok bunu duyduğumda mutlu oluyorum. Yani “Benim üzerimde çok izin var. Hani yıllardır seni şu şu videolarından çok şey öğrendim” falan. İyi geliyor bana yani. Manevi tatmin de sağlıyor.*

To conclude, participants revealed that being an influencer has a deeper meaning than just influencing people and characterized it as touching people's lives and leaving marks on the world. They also emphasized the moral satisfaction they derived from this and the motivation to continue in the profession that comes from touching people's lives and leaving a mark on them.

### **3.2.5. Being a Big Sister: Being Taken Seriously with the Price of Responsibility**

In a similar line with being a role model or perceived as an idol as well as touching the lives of and leaving marks on the lives of followers, all participants said that they are referred to as "big sister" by their followers and explained what it means being a big sister in the interviews. Participants affirmed that being called as "big sister" reflects the confidence of their followers in them and imposes responsibility on them. Additionally, the participants equated the phrase "being a big sister" with being taken seriously, being listened to, and having their opinions valued by followers and their inner circle. In this regard, Yaren explained being called as “big sister” by her followers in the context of trusting her and getting advice from her, as follows:

Y: Yes, they call me sister. ... But it's a nice feeling, I mean, it's a nice thing, I think it's a nice feeling that so many people really trust you, ask you things, take what you say as advice.

*Original:*

*Y: Evet, abla diyorlar. ... Ama güzel bir duygu yani, güzel bir şey bu kadar o insanların sana gerçekten güvenip, sana bir şeyler soruyor olması, senin söylediğin şeyleri tavsiye olarak alıyor olması bence hoş bir duygu.*

Nilsu equated being referred to as “big sister” by her followers with being taken seriously and her opinions being valued. She also stated after she became an influencer, her ideas were valued and taken more seriously by her family and circle.

R: What is the connection between being a big sister and giving advice, you bring them together?

N: Yes, I mean, it's as if you take advice from the elders and you listen to them. I don't know if maybe I did something like this, but I feel as if what I say is valued. I feel as if they care about something I say. Because as I said, before it didn't matter much, I was made to feel that way and I felt that way, but now I feel as if what I say is valued, what I say is important, valuable. The same is true for my family. Before everything was asked to my brother, not to me. But now, no, I am also asked, my brother is also asked. Likewise, my cousins, you know, everyone is asking me now. "How should I do this? Should I do that?" I like this very much because now I feel more valued. Before I was just a loved person, but now I think at least my opinions are valued.

*Original:*

*A: Ablalıkla tavsiye vermek arasında nasıl bir bağlantı var, bir arada getiriyorsunuz?*

*N: Evet yani sanki büyükten tavsiye alırsın ve bunun sözünü dinlersin. Ya belki de böyle bir şey yapmışımdır bilmiyorum ama sanki benim dediklerime değer veriliyormuş gibi hissediyorum. Sanki benim dediğim bir şeyleri önemsiyorlarmış gibi hissediyorum. Çünkü dediğim gibi önceden çok önemsemiyordu öyle hissettiriliyordu ve öyle hissediyordum ama şimdi dediğim şeyler önemseniyormuş, söylediğim şeyler önemliymiş, değerliymiş gibi hissediyorum. Aynı şey ailem için de geçerli. Önceden her şey kardeşime sorulurdu, bana sorulmazdı. Ama şimdi bana da soruluyor. Aynı şekilde kuzenlerim de hani herkes şuanda bana soruyor. "Ya şunu nasıl yapsam? Bunu böyle yapsam mı? Bu çok hoşuma gidiyor çünkü artık değerli daha değerli hissediyorum. Önceden sadece sevilen bir insandım ama şimdi en azından fikirlerime de değer verildiğini düşünüyorum."*

Pelin, similar to Nilsu, approached being called "big sister" by her followers within the framework of being taken seriously. Pelin, who says that she has always been the youngest person around her, mentioned that after becoming an influencer, she is taken seriously by those around her. She identified that as a great but an imposing experience.

P: Yes, I think that's where I broke up. I'm an only child and I never had any siblings or my peers were always my peers or I was friends with older people. I was always the youngest, but when I suddenly became someone's older sister, at first I started to be ultra careful about my behavior. I never swore or anything like that. I was restricting myself a lot. Then I realized that older sisters can also make mistakes. Then I let it go, I started not to bother myself so much. As I said, this is a huge responsibility. Of course, none of us are born as older sisters, but if I had learned to be an older sister at a younger age, maybe I wouldn't have had such a hard time. In the very last days of my adolescence, it is both a great responsibility and a very nice feeling.

R: You said that you were always the youngest before. What was that experience like?

P: It was not a very good experience, to be honest. I used to think it was very nice, but one of the things that comes with being the youngest is being the least experienced and people take you the least seriously. I was not taken seriously in the family. I mean, they would say Pelin is very smart, Pelin is very like this and that, but I wasn't taken very seriously, to be honest. After I became an influencer, everyone started to take me seriously, which was good.

*Original:*

*P: Evet sanırım orda koptum zaten. Bu çok değişik bir şey. Ben tek çocuğum ve hiç kardeşim olmadı ya da akranlarım ya hep arkadaşlarım akranlarımdı ya da daha büyük insanlarla arkadaş oldum. Hep ortamın en küçüğü bendim ama bir anda birilerinin ablası olunca önce bir anda her davranışıma ultra dikkat etmeye başladım. Hiç küfür etmiyordum falan. Kendimi çok kısıtlıyordum. Sonra ablaların da hata yapabileceğini fark ettim. Sonra bir saldı, kendimi o kadar sıkılamaya başladım. Dediğim gibi bu çok büyük bir sorumluluk. Tabi hiçbirimiz doğuştan abla değiliz ama daha küçük yaştan abla olmayı öğrenmiş olsaydım belki bu kadar zorlanmayacaktım. Ergenliğimin en böyle son zamanlarında yani hem büyük bir sorumluluk hem de çok da güzel bir his.*

*A: Öncesinde de hep en küçük olduğunuzu söylediniz. O nasıl bir deneyimdi?*

*P: Çok da güzel bir deneyim değildi açıkçası. Eskiden çok güzel olduğunu düşünüyordum ama en küçük olmanın getirdiği bir şey de en tecrübesiz olmak ve insanların sizi en az ciddiye alması. Pek ciddiye alınmazdım ailede. Yani çok işte Pelin çok zeki, Pelin çok şöyle falan derlerdi ama çok da ciddiye alınmazdım açıkçası. Influencer olduktan sonra herkes beni bir ciddiye almaya başladı, iyi oldu.*

### **3.3. “The Reverse Side of the Coin”: Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience**

The superordinate theme examines unspoken aspects of social media, what bothers the influencers about the experience in the world of social media and of sharing their lives, as well as what they do not share about their lives. The subordinate themes are (1) “Let's Focus on Ourselves, No Need to Spread Outward”: Discomfort of Being Watched by Outsiders from the Cocoon, (2) Repelled by Competition, Yet Unable to Resist Comparison, (3) Real or Fake? The Spurious World of Social Media, and (4) Selectivity in Sharing; Hiding Negativities and Showing Positives.

### 3.3.1. “Let's Focus on Ourselves, No Need to Spread Outward”: Discomfort of Being Watched by Outsiders from the Cocoon

Although participants frequently articulated their desire to be seen and to show in the interviews, there is a contradiction in their discourse. All of the participants referred to their followers as family or friends. However, they also defined their followers as people they do not know and expressed their discomfort with being followed by unknown people. The reason is that there might be people with bad intentions who want to harm them among their followers. For this reason, they stated that they are hesitant to share their lives. They try to be careful and take certain precautions when sharing their posts. For example, Çağla expressed her fear of being followed by people she does not know and the precautions she took to avoid being harmed by people with negative intentions as follows:

Ç: I'm a little scared, for example. After all, a lot of people I don't know. They may have good intentions or bad intentions. It's not good to share too much. For example, I even pay attention to this; if I go somewhere for a moment, sometimes I share it, but I think about it a lot so that I can share it later. I share it after I leave the place. Because there may be people with ulterior motives, malicious intentions. There are also perverts. ...I mean, I can say that we always want to believe that good people are following us. You know, when I look at my message box, if there are messages that bother me a little bit, I block them directly. I don't want them to see me anymore, who knows who's using it. It could be a fake account, it could be his own account. These are the ones who really show themselves. Some of them sneakily follow without showing it, for example. We cannot control this. That's why we have to share in control.

*Original:*

Ç: Biraz korkuyorum mesela. Sonuçta tanımadığım bir sürü insan. İyi niyetli de olabilir, kötü niyetli de olabilir takip edenler. Çok fazla paylaşmak iyi değil her şeyi. Mesela ben şuna bile dikkat ederim; anlık bir yere gitsem bazen paylaşırım ama çok böyle düşünürüm de sonra paylaşayım diye. Oradan ayrıldıktan sonra paylaşırım. Çünkü art niyetli, kötü niyetli insanlar da olabilir. Sapığı da var bunun sonuçta. ...Yani hep iyilerin takip ettiğine inanmak istiyoruz diyebilirim. Hani böyle mesaj kutuma bakayım birazcık canımı sıkan mesajlar olsun direkt engelliyorum yani. Hani görmesin kimse artık kim bilir kim kullanıyor. Fake hesap da olabilir, kendi hesabı da olabilir. Ki bunlar gerçekten kendini belli eden kesim. Kimisi de belli etmeden sinsi sinsi takip ediyor mesela. Bunu kontrol edemeyiz. O yüzden kontrolü paylaşımlar yapmak zorundayız.

Zeynep also associated being followed by people she does not know with feelings of discomfort. She shared her experiences of being followed and threatened by a stranger. Like Çağla, Zeynep said that she takes some precautions because of her feeling of hesitation. She described her experiences and her feeling of hesitation to share her life.

Z: I mean, for example, especially as I said, there are many times when I try to make sure that where I live is not very obvious. Last year someone found my house and it was actually quite scary. He was a boy who threatened me on Instagram and texts. I saw him all the time but I didn't think he would come to my house and I was at school that day. Because it was such a stalking incident, for example, last year I was worried because I can't change my home address all of a sudden. If I had my number, my number has been changing since I was little. That's not a problem, but when it's a home address or something like that, I'm very worried about where I live, let me not start the video when I leave the house, let me start in the car so that the street is not visible, etc. I don't know how that person found it.

*Original:*

Z: Yani mesela özellikle dediğim gibi oturduğum yerin çok belli olmaması için çabaladığım çok oluyor. Geçen yıl biri evimi bulmuştu ve bayağı korkunç bir olaydı aslında. Beni Instagram'dan, mesajdan tehdit eden bir çocuktan zaten. Sürekli görüyordum ama evime geleceğini düşünmemiştim. Ben de okuldaydım o gün. Böyle sapıklık derecesine gelen bir olay olduğu için mesela geçen yıl bir tedirgin olmuştum çünkü evimin adresini değiştiremem bir anda. Numaram olsa, küçüklükten beri zaten numaram sürekli değişiyor. O sorun değil ama ev adresi falan olunca bu oturduğum yer konusunda çok aman işte videoya evden çıkarken başlamayayım, arabada başlayayım ki sokak gözükmessin vs. Nasıl buldu o kişi onu da bilmiyorum.

In a slightly different way from Zeynep and Çağla, Ekin combined being followed by people she does not know with being seen and watched by people other than her followers. Defining her followers as her inner circle, Ekin talked about the discomfort of being watched by people other than her followers or her audience.

E: And people from outside your audience also come. You understand that. For example, while a normal video of mine would have a maximum of 100 thousand views, it has been circulated by the algorithm and has been watched a million times. There is a lot of nonsense there, people who have nothing to do with us. For example, I think the comments from them are completely different, more ignorant comments...

R: How does it feel for you to be in the circulation of different people, for different people from your audience to see you?



E: I mean, it doesn't make me feel safe. For example, I don't read the comments under my videos. If it's already circulated, I don't read it anymore.... And I guess I don't want to remember that everyone is watching. That's why I want to feel like I'm continuing in my own cocoon. That's why I try not to see them so much...I mean, I think that's why my goal was always around 200-250 thousand followers. I mean, for example, I never aimed for a million on YouTube. I was manifesting it in my head and the number I manifested was 200 thousand 250 thousand. So I think even that shows it. Why don't you want to have a million followers now? I guess it's a bit more of a self-protection. Let's keep to ourselves. Let's not spread out too much, I guess I have a feeling. I want this to be better.

*Original:*

*E: Ve senin kitlenin dışından tipler de geliyor. Onu anlıyorsun. Atıyorum benim normal bir videom maksimum 100 bin izlenecekken böyle iyice algoritmanın dolaşımına girmiş milyon izlenmiş. Orada bir sürü abuk sabuk, bizimle alakası olmayan tipler var. Mesela onlardan gelen yorumlar hani bambaşka daha böyle biraz daha cahil yorumlar bence...*

*A: O farklı insanların dolayımına girmesi, kitlenizden farklı insanların sizi görmesi, nasıl geliyor size?*

*K: Yani o böyle nasıl diyeyim güvende hissettirmiyor kendimi. Hani okumuyorum mesela öyle videolarımın altındaki yorumları. Artık dolaşıma girmişse daha fazla okumuyorum.... Ve herkesin izlediğini hatırlamak da istemiyorum sanırım. O yüzden ben kendi kozamda devam ediyor gibi hissetmek istiyorum. O yüzden çok onları böyle görmemeye çalışıyorum...Yani bence hatta o yüzden hep mesela hedefim 200-250 bin civarı takipçiydi. Yani mesela hiçbir zaman YouTube'da milyonu hedeflemedim. Hani manifestliyordum kafamda ve manifestlediğim rakam 200 bin 250 bindi. Yani o bile bence bunu gösteriyor. Şimdi niye milyon takipçin olsun istemiyorsun? Herhalde biraz daha böyle kendimi korumaya almak hani. Aman biz bize olalım. Çok da yayılmayalım dışarı gibi bir duygum var herhalde. Bunu daha iyi istiyorum.*

In other words, although the participants frequently emphasized their need to demonstrate their lives in the interviews, they also mentioned the discomfort of being followed by people they do not know, either inside or outside their followers.

### **3.3.2. Repelled by Competition, Yet Unable to Resist Comparison**

A great majority of the participants indicated that there is a competition in social media, which is usually based on material gain. They stated that this competition in the social media environment alienates them from their work and reduces their motivation. Pelin exemplified the competitive atmosphere of social media as follows;

P: For example, there is a product, a company. That product will be promoted and the company reaches out to an agency. The agency has a few people on their list who produce similar content. Of course, they cannot talk to all of them. In the past, they used to give these ads to everyone, but now they select from among them. I guess so that it is not too obvious that it is an advertisement. During that selection, of course, I think people are sharpening against each other and a competitive environment is inevitably created.

*Original:*

*P: Mesela bir ürün var, bir firma. O ürünün tanıtımı yapılacak ve firma bir ajansa ulaşıyor. Ajansta benzer içerik üreten birkaç kişi var listelerinde. Onların tabi ki hepsiyle konuşamıyorlar. Eskiden herkese veriyorlardı bu reklamları ama artık seçiyorlar aradan. Çok belli olmasın reklam olduğu diye sanırım. O seçim sırasında insan tabi ki birine karşı bileniyor sanırım ve bir rekabet ortamı oluşuyor ister istemez.*

Zeynep reported that competition in this devious market is something that makes her uncomfortable. She defined competition as something that alienates and frightens her from her profession.

Z: I mean, it's a feeling that sometimes turns me off from social media, that there's so much competition. I don't think I'm a very competitive person. ...I'm usually a calm person when it comes to competition and most of the people I knew there were people I wouldn't really want to be friends with. So I've always stayed away. Even if I received a comment, I wouldn't respond by name. Because I always hated that my presence there would turn into any kind of drama. That's why I was never involved in the rivalries there or I tried not to compare myself with anyone most of the time. I still do it a lot unintentionally. But sometimes I think it doesn't have to be a bad thing. You know, it's normal for me to compare myself with someone, it's in my nature. That's why I don't think that this feeling, this comparison, is eating me up. But competition in a market, in an industry where relationships are not sincere always scared me and I always tried to stay away from competition. I was more interested in myself, in what I do.

*Original:*

*Z: Yani hiç bu beni sosyal medyadan çok bazen soğutan bir duygu, rekabetin bu kadar fazla olması. Kendim çünkü çok aşırı rekabetçi biri olduğumu düşünmüyorum. ...Konu rekabet olduğunda sakın bir insan oluyorum genelde ve oradan tanıdığım insanların çoğu gerçekten arkadaş olmak istemeyeceğim insanlardı. O yüzden hep uzak durdum. Bana laf atılsa bile, isim vererek cevap vermezdim yani. Çünkü oradaki varlığımın herhangi bir dramaya dönüşmesinden nefret ederdim her zaman. O yüzden oralardaki rekabetlerde zaten hiç yoktum veya kendimi çoğu zaman kimseyle kıyaslamamaya çalıştım. İstemedim yaptığım hala çok oluyor. Ama bazen de diyorum ki kötü bir şey olmak zorunda değil. Hani biriyle kıyaslamam normal bir şey, hani doğamda vardır. O yüzden beni bitirdiğini, beni yediğini düşünmüyorum bu duygunun,*

*kıyaslamanın. Ama ilişkilerin samimi olmadığı bir pazarda, bir endüstrideki rekabet beni hep korkuttu ve hep uzak kalmaya çalıştım rekabetten. Biraz daha kendimle, kendi yaptığım ile ilgilendim.*

Although the participants expressed that they were uncomfortable with the competitive environment on social media, they also stated in their discourse that they were also in this environment. They frequently emphasized other influencers when talking about their careers and social media accounts. Participants, who mentioned that they compare themselves with other influencers, explained that they compete with other accounts through the number of likes, followers, or views they receive. Zeynep described that when her own photo is liked less, her focus shifts to how much other influencers are liked, and she makes comparisons, as follows:

Z: Of course, it is hurtful when a photo I take gets few likes. I say that it wasn't like this before. Of course I start comparing myself with the past or with someone else. Even though I don't want to, I do. But here is his photo getting these likes, sometimes I think wow. ...Whenever I watch other people's stories, then that comparison, that competition, I actually think that I am a competitor with them and it scares me a lot. I feel uncomfortable.

*Original:*

*Z: Tabii ki benim attığım bir fotoğrafın az beğenilmesi kırıcı bir şey oluyor. Diyorum ki eskiden böyle değildi. Tabii ki kendimi eskiyle veya başkasıyla kıyaslamaya giriyorum. Hiç istemesem de insan giriyor. Ama işte onun fotoğrafı bu beğenileri alıyor, wow diye düşünüyorum bazen. ...Ne zaman başkalarının hikayelerini izlesem, o zaman böyle o kıyaslama, o rekabet, aslında ben onlarla rakibim diye düşünüyorum ve beni çok korkutuyor. Rahatsız oluyorum.*

Nilsu stated that she is watching the stories of other influencers and these stories make her feel terrible. She explained the reason for this feeling with the sense of failure when seeing what other influencers do and where they go.

N: Because there are too many influencers who came before or the YouTubers are too famous. Seeing these things makes me tired sometimes, I won't lie. Because they have fun abroad every day. You know, it's normal entertainment, yes I like it, but when I compare myself with them, I say, you know, they are successful, but you haven't achieved much.

*Original:*

*N: Çünkü önceden gelen çok fazla influencer var ya da youtuberlar çok fazla ünlüler. Bunları görmek beni bazen yoruyor, yalan söylemeyeceğim. Çünkü*

*her gün yurt dışında eğleniyorlar. Hani normal bir eğlence evet hoşuma gidiyor ama onlarla kendimi kıyasladığımda işte diyorum ki hani bunlar başarıyor ama sen çok fazla başaramamışsın.*

Ekin also mentioned that when she follows influencers who travel a lot, she is jealous of their lives because of her own life choices and emphasized that she does not follow them for this reason.

E: Or for example, when I see influencers traveling a lot, I get jealous. That's why I don't want to. I mean, I made a choice and I have a school life. But when I see it, it's always like, you know, I don't like to see the other possibility in such a way, I mean, I don't like to see it live. ...Therefore, I don't follow too much, frankly.

*Original:*

*E: Ya da mesela ben çok gezen influencer gördüğümde kıskanıyorum. O yüzden de istemiyorum. Yani bir tercih yaptım ve okul hayatım var. Ama görünce de böyle hani insan hep, diğer ihtimali de böyle bir, yani canlı canlı görmek hoşuma gitmiyor sanki. ...Dolayısıyla çok fazla takip etmiyorum açıkçası.*

In short, participants mentioned that they feel uncomfortable being in the competitive world of social media. On the other hand, they also mentioned that they are competing and comparing themselves with other influencers. They also expressed their discomfort and jealousy when they see influencers that do what they cannot do on their accounts or in their personal lives.

### **3.3.3. Real or Fake? The Spurious World of Social Media**

Most of the participants frequently emphasized the importance of establishing a real connection with their followers. Yaren exemplified this importance as follows:

Y: (Talking about the followers he met in daily life) It was like they were really my friends. ... Actually, in that way, we have a good, beautiful, real connection. ... So I think it's important to create something real.

*Original:*

*Y: (Günlük hayatta karşılaştığı takipçilerinden bahsediyor) Sanki gerçekten arkadaşlarım gibiydi. ...Aslında o şekilde de iyi, güzel, gerçek bir bağ kurmuş oluyoruz. ... Yani gerçek bir şey yaratmak bence önemli.*

On the other hand, they defined the social media world as a devious place and that what is shared on social media does not reflect reality. They also emphasized that this deception is also caused by mutual benefit relationships. In her statements about the relations in social media, Zeynep emphasized her discomfort and avoidance to establish close relationships with people due to their deceptive character.

Z: I usually don't have any influencer friends. I have very few anyway. It was always something I tried to stay away from. I didn't get too close to people either because of the types of people I knew from my relationship with girls in high school or because of the fear of feeling the fakeness of social media, which I already dislike, in people who do it as a job.

Original:

Z: Genelde hiç influencer arkadaşım olmaz. Zaten çok az vardır. Hep de uzak durmaya çalıştığım bir şeydi. Gerek lisedeki kızlarla olan ilişkimden tanıdığım insan tiplerinden, gerek ise bizim sosyal medyanın o zaten sevmediğim fakeliğini iş olarak yapan insanlarda da hissedebilme korkusundan dolayı çok yaklaşıyordum insanlara.

Pelin also described the deceptive nature of social media. She mentioned that what we see in social media does not reflect reality and this is due to the competition between influencers.

P: Table of wolves. What kind of environment? An environment where everyone is very famous, very popular, very wonderful, the most successful, the smartest, the most beautiful. That's how it looks like. At least that's how everyone presents themselves from the outside. That's not a bad thing. It is the necessity of the place. And it has to be like that. Otherwise, you might be a little bit oppressed. They might feel bad. There is also a very serious competition. There is also serious competition, especially among content producers of the same age group and who produce similar content. It's a bit of an implicit competition. Some friendships are very good friendships, but of course this is always what we see from the outside. Friendships that look very good on the outside may be based only on a signature on the inside. That's why I think it's a bit difficult to believe in their sincerity, to believe in their reality.

Original:

P: Kurtlar sofrası. Nasıl bir çevre? Herkesin çok ünlü, çok popüler, çok harika, en başarılı, en zeki, en güzel olduğu bir ortam. Yani öyle gözüktüyor. En azından dışarıdan herkes kendini öyle tanıtıyor. Bu kötü bir şey değil. Oranın gerekliliği öyle. Öyle de olması gerekiyor. Öteki türlü birazcık ezilebilir yani insan. Kendini kötü hissedebilir. Çok da ciddi bir rekabet var.

*Özellikle aynı yaş grubu ve benzer içerikleri üreten içerik üreticileri arasında ciddi bir rekabet de var. Biraz üstü kapalı bir rekabet. Bazı arkadaşlıklar çok güzel arkadaşlıklar ama tabi ki bu hep bizim dışarıdan gördüğümüz şeyler. Dışarıdan çok güzel görünen arkadaşlıklar, içerde sadece bir imzaya dayanıyor da olabilir. O yüzden samimiyetine inanmanın, gerçekliğine inanmanın biraz zor olduğu bir ortam olduğunu düşünüyorum.*

Yaren also emphasized the disingenuity in the relationships on social media and stated that these relationships are based on interest. She pointed out her discomfort with people's fake accounts and the comments they make on these accounts.

Y: It's very complicated, very. I mean there are very, very good people. There are people who are very honest. But they are very fake just because their account is going up. For example, befriending each other according to their followers. You have 100 thousand and he has 100 thousand. Or the other one is 200 thousand, okay, let me be friends with him so that I can get more followers. So there are no real relationships. As I just said, in real life, for example, her friend follows her. For example, she comments from her own account. He makes a comment like "My love is very beautiful" or something like that, but he comes from his fake account and writes "Sister, you dress so disgusting" or something like that. For example, she was my friend, we were just together. So I feel a little sad because I see so many fake people.... They approach you just because they think that they will make more money when the number of people there increases. And that's very strange to me. It's not a nice thing. For example, I don't think that person can really recommend something, so the connection part is actually a really valuable thing.

*Original:*

*Y: Çok karmaşık çok. Yani çok çok iyi insanlar var. Çok dürüst olan insanlar var. Ama çok sahte sırf işte hesabı yükseliyor diye. Mesela takipçilerine göre birbirleriyle arkadaşlık etmek falan işte. Sen 100 binsin o da 100 bin tamam. Ya da işte diğeri 200 bin tamam ben bununla arkadaşlık edeyim ki bana daha fazla takipçi gelsin falan gibi. Yani gerçek ilişkiler kurulmuyor. Dediğim gibi az önce işte gerçek hayatta arkadaşı mesela takip ediyor. Mesela kendi hesabından yorum yapıyor. "Aşkım çok güzel olmuş" falan diye bir yorum yapıyor ama fake hesabından gelip işte "Abla çok iğrenç giyiniyorsun" falan yazıyor. Mesela hani arkadaşımdı, az önce beraberdik falan. Yani çok fazla sahte insanlar gördüğüm için biraz üzülüyorum.... Sana sırf işte oradaki sayı arttığında sen daha fazla para kazanacaksın diye yaklaşıyorsun. Bu da bana çok garip geliyor yani. Hiç hoş bir şey değil yani. Mesela o kişinin bir şeyi gerçekten önerebileceğini düşünmüyorum. O yüzden aradaki bağ kısmı aslında gerçekten çok değerli bir şey.*

In other words, participants were complaining about the disingenuity and deception of the social media world. They emphasized that what is reflected on social media

and what actually happens do not coincide. They said they are uncomfortable and sometimes frightened due to this situation. In this case, the fact that the environment is insecure and deceptive with trust, the importance of which is emphasized by the participants, leads to an ambivalent view of relationships on social media. This ambivalent and insincere situation is explained by the participants as an environment in which they are uncomfortable and avoid establishing relationships.

#### **3.3.4. Selectivity in Sharing: Hiding Negativities and Showing Positivities**

Despite appearances to the contrary, the vast majority of the participants emphasized that the things described, the relationships established, or the things people try to show in social media often do not reflect reality and have a misleading side. Even though they complained about the deceitfulness of social media and claimed to share the entirety of their lives, they emphasize in their discourse that it is not possible or preferable to reflect their lives completely. In her discourse, Yaren summarized this as to the following statement:

Y: Even though I share it only with people like that, in my own life, I don't share myself completely. Of course, people who follow me cannot know exactly what I am going through.

*Original:*

*Y: Sadece böyle insanların oradan, yani burada tabii ki kendi hayatımda paylaşıyor olsam da tamamen kendimi paylaşmıyorum. Ne yaşadığımı falan beni takip eden insanlar tabii ki tam olarak bilemez.*

Participants underlined that people on social media tend to share the positive aspects of their lives and avoid sharing the negative aspects. In other words, they mentioned that they show what they want to show and what makes them look good on their social media accounts. All of the participants also stated that they are hesitant to share negative feelings and thoughts about their lives and are more inclined to share positive ones. Participants discussed this selectivity in their sharing in two dimensions. The first dimension is that participants often want to share the positive things and hide the negative things about their own mental worlds, which they bring together with not affecting others negatively. The second one is that participants hide

what they see as negative in their physical characteristics, which they call flaws. The examples of preferring sharing the positive aspects in Zeynep's discourse is given below.

Z: What everyone already thinks and knows, what people are aware of most of the time, is that literally everything or nothing on social media is real. If no one's life can really be that good, only the good parts are shared. I think people are right about this, of course I think so too. But I guess this is something I prefer. Actually, like me, for example, there are moments when I think I'm creatively depressed, and when I see a video or an article about it, I say, oh, there are things that make me feel good because I'm not alone. Actually, this is not the only thing, sharing or seeing the good things. But I guess it's because of my content style.

*Original:*

*Z: Herkesin zaten düşündüğü ve bildiği, çoğu zaman insanların farkında olduğu şey, sosyal medyadaki her şeyin veya hiçbir şeyin gerçek olmadığı tam olarak. Kimsenin hayatı gerçekten o kadar iyi olamazsa sadece iyi kısımları paylaşılıyor. Bu konuda haklı olduğunu düşünüyorum insanların, ben de öyle düşünüyorum tabii ki. Ama bu benim sanırım biraz da tercih ettiğim bir şey. Aslında ben mesela benim gibi, mesela ben kreatif anlamda bunalımda olduğumu düşündüğüm anlar oluyor ve bununla ilgili bir video veya bir yazı gördüğümde diyorum ki aa yalnız değilim diye beni iyi hissettiren şeyler oluyor. Aslında sadece olay bu olmuyor yani, iyileri paylaşmak veya görmek. Ama benim içerik tarzımdan dolayı galiba.*

Zeynep also exemplifies not sharing her negative states of her mentality in order not to affect people negatively, as follows.

Z: The things I don't share are usually my own psychology. Because there are people, influencers, on social media who write long articles like this or maybe share how they are feeling if they are depressed. Even though it was a bad period or a good period, I always hid my own feelings and thoughts a little more, I don't know why. But I always tried to be the person I am there, but you can't always be at the same point. During my difficult times, I often did not share why I was going through a difficult time or what I was experiencing. I think I'm more likely to share moments when I'm having fun and traveling. But I'm really upset about something, maybe something bothers me a lot, I can actually share about it, but it seems like sharing these will make people tired, upset or they don't want to see it.

*Original:*

*Z: Paylaşmadığım şeyler genelde herhalde böyle nasıl desem kendi psikolojim oluyor. Çünkü böyle uzun uzun yazılar yazan veya işte belki depresyondaysa onun nasıl geçtiğini paylaşan insanlar oluyor sosyal*



*medyada, influencerlar oluyor. Ben hep böyle kötü bir dönem olsa da iyi bir dönem olsa da kendi hislerimi ve düşüncelerimi hep biraz daha sakladım niyeyse bunu bilmiyorum. Ama hep de olduğum kişi olmaya çalıştım orada ama hep de bir noktada olunmuyor. Zor dönemlerimde çok böyle neden zor bir dönemden geçiyorum, ne yaşıyorum diye paylaşmadım. Biraz daha sanırım yani eğlendiğim ve gezdiğim anlar daha çok paylaşmaya yatkın oluyorum. Ama gerçekten bir şeye moralim bozulmuştur belki bir şey canımı çok sıkmıştır onunla ilgili aslında paylaşım da yapabilirim ama sanki bunları paylaşmak insanları böyle yoracak, üzecek veya bunu görmek istemiyorlar.*

Participants also expressed that they are more inclined to share what they see as good parts of themselves physically, while they preferred not to share what they see as flaws, and even specifically avoid doing so by using some applications to hide the reality.

Ç: I was treated for acne. ... Before that, I didn't take a lot of pictures of my face, with filters and stuff, but it's a bit of a social media thing. Everyone started taking pictures with filters and stuff like that. Social media has changed the perception of beauty. Such faceups, filters. This is a bit bad. Now that my face has improved a little more recently. When I turn on the camera like this because I see myself happier. For example, I shoot without filters now. I can say that. I didn't want to share it before, I was depressed.

R: What demoralized you there?

Ç: The ugliness. I mean a flaw. I saw myself as ugly.

Original:

Ç: Sivilce tedavisi gördüm. ... Bundan önce çok fazla böyle yüzümü çekmiyordum. Filtreli falan çekiyordum. Ama biraz sosyal medyanın da şeyi. Herkes böyle filtreli falan çekmeye başladı. Böyle güzellik algısını değiştirdi sosyal medya. Böyle faceuplar, filtreler. Bu biraz kötü. İşte şimdi son zamanlarda biraz daha yüzüm iyileştiği için. Kendimi daha mutlu gördüğüm için böyle kamerayı açtığımda. Mesela filtresiz çekim yapıyorum artık. Onu söyleyebilirim. Eskiden paylaşmak istemiyordum. Moralim bozuluyordu.

A: Neydi orada moralinizi bozan?

Ç: Çirkin. Kusur yani. Çirkin görüyordum kendimi.

Like Çağla, Nilsu also mentioned that she is not comfortable with sharing posts when she feels ugly and emphasized the fact that she does not fully reveal herself on social media.

N: Well, it was a very normal day. And when someone came and took a photo with me, she was a little girl, to be exact. And I liked it. She also saw

her as an idol. And that's because she loves taking photos. For example, I immediately followed that girl. When she asks something, I try to answer right away. I love leading the way. But at that moment, as I said, I am ugly, or I said, I am a little ugly today, but let's take a photo, but is it okay if you don't share it? Then when I said this, I thought of myself as something. Well, as I said, I mean, how should I put it, it means that sometimes you don't show yourself on social media. I actually contradicted myself there. Because I use it like a diary on social media.

*Original:*

*N: Hani çok normal bir gündü. Ve biri gelip benimle fotoğraf çekildiğinde küçük bir kızdı daha doğrusu. Ve hoşuma gitti. Biraz da idol olarak görüyordu. O da çünkü fotoğraf çekmeyi çok seviyormuş. Hemen takip ettim mesela o kıztı. Bir şey sorduğunda hemen cevap vermeyi falan cevaplıyorum. Yol göstermeyi seviyorum. Ama o an dediğim gibi çirkinim veya dedim ben bugün biraz çirkinim ama fotoğraf çekilelim ama paylaşmasan olur mu? Sonra bunu dediğimde ben kendimi şey olarak düşündüm. Ya dedim demek ki yani nasıl desem demek ki sosyal medyada sen kendini göstermiyorsun o zaman bazen. Kendi kendime çeliştim yani aslında orada. Çünkü ben burada sosyal medyada günlük gibi kullanıyorum.*

In other words, participants mentioned that they do not want to share and show the things on social media that they do not see and are not seen as mentally or physically good in themselves. Therefore, they revealed that their posts on social media reflect what is good in themselves. They also emphasized that social media is not a place where they reflect themselves fully and underlined that social media does not always reflect the truth.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of influencers who share their lives with others, and the role of the dynamics of relating on these experiences. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), method was used to have a deep understanding of these experiences. In the light of IPA, three superordinate themes emerged in the current study. The emanating superordinate themes are (1) *Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career*, (2) *Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer*, (3) *The Reverse Side of the Coin: Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience*. In this section, the themes will be discussed in accordance with the existing literature.

#### **4.1. Being In-Flu: Idolizing and Imitating Other Influencers at the Onset of Career**

In the current study, participants indicated that there were influencers they followed, were influenced by, and idolized in their career processes. They perceived the lives of these people as perfect, admired them, and strived to be like them. Lacanian theory explains this situation with the concept of mirror stage. In the mirror stage, the highlight is on the reflection that the infant sees itself in the mirror. However, the image actually does not reflect the baby itself. That is a reverse reflection of the infant, but whole and in control of its own body, unlike the fragmented body perception of the baby (Evans, 2006; Fink, 2022; Nobus, 2023). This Gestalt, complete image that the infant chases to have during its lifetime in the mirror, is defined as the ideal ego. The subject desires to see itself in this ideal way. He/she ignores any contrary situation and tries to match the self with this powerful image (Fink, 2022). The phone screen can be likened to the position of a mirror in this

context (Reich, 2024). Although the camera, and therefore the phone screen in this context, appears as a reflection of the images that appear on the screen, it also reflects the perception of these images by the people who see it (Homer, 2016). In other words, the idealized lives displayed on phone screens represent not only the inner worlds of those capturing and sharing these moments but also those who perceive these scenes as flawless by viewing them. Additionally, similar to the mirror, the phone screen contains many images that are positioned reversibly. Through the screen on the phone, many perfect lives, beautiful people, and begrudged relationships are projected as ideal and desirable to have. People are immersed in the imaginary world on the phone and chase the ideal images there (Zhakin, 2023). In this regard, the participants in this study emphasized other influencers whom they followed in social media and they perceived as an ideal, admired, and wanted to be like in their processes before becoming influencers. They stated that they dreamed of being like them in the past. This situation, which can be conceptualized with Lacanian theory, confirms the results of Zhakin's study about the usage of social networking sites and the conception of self. Zhakin (2023) states that social media projects the existence of an ideal and seemingly perfect life to its users. In social media, users create a virtual identity that is different from reality in the light of what is expected in popular culture, and the literature defines this identity as a second self. Under this condition, users' perception of reality about life and themselves changes and they feel pressure to have the life they perceive. This has a negative impact on the emotional state and self-worth of users (Zhakin, 2023). This conceptualization from the literature is identifiable with the discourse of 'being in-flu' mentioned by the participants in the present study. In other words, Nilsu used the expression 'in-flu' even though she wanted to say that she was semantically influenced by the lives, clothing styles and similar things she saw in other accounts. According to Lacan, language has a great importance in psychoanalysis. He summarizes the significance of language in psychoanalysis with the phrase 'the Unconscious is structured like a language'. With this statement, Lacan encapsulates that unconscious materials such as desires, inner conflicts and fears can only be expressed and studied through language and analyzing the unconscious can only be done through language. For this purpose, he utilizes signifiers, which are concepts that are expressed through language (Homer, 2016; Uçar, & Gençöz, 2019). In this

context, the concept of flu refers to an infectious disease. Infectious diseases are caused by pathogenic microorganisms that can spread directly or indirectly from one person to another (World Health Organization [WHO], 200). This narrative is a good summary of the imitation of what is perceived as an ideal in social media and the rapid spread of this ideal among users. In addition, Nilsu's statement that she wore a crop because she was influenced by another influencer despite perceiving herself as overweight and not liking her body can be given as an example of the existing ideal body perception and appreciation elements such as clothes spread on social media.

In this regard, as it was mentioned before, participants expressed that they were imitating other influencers whom they perceived as an ideal in their journey to become influencers. Imitation is an action that every human being, young or old, has been performing since ancient times. Although it is not surprising for humans that infants can also perform this action in the context of imitating the behaviors of adults, studies in this field have been carried out since the 1970s (Jones, 2017). For example, in the study of Meltzoff and Moore (1989), infants' imitation of facial movements and the mechanisms by which this occurs were investigated. They found that infants were able to imitate tongue protrusions and head movements. The researchers also reported that infants continued to perform this imitation from their memory after the screen stopped moving. Additionally, the results of the study of Nagy and colleagues (2013) confirm the results of the previous study and provide evidence for the selective imitation response of newborns. Moreover, findings proved that the imitation of the newborns is not an arousal response and that methodological factors manipulated the results. In the current study, when talking about their motivations and stories of starting to become influencers, participants frequently emphasized the influence of other influencers and their motivation to be like them. In other words, they emphasized that they watched the influencers they followed on social media, were influenced by and admired. As a result of this admiration, they imitated what the influencers do on their Instagram accounts and tried to be like the influencers they followed.

In psychoanalytic theory, imitation is explained by some concepts such as internalization, introjection, and identification. Internalization is defined as mental

interiorization of things and object relations belonging to the external world. Freud emphasized the regulatory effect of internalization between the external world and the internal world. It is also emphasized in the literature that with internalization, the intense tension of authority figures is reduced through adaptation (Taymur, & Boratav, 2013). On the other hand, introjection is described as the internalization of the properties of the external object as if they were one's own (Karakaş, 2017). Additionally, identification is acknowledged as the aftereffect of internalization and introjection. It is explained in Freud's works and psychoanalytic literature as the subject's adoption of an attribute belonging to another as his/her own and linking himself/herself to the thoughts and opinions of another (Evans, 2006; Karakaş, 2017). Lacan, on the other hand, explains identification in terms of the transformation of the subject when it assumes the mirror image. He defines it as the person identifying the mirror image and adopting that as his/her own (Evans, 2006). In the mirror stage, where the ego is formed, the infant identifies itself with the perfect image it sees in the mirror and adopts this image. The beginning of the ego, the imaginary identity, is possible through complete identification with the mirror image (Özcan, 2023). In this study, the fact that the participants followed the influencers they liked, imitated them, and created their own accounts can be considered in this context. This attitude of the participants can be interpreted as internalizing the ideal images they idolized and were influenced by, then adopting these images as their own, and maintaining their presence on social media by opening their own accounts by identifying with these ideal images.

However, studies in psychology literature indicate that identifying with idealized images can lead to significant stress when individuals either struggle to align themselves with these ideal perceptions or fear losing the idealized image once it is achieved (Nash et al., 2019). This situation can be exemplified by the stress and frustration that Pelin, one of the participants, mentioned in the next theme, experienced in order to adapt to the image of an older sister, which they thought was expected of them by their followers. Studies suggest that this stress, caused mostly by feelings of social exclusion, is associated with problematic use of social media (Casale et al., 2018).

#### **4.2. Source of Motivation and Reinforcements for Becoming an Influencer**

Lacan situates the gaze as beyond the vision of the subject, and describes it as in the field of the Other (Lacan, 1966/202; Uçurum, & Can, 2023). In the mirror stage theorized by Lacan, there is another presence in the mirror other than the infant's. It is the existence of the Other that constructs the baby's external world, reflects that it has a complete self, creates and regulates the illusion of "self-image", and leads to the construction of the ego (Lacan, 1964/2019). The mother (i.e. the first big Other), exposes the infant to who it is and what it looks like. In other words, the infant perceives its existence in the external world through the eyes and gaze of the mother. The reactions and discourses of the mother, who accompanies the child in the mirror, function as a mirror. It creates a reference point for the child about oneself and the external world. She tells the child "This is you! You are awesome! I see you!". This labeling gives the infant an identity and an idea of what it is in the eyes of the mother. The infant fixates on that discourse and focuses its existence on maintaining and capturing that. The infant, who sees itself through mother's eyes and recognizes its entity through her discourses, can only see itself when it is seen by the mother and feels that it exists when it is approved by her. This means that the subject positions himself/herself as the object of desire of the Other. In other words, the subject, who is obsessed with what the Other wants from him/her and his/her image in the eyes of the Other, is on the way to become the object of the Other's desire instead of being a desiring subject (Özcan, 2023). In the current study, participants frequently addressed their desire to gain the approval and admiration of their followers and explained this approval and admiration as their motivation to continue. Participants indicated that receiving approval and appreciation as a phenomenon makes their lives more pleasant and associated this with their other relationships. This situation can be similar to the effort of the subject, who is trying to catch the gaze and positioned in the desire of the Other, to exist in the eyes of the Other by getting approval. Participants continue this dynamic with the Other in their relationships with their followers and chasing what their followers want from them to get approval.

This approval-seeking behavior can also be an example of individuals doing what is expected and desired of them and fitting into the mold imposed on them by society or

elders. In today's society, where achievement and consumption are primary markers of individual identity, increasing pressure on people to conform to standards of success and taste often leads to issues like stress and burnout. This, in turn, contributes to the development of addictions and mental disorders among individuals striving to adapt to these ideals (Verhaeghe, 2014).

This search for approval, which takes place in social media posts and relationships with followers, is also addressed in different studies in the psychology literature. The theme of approval seeking reported by the participants in the current study confirms the results in the literature. For example, Nash and colleagues (2019) concluded in their study that the likes and followers received on social media are related to social acceptance and approval behavior. On the other hand, this study emphasizes that seeking acceptance and approval, especially in the narcissistic population, functions as an escape method and has a redemptive role by protecting narcissists from social exclusion (Nash et al., 2019). In parallel with other studies in the literature, the study of Casale and colleagues (2018) shows that individuals who use social media primarily for approval-seeking and enhancing their self-worth are more likely to develop a dependency on these platforms, often reaching levels of problematic use. This is similar to the participants' reported motivation to share more as they receive approval and likes, and to increase their motivation to continue as influencers.

The motivation to continue as they receive approval and appreciation may also be due to participants changing the way they perceive themselves. In Lacanian theory, in contrast to the fragmented body perception they experience, infants experience a Gestalt body image in the mirror through the discourse of the mother. The ideal image seen in the mirror, which is the ideal ego, is what enables the misrecognition that underlies the self to form. Despite all its deficiencies, the subject tends to see himself/herself in a certain ideal and tends to ignore things that do not correspond with it. For this reason, there is an impulse in the subject that strives to identify itself with this omnipotent and complete image in the mirror (Fink, 2022). On the other hand, this identification comes with a price of alienation of oneself. Alienation is an inevitable result of identification with the image one sees in the mirror external to oneself, which is a reflection of its own, but not exactly itself. That is, the unified



sense of self is acquired at the cost of the self becoming someone else and the subject will be trying to overlap these two images through life (Homer, 2016; Özcan, 2023). When talking about their relationships with their followers, the participants also emphasized the hidden meaning of being an influencer, which is touching the lives of followers, healing them, and leaving a mark on their lives. Participants, who received comments from their followers such as “You motivated me”, “You lifted me up”, “You have such traces in my life”, mentioned that as they heard these comments, they took on this image and their motivation to continue increased. This situation is similar to the child fixated on the discourse of the Other and the ideal image in the mirror stage, fulfilling that discourse by maintaining the admirable in this context, and becoming the object of desire of the Other. The fact that they persist in what they do as they hear these discourses can be explained as an effort to remain the object of desire.

On the other hand, participants are in an effort to be seen, liked, and influenced on social media. They often mention the importance of being seen by people, increasing the number of likes and followers, and touching people's lives in their subjectivity. Participants also emphasized that these points have a deep meaning and are a great motivation for them to continue. This situation can be considered as a defense mechanism against the feeling of insignificance and the spiral of meaninglessness that has emerged with the developing new world order (Becker, 2016). In other words, in the world of social media, where the lives, experiences, and achievements of others are always emphasized to be better and more prominent, and which reinforces the feeling of insignificance, being involved in the narcissistic culture by getting caught in the cycle of having a great influence on people's lives and being liked by people can be interpreted as adapting to the perversion of society, because being mentioned, admired, influencing, and touching people's lives can also be interpreted as adopting the position of the Other (Becker, 2016).

Additionally, participants in this study frequently noted that their followers aspire to their lifestyle and wish to live similarly. Those who felt they were viewed as role models described being an influencer as having the ability to impact others and serve as a model for them. Participants expressed pride in guiding others and serving as

role models, often referencing the influencers they previously admired. Many shared that they had once aspired to be like these role models, only to find that now, as influencers themselves, their own followers sought to emulate their lifestyle. In this context, participants identified with the 'perfect' images they saw in their reflections on the phone screen—living idealized lives, doing whatever they wanted whenever they wanted—and constructed their identities around this idealized image.

From this perspective, in one of the subordinate themes of this theme, participants also mentioned the importance of the word calling by as “big sister” for them. They associated this word with being taken seriously, dispensing advice, being listened to and being valued by others. Participants, who reported that they were not taken seriously and not listened to by family members in the past, emphasized the satisfaction of being listened to and advised by their followers. The participants, who mentioned that they were the younger members of their families, attributed their feelings of not being taken seriously to their age. They also emphasized that they had previously desired recognition and respect in their families and social environment. This situation evokes the experience of the infant who admires the omnipotent image in the mirror, wants to become that “big” image and identifies with that. However, participants said that this experience of completeness comes with a price; that is, being a big sister is a big responsibility for them. They mentioned that they restricted their own actions and discourse after they started to be called "big sister" and that they felt constricted in doing so. When they started to be referred to as such in the beginning of their career, they forced themselves to pay attention to how they acted and what they said. For instance, Pelin expressed that she spends too much effort to prevent herself from swearing and performing wrong actions in front of the followers in social media sharings. In other words, participants have restricted things that belong to their own identity to become a role model. It brings to mind the alienation of the subject from himself, which is the price of identifying with the ideal image in the mirror (Evans, 2006).

In addition to the identification and alienation of self, according to Lacan, the gaze is established even before the existence of the subject. It exists from the very beginning and is outside the subject's vision. Lacan says that the gaze belongs to the field of the

Other. This means that the gaze is the gaze of the Other and the subject is only the object of that gaze (Lacan, 1966/2022; Uçurum, & Can, 2023). Participants in this study combined the experience of sharing their lives with being visible and talked about their desire to be seen and show themselves. The participants also emphasized the importance of being at the forefront in their lives and mentioned the relationship of the audience in this dual dynamic. They pointed out that in a life without an audience, it would be as if things had never happened. This is an example of the blurring of boundaries as a result of the adoption of a system based on showing and appearing with the introduction of technology into our lives. This situation which has become a reality of society in this context can resemble the baby in the mirror who cannot see itself and establish its existence when it is not seen by the mother. Therefore, it is a situation where the subject who is not seen by the big Other questions its own existence. In this regard, participants mention themselves as the object of the gaze of the others. This object is the object of the scopic drive; it is connected with desire and is a partial manifestation of desire (Evans, 2006). This brings to mind the concept of exhibitionism, which is included in perversion in psychoanalytic theory. As it was mentioned in previous sections, in exhibitionism, the subject strives to become the object of the Other's pleasure by capturing the gaze of the Other through exhibition. In this direction, it creates a mutual jouissance space by plugging the Other's lack (Miller, 2006). The impulse of the participants to share more and more as they share and as they are wondered by their followers can be explained with the unlimited jouissance that comes from exhibiting their lives and catching the gaze of the others. Addictions, particularly social media addiction, can be viewed as a consequence of a lack of boundaries around jouissance, leading individuals to seek external satisfaction. With the diminishing role of regulatory functions by authority figures, the boundless nature of the market economy, and societal pressures that encourage the pursuit of pleasure, individuals often search for their self-worth and validation through material possessions, attempting to fill their internal voids in this manner. However, as they chase greater satisfaction, they find themselves trapped in a cycle of perpetual dissatisfaction. Consequently, the rise of technology and capitalist ideologies has contributed to increased rates of addictions and ADHD in the new world order (McGowan, 2004). This situation can be

considered as a result of the capitalist discourse that has become widespread with social media and increased with the concept of influencers.

On the other hand, although the participants' relationships with their followers and other influencers are similar to the subject's relationship with the Other and are evaluated in that context, these are the people with whom the subject has a relationship on the horizontal axis. This leads us to the theory of new psychic economies developed by Charles Melman. In the twenty-first century, with the evaporation of ideologies, references and fundamental texts in the changing world order and the development of technology and capitalist discourse, the boundaries and limits that form the basis of civilization have begun to diminish. That causes the Other to be threatened with losing the legislative function (Melman, 2010). As a result of this changing world order and the loss of the legislative function of the Other, vertical relations lose their importance while horizontal relations and the gaze of others gain weight (Melman, 2010). As can be seen in this current work, the subject's relations with the Other, the effort to get approval from the Other, and to be seen by the Other have been replaced by the approval and gaze of others on the horizontal level. Participants described being deeply concerned with what their followers enjoy, what content their audience wants to see, and what will be liked and accepted on their accounts. This preoccupation, as reflected in their narratives, highlights their ongoing pursuit of approval and validation from their followers. In other words, as a result of the emptiness of the Other, individuals try to obtain self-worth and approval from external sources, such as social media, alcohol and so on. In this regard, participants strive to get their needs for approval and to be seen by those who are similar to themselves through social media. Addictions, in this context, social media addiction, can be considered as a result of the lack of limits to jouissance by turning to external satisfaction. With the evisceration of the legislative function of the Other and the increase in the limitlessness of the market economy, individuals seek their inner value and approval through materials and try to fill their inner voids in this way.

Moreover, this situation leads to the disappearance of limits in the relations of subjects and the world order, and everything is lived as publicly visible. Melman

(2010) explains the rise of the image and the fact that it no longer functions as a signifier in this context. He underlines that people tend to show themselves completely in electronic media. The participants of this study also talked about their urge to share their lives, explaining sharing every moment of their lives gives them pleasure and satisfaction. They also added that they continue to share as long as people continue to be curious, and that they cannot set limits to their sharing and stop themselves from doing so. The inability of participants to stop the impulse to share is an example of the inability to limit pleasure as a result of the new world order since the gaze is the object of the scopical drive, and at the same time, a source of jouissance (Evans, 2006).

#### **4.3. The Reverse Side of the Coin; “Discomforts of and Unknowns About Social Media Experience”**

The concept of uncanny, which is explained in previous sections in detail, can be explained as an event or object that is mysterious and includes anxious uncertainty about what is real but, at the same time, strangely familiar (Freud, 1919/1955; Karakaş, 2017; Windsor, 2019). Freud emphasized familiarity in the word uncanny and defined it as discomfort and fear of something very familiar but repressed in the past. As Freud mentioned, these phenomena relate to things that are frightening, that evoke fear and horror (Freud, 1919/1955; Windsor, 2019).

According to Freud (1919/1955), there are many situations that create the feeling of uncanny. As one of them, Freud mentioned the fear of being followed and harmed by the evil eye. Although this stems from the person's own feelings of jealousy and harm because of what the other person has, it is suppressed in the past and projected onto other people. According to Freud, this feeling coincides with the fear of being followed, watched and harmed by other people, and the uncertainty of the stalkers' intentions also causes fear and anxiety. Although the participants of this study often talked about their desire to share every moment of their lives, they said that they did not actually know their followers and emphasized their discomfort with being seen and followed by unknown people. The participants underlined the fear they felt of being followed by people they did not know and whose intentions were unknown to

them, whether good or bad. In other words, the unknown intention creates a threat to get harmed by other people for the participants. They also said that this situation posed a threat to them and their lives from time to time, and emphasized the measures they took to control this situation. This fear, anxiety and distress expressed by the participants about being watched by strangers is in accordance with Freud's definition of the uncanny in getting harm from the unfamiliar.

On the other hand, although the followers are people the participants do not know personally, the participants often highlighted similarities between themselves and their followers during the interviews. They mentioned following other influencers before becoming influencers themselves, feeling like fans of those influencers, and even experiencing admiration and envy towards them. In other words, despite being strangers, these followers are seen as extensions of the participants. This connection relates to the concept of the "uncanny" — the familiar within the unfamiliar, where the unknown feels strangely recognizable. Furthermore, from a perspective that is in alignment with the theory, the participants also stated that it was caused by the uncertainty of the unknown. In addition, some of the participants highlighted that they were close to their followers but felt insecure about being followed by people other than their followers and talked about the desire to “keep it to ourselves” with their followers. This is another example of the discomfort of the unfamiliar as exemplified by the participants. The fear of the unknown, which is deeply rooted in human psychology, is explained as evolutionarily based and vitally fundamental in evolutionary literature. This fear is the result of an internal mechanism that exists to override danger by eliminating the unknown, to reduce anxiety and to maintain life (Anderson et al., 2016). In this context, in line with the discourses of the participants, the discomfort they feel from the unknown can be interpreted as arising from the presence of an unknown that may pose a threat to the self-image and life they have established on social media. In other words, the phenomenon of discomfort from being followed by unknown participants may be considered as a threat to the existence of the self they have established on the screen. In this context, the measures they take and the desire not to be followed by strangers can be considered as measures taken by the participants to protect the images they project.

Furthermore, participants stated that people, lives, and relationships on social media are deceptive and that people do everything for their own interests. They highlighted the difficulty of establishing a relationship of trust in the social media community and withdrew themselves in order not to be harmed in this deceptive world. Participants also said that the comments made by fake accounts may actually come from a close friend and indicated the feeling of discomfort caused by the unknown or uncertainty includes familiarity. This discourse of the participants can be described as a feeling of uncanny due to uncertainty in a deceptive world which may include familiarity and where they do not know what is really behind.

Freud (1919/1955) also explored the unsettling nature of the 'double' in his theory of the uncanny. He suggested that through the formation of the ego, the subject becomes alienated from himself by identifying with and simultaneously repressing certain images. This process creates self-doubt within the subject. Freud (1919/1955) argued that encountering others who resemble oneself evokes a sense of existential threat and a fear of annihilation. Participants who mentioned that there are large numbers of peers and influencers doing similar work in the social media market indicated that this causes competition. However, they said that this competition disturbed and frightened them, and they kept themselves out of the competition in order not to be harmed. However, at the same time, they found themselves in that competition and comparison. In other words, the participants, who are identified by the image they see on the screen, compete with the reflections in the mirror on the one hand. On the other hand, they experience a fear and confusion of being and withdraw from the competition as a result of alienation from themselves. The reason is that sustaining competition threatens their existence and involves the danger of extinction.

Moreover, as it was mentioned, the image in the mirror has an admirable, whole, ideal appearance. Although the infant imagines this image as its own, it also realizes something. This image does not reflect the fragmented perception of the body that it experiences, it is whole and complete, just like the other people it sees around, such as siblings and parents (Fink, 2022). Therefore, this image is not only an ideal to admire and strive to become, but also a threatening rival for the subject. This rivalry

between the subject and the image in the mirror is also reflected in the subject's future relationships (Homer, 2016). In this study, participants stated that although they were frightened and discomforted by the competitive environment in their world, they also compared themselves to other influencers and found themselves competing with them. Participants in this study stated that even though they were afraid and uncomfortable of competing, they maintained competitions. Participants who said that they compared themselves with other influencers based on the number of likes and viewings stated that they felt unsuccessful, jealous of them, and sometimes resentful. Because they realized that others have traveled more than them, have better views, and have more likes. This situation is similar to the feeling of disappointment, jealousy and competition in the mirror stage when the infant experiences its own body as fragmented but sees that its peers around have a complete body and can control it. For this reason, participants compete with their peers to prove their existence, strive to reach the ideal ego, and try to be complete.

On the other hand, the perception of wholeness is a state that is reflected to the infant from the outside world and that the infant does not actually possess. For this reason, it poses a danger and arouses violence because it is at risk of disappearing at any moment (Erten et al., 2022). The infant attributes these violent and malicious thoughts to the outside world and creates a perception of threat to itself (Roth, 2001). In this study, the discomfort of being seen by people in the outside world, the fears of being harmed, and the competition with the idealized images that the participants frequently emphasized can be interpreted as the thoughts of violence that the paranoid subject, who is alienated from himself by identifying with an external image, attributes to the external world due to the threat of extinction and the perception of danger.

Additionally, influencer marketing plays a crucial role in the careers of these participants, especially regarding their income sources and competition with peers. Participants frequently referenced their earnings and brand collaborations when discussing competition with other influencers. This reflects the dynamics described in the Theory of Multi-level Selection (Johnson et al, 2013), where influencers are in constant competition with others similar to themselves to maintain their existence



and enhance their position in the business landscape. This is an emphasis on the importance of competition at the marketing level and the confirmation of the explanations based on psychoanalytic theory in this context.

Participants in this study also said that nothing that is shared on social media is real. Although they asserted that they share everything about their lives in social media, there are things that they do not share. Participants mentioned that they do not share what they see as negative in their lives and mentalities but only share what they see as positive things and their joyful moments. They often emphasize “they want to see this” when talking about their followers. In addition, the participants said that they do not share what they see as physical defects. For example, Çağla exemplifies this as acne, and her attempt to hide it as if it does not exist with the help of phone applications. This shows that participants who have the assumption in their minds that there is a desired and expected image by their followers. In order to realize this image, they draw a profile as if they fit that image and share what they think is expected from them. This situation brings to mind the position taken by the subject on the discourse stamped by the Other in the mirror, which gives information about the expectations, demands and wishes of the Other assumed by the subject. The subject tries to read the desire of the Other on the discourses of the Other and to be positioned in it, to be the object of its desire (Özcan, 2023). Fulfilling the expectations of their followers is equivalent to becoming the object of desire. However, as mentioned in the previous theme, what should not be overlooked is that the participants are talking about being the object of desire of others on the horizontal axis and fulfilling their expectations. Moreover, the image formed in the minds of the participants is the result of what the mother, acting as a mirror, reflects to the subject. In other words, the participants adopt the image they see and assume as ideal and share posts in their profiles that are in line with that image, for example, that they have fun, look perfect, reflect a good life, and reflect their lives on the screen as if they were complete and perfect.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first qualitative study in the psychology literature that aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences and meanings associated with being an influencer, as well as their relationship with social media. It interprets this phenomenon within the scope of existing literature. Additionally, the current body of research includes limited studies that seek to explore the social media landscape from the influencers' perspective. This study is pioneering in Turkish literature as it specifically examines the experience of using social media—particularly Instagram—from the viewpoint of influencers.

The implications of this study provide a comprehensive view of influencers' social media experiences on Instagram, along with theoretical insights and practical recommendations for professionals working with these individuals and their audiences in clinical settings. By evaluating and theorizing influencers' experiences based on their own narratives, this research fills a significant gap in the literature.

As highlighted by Melman (2010), the shifting world order has given rise to new psychological structures, resulting in a broader prevalence of mental health issues such as ADHD, eating disorders, and addictions. The concept of the influencer has emerged in this evolving technological and social landscape, influencing people's well-being and mental states, as shown in various studies. Understanding this experience from the influencers' perspective is crucial for comprehending the experiences of their audiences and the broader social impact they create. Moreover, this study highlights the effects of the new world order shaped by technology, social media, and the rise of influencers on body image and identity development. It emphasizes the potential consequences, such as addiction and problematic body

perceptions. Therefore, this study offers a theoretical framework for understanding the evolving social structures influenced by technological advancements, guiding clinicians to consider the functions and methods of unconscious processes in this new social context.

There are also limitations of this study. First of all, this study did not specify a range for the number of followers. At the beginning of this study, the number of followers is designated as an inclusion criterion, and it is thought to include the influencers who have more than 100.000 followers in the study. On the other hand, it was observed that the themes did not differentiate. On the other hand, themes may differ in a different study with a different sample. Therefore, specifying the number of followers made it more conventional to obtain specific data to understand the experience of being an influencer. In other words, limiting the number of followers, which constitutes a significant part of being an influencer, could have provided more homogeneous data to illuminate the experience. In future studies, limiting the number of participants may provide more homogeneous results. Secondly, in this study, there are no culture-specific elements identified in this study. In other words, if this study had been conducted in a different cultural context rather than within Turkish culture, the results might have differed. However, the participants in this study did not explicitly refer to any specific cultural factors or elements influencing their experiences. The existing literature suggests that the introduction of the internet, particularly social media, into everyday life has significantly increased intercultural interactions. This heightened interaction has contributed to a reduction in perceived cultural differences. In essence, the rise of the internet has fostered the development of a global online community, making cultural distinctions less pronounced and promoting a sense of shared global identity (Marcoccia, 2012). For this reason, there may not have been any culturally specific data from a sample so immersed in technology and social media for these reasons. Future researchers can bring a different perspective to this issue if they conduct a study focusing on discourses on culturally specific elements in this topic or develop their study questions in that direction.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this thesis is conducted to examine the experiences of influencers who share their lives as lifestyle and the meaning of and the dynamics of it for them in the scope of existing literature. The results of this current study revealed that admiration, being influenced, and imitation are important factors of becoming an influencer. At the beginning of their career, influencers were influenced by other influencers and contents; they took the other influencers as role models and wished to be like them. Afterwards, they imitated them and their contents and built their careers on this influence and imitation. This influence and imitation are the results of fascination with, and subsequent identification with, what they see on the screen as an ideal ego.

The results of the study also show that being visible and getting approval are important building blocks of the experience of being an influencer. Influencers experience great enjoyment from being seen and being on stage. They explain the experience of sharing their lives in terms of this enjoyment and the limitations they are unable to bring to this enjoyment. The inability to limit the pleasure of sharing and exhibiting life is explained with the unlimited *jouissance* that comes from exhibiting their lives and catching the gaze of the Other. In addition, the approval and compliments that influencers receive as a result of their posts also increase their motivation to share. The aspiration to be seen and to receive approval is the product of an effort to catch the gaze in relation to the Other. The effort made in relation to these is the product of an effort to exist in the eyes of the Other and to occupy the position of the object of desire. On the other hand, the gaze or approval is sought not from the Other on the vertical axis, but from the followers on the horizontal axis. As a result of the loss of the legislative function of the Other in the new world order, mentioned by Melman (2010), they spend the effort to meet the need for the gaze and

approval, previously required in vertical relations, from others in horizontal relations. Also, touching the lives of others, being taken seriously, being a role model for the followers, and having their opinions valued are other factors that influencers cite as important motivators for continuing their careers. However, participants added that this comes with a price. These motivations, which belong to the imaginary order, reflect an ideal I, and as a result of identification with this ideal ego, the subject becomes alienated from himself.

In addition, the results of this study show that while there are many factors that motivate influencers in their profession, there are also situations where they feel uncomfortable in this experience. For example, being followed by strangers on social media, the deceptive world of social media to which influencers themselves have adapted, and the competition therein make influencers feel uncomfortable and threatened. This discomfort and threat can be explained by the sense of uncanny arising from the unknown. This unknown, in fact, refers to the return of what was known but repressed in the pre-oedipal period (Freud, 1919/1955).

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

<b>UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ</b> <b>APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER</b>	 <b>ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ</b> <b>MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY</b>
DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800 ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY T. +90 312 210 22 91 F. +90 312 210 79 59 ueam@metu.edu.tr www.ueam.metu.edu.tr	
Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu	18 OCAK 2024
Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)	
İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu	
<b>Sayın Prof.Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ</b> Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Nagihan Bekçi Gökçeoğlu'nun " <i>Influencerların Sosyal Medya Kullanım Deneyimlerinin Niteliksel Açıdan İncelenmesi</i> " başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek <b>0183-ODTÜİAEK-2024</b> protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım	
Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN Başkan	
Prof.Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK Üye	Doç. Dr. Ali Emre Turgut Üye
Doç. Dr. Şerife SEVİNÇ Üye	Doç.Dr/ Murat Perit ÇAKIR Üye
Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Süreyya ÖZCAN KABASAKAL Üye	Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ Üye

## B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### ARAŞTIRMAYA GÖNÜLLÜ KATILIM FORMU

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Klinik Psikoloji Bölümü Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Nagihan Bekçi Gökçeoğlu tarafından Prof. Dr. Tülin Gençöz danışmanlığı ve Dr. Öğr. Üyesi. Derya Özbek Şimşek eş-danışmanlığındaki yüksek lisans tezi kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu form sizi araştırma hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

#### **Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir?**

Araştırmanın amacı, influencerların sosyal medya kullanım alışkanlıklarını, bu süreçteki deneyimlerini ve bu sürecin psikolojik doğasını incelemektir.

#### **Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz?**

Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz, yaklaşık olarak 60-90 dakika sürmesi beklenen bir görüşmeye girmeniz beklenmektedir. Görüşme esnasında size bir dizi açık uçlu sorular yöneltilecek ve bunları cevaplamanız beklenecektir. Görüşme, değerlendirilmek üzere ses kaydına alınacaktır.

#### **Sizden Topladığımız Bilgileri Nasıl Kullanacağız?**

Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Çalışmada sizden kimlik veya kurum belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır.

#### **Katılımınızla ilgili bilmeniz gerekenler:**

Çalışma, genel olarak kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular veya uygulamalar içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz çalışmayı yarıda bırakıp çıkmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda çalışmayı uygulayan kişiye çalışmadan çıkmak istediğinizi söylemeniz yeterli olacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ettiğiniz için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

**Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz ... adresine yazabilirsiniz**

***Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.***

(Formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra uygulayıcıya geri veriniz).

İsim Soyad

Tarih

İmza

### C. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1- Kısaca kendinizi tanıtır mısınız?
- 2- Influencer olmak ne demek, siz bunu nasıl tanımlarsınız (insanları etkilemek ne demek, nasıl bir şey)
- 3- Influencer olmadan önceki hayatınız nasıldı? (aile hayatı, anne babası ile ilişkileri, sosyal ilişkileri)
- 4- Influencer olduktan sonra hayatı değişti mi? Değiştiyse nasıl değişti? (aile ilişkileri, sosyal ilişkileri vs.)
- 5- İlginiz nasıl başladı, nasıl karar verdiniz? / Influencerlığa nasıl yöneldiniz? (Nasıl yöneldi, nasıl gelişti, alanı nasıl seçmiş, günde kaç saatini sosyal medyada geçiriyor)
- 6- Takipçilerinizin olması size nasıl geliyor (bilinmek, kendini insanlara açmak, tanınmak, takip edilmek)
- 7- Beğeni almak nasıl bir şey? (Beğenilmek, tanınmak, merak edilmesi...)
- 8- Siz birilerini takip ediyor musunuz? (Kimleri takip ediyorsunuz, nasıl hesaplar, kaç kişi...)
- 9- Gizli hesabınız var mı? (Varsa onu nasıl kullanıyorsunuz, ne amaçla kullanıyorsunuz? Kendiniz mi yönetiyorsunuz?) (Yorumlar paylaştığınız içeriği nasıl etkiliyor)
- 10- Linç kültürü olan bir iş, linçleri nasıl deneyimliyorsunuz?
- 11- Takipçilerinizden gelen geri bildirimleri nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz (yönetiyorsunuz, bu sizi zorluyor mu?)
- 12- Reklam alıyor musunuz? Ne tarz reklamlar alıyorsunuz? (Baştaki deneyiminizle reklam almaya başladıktan sonraki süreç arasında bir fark var mı? Varsa nasıl bir fark var?)
- 13- Influencer olmadan önceki ve olduktan sonraki paylaşımlarınız farklılaştı mı? Nasıl değişti? (Motivasyonu bundan nasıl etkilendi) Siz nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?



14- Hesabınızı oluşturduğunuz profil ile benzerlik ve farklılıklarınız nelerdir?

Bununla ilgili ne düşünüyorsunuz?

15- Konuşulanlara ek olarak eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?



## **D. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET**

### **1. GİRİŞ**

#### **1.1. Arka Plan ve Kavramsallaştırma**

##### **1.1.1. Sosyal Medya Kullanımının Tarihçesi ve Kavramsallaştırılması**

Sosyal medya, internet tabanlı bir iletişim platformudur. İstatistikler, dünya nüfusunun yaklaşık yüzde 63'ünün sosyal medya kullandığını (Kapios, 2024) ve her kullanıcının günde yaklaşık iki buçuk saatini bu platformlarda geçirdiğini göstermektedir (Kemp, 2024). Literatürde insanların sosyal medya platformlarını çoğunlukla birbirleriyle etkileşime geçmek, bilgi ve ilgi alanlarını paylaşmak için kullandıkları sonucuna varılmaktadır (Berryman vd., 2018). Ayrıca, iş ve pazarlama gibi farklı amaçları ve boyutları da vardır (Rugova ve Prenaj, 2016).

##### **1.1.1.1. İletişim Bağlamında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı**

Sosyal medya, yüz yüze temas olmadan etkileşime olanak sağladığından, kişilerarası iletişimde zorlanan bireylerin iletişim becerilerini geliştirmede önemli bir rol oynamaktadır (Valkenburg ve Peter, 2007). Öte yandan, sosyal medya kullanımı bireylerin yüz yüze etkileşime geçme oranlarını azalttığından bireyleri sosyal çevrelerinden uzaklaştırarak doğrudan izole edebilir. Bu etki, özellikle sosyal medya kullanımı bağımlılık düzeyine ulaştığında daha da belirgin hale gelmektedir (Savcı ve Aysan, 2016).

##### **1.1.1.2. Pazarlama ve Reklamcılık Bağlamında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı**

Sosyal medya platformları, işletmelerin daha düşük maliyetlerle geniş kitlelere ulaşabilmelerinde ve müşteri etkileşimini güçlendirmelerinde önemli etkiye sahiptir

(Rugov ve Prenaj, 2016). Bu bağlamda, firmaların pazardaki kalıcılığını artırmak amacıyla pazarlama ve reklamcılıkta kullanılan etkili bir tekniktir (De Veirman vd., 2019).

#### **1.1.1.3. Sosyoloji Bağlamında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı**

Sosyal medyanın toplumsal hayata girmesiyle birlikte bireyler ve toplumlar arasındaki etkileşim hızlanmıştır (Güzel, 2020). Aynı zamanda toplumsal normlardaki değişimleri de etkileyerek yeni normlar yaratmaktadır (Arias, 2019). Örneğin Åberg (2020), görünüşle ilgili yorum normlarının sosyal medya üzerindeki etkisinin uzun vadeli psikolojik etkileri olabileceği bulgusuna ulaşmıştır. Bunun sonucunda, özellikle genç kadınlar arasında beden memnuniyetsizliği artmaktadır.

#### **1.1.1.4. Psikoloji Bağlamında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı**

Literatürdeki çalışmalar sosyal medya kullanımı ile kullanıcıların iyi olma hali ve özsaygıları arasında bir ilişki bulmuştur (Zhang vd., 2023). Ayrıca sosyal medya kullanımının kullanıcıların bilişsel kapasitelerini olumlu yönde etkilediği de bulgular arasındadır (Quinn, 2018). Öte yandan çalışmalar, sosyal medya kullanımının stres, düşük özgüven, depresyon, intihar fikirleri (O'Reilly vd., 2018) ve bağımlılık (Bilgin vd., 2020) ile ilişkili olduğunu belirtmektedir.

Ayrıca, özellikle gençlerin sosyal medyadan aldıkları geri bildirimlere onay arama ve dışlanma korkusu üzerinden duygusal olarak yatırım yaptıklarını ve bu yatırımın gençlerin kimlik gelişimi üzerinde büyük etkileri olduğu yönünde bulgulara ulaşılmıştır (Ward, 2017).

##### **1.1.1.4.1. Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı**

Sosyal medya bağımlılığı, sosyal medyanın aşırı ve kompulsif bir şekilde kontrol edilmesi olarak tanımlanabilir (Zivnуска vd., 2019). Aktaş (2021). Kendini bağımlı olarak tanımlayan kişilerin sosyal medya kullanımlarında zaman kontrolü sıkıntısı yaşadıklarını ve kendilerine koydukları sınırların olmamasına vurgu yaptıklarını belirtmektedir. Ayrıca bu kişiler, sosyal medyayı kendilerini güçlü ve sınırsız

hissettiren bir platform olarak tanımlamışlardır. Bununla birlikte, kullanıma başladıktan sonra sosyal medyasız yaşayamadıklarını ve kontrolünü kayb ettiklerini vurgulamaktadırlar (Aktaş, 2021).

### **1.1.2. Instagram'ın Kavramsallaştırılması ve Tarihçesi**

En sık kullanılan sosyal medya platformlarından biri, 2010 yılında kurulan Instagram'dır (Mou, 2020). Instagram görsel olarak pazarlamaya uygun olması, kolay iletişim kurulabilmesi ve ücretsiz olması nedeniyle tercih edilmektedir (Mattern, 2016). Kullanıcılar, Instagram kullanım motivasyonlarını zevk alma, başkalarıyla sosyal etkileşim kurma, merak ve diğer insanların ne yaptığını bilme isteği olarak belirtmişlerdir (Soletti vd., 2022). Ayrıca Instagram'ın kullanıcıların beden ve imaj algıları üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri de rapor edilmiştir (Baker vd., 2019).

### **1.1.3. Sosyal Medya Influencer'ları**

Varlığı Instagram ile özdeşleşen influencer'lar, sosyal medyada takipçi kitlesi oluşturmuş kişilerdir. Günlük yaşam deneyimlerini, hayatlarını ve oluşturdukları içerikleri sosyal medya platformları üzerinden paylaşmaktadırlar. Bu paylaşımlar doğrultusunda liderlik ederek takipçiler üzerinde önemli bir etki oluşturmaktadırlar (Freberg vd., 2021). Araştırmalar, influencer'ların takipçileri üzerindeki duygusal destek kazanma, keyifli deneyimler yaşama, empati hissetme ve iyi bir zihniyet oluşturma gibi olumlu etkilerinin yanında anksiyete, beden imajından memnuniyetsizlik ve sosyal karşılaştırma gibi olumsuz etkilerinden de bahsetmektedirler (Movaghar vd., 2023).

## **1.2. Psikanalitik Kuram Üzerine Bir Keşif**

### **1.2.1. Lacanyen Psikanalitik Teori**

Ünlü bir psikanalist olan Charles Melman, 21. yüzyılda teknolojinin gelişmesi ve sosyal medyanın insanların hayatına girmesi sonucunda sınırların ve yasakların ortadan kalkmaya başladığından bahsetmektedir. Başka'nın yasa koyma işlevini

yitirmesiyle birlikte toplum sınırsız bir zevk alma çabası içine girmiştir (Melman, 2010).

#### **1.2.1.1. Yeni Ruhsal Yapılanmalar**

Teknolojideki gelişmeler ve bunun sınır tanımaz doğası sonucunda insanlar teknoloji aracılığıyla gerçeklik üzerinde etki sahibi olmaya başlamış, sanal olan gerçek olana tercih edilmeye başlanmıştır (Dimitriadis, 2024; Özkan, 2020). Melman (2010)'a göre, teknoloji ve sosyal medyanın gelişmesiyle sınırlar ve yasa ortadan kalkmakta, otorite meşruiyetini yitirmekte, Başka'nın yasa koyucu işlevinin içi boşalmaktadır. Bunun sonucunda toplum gösteri toplumu haline gelmiş ve sınırsız zevke odaklanarak sapkınlığa yöneltmektedir. Sonuç olarak, insanlar ilişkilerinde diğer insanları bir nesne konumuna yerleştirmekte (Melman, 2010) ve ister yasal ister yasadışı olsun, zevk almaya çalışmaktadırlar (Dimitriadis, 2024).

Bu durumun bir sonucu olarak yeni ruhsal yapılanmalar ortaya çıkmış ve depresyon, yeme bozuklukları, DEHB ve bağımlılık oranları artmıştır. Ayrıca internet ve sosyal medya kullanımının yaygınlaşması ile dikey ilişkiye atfedilenler yatay ilişkide diğerlerine atfedilmekte ve ilişki benzerler arası bütünleşmektedir. Bu durum kişilerin ideal egolarına takılıp kalmalarına neden olmakta ve ego ideali değerini yitirmektedir (Melman, 2010).

#### **1.2.1.2. Ayna Evresi**

Ayna evresi, bebekliğin 6-18 aylarını kapsar (Homer, 2016). Bu evrede bebek ilk kez aynada kendi görüntüsüyle karşılaşır. Aynadaki görüntünün büyüüne kapılan bebek, bu yansımayı kendi görüntüsü olarak yanlış anlar. Çünkü kendisinde hissettiği parçalanmış beden algısından farklıdır, bütündür (Özcan, 2023). Öznenin hayatının geri kalanında sahip olmak istediği bu mükemmel imge, asla gerçekleşmeyecek bir fantezinin ürünüdür. Bu imge İdeal-ego olarak tanımlanır (Evans, 2006). Bebeğe dış dünyadan dayatılan ideal ego, çocuk tarafından benimsenir (Özcan, 2023), buna özdeşleşme denir (Evans, 2006). Dolayısıyla özne aynada gördüğü bu hayali eşlenikle özdeşleşerek kendine yabancılaşır (Evans, 2006).

Ayna evresinde ayrıca bebeğin aynada gördüğü, onu aynaya sabitleyen ve ne olduğunu söyleyen bir de anne vardır. Çocuk kendini annesinin, yani ilk Başka'nın bakışı aracılığıyla tanır ve çocuğun bir sonraki hedefi “Başka benden ne istiyor?” sorusunun cevabını kavramaya çalışmaktır. Annesinin arzusuna takıntılı olan ve onun arzusunun nesnesi haline gelen özne, kendini ancak Başka'nın bakışıyla görebilir ve bu nedenle yaşam boyunca Başka tarafından görülmeye ihtiyaç duyar (Özcan, 2023).

### **1.2.1.3. Bakış**

Lacan, “Bir noktadan görebiliyorum, ama varoluşumda her yönden bakılıyorum” demiştir (Lacan, 1966/2022: 80). Bu cümleyle bakışın öznenin görüş alanının ötesinde ve egemenlik alanının dışında olduğunu vurgulamaktadır (Uçurum ve Can, 2023). Bakan göz, öznenin gözünden olurken bakış nesne tarafındadır ve Lacan bakışın Başka'nın bakışı olduğunu ve ikisinin çakışmasının imkânsızlığını vurgular. Yani özne bakılan olarak bakışın nesnesi konumuna yerleşmektedir (Uçurum ve Can, 2023). Bu, ayna evresinde egosunu annenin varlığına, söylemlerine, bakışına, yani Başka'nın kendisinden ne istediğine göre kuran ve Başka'nın arzu nesnesi konumuna oturan bebeği akla getirir (Özcan, 2023).

## **1.2.2. Diğer Psikanalitik Kavramlar**

### **1.2.2.1. Teşhircilik**

Freud (1905/2021), bakma eylemini cinsel amacın yerini aldığı bir sapma olarak tanımlar. Ayrıca, teşhircilik ve röntgencilikte gözü erotojen bir bölge olarak tanımlar. Lacan, erotojen bölgelere paralel olarak, Freud'un üç dürtü kavramına iki yeni dürtü daha ekledi: skopik ve vokal. Dürtüler biyolojinin dışındadır ve doyuma doğru yönlendirilmek yerine, nesnenin yörüngesinde dönerek amaçlarını sürdürürler. Başka bir deyişle, dürtünün amacı doyuma ulaşmak değil, nesneyi tekrar tekrar takip ederek zevki sürdürmektir (Evan, 2016). Lacanyen teoride, bakış, skopik dürtünün nesnesi haline gelir. Bu, bakışın ve dürtünün Başka'nın alanında şekillendiği anlamına gelir. Teşhircilikte, teşhircinin bilinçdışı amacı, sergileme yoluyla Başka'nın zevkinin

nesnesi olmaktır. Başka bir deyişle, teşhirci, Başka'nın eksikliğini, bakışı teşhir yoluyla açığa çıkararak gidermeyi ve bakışın etrafında dolaşarak zevki sürdürmeyi amaçlar (Miller, 2006).

#### **1.2.2.2. Tekinsiz**

Freud, tekinsiz kavramını korkutucu olan ve dehşet yaratan şeylerle ve bu korkutucu şeylerin yarattığı belirsizlik hissiyle ilişkilendirmiştir (Royle, 2003). Tekinsiz kavramı, bastırılan ve kaygı yaratan şeylerin geri dönüşü ve bu geri dönüşün yarattığı korku olarak ifade edilir. Tekinsiz olan, bilinçdışında bireye aşınadır, ancak bastırma yoluyla yabancılaştırılmıştır. Freud (1919/1955), bastırılmış olanın geri dönüşünün yanı sıra, benzerleriyle karşılaşma durumunda da tekinsizlik hissinin ortaya çıktığını vurgulamaktadır. Özne aynada özdeşleştiği imge sonucunda kendi kimliğinden ve benliğinden şüphe duyar. Bu durum kişide tekinsizlik hissi yaratır. Ayrıca Freud (1919/1955) bir başka tekinsiz olguyu da kötücül göz tarafından izlenmek olarak ele almıştır. Freud bu olguyu, kişinin sahip olduğu değerli şeylerin bir başkasında yaratacağı kıskançlık duygusu nedeniyle hissettiği zarar görme korkusu olarak tanımlamaktadır.

#### **1.2.2.3. Paranoya**

Paranoya, insanların zarar göreceklere dair inanç ya da korku duymaları ve bu zarar verme niyetini dış dünyadaki diğer kişilere yansıtılmaları olarak belirtilebilir (Raihani ve Bell, 2019). Freud (1925) paranoyayı, bilinçdışı saldırgan arzuların ve çatışmaların çözülme çabası içinde dış dünyaya yansıtılması olarak açıklar. Klein ise paranoyanın bebekliğin erken dönemlerine dayandığını ve paranoyanın bebeğin nesnelerle kurduğu ilişkinin bir yansıması olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Klein'a göre bebek nesneleri iyi ve kötü olarak ikiye ayırır ve kendinde var olan dayanılmaz kötü düşünceleri bilinçdışı olarak dış dünyaya yansıtır (Roth, 2001). Lacan ise paranoyayı ayna evresi ile özdeşleşme ve yabancılaşma kavramları üzerinden açıklar (Erten vd., 2022). Dışarıdan yansıyan ve özneyi kendisine yabancılaştıran ideal imge, öznde hayranlık kadar düşmanlık da uyandırmakta ve tehlike arz etmektedir.

### **1.3. Araştırma Beyanı ve Araştırma Soruları**

Çalışmanın temel amacı, sosyal medya platformlarında hayatlarını paylaşan bir influencer olma deneyimini ve bu deneyimin anlamını keşfetmektir. Bu bağlamda, Instagram'da paylaşım yapan influencer'ların sosyal medya kullanım deneyimlerinin, takipçileri ve diğer influencer'larla ilişkilerinin ve influencer olmanın onlar için ne anlama geldiğinin, katılımcıların kendi bakış açıları ve söylemleri incelenerek literatür bağlamında kavramsallaştırılması amaçlanmaktadır.

## **2. METODOLOJİ**

### **2.1. Nitel Araştırma ve Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz**

Nitel araştırma yöntemleri, insanların deneyimleri hakkında derinlemesine bilgi ve anlayış sağlamayı amaçlayan metodolojilerdir (Fossey vd., 2002). Bu yöntemler, bir konunun kapsamlı bir şekilde tartışılması gerektiğinde ve bu konuda yeterli teori ve bilgi bulunmadığında seçilme eğilimindedir (Tavallaei ve Talib, 2010).

Nitel yöntemlerden biri olan Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz, kuramını insanların gündelik hayatlarında deneyimledikleri deneyimlere atfedilen anlamlar ve bu deneyimlerin insanların bireyselliği üzerindeki yorumları üzerine kurmaktadır (Smith, 2011).

Bu çalışmada YFA kullanılarak influencer'ların öznel deneyimlerinin kendi söylemleri ve yorumlama biçimleri üzerinden keşfedilmesi amaçlanmıştır.

### **2.2. Katılımcılar ve Örneklem Yöntemi**

Bu çalışmada, Smith ve Osborn'un (2015) önerdiği gibi, YFA ilkelerine uygun olarak homojen ve amaçlı örneklem yöntemlerine bağlı kalınmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, 18-40 yaş arası, Instagram'da hayatlarını “yaşam tarzı” olarak paylaşan ve sosyal medyadan gelir elde eden influencer'lar araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir.



Mevcut çalışmaya altı kadın influencer katılmıştır. Katılımcıların yaş aralığı 23-36 arasındadır. Katılımcıların 10.000 ila 600.000 takipçisi bulunmaktadır. Katılımcıların influencer olarak sosyal medya deneyimleri 1 ila 8 yıl arasında değişmektedir.

### **2.3. Prosedür**

Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'ndan etik onay alınmıştır. Kriterleri karşılayan bireyler Instagram üzerinden direkt mesaj ve e-posta yoluyla çalışmaya davet edilmiştir. Çalışmaya katılmak isteyen katılımcılara bilgilendirilmiş onam formları gönderilmiş ve formu doldurup araştırmacıya gönderdikten sonra görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Smith ve Osborn'a (2003) göre araştırma sorularının derinlemesine analiz edilebilmesi için görüşmelerin sayısı ve görüşmelerde konunun detaylı bir şekilde ele alınıp alınmadığı kritik bir konudur (Sarı, 2022). Yapılan analizler sonucunda detaylı bilgi almak için 2 görüşme yeterli olmuştur. Katılımcılardan birine ikinci görüşme için ulaşılamaması nedeniyle toplamda on bir görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcıların isimleri gizliliği sağlamak amacıyla takma isimlerle değiştirilmiştir. Verilerin tamamı 14 aylık bir sürede toplanmıştır.

### **2.4. Veri Analizi**

Görüşmeler ses kaydına alınmıştır. Her görüşmeden sonra ses kayıtları kelime kelime yazıya dökülerek kendi içinde analiz edilmiş ve ardından bir sonraki katılımcı ile görüşülmüştür. Pietkiewicz ve Smith'in (2014) önerdiği gibi, deşifre işleminden sonra transkriptler tekrar tekrar okunmuş, katılımcıların deneyimleri ve yorumları kodlanmış ve temalar oluşturulurken kodlar yorumlanmıştır. Daha sonra temalar kümelenerek bir çatı altında toplanmıştır. Sırasıyla tüm görüşmeler için aynı prosedür uygulandıktan sonra analizler arasında çapraz durum karşılaştırması yapılmış, üst ve alt temalar oluşturulmuştur.

### **2.5. Çalışmanın Güvenilirliği**

Nitel araştırmada veriyi sadece katılımcının bakış açısından ele almak, görüşmeleri yapan ve verileri analiz eden araştırmacının konunun belirlenmesindeki rolünü ve

araştırmacı ile katılımcı arasındaki etkileşimin etkisini göz ardı etmek anlamına gelecektir (Willig, 2008, aktaran Tanyaş, 2014).

Bu bağlamda benim bu konuya olan ilgim, sosyal medya hesabımın olmasının beni sosyal medya bağımlılığına sürükleyebileceği ve sürekli sosyal medyada olduğum için işlerimin aksayacağı yönündeki kaygı ve düşüncelerimden kaynaklanıyor. Ancak bu karşılıklı ve iki yönlü bir ilişki ve paylaşım tarafında influencer'lar boyutunu ele almanın çok önemli olacağını düşündüm.

### 3. BULGULAR

#### 3.1. İn-Flu Olmak: Kariyerin Başlangıcında Diğer Influencer'ları İdolleştirme ve Taklit Etme

Birinci üst tema, katılımcıların diğer influencer'lar gibi olma arzusunu ve kariyerlerinin başlangıcında diğer influencer'ların kendileri için rol model olmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcılar, kendi hesapları ve paylaşımları ile takip ettikleri influencer'ların hesapları arasındaki benzerliklerin altını çizmişlerdir. Katılımcılar, influencer kariyerlerinin başlangıcından bahsederken etkilendikleri diğer influencer'lardan bahsetmiş ve ilk içeriklerini üretirken taklide dayalı bir dinamığa vurgu yapmışlardır.

Örneğin Pelin bu durumu şu şekilde açıklamaktadır:

*P: Ben de şu anda yarattığım bu rutinlerimi her şeyimi birilerini izleyerek yarattım. Her sabah uyandığımda yaptığım makyajın o makyaj olmasının sebepleri var gerçekten.*

#### 3.2. Influencer Olmak İçin Motivasyon Kaynağı ve Pekiştiriciler

İkinci üst tema, influencer'ların mesleklerini sürdürme amaçlarını ve motivasyonlarını tasvir etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, takipçilerinin söylemlerinin öneminden ve kendi kişisel geçmişlerinden motivasyon kaynağı olarak

bahsetmişlerdir. Influencer'ların bakış açısından mesleğin tanımı ve bu işin onlara sağladığı manevi tatmin de bu temada ele alınmaktadır.

### **3.2.1. Hayattan Canlı Yayın: Göz Önünde Olmanın ve İzlenmenin Zevkini Çıkarmak Üzerine**

Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu paylaşım motivasyonlarını görünür olma ve/veya hayatlarını gösterme ihtiyacı ile açıklamıştır. Ayrıca, insanlar merak ettikçe paylaşım sıklıklarının arttığını ve paylaşma dürtülerine sınır koyamadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca hayatlarının her anını paylaşmayı spot ışığında (ya da sahnede) olmak ve izlenmekten keyif almakla eş tutmuşlardır. Görünür olmak için çaba sarf ettiklerini ve hayatlarını göstermekten hoşlandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcılar, kimsenin izlemediği ya da fark etmediği bir senaryoda deneyimlerinin önemini ve anlamını yitirdiğini, sanki hiç yaşanmamış gibi hissettiklerini vurgulamışlardır.

### **3.2.2. Onayın Gücü: Beğeniler ve Onaylama Influencer'ları Nasıl Pekiştirir?**

Influencer olma yolculuğunda motivasyon kaynakları ve pekiştireçlerden bahsederken, görüşmelerde sıklıkla vurgulanan hususlardan biri katılımcıların takipçilerinin onayını ve beğenisini kazanma arzusu olmuştur. Buna ek olarak, katılımcılar beğenilme ve onaylanmanın olumlu şekillendirici etkisinin yanı sıra hayatları üzerindeki motive edici etkisini de eklemişlerdir.

Pelin bu durumu şöyle özetlemektedir:

*P: O dönemlerde insanların fikirlerini duymak beni ve hayatımı çok şekillendirdi. Tabi ki yaptığım bazı şeyler tebrik ediliyordu bu tebrikler hoşuma gitti. ... Hayat güzelleşiyor birazcık yalan yok. Tanınmak çok güzel bir his. Tabi ki bu çok kişisel bir şey. Sabahtan beri onay ihtiyacımdan bahsediyoruz. Tanınmak, beğenilmek, takdir görmek güzel şeyler ... Yaşam küçüktü. İnsanların beğendiği şeyler, onay alma ihtiyacı ile alakalı sanırım, onay aldıkça daha çok pekişti.*

### 3.2.3. “Ben Sen Olmak İstiyorum”: Rol Model Olmak ve İnsanlara İlham Vermek

Influencer'ların paylaşım motivasyonlarıyla ilgili olarak ortaya çıkan bir diğer tema da rol model, ilham kaynağı ve hatta idol olmakla ilgiliydi. Katılımcılar influencer olmayı insanları etkilemek ve izleyicilerin hayatlarında ve tercihlerinde rol oynamak ifadeleriyle tanımlamıştır.

Zeynep bu durumu aşağıdaki gibi anlatmıştır:

*Z: Kendi hayatımdan da benim böyle bana gelen hep en büyük yorumlar şey oldu. En büyük dediğim çok sık duyduğum ve her yıl yüzlerce kez duyduğum bir yorum. Sen olmak istiyorum. Senin hayatını yaşamak istiyorum. Senin gibi yaşamak istiyorum. Büyüyünce sen olacağım falan hep böyle yorumlar oluyor. Ben biraz daha sanırım insanları gerçekten lifestyle olarak etkiliyorum. İşte böyle manzaralı bir ev. O renk bir araba. Bu tarz bir köpek. Böyle arkadaşlar. Böyle bir hayat. Benim gerçekten yaşadığım, paylaştığım anların onlar da diyor ki evet bu arkadaş grubunu ben de istiyorum. Ben de Erasmus'a gitmek istiyorum. Gerçekten biraz daha hayat tarzı olarak etkilediğimi düşünüyorum insanları. Belli bir spesifik ürünü aldirmaktan veya kategoridense. Evet influencer olmak bu benim için herhalde.*

### 3.2.4. Takipçilerin Hayatlarına Dokunmak ve Hayatlarında İz Bırakmak: “Çok daha derin bir anlamı var”

Tüm katılımcılar ifadelerinde takipçilerinin hayatlarına dokunmayı, onların hayatlarında izler bırakmayı ve hayatlarını daha iyi hale getirmeyi vurgulamışlardır. Bunu, bu kariyere devam etme amaçları ve motivasyonları olarak belirtmişlerdir. Influencer olmayı ve anlamını başkalarının hayatlarına dokunmak ve onlar için bir rol model olmak olarak tanımlamışlardır. Katılımcılar ayrıca sıklıkla insanlar üzerinde iz bırakmanın ve onlar için motivasyon kaynağı olmanın manevi tatmin sağladığını vurgulamıştır.

### **3.2.5. Abla Olmak: Sorumluluk Pahasına Ciddiye Alınmak**

Katılımcıların tümü takipçileri tarafından “abla” olarak anıldıklarını söylemiş ve görüşmelerde abla olmanın ne anlama geldiğini açıklamışlardır. Katılımcılar “abla” olarak anılmanın takipçilerinin kendilerine olan güvenini yansıttığını belirtmiştir. Ayrıca, katılımcılar “abla olmak” ifadesini ciddiye alınmak, dinlenmek ve fikirlerine takipçileri ve yakın çevreleri tarafından değeri verilmesi ile eş tutmuştur. Öte yandan takipçilerinin ablası olmanın kendilerine büyük bir sorumluluk yüklediğini, bu sorumluluk sebebiyle örnek bir role büründüklerini ve kendileri olmaktan uzaklaştıklarını vurgulamaktadırlar.

### **3.3. “Madalyonun Öteki Yüzü”: Sosyal Medya Deneyiminin Rahatsızlıkları ve Bilinmeyenleri**

Bu üst tema, sosyal medyanın konuşulmayan yönlerini, sosyal medya dünyasındaki deneyim ve hayatlarını paylaşma konusunda influencer'ları neyin rahatsız ettiğini ve hayatlarıyla ilgili neleri paylaşmadıklarını incelemektedir.

#### **3.3.1. “Kendimize Odaklanalım, Dışarıya Yayılmaya Gerek Yok”: Kozanın Dışındakiler Tarafından İzleniyor Olmanın Rahatsızlığı**

Katılımcıların tamamı takipçilerinden aile ya da arkadaş olarak bahsetmiştir. Ancak takipçilerini tanımadıkları kişiler olarak da tanımlamışlar ve tanımadıkları kişiler tarafından takip edilmekten duydukları rahatsızlığı da dile getirmişlerdir. Bunun nedeni ise takipçileri arasında kendilerine zarar vermek isteyen kötü niyetli kişilerin olabileceğidir. Bu nedenle hayatlarını paylaşmaktan çekindiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Paylaşımlarını yaparken dikkatli olmaya ve bazı önlemler almaya çalıştıklarını vurgulamaktadırlar.

#### **3.3.2. Rekabet Tarafından Uzaklaştırılmak, Ancak Karşılaştırmaya Direnememek**

Katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu sosyal medyada genellikle maddi kazanca dayalı bir rekabet olduğunu belirtmiştir. Sosyal medya ortamındaki bu rekabetin kendilerini

işlerinden soğuttuğunu ve motivasyonlarını düşürdüğünü belirtmişlerdir. Ancak katılımcılar sosyal medyadaki rekabet ortamından rahatsız olduklarını ifade etseler de söylemlerinde kendilerinin de bu ortamın içinde olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Kendilerini diğer influencer'larla kıyasladıklarını belirten katılımcılar, beğeni, takipçi ya da izlenme sayıları üzerinden diğer hesaplarla rekabet ettiklerini açıklamışlardır.

Zeynep bu durumu şu şekilde açıklamaktadır:

*Z: Tabii ki benim attığım bir fotoğrafın az beğenilmesi kırıcı bir şey oluyor. Diyorum ki eskiden böyle değildi. Tabii ki kendimi eskiyle veya başkasıyla kıyaslamaya giriyorum. Hiç istemesem de insan giriyor. Ama işte onun fotoğrafı bu beğenileri alıyor, wow diye düşünüyorum bazen. ...Ne zaman başkalarının hikayelerini izlesem, o zaman böyle o kıyaslama, o rekabet, aslında ben onlarla rakibim diye düşünüyorum ve beni çok korkutuyor. Rahatsız oluyorum.*

### **3.3.3. Gerçek mi Sahte mi? Sosyal Medyanın Aldatıcı Dünyası**

Katılımcılar, sosyal medyayı samimiyetsiz ve aldatıcı bir yer olarak tanımlamışlar ve sosyal medyada paylaşılanların gerçeği yansıtmadığını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca bu aldatmacanın karşılıklı çıkar ilişkilerinden de kaynaklandığını vurgulamışlardır. Katılımcılar bunun kendilerini rahatsız ettiğini belirtmektedir. Bu durumda, katılımcılar tarafından önemi vurgulanan güven konusunda ortamın güvensiz ve aldatıcı olması, sosyal medyadaki ilişkilere ikircikli bakılmasına yol açmaktadır. Bu ikircikli ve samimiyetsiz durum katılımcılar tarafından ilişki kurmaktan kaçındıkları bir ortam olarak açıklanmaktadır.

### **3.3.4. Paylaşımında Seçicilik: Olumsuzlukları Gizlemek ve Olumlu Yönleri Göstermek**

Görünenin aksine katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu sosyal medyada anlatılanların, kurulan ilişkilerin ya da insanların göstermeye çalıştıklarının çoğu zaman gerçeği yansıtmadığını vurgulamıştır. Her ne kadar sosyal medyanın yanıltıcılığından yakınsalar da söylemlerinde hayatlarının tamamını yansıtmanın tercih edilebilir

olmadığını vurgulamaktadırlar. Başka bir deyişle, sosyal medya hesaplarında göstermek istediklerini ve kendilerini iyi gösteren şeyleri gösterdiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcıların tamamı ayrıca hayatlarıyla ilgili olumsuz duygu ve düşünceleri paylaşmaktan çekindiklerini ve olumlu olanları paylaşmaya daha meyilli olduklarını belirtmiştir.

#### **4. TARTIŞMA**

##### **4.1. İn-Flu Olmak: Kariyerin Başlangıcında Diğer Influencer'ları İdolleştirme ve Taklit Etme**

Bu çalışmada katılımcılar kariyer süreçlerinde rol model aldıkları kişiler olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bu kişilerin hayatlarını mükemmel olarak algılamışlar, onlara hayranlık duymuşlar ve onlar gibi olmak için çabalamışlardır. Lacanyen kuram bu durumu ayna evresi ile açıklar. Bebeğin yaşamı boyunca aynada sahip olmak istediği Gestalt, bütünlüklü imge, ideal ego olarak tanımlanır ve özne benliğini bu güçlü imgeyle eşleştirmeye çalışır (Fink, 2022). Başka bir deyişle, telefon ekranlarında sergilenen idealize edilmiş hayatlar sebebiyle insanlar telefondaki hayali dünyaya dalmakta ve oradaki ideal imgelerin peşine düşmektedir (Zhakin, 2023).

Ancak psikoloji literatüründeki çalışmalar, idealize edilmiş imajlarla özdeşleşmenin, bireylerin ya kendilerini bu ideal algılarla uyumlu hale getirmekte zorlandıklarında ya da idealize edilmiş imajı elde ettikten sonra kaybetmekten korktuklarında önemli bir strese yol açabileceğini göstermektedir (Nash vd., 2019).

##### **4.2. Influencer Olmak İçin Motivasyon Kaynağı ve Pekiştireçler**

Bebek dış dünyadaki varlığını annenin bakışı aracılığıyla algılar ve ancak anne tarafından onaylandığında var olduğunu hisseder. Bu da öznenin kendisini Başka'nın arzu nesnesi olarak konumlandırması anlamına gelir. Bu çalışmada katılımcılar, takipçilerinin onay ve beğenisini kazanma arzularına sıklıkla değinmişlerdir. Bu durum, bakışı yakalamaya çalışan ve Başka'nın arzusunda konumlanan öznenin onay olarak Başka'nın gözünde var olma çabasına benzetilebilir. Takipçilerinden “Beni

motive ettin”, “Beni ayağa kaldırdın” gibi yorumlar alan katılımcılar, bu yorumları duydukça bu imaja büründüklerinden bahsetmişlerdir. Bu durum, ayna evresinde Başka’nın söylemine ve ideal imgeye sabitlenen çocuğun, Başka’nın arzu nesnesi haline gelmesine benzemektedir. Bu söylemleri duydukça yaptıklarında ısrarcı olmaları, arzu nesnesi olmayı sürdürme çabası olarak açıklanabilir.

Bu temanın alt temalarından birinde katılımcılar “abla” kelimesinin kendileri için öneminden de bahsetmişlerdir. Bu kelimeyi ciddiye alınmak, tavsiye vermek, dinlenmek ve başkaları tarafından değer görmekle ilişkilendirmişlerdir. Bu durum, aynadaki her şeye gücü yeten görüntüye hayranlık duyan, o “büyük” görüntüyle özdeşleşen bebeğin deneyimini çağrıştırmaktadır. Ancak katılımcılar bu bütünlük deneyiminin bir bedeli olduğunu, yani abla olmanın kendileri için büyük bir sorumluluk olduğunu söylemişlerdir. Kendilerine “abla” denmeye başladıktan sonra kendi eylem ve söylemlerini kısıtladıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bu da aynadaki ideal imgeyle özdeşleşmenin bedeli olan öznenin kendine yabancılaşmasını akla getirmektedir (Evans, 2006).

Öte yandan katılımcıların takipçileri ve diğer influencer'larla olan ilişkileri öznenin Başka ile olan ilişkisine benzese de bunlar öznenin yatay ekseninde ilişki kurduğu kişilerdir. Yirmi birinci yüzyılda değişen dünya düzeninde ideolojilerin, referansların ve temel metinlerin yok olması, teknolojinin ve kapitalist söylemin gelişmesiyle birlikte uygarlığın temelini oluşturan sınırlar ve sınırlılıklar azalmaya başlamıştır. Bu da Başka’nın yasa koyucu işlevini kaybetme tehdidiyle karşı karşıya kalmasına neden olmaktadır (Melman, 2010). Bunun sonucunda dikey ilişkiler önemini yitirirken, yatay ilişkiler ve ötekilerin bakışı ağırlık kazanmaktadır. Başka’nın boşluğunun bir sonucu olarak, bireyler sosyal medya, alkol ve benzeri dış kaynaklardan öz-değer ve onay elde etmeye çalışmaktadır (Melman, 2010).

#### **4.3. “Madalyonun Öteki Yüzü”: Sosyal Medya Deneyiminin Rahatsızlıkları ve Bilinmeyenleri**

Tekinsiz kavramı, Freud (1919/1955) tarafından çok tanındık ama geçmişte bastırılmış bir şeyden duyulan rahatsızlık ve korku olarak tanımlamıştır. Freud'a (1919/1955)



göre, tekinsizlik hissi yaratan birçok durum vardır ve bunlardan biri, kötücül göz tarafından takip edilme ve zarar görme korkusudur. Bu çalışmanın katılımcıları, takipçilerini aslında tanımadıklarını söylemişler ve tanımadıkları kişiler tarafından görülmekten ve takip edilmekten duydukları rahatsızlığı vurgulamışlardır. Ayrıca bu durumun zaman zaman kendileri ve hayatları için tehdit oluşturduğunu söylemişler ve bu durumu kontrol altına almak için aldıkları önlemleri vurgulamışlardır. Ek olarak katılımcılar sahte hesaplar tarafından yapılan yorumların aslında yakın bir arkadaştan gelebileceğini söyleyerek bilinmezliğin ya da belirsizliğin tanıdıklık içermesinden kaynaklanan rahatsızlık hissini belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcıların bu söylemi, aşinalık içerebilen ve arkasında gerçekte ne olduğunu bilmedikleri aldatıcı bir dünyada belirsizlikten kaynaklanan tekinsizlik hissi olarak tanımlanabilir (Freud, 1919/1955).

Freud (1919/1955), kendine benzeyen başkalarıyla karşılaşmanın varoluşsal bir tehdit duygusu ve yok olma korkusu uyandırdığını savunmuştur. Sosyal medya pazarında benzer işler yapan çok sayıda influencer olduğundan bahseden katılımcılar, bunun rekabete neden olduğunu belirtmiştir. Ancak bu rekabetin kendilerini rahatsız ettiğini ve korkuttuğunu, zarar görmemek için kendilerini rekabetin dışında tuttuklarını söylemişlerdir. Yani ekranda gördükleri görüntü ile özdeşleşen katılımcılar, bir yandan aynadaki yansımaları ile yarışmaktadır. Diğer yandan da kendilerine yabancılaşmanın bir sonucu olarak varlık korkusu ve karmaşası yaşamakta ve rekabetten çekilmektedirler. Bu nedenle katılımcılar varlıklarını kanıtlamak için akranlarıyla rekabet etmekte, ideal egoya ulaşmak için çabalamakta ve tam olmaya çalışmaktadırlar.

Öte yandan bütünlük algısı, bebeğe dış dünyadan yansıyan ve bebeğin aslında sahip olmadığı bir durumdur. Bu nedenle her an yok olma riski taşıdığı için tehlike arz eder ve şiddet uyandırır (Erten vd., 2022). Bebek bu şiddet içeren ve kötü niyetli düşünceleri dış dünyaya atfeder ve kendisine yönelik bir tehdit algısı yaratır (Roth, 2001). Bu çalışmada katılımcıların sıklıkla vurguladığı dış dünyadaki insanlar tarafından görülmekten duyulan rahatsızlık ve zarar görme korkuları, dışsal bir imgeyle özdeşleşerek kendine yabancılaşan paranoid öznenin yok olma tehdidi nedeniyle dış dünyaya atfettiği şiddet düşünceleri olarak yorumlanabilir.

## 5. SONUÇLAR, KISITLAMALAR VE İLERİ ARAŞTIRMALAR

Bildiğimiz kadarıyla bu çalışma, psikoloji literatüründe influencer olmakla ilişkili deneyim ve anlamların yanı sıra sosyal medya ile olan ilişkilerini derinlemesine anlamayı amaçlayan ilk nitel çalışmadır. Bu çalışma, sosyal medya -özellikle de Instagram- kullanım deneyimini influencer'ların bakış açısından incelediği için Türkçe literatürde öncü bir nitelik taşımaktadır.

İnfluencer'lık kavramı, bu değişen teknolojik ve sosyal ortamda ortaya çıkmış ve insanların ruhsal durumlarını etkilemiştir. Bu deneyimi influencer'ların bakış açısından anlamak, izleyicilerinin deneyimlerini ve yarattıkları etkiyi anlamak için önemlidir.

Bu çalışmanın sınırlılıkları da bulunmaktadır. Öncelikle, bu çalışmada takipçi sayısı için bir aralık belirtilmemiştir. Bu çalışmanın başında takipçi sayısı bir dahil etme kriteri olarak belirlenmiş ve 100.000'den fazla takipçisi olan influencer'ların çalışmaya dahil edileceği düşünülmüştür. Öte yandan temaların farklılaşmadığı gözlemlenmiştir. İkinci olarak, bu çalışmada kültüre özgü herhangi bir unsur tespit edilmemiştir. Başka bir deyişle, bu çalışma Türk kültürü yerine farklı bir kültürel bağlamda yürütülmüş olsaydı, sonuçlar farklı olabilirdi.

## 6. SONUÇ

Sonuç olarak bu tez, yaşamlarını bir yaşam tarzı olarak paylaşan influencer'ların deneyimlerini ve bunun onlar için anlamını mevcut literatür kapsamında incelemek amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, hayranlık, etkilenme ve taklit etmenin influencer olmanın önemli faktörleri olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu etkilenme ve taklit, ekranda ideal ego olarak gördüklerine hayranlık duymanın ve onlarla özdeşleşmenin sonucudur. Araştırmanın sonuçları ayrıca görünür olmanın ve onay almanın influencer olma deneyiminin önemli yapı taşları olduğunu göstermektedir. Hayatı paylaşmanın ve sergilemenin verdiği zevki sınırlayamamak, hayatlarını sergilemenin ve Başka'nın bakışını yakalamanın verdiği sınırsız jouissance ile açıklanabilir. Ayrıca influencer'ların paylaşımları sonucunda aldıkları

onay ve iltifatlar da paylaşım motivasyonlarını arttırmaktadır. Ayrıca, influencer'lık deneyiminde katılımcıların kendilerini rahatsız hissettikleri durumlar da vardır. Örneğin, sosyal medyada yabancılar tarafından takip edilmek, influencer'ların kendilerinin de uyum sağladığı sosyal medyanın aldatıcı dünyası ve buradaki rekabet influencer'ları rahatsız ve tehdit altında hissettirmektedir. Bu rahatsızlık ve tehdit, bilinmeyenden kaynaklanan tekinsizlik duygusuyla açıklanabilir (Freud, 1919/1955).



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