

Life Practices on Social Media of Minority's Generation Z in Turkey during the COVID-19 Period

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused and continues to cause uncertainty around the world. It is a traumatic event that psychologically affects all segments of society. However, particularly the young and disadvantaged in a society like minorities, refugees and disabled people may face even harsher problems. The youngest generation to witness this traumatic event is generation Z. Individuals of this generation came to the world in a period when communication technologies have experienced tremendous growth and progress, thus making them carry characteristics which are very different from other generations. Since this generation is still very young, it is challenging to obtain academic data on them. Studies on this generation are just being conducted, and the number of scientific studies in this field is still minimal. However, what stands out in the already existing research is that social media is an integral part of their lives. While there are many studies on social media usage habits and the effects of these during the pandemic, the research done on minorities in society during this period does also not stand out in the literature. Therefore, this study focuses on an even smaller fraction of the already tiny fraction (0,2%) of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey; the Syrian generation Z in Turkey. Using the method of online surveys, this study demonstrated that all of the surveyed members of the Syrian generation Z, in Turkey connect to the internet, use social media and follow COVID-19 related news on social media on a daily basis. The study also revealed that they spend more time on social media than before COVID-19 and frequently communicate with their friends on social media. Furthermore, this study found that during the COVID-19 period, the surveyed members of the Syrian generation Z were more anxious and generally preferred spending time with their hobbies as well as communicating with their friends and families as a method of coping with their concerns. Also, half of the surveyed members stated that social media helped relieve their concerns during this period.

Keywords: Covid-19, Social Media, Minorities, Coping, Generation Z.

Türkiye’de Azınlık Z Kuşağının Covid-19 Döneminde Sosyal Medya ile Yaşam Pratikleri

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Öz

Kuşak kavramı, belirli iki tarih arasında doğan ve kendi yaşamlarına denk gelen tarihsel süreçteki önemli olaylara, gelişmelere, yeniliklere ve süreçlere birlikte tanıklık etmiş yakın yaş gruplarındaki insanlara işaret eder. 2000 ve sonrası doğan bireyleri temsil eden Z Kuşağının dijital medya ile iç içe büyümesi sebebiyle diğer kuşaklardan çok daha farklı özelliklere sahip olduğu söylenebilir. İletişim teknolojilerinin büyük ilerleme kat ettiği bu dönemde dünyaya gelen Z kuşağı bireyleri, önceki kuşaklardan farklı olarak yaşamlarının tüm alanlarında teknolojinin her türlü getirisinden yararlanmaktadırlar. Sosyal yaşamlarını internet ve ağ üzerinden koordine eden bu kuşak için mesafeler önemini yitirmiştir. Aynı zamanda sürekli ve yoğun bir veri akışına maruz kalan bu kuşak üyelerinin, eşzamanlı olarak çok sayıda konuyla uğraşabilme becerisine sahip oldukları söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Henüz çok yeni bir kuşak olan Z kuşağının en büyük üyesi 19 yaşındadır. Bu nedenle doğrudan Z kuşağı ile ilgili çok az sayıda akademik çalışma yapılmıştır. Buna karşın yapılan az sayıdaki çalışmada öne çıkan nokta Z kuşağının, sosyal medya ile çok erken yaşlarda tanıştığıdır. Ayrıca bu kuşak dünyada devam eden salgına tanıklık etmektedir. Salgın dünyada ve Türkiye’de sosyal, ekonomik, siyasi, iktisadi, idari, hukuki, askerî, dinî ve kültürel alanlarda birçok önemli etkilere ve sonuçlara neden olan radikal kararlar alınmasına neden olmuştur. Türkiye’de ilk, orta ve liselerde eğitim-öğretim askıya alınırken, bütün üniversitelerde bahar dönemi dersleri iptal edilerek sınavlar ertelenmiştir. Nüfusun büyük çoğunluğu Müslüman olan ülkede cuma namazı olmak üzere cami ve mescitlerde cemaatle namaza ara verildiğini duyurulmuştur. Hükümet, salgının yayılım hızını düşürmek ve insanlar arasında sosyal mesafeyi korumak için ilk olarak 65 yaş ve üstü kişilere sokağa çıkma yasağı uygulaması başlatmıştır. Daha sonra bu kısıtlamayı çalışmamızın konusu olan 20 yaş ve altı çocuk ve gençleri de kapsayacak şekilde genişletmiştir. Bu kararların toplumun en dinamik kesimini oluşturan bu kuşak üzerinde psikolojik etkileri kaçınılmazdır. Pandemi sürecinde sosyal medya kullanım alışkanlıkları ve etkileri üzerine birçok araştırma yapılmaktadır. Fakat azınlıklar üzerine bu süreçte yapılmış pek fazla araştırma bulunmamaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye’deki nüfusun çok küçük bir kesimini oluşturan gayri- müslim azınlıklar (%0,2) içinde daha da küçük bir kesim olan Süryani Z kuşağının pandemi sürecindeki sosyal medya kullanım alışkanlıkları ve bu dönemin zorluklarının üzerinden nasıl geldikleri ve sosyal medyanın bununla olan ilişkisini anlamak çalışmanın konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada yöntem olarak çevrimiçi anketler uygulanmıştır. Veriler işlenerek, Covid-19 döneminde, azınlıkların yaşam pratikleri, psikolojik ve iletişim süreçleri anlaşılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Covid-19, Sosyal Medya, Azınlıklar, Başa Çıkma, Z Kuşağı.

Introduction

The term generation refers to people in close age groups who were born between two specific dates and have together witnessed important events, developments and innovations in the historical process that coincided with their lives. Individuals of the same generation are interconnected with common life experiences and values. The nature of this bond is important. While individuals within a generation can make very different life choices, there is a tendency of shared values and experiences which separates them from other generations (Törőcsik, Szucs and Kehl, 2014, p.25).

COVID-19 has indisputably taken its place in history as a pandemic that has had an impact all over the world. The first case was detected on December 12th, 2019, in Wuhan, China. Within a few months, on March 11th 2020, The World Health Organization declared it as a 'Pandemic'. The first COVID-19 case in Turkey was detected on March 10th, 2020. Since then, it has had social, economic, political, administrative, legal, military, religious and cultural impact and has forced radical changes and decisions in Turkey. During the first COVID-19 wave in March, April and May 2020 education in primary, secondary and high schools was suspended in the whole country, spring term courses were cancelled in all universities and exams were postponed. In a country, where almost the entire population is Muslim, prayers were suspended in mosques and masjids, including the Friday prayer. The government first, in an effort to limit the spread of the disease and to maintain social distance between people, introduced a curfew for the population aged 65 years and older. Later, it expanded this restriction to include the subjects of our study, children and adolescents aged 20 years and younger. Until now the Turkish government has systematically eased and restricted the above-mentioned restrictions several times depending on the number of COVID-19 cases in the country. Currently, a four-tier system, introduced on March 1st 2021, on local COVID-19 related restrictions is in place. For "high" and "very high" risk regions within the country, Sunday curfews remain. Also, the nationwide curfew between 9PM and 5AM. Monday through Friday, is still in effect. It can be assumed that these decisions have had inevitable psychological effects on which constitutes the most dynamic segment of society.

Furthermore, it can be assumed that, in the face of this traumatic situation in which all segments of society are affected, the disadvantaged in the society like minorities, refugees and disabled people will face different problems.

In this context, this study focuses on an even smaller fraction of the already tiny fraction (0,2%) of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey: the Syriac Generation Z in Turkey. Online surveys were used as a method in this study. By processing the information gathered, this study examines the life practices, the psychological and communication processes of the Syriac Generation Z in Turkey during the COVID-19 period and tries to establish an understanding of how this group is coping with the difficulties of this period and which role social media plays in this.

The Concept of Generations and Generation Z

The term generation refers to people in close age groups who were born between two specific dates and have together witnessed important events, developments and innovations in the historical process that coincided with their lives. Academically the term generation can be defined as: "A group that is born during specific birth years and shares social and historical milestones during their years of evolution" (Cogin, 2012, p.2270 as cited in Gürbüz, 2015, p.41). Individuals of the same generation have shared common entertainment concepts, problems, politics and ideologies of the same period. The conditions of each period in history determine the living standards of the individuals living in that period. Generations live under conditions common to all members of that generation. This circumstance adds similarity to them on an individual level. On average, a new generation is born every twenty years, and with them: shared desires, needs, expectations, belongings and activities emerge (Adıgüzel, Batur and Ekşili, 2014, p.170).

When reviewing the literature, it is striking to find that there is no clear consensus on age groups taken as a reference in categorizing the generations. However, according to the classification that receives the most acceptance in the literature, individuals born before the Second World War are called the "Traditional Generation", and individuals born between 1945-1965 are referred to as the "Baby Boomer Generation".

Furthermore, individuals born between 1966-1979 carry the name "Generation X" and individuals born between 1980-1995 are considered as "Generation Y". Individuals born after 1995, on the other hand, constitute "Generation Z", or in other words, the "New Silent Generation" (Gürbüz, 2015, p.42-43).

The initial birth year of Generation Z can vary between studies. For some, it is the year 1995, and for others, it is the year 2000. In this study, the year 2000 will be taken as the reference date for the Z generation. For Generation Z, the name "Digital Natives" is also used because they speak the digital language as a native tongue, and they are a generation that grows together with digital media. Unlike previous generations, the individuals of Generation Z, who were born in a period of tremendous technological advancements, especially in the field of communication technologies, make use and benefit of these technologies in all areas of their lives. Distances have lost their importance for this generation because they coordinate their social lives over the internet and social media. It can also be assumed that the individuals of this generation, due to their exposure to a constant flow of information, have the ability to deal with many issues simultaneously. Since most of this generation has not yet participated in business life, it is not easy to obtain academic data on their professional experiences. Generally, studies on Generation Z are just being conducted, and the number of scientific studies in this field is still minimal.

Generation Z and Social Media: As stated in the section above, all generations within the generational classifications have certain common features and values within themselves. An example of Turkey's Generation Y, individuals born between the years 1980-1995, lack of political interest compared to individuals born in the years 1966-1979, in other words, Generation X, helps to demonstrate this phenomenon. The explanation lies with the conditions of this period, which formed the social atmosphere. Periodic conditions play a crucial role in generational studies because many of the common features that lead to the emergence of the concept of generations are directly related to these conditions. For Generation Z, these periodic conditions are quite different when compared to previous generations. The most critical factor in this is

undoubtedly technology; especially with the development of communication technologies, their role and importance in people's lives have reached enormous dimensions. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z was born into a virtual world. Looking at generation studies, it is seen that although there are many differences between the X and Y generations, some common features can be determined. This is because although individuals in these two generations have lived in different historical periods, these historical periods have a lot in common. However, for Generation Z, it proves to be challenging to establish similarities with any previous generation, because this would not be a very realistic approach to compare this generation to previous ones.

New communication technologies, which have become one of the indispensables of daily life, have been the most distinctive proposition we use when comparing our century with other centuries. The fact that this period is called the "communication age" proves this. The most important place among new communication is undoubtedly taken by internet technology. With the advent of the internet, people have had the opportunity to quickly communicate with other people anywhere in the world via a virtual network. With the development of the internet, the phenomenon of globalization, which has marked the period from the end of the Second World War to the present, has also reached a new point. The "global village" idea of Marshall McLuhan, one of the famous technological determinists, shows itself more and more every day in today's globalizing world.

The effect of internet technology on globalization is undeniable. One of the most critical aspects of the internet today is social media. Eldeniz defines social media as "social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums and content communities, virtual game environments and microblogs, which allow users to post personal news about themselves, make friends or communicate with friends in an interactive way, share their videos and organize various events" (Aydoğan and Akyüz, 2010, p.37). With social media, users have the opportunity to communicate with other users in real-time. Simultaneously, social media has a direct impact on the globalization process due to individuals being able to reach anywhere in the world via a digital network. Manuel Castells explains today's world and its social relations with the theory of "network society". According to

Castells, nothing is the same in today's world. Now there are only those who can get a place in the network and the network itself. Trade relations, politics and art. every phenomenon is shaped around this network. Those who want to gain power in any subject must have the ability to expand their place in this network (Castells as cited in Güngör, 2018, p.211).

According to data from the "Global Digital Report 2020" a joint work of organizations named We Are Social and Hootsuite, the global internet usage has reached 4.5 billion in 2020 and the number of social media users reached 3.8 billion. According to this statistic, it is seen that half of the world's population are social media users. Again, looking at the findings of this report, it is striking that the use of social media starts almost in childhood. So much so that the usage age of Facebook has dropped to 12 years and Instagram to 13 years. According to the country-specific data of the "Digital 2020 in Turkey" report prepared by the same organizations, 62,07 million people use the internet in Turkey, which corresponds to 74% of Turkey's 82 million population and 54 million people corresponding to 64% of the population actively use social media. According to the report, the most widely used social media platforms in Turkey are, respectively, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook (We Are Social, 2020). In addition, in this report, it is striking that individuals of Generation Z use social media platforms intensively. "Generation Z's birth into a virtual world", which is highly emphasized in the study, is proven by these statistical data.

For the still very young Generation Z, with its oldest member 20 years of age, there are very few academic studies. On the other hand, the highlight of the few studies that have been conducted was the deep relationship of Generation Z with technology and the internet. A joint research study conducted by GFK and DigitaTalks named "Children's Device Ownership and Social Media Usage" found that of children aged from 6-15 years in Turkey: 59% own a smartphone, 42% own a tablet, and 44% own a computer. Considering that these rates are much higher for Generation Z members between the ages of 15-19 years, the overall social media usage rate of Generation Z rises up to 70% (DigitaTalks, 2020). When looking at usage practices, the essential point is that social media occupies a central place in the lives of the Generation Z. For them, social media has gone beyond being a tool that makes life easier and has become

one of the main goals of life. As can be seen when looking at the statistics in this study, a significant part of the lives of Generation Z individuals who have grown up with social media since childhood is shaped by the influence of social media. These individuals use social media, which offers a vast interaction opportunity, more than other generations for socialization. It has become a duty for Generation Z to share their hobbies, clothing and many other aspects of their lives on social media. Likewise, for social activities in real life, social media is used extensively by Generation Z for communicating and announcing these activities. If we would make a bold prediction, the need for "self-realization" in Maslow's Pyramid of Needs for Generation Z is increasingly becoming a need that is mostly met on social media. In conclusion, the relationship of Generation Z with social media starting from childhood is complex, deep and very powerful.

The Syrians and their Origins

Syriacs are an ancient community, whose origins date back 5000 years, are the heirs of the ancient Mesopotamian peoples. They flourished in Mesopotamia and played an essential role in the development of civilization. After adopting Christianity, this community saw its initial importance decrease due to the pressure and sovereignty of those who invaded its geography. Now the members of the Aramaic community live scattered in different parts of the world.

Many types of research have been made and published on the origins and history of this ancient community that accepted the first Christianity and spoke Aramaic, one of the first languages in the world. There are many assumptions about the origin of the Syrians. What is certain, however, is that Mesopotamia is the homeland of Syrians (Günel, 1970, p.83). Geographically, the area that rises between the Diyarbakır basin and the Syrian Desert with the Cudi Mountain of the Hakkari Mountains extending to the eastern edge of the Tigris Valley and the Mardin Mountains extending to the west of the valley can be described as the homeland of the Syrians (Öztemir, 1988, p.34).

There are three known different views on the origin of Syrians and where they came from. One of these views is the thesis defending that the

Syriacs are descended from the Arameans. The basis of this thesis claims that the Syriac people speak Aramaic, and therefore their origin is the Arameans. The second view on the origin of the Syriacs is the thesis that they are descendants of Assyrians who established the ancient Mesopotamian empire. The shortcomings of these two views revealed a new view stating that the Syriacs have their origins in all ancient Mesopotamian peoples.

Aside from their historical explanations, these three views on the origins of Syriacs are important because they signify different social models that the defenders of these views want for Syriacs. In other words, those who defend the Assyrian view wish for the Syriacs to be a political society first; On the other hand, those who defend the Aramaic view try to create a social model based on belief and to hold the society together within the framework of this model.

In fact, the people that are meant to be described as Assyrian and Aramaic are the same. The people in question are a community that carries the ancient Mesopotamian culture and is Christian in terms of belief. In Iraq and Iran, these people are mostly known as "Assyrian" while in Syria and Turkey they are recognized under the name "Syriac". The word Syriac has gained prevalence, primarily after Christianity and refers to the people of Upper Mesopotamia who are Christians. The term "Assyrian" is used for the people of Upper Mesopotamia before Christ. The words "Assyrian", Aramaic, "Syriac" (and other names; Chaldean, Maronite, etc.), which are used for these people somewhere today, describe the same community (Süryaniler.org, n.d.)

Syriacs in Turkey: The total population of Syriacs in the world is unknown. The reason for this is the migration phenomenon they encountered. Migration is a geographic displacement, which a person undertakes from one settlement area (city, village, ao.) to another settlement area to spend all or part of their future lives (Akkayan, 1979, p.21). However, migration is not just a geographical displacement. Migration is an event that profoundly impacts a society's culture, economy, politics and other factors. Due to its versatile character, it is a subject that attracts everyone from anthropologists to sociologists. Besides, immigration issues are a significant problem for a state or nation

that have various implications for social, financial, administrative, legal, economic, political and cultural aspects (Eren,1966, p.5). It is estimated that the Syriac community, which is the addressee of this problem, has approximately four million members. The whole world can be considered as their settlement area. Syriac people settled in Middle Eastern countries, Western European countries, India and more recently in the USA and Australia.

Although the population in Turkey has declined due to massive migration, according to information received from the Syriac Foundation executives, today 15000 Syriacs live in Istanbul and 5000 more live mainly in the Southeast and other places around Turkey, totalling a population of 20000 in the country.

Syriacs in Turkey today mostly live in small communities in the Mardin province, towns and villages, as well as Diyarbakır, Hatay, Elazığ and Adıyaman. Due to inward migration in the last 45 years, the largest Syriac community can be found in Istanbul. However, it is also possible to come across Syriacs in other large cities such as Ankara and Izmir.

It is thought that the subject of our study: the Syriac Generation Z comprises around 600 people in total. These individuals, who are the children of a generation who faced the phenomenon of migration, generally live in large cities. As a minority, these individuals have a different religious and cultural identity from the majority of the society they live in and can be expected to adopt a different psychological attitude than the rest of society. Furthermore, since this generation was also experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic and was born into the era of communication technologies, it can be assumed that they express themselves through social media. These assumptions will be tested and discussed in upcoming parts of this study.

COVID-19

Outbreaks, wars, economic crises, natural disasters are events that have an impact on many areas. Primarily social, economic, psychological changes and developments in society during such periods affect individuals and are closely observed by institutions. COVID-19, in particular, has taken its place in history as a pandemic that has had an

impact all over the world. The initial outbreak was in China and its surroundings, later the virus crossed the borders of Asia and started to threaten the whole world. It has become a topic that is discussed every day as the most important event of the agenda all over the world. The first case detected in this outbreak is dated on 12 December 2019 and was first named "Wuhan Coronavirus". Since it was similar to the SARS epidemic in 2003 and appeared in 2019, its name changed to "2019nCoV".

After the rapid spread and a sharp increase in the number of cases all over the world, the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020 declared the virus as an "International Public Health Emergency". The emergency declaration started with the USA's travel ban on China on 31 January and then with the travel ban decisions around the world.

The first COVID-19 case in Turkey was detected on 10 March 2020. Since then, it has caused social, economic, political, administrative, legal, military, religious and cultural areas to become impacted by radical changes and decisions in Turkey. While education in primary, secondary and high schools was suspended in the whole country, spring term courses were cancelled in all universities and exams were postponed. In a country, where almost the entire population is Muslim, prayers were suspended in mosques and masjids, including the Friday prayer. The government first, to limit the spread of the disease and to maintain social distance between people, introduced a curfew for the population aged 65 years and older. Later, it expanded this restriction to include the subjects of our study, children and adolescents aged 20 years and younger. The public was urged not to travel outside the country and also not to leave the house unless they had legitimate reasons. On April 11-12, 2020, The Ministry of Interior declared a large-scale curfew for the first time in 20 years after the general census in the year 2000. The curfew covered 30 metropolitan areas and the province of Zonguldak, in which 64 million, or 78% of Turkey's population live (Ministry of Interior, 2020). Until now the Turkish government has systematically eased and restricted the above-mentioned restrictions several times depending on the number of COVID-19 cases in the country. Currently, a four-tier system, introduced on March 1st 2021, on local COVID-19 related restrictions is in place. For "high" and "very high" risk regions within the country, Sunday curfews remain. Also, the nationwide curfew between 9PM and 5AM. Monday through Friday,

is still in effect (Ministry of Interior, 2021). It can be assumed that these decisions have had inevitable psychological effects on individuals of Generation Z, which constitute the most dynamic segment of society. How this generation copes with the new life situation during this pandemic is the main subject of our study.

Research

Research Objectives: Individuals born in in the digital era carry many names such as millennials (Pedró, 2006, p.2), net generation (Oblinger, Oblinger, 2005, p.12), technological natives (Monereo, 2004, p. 32), gamer generation (Carstens, Beck, 2005, p. 23), homo zappiens (Veen, 2003, p.6) or digital native (Prensky, 2009, p.1).

These individuals are highly skilled and creative in using technological tools. It can be observed that these individuals make use of their skills in a multidisciplinary manner. Their daily lives are characterized by juggling between different digital technologies and information sources and simultaneous ongoing instant communication. Therefore, it is impossible to say that they are passive in their use of digital technologies (Pedró, 2006, p.2).

In this context, this study aims to answer how the Generation Z Syrians, who live as a minority in Turkey, use social media and how they cope in the face of a never seen before worldwide pandemic. Furthermore, this study also aims to answer the following questions:

- Has social media usage increased during the COVID-19 period?
- Are these individuals more anxious than before the COVID-19 period?
- By what means are they trying to cope with their anxiety related to COVID-19?
- Does Social Media usage help them to cope with their anxiety?

Research Materials and Method: For this study, the online survey method was used. The questions of the questionnaire sent to the participants were prepared using the Likert scale based on the bipolar / quintet assessment/response categories presented by Rensis Likert (Likert, 1932,

p.5-20). The questionnaire has been attached as supplementary material to this study.

Research Context and Sample: According to the "Digital in Turkey 2020" report, 62,07 million people use the internet in Turkey, which corresponds to 74% of Turkey's 83 million population and 54 million people corresponding to 64% of the population actively use social media. The average time users spend on the internet is approximately 7 hours and 15 minutes. Although there is no indication in the report about the social media usage of generation Z, it can be safely assumed that this generation is among the heavy social media users.

In this context, the Generation Z sample of the community that defines itself as Syriac in Turkey, which is thought to be around 600 people within the total 20000 people population of Syriacs in Turkey.

Results

The online survey for this study was conducted between the dates of 22-31 March 2021. Seventy-three individuals participated in this survey.

Of the participating individuals 21.4% are between 18-19 years of age and 78.6% are between 20-21 years of age; 50.7% of those surveyed are female, and 49.3% are male; 84.9% of those surveyed are students; 15.1% of them are working; 28.8% of the participants are high school students. 71.2% are undergraduate or postgraduate students.

All participants of the survey connect to the internet on a daily basis. 37% only connect to the internet using smartphones; the remaining 63% connect to the internet using both smartphones and computers.

When asked where the participants get the most news about COVID-19, they answered as illustrated below:

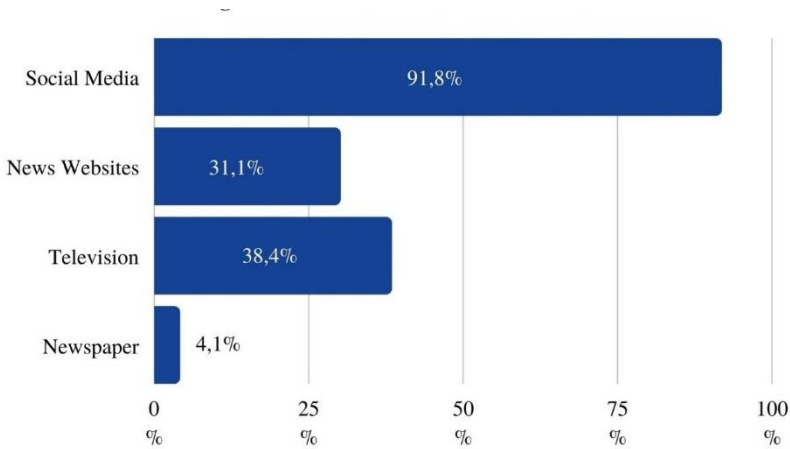


Figure 1. COVID-19 Related News Sources

91.8% of the participants get their COVID-19 related news from Social Media; 38.4% from television; 30.1% from news websites; only 4.1% stated that they read news about the pandemic in newspapers.

To the question on which Social Media platforms they have an account on, the participants answered as follows:

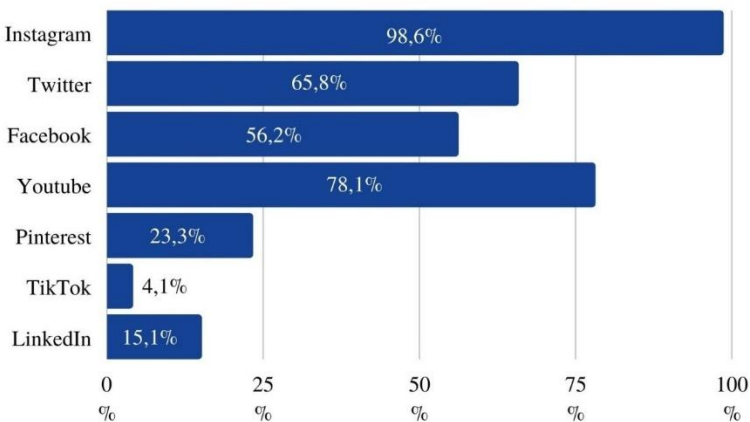


Figure 2. Social Media Account Rates

The platform with the highest user count of our survey group by far is Instagram, as 98.6% of the participants have an account on this platform; other Social Media platforms like Youtube (78,1%), Twitter (65.8%) and Facebook (56.2%) also have a high account rate. Pinterest (23.3%), LinkedIn (15.1%) and TikTok (4.1%) are significantly less common in our survey group.

76.7% of the participants stated that their use of social media increased during the COVID-19 period compared to before.

When asked which Social Media platforms would be indispensable to the participants: 94.5% stated that Instagram would be indispensable to them, 45.2% stated Youtube, 27.4% stated Twitter, 6.8% stated Pinterest, 5.5% stated Facebook, 2,7% of them stated that they would not give up Tiktok and 1.4% stated LinkedIn.

37% of the surveyed stated that they never met with their friends during the COVID-19 period, 60.3% stated sometimes, and 2.7% stated that they frequently met their friends.

53.4% of the participants stated that they frequently talk to their friends on the phone, and 46.6% of them stated that they only talk sometimes. While 89% stated that they frequently contacted their friends via social media during the COVID-19 period; 11% stated that they only got sometimes in contact.

56.2% of the participants described themselves as more stressful than before COVID-19, and 43.8% as the same and 68.5% stated that they see themselves more unhappy than before Covid-19, while 31.5% said they feel the same. Furthermore, 72.6% of the respondents stated that they are more anxious than before COVID-19, and 27.4% marked that they feel the same.

53.4% of the respondents stated that social media was a good way of reducing COVID-19 related stress, while 46.6% did not think so.

47.9% of the respondents said they prayed more during the COVID-19 period than in the past, while 52.1% said they did not.

The participants submitted the following answers to the multiple-choice question "What are you worried about because of COVID-19?":



Figure 3. Concerns due to COVID-19

As seen in the illustration above: not a single participant is not worried, 91,8% worry that a member of their family might lose their health, 80,8% worry about an uncertain future, 61,6% worry about the loss of their health and 43,8% worry that their education level might be insufficient.

Furthermore, when confronted with the multiple-choice question “What are you doing to deal with the concerns you have marked above?” the surveyed stated the following:

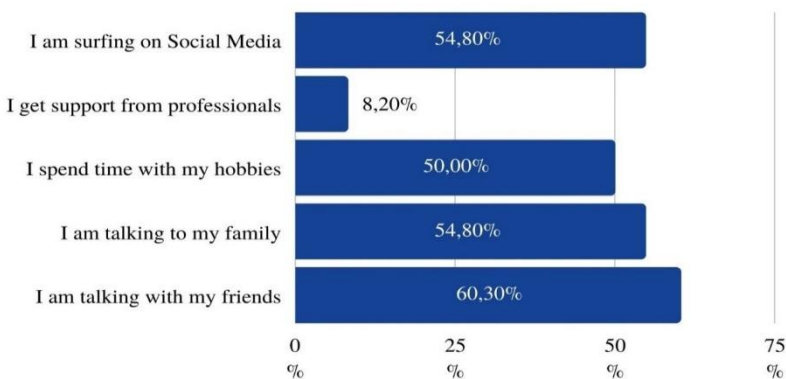


Figure 4. Coping with Concerns

60.3% of the participants stated that they talked to their friends in order to cope with their concerns about COVID-19, 54.8% stated that they talked to their families, 54.8% stated they were surfing on social media, 50% spent time with their hobbies and only 8.2% of them stated that they received professional support.

Discussion

In order to explain the unity of behaviour of human beings born in the same climate, technological and social eras of the world, the concept of generations has been introduced, and classifications have been made. The generation born after the year 2000, during a period of communication technology advancements exhibits great differences compared to the previous generations. Understanding this generation, of which the oldest member is 21 years of age and which in the literature is referred to as the Generation Z, is crucial in terms of understanding their attitudes regarding the future and reducing the conflict between generations.

Generation Z, whose members have mostly not yet been involved in professional life and continue their education, constitutes the most dynamic segment of society and will shape the future. They are also the youngest generation to encounter the currently ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This whole world affecting pandemic continues to cause deaths and is a traumatic situation for the whole of society. Governments have taken and are taking drastic measures against this threat. Particularly the Generation Z in Turkey was affected by these measures in the form of curfews, suspended education or conversion to distance-learning. Besides, members of this generation had to stay away from their loved ones and their social environment due to the risk of virus transmission.

This circumstance is naturally expected to cause stress and anxiety in all individuals. Anxiety in an individual emerges when a thought that something terrible will happen coupled with the notion that he/she cannot prevent it, arises (Antony Swinson, 2000, p.56).

Anxiety is a state of fear and tension that occurs as a reaction to a threat or stress. It can be defined as unpleasant emotional and observable reactions such as sadness and tension caused by stressful situations

(Spielberger, 1972, p.11). It is evident that the unknown and fear will affect human psychology.

The new state of life due to COVID-19 causes stress in individuals and affects their behaviour and relationships with other people. Of course, every individual is affected by changes in the environment, but some individuals can be more affected than others. Also, stress is not something that happens spontaneously, in order for stress to form in a human being, the environment in which these human lives must affect him/her. This causes specific biochemical changes in a human's body, to which the body reacts with stress (Pehlivan, 1995, p.27).

According to Cüceloğlu, stress is "an individual's effort to cope, beyond his/hers physical and psychological limits, with uncomfortable conditions in this individual's physical and social environment" (Cüceloğlu, 1994, p.321).

In light of these definitions, it can be stated that the new restrictive state of life caused by COVID-19 affects and transforms all individuals. In the face of this traumatic situation in which all segments of society are affected, it should be considered that the disadvantaged in the society like minorities, refugees, and the disabled may even face harsher problems.

Our study gathered data on Generation Z of the religious minority of Syriacs Turkey. The objective of this study was to understand how they are affected by COVID-19 and how they use social media in this context.

According to Turkey's Statistics Board, the population of Turkey counted 83.614.362 people, by the end of January 2020 (TUIK, 2021). Among this population, the religious minority of Syriacs account for approximately 20,000 people. Within this minority, approximately 600 individuals can be classified as Generation Z individuals. Seventy-three of these individuals participated in the online questionnaire for this study.

First, the demographic characteristics of the study's subjects were determined. The gender distribution is almost equal. 78.6% are between 19-20 years old, and the rest are between 18-19 years old. 84.9% of the subjects are continuing their education life; the remaining part is already involved in professional life. It is noteworthy that unemployment does not seem to be a problem for our subjects. This can be explained with the contributions of their families and the inclusiveness of the minority community.

It can be observed that education is highly valued for the participants of our study because 28.8% of them are in high school and 71,2% of them stated that they are continuing their undergraduate or postgraduate education.

As expected, internet usage is very high among these individuals. 100% of the participants connect to the internet every day. Furthermore, 37% use only smartphones while connecting; the rest use both smartphones and computers. This is an indication that the internet has become an integral part of their life.

In order to understand the participants' practices on social media with regards to COVID-19, they were asked to state where they get their COVID-19 related news from to which 91.8% of them stated that they were getting it from social media platforms. Also, 30.8% got their COVID-19 related news from news websites and 38.4% from television. Only 4,1% follow COVID-19 related news in newspapers. For this generation, social media is the dominant source of news.

Which social media platform is used more may differ from generation to generation. For this minority generation Z, Instagram is the most used platform, with 98.6% of our participants actively using it. In addition, 94.5% of the participants defined this platform as indispensable for them. Secondly, youtube account ownership is 78.1%, and 45.2% of the participants defined this platform as indispensable for them. The third most frequently used platform is Twitter, with 65.8% with 27.4% of the subjects defining it as indispensable. Facebook account ownership comes fourth with 56.2%. However, only 5.5% of the subjects defined this platform as indispensable for them. It can be observed that the participants prefer platforms with visual aspects.

The data obtained by asking the participants if their social media usage has increased during COVID-19, to which 76% responded that they use social media platforms more than before, offers an insight to the relationship between social media and this pandemic. This was an anticipated outcome of our study.

Another objective of our study is to determine if this generation experiences more anxiety and stress during this period, if so, what are they doing to cope with these psychological conditions and furthermore to which role social media plays for them in this context?

72.6% of the participants described themselves as more anxious, 68.5% as more unhappy and 56.2% as more stressful than before in the COVID-19 period. Additionally, 0% of the participants stated that they had no worries related to COVID-19, which leads to the conclusion that all of the subjects had concerns and, as anticipated, the vast majority are in a negative psychological state compared to before COVID-19.

When asked about specific reasons of their concerns the participants 91.8% are concerned about family members losing their health, 80,8% are concerned about an uncertain future, 61,6% of them stated that they were worried about the loss of their own health and 43,8% stated that they were concerned about their insufficient education level.

In order to understand how this generation of young Syrians were coping with this situation, questions were formulated by creating options in accordance with the methods stated in the literature.

Erdoğan stated that effective time management, relaxation practices, lively imagination, exercise and body movements, behavioural self-control, communication, meditation, food control and massage are individual strategies in coping with stress. He recommends taking a hobby and being extroverted (Erdoğan, 1991, p.14).

In this context, 60.3% of the questions asked about what the participants did to cope with their anxiety during the COVID-19 period were answered as follows: 53,4% stated that they were talking to friends on the phone. Also, 89% of them stated that they communicated with their friends via social media frequently, and only 11% stated that they were only communicating sometimes with their friends. Again, social media emerges as the dominant communication medium for this generation.

During COVID-19 period, 54.8% of the subjects also stated that they talked to their families, only a small proportion of 8.4% stated they received support from professionals in order to cope with their anxiety and concerns. In addition, 52.1% of the subjects stated that they prayed more than before, it could be asserted that in a sense, they are asking for help from a supernatural being.

In order to understand the relationship between social media usage anxiety and COVID-19, the participants were asked whether they think social media is useful for reducing your stress during the COVID-19 period, 53.4% answered positively. Additionally, 54.8% of the subjects

stated that they used social media to reduce their anxiety during this period.

As a result of this study, it can be stated that the entire participating Syriac Generation Z in Turkey have social media accounts, access the internet daily, follows COVID-19 related news through social media, use social media more compared to before COVID-19 and frequently spend their time with friends on social media.

This study has also revealed that during the COVID-19 period, the Generation Z of the Syriac minority in Turkey was more concerned and anxious and that they were generally interested in their hobbies as well as communicating with their friends and families as a method of dealing with these concerns. Furthermore, half of the Syriac Generation Z stated they think that social media was useful in relieving their concerns. This result turned out less than anticipated, and more research is needed.

With this study, a data set was created for other researchers to establish the concerns of Generation Z due to COVID-19, their practices of using social media, what ways they use to cope with their concerns, and the role of social media in all of this. Also, the fact that these data belong to a cultural and religious minority, which are relatively difficult to access, will allow researchers to compare similar studies with different segments of society.

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