VIRTUAL GRIEVING IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19

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submitted by **MERVE HİLAL KARABULUT** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological Counseling, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Hanife AKAR
Head of Department
Department of Educational Sciences

Prof. Dr. Özgür ERDUR BAKER
Supervisor
Department of Educational Sciences

Examining Committee Members:

Prof. Dr. Zeynep HATIPOĞLU SÜMER (Head of the Examining Committee)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Educational Sciences

Prof. Dr. Özgür ERDUR BAKER (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Educational Sciences

Assist. Prof. Dr. Fatma Zehra ÜNLÜ KAYNAKÇI
TED University
Department of Educational Sciences

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last Name: Merve Hilal KARABULUT

Signature:

ABSTRACT

VIRTUAL GRIEVING IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19

KARABULUT, Merve Hilal

M.S., The Department of Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological
Counseling

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Özgür ERDUR BAKER

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In this study, the experiences of the virtual world on grieving, how the virtual world is used in grief, the way bonds in social media are maintained, and the experiences of the virtual world on the reconstruction of meaning during the time of COVID-19 was investigated. To examine the experiences of grieving individuals in virtual environments, qualitative research methodology was chosen to explore individuals' digital grief experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. A phenomenological research design was chosen to identify common aspects of experiences of the grieving process on social media during COVID-19 and their impact on bereaved individuals. Semi structured interviews were conducted with a total of 10 participants, six women and four men, reached through purposive sampling technique. The qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA 2022 was used to complete the content analysis of the results. According to the results of the study, individuals grieving during COVID-19 shared grief posts on their social media accounts. These posts experienced positively and negatively. At the same time, the contribution of social media to the continuity of bonds and the reconstruction of meaning was determined. Positive experiences such as social

support and emotion regulation were identified, while negative experiences such as social appearance effect and other people's interactions were found. While the permanence of the deceased person's accounts contributed to the continuity of the bond, the interactions obtained through common experiences on social media contributed to the reconstruction of meaning.

ÖZ

COVID-19 DÖNEMİNDE SANAL YAS

KARABULUT, Merve Hilal

Yüksek Lisans, Eğitim Bilimleri, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Bölümü

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Bu çalışmada, çevrimiçi araçların yas süreci esnasında nasıl deneyimlendiği, sosyal medyadaki bağların nasıl sürdürüldüğü ve sanal dünyanın anlamın yeniden yapılandırılması deneyimine etkisi COVID-19 döneminde Türkiye örneklemi üzerinden incelenmiştir. Yas tutan bireylerin sanal ortamlardaki deneyimlerini ve COVID-19 salgını sırasında bireylerin yas deneyimlerini incelemek amacıyla nitel araştırma yöntemi seçilmiştir. COVID-19 sırasında sosyal medyada yas sürecine ilişkin deneyimlerin ortak yönlerini ve bunların yas tutan bireyler üzerindeki etkisini belirlemek için fenomenolojik bir araştırma tasarımı seçilmiştir. Amaçlı örnekleme tekniği ile ulaşılan 6'sı kadın ve 4'ü erkek olmak üzere toplam 10 katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçların içerik analizini tamamlamak için MAXQDA 2022 nitel veri analiz programı kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, COVID-19 sürecinde yas tutan bireyler sosyal medya hesaplarında yas paylaşımları yapmıştır. Bu paylaşımların olumlu ve olumsuz olarak deneyimlenmiştir. Aynı zamanda sosyal medyanın bağların devamlılığına ve anlamın yeniden yapılandırılmasına katkısı tespit edilmiştir. Sosyal destek ve duygu düzenleme gibi olumlu deneyimler tespit edilirken, sosyal görünüm etkisi ve diğer insanların etkileşimleri gibi olumsuz

deneyimler bulunmuştur. Vefat eden kişinin hesaplarının kalıcılığı bağlarının devamlılığına katkıda bulunurken, sosyal medyada ortak deneyimler yoluyla elde edilen etkileşimler anlamın yeniden yapılandırılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yas; Sosyal Medya; COVID-19; Bağların Devamlılığı; Anlamın Yeniden Yapılandırılması

To my dear mother,
Kafiye KARABULUT
&
my dear sister,
Seval KARABULUT SERDAR

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This section includes the theoretical background of the research, the purpose of the research, the significance of the research, the research questions, and explanations of the terms respectively.

1.1. Background to the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has been changing people's life in various ways. Researchers have revealed that grief-related issues are some of the most common changes due to COVID-19 causing many losses. Pandemics and epidemics have been part of history. These include the bubonic plague, smallpox, influenza, cholera, the Spanish flu, SARS, Ebola, and Zika virus (Hays, 2005; Huremovic, 2019). These diseases resulted in the death of thousands of people (Hays, 2005). In 2019, COVID-19 pandemic emerged. In December 2019, the World Health Organization China Country Office was informed about pneumonia cases with unknown causes in the city of Wuhan. Information about these illnesses was announced by China, and the illness was labelled coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19. Before long, the virus spread outside of the country. In March 2020, the WHO classified COVID-19 as a pandemic (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). On March 11, the first case in Turkey was announced, and, on March 17, the first death was announced (Narlı, 2021). The number of cases from the virus increased each day. By early July 2021, the total number of deaths in Turkey was approximately 50,000 and total case was approximately 5 million (Ministry of Health, 2022).

To prevent the spread of the new virus, the government declared several restrictions such as social isolation (being distant from each other as possible) and curfews

(Ministry of Health, 2020). For this reason, mass gatherings were banned. With the sudden enforcement of social isolation in everyday life, the widespread use of the Internet occurred. Business activities and education had to be executed at a distance via social media platforms and Internet-based meeting platforms. The restriction of daily life activities caused people to decrease their face-to-face interactions and to conduct them over the internet (Wallace et al., 2020). Social interactions changed to be based on the internet. Sites such as social media platforms became popular among communities to socialize in everyday life. These platforms are applications that enable users to create profiles with personal information. In these sites, the user could invite their friends to see their content, message each other and follow their friends' profiles (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As users follow other people's pages and expand their circles, their use of social media also increased (Schau & Gilly, 2003). This situation could show that social media is not only an individual space, but also a platform that develops with interactions with other people. Some of the uses of social media include communicating with other people and creating digital expressions of themselves. Being in a social setting is an important contributor to the happiness and life satisfaction of individuals (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). However, the physical and social environment were restricted by social isolation due to COVID-19 rules. Instead of a physical social environment, the socializing created in the virtual world has become significant for the mental health of individuals (Pancani et al., 2021). In addition, social media users desire to express themselves more when there are important and personal events such as graduation, marriage, promotion, parenthood, and other life milestones (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Losing a loved one is one of those personal milestones. The bereavement experience, part of the flow of life, could be seen as a private event that changes lives. During the early months of COVID-19 with numerous announcements about increasing death rates and emerging physical restrictions, individuals might feel the desire to express themselves about their bereavement process.

Following the rapid increase in COVID-19 cases, fatalities started to rise. In May 2020, approximately 4 million cases were seen worldwide, and approximately 300,000 deaths were reprted (Budak & Korkmaz, 2020). Along with the social isolation, COVID-19 seems to have led to changes in grieving practices. Before COVID-19,

when a loved one dies, the funeral usually took place in large groups, and gatherings assembled in homes to pray and commemorate the deceased. However, due to social isolation, the rituals performed after the decease of a loved one could not be fully carried out. For instance, the maximum number of people attending the funeral was set at thirty, and house visits were prohibited (Ministry of Health, 2020). These restrictions resulted in less social support from people who would form around the bereaved individuals when they experienced loss. It is important to create a social environment in times of mourning because not talking about important life events and not expressing feelings has a negative effect on mental and physical health (Pennebaker, 1997). As a result of a study by Segal et al. (1999) on grieving elderly individuals who lost their spouses, it was determined that the expression of emotionally painful feelings had a positive effect on their psychological well-being. Verbal disclosure of thoughts and feelings about the loss, done for 20 minutes daily for two weeks, decreased the symptoms of hopelessness, intrusive thoughts, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and depression.

The losses experienced during the COVID-19 period differ from the losses in the normal period. According to research reports, people who experience loss during the pandemic period could experience primary, secondary, and multiple loss at the same time (Breen, 2020; Kartseva & Kuznetsova, 2020; Mayland et al., 2020). Individuals who experience primary loss such as losing a loved one, also experience secondary losses based on restriction of freedom (Breen, 2020). Additionally, losses of relationships and employment happens. Because of the social distancing, emotional and physical intimacy decreased. Feelings of loneliness which is a part of almost every bereavement could intensify (Stroebe & Schut 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020). Thus, COVID-19 restrictions disrupted the usual experiences of grief from losing someone. These experiences include funeral gatherings, after loss gatherings, and travelling to see the family (Wallace et al., 2020).

All these restrictions led people to utilize internet-based communication technologies more than ever before. Skype, Zoom WebEx, WhatsApp became the main instant communication tools. Based on the review of literature of 44 scientific articles, Stroebe and Schut (2021) reported that, the persisting difficulty during bereavement in the time

of COVID-19 restrictions was the lack of in-person social support from families and friends. Bereaving individuals shared posts on social media about how they could not say goodbye to the people they lost, or how they attended funerals remotely via telephone or videos (Wallace et al., 2020). Due to their inability to find physical, in-person support, some developed new methods of securing support through social media. As a result, a new research area emerged. Although research on the commonality and impacts of social media use among grieving individuals are still in its infancy, the existing literature suggests that the use of social media in the grieving process has various effects on the bereaved individuals (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Döveling, 2015; Lingel, 2013; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). These research results demonstrate the need for further research to better understand the positive and/or negative effects of bereavement experiences in social media, in addition to its extent and the nature of utilization.

Therefore, it is assumed by this research that the restrictions brought by COVID-19 might have had a negative impact on individuals experiencing the grieving process. It is also assumed that the fact that people could not find physical social support due to the restrictions in the COVID-19 period might have led them to use social media more in their grieving process. Digital world could be used in various ways. Gatherings through phone calls, live video funerals, social media platforms, virtual reality technologies, personal web-based blogs, and online support groups are environments to create virtual social surroundings for bereaved individuals (Eaglesham, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2012; Riva et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021). Grieving individuals could use the virtual world to announce funerals and organizations, share their own mourning experiences, and receive support from other people (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011).

In addition to the use of the virtual world for social support by the mourners, according to Bouc et al. (2016), the mourners also used the virtual world to ensure the continuity of their bonds with the deceased. Three themes emerged from the research of Bouc et al. (2016), who analyzed the content of the messages published on the Facebook profile pages of the deceased. The themes were processing the death, remembering the deceased, and continuing the connection. Processing the death included explicit emotional expressions such as negative emotions (sadness, confusion, pain, despair),

positive emotions (acceptance, happiness, gratitude), conflicting feelings (spirituality), creative expressions (poetry, lyrics), and asking questions (why?). Remembering the deceased included shared memories, relationship before death, the character of the deceased, and dedication to deceased. Continuing the connection included checking in (stopping by to say hi, making promises for future visits), updates (important news), making requests (please watch our family), and eventual reunion in afterlife. When it comes to the extent to which these themes are sustained in social media use, different frequencies were found. Processing the death and remembering the deceased peaked immediately after loss, and decreased frequently in time with the feeling of shock and disbelief (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011). However, continuing the connection increased in time. Additionally, at anniversaries, birthdays, and notable holidays the frequency of messages increased. Because of the social media automated feature, friends of deceased were getting notification about birthdays, and it influenced the continuing the relationship with the deceased (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011). This study is valuable in showing that the use of social media in the bereavement process is used as more than one motivational tool. Social media was used not only for sociability but also to maintain bonds with the deceased and to regulate their own emotional states.

In short, this research assumed that individuals who went through the grieving process because of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 had difficulty in finding physical social support around them. In the absence of physical social support, the virtual world, particularly social media sites could be used as an alternative. The social media sites appear to provide social support to bereaved individuals. Since expressing the loss situation verbally provides a positive effect on mental health during the grieving process, using the social media sites as a substitute instead of physical social support could be an alternative way to expressing the loss.

The use of social media during the grieving process could provide the continuation of the bond between the deceased and the bereaved individual. Additionally, it is said that the continuity of bonds is associated with meaning-making during bereavement (Neimeyer et al., 2006).

In general, the existing literature has explained that people who use social media during the grieving process receive social support, reach common experiences and

ensure the continuity of ties (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Knowles et al., 2017). However, the possible negative experiences of social media use during the grieving process were not frequently mentioned. In addition, studies with different sample groups are insufficient. At the same time, there is a lack of research on whether the sudden entry of the COVID-19 period and the increase in social media use have an impact on the mourning period. For this reason, this study has investigated the experiences of the virtual world on grieving, how the virtual world is used in grief, the way bonds in social media are maintained, and the experiences of the virtual world on the search for meaning in the context of Turkey during the time of COVID-19.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The sudden increase in death rates with COVID-19, the possibility of not being able to find social support in their environment due to social isolation raised questions on how the grieving period is experienced during COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that when people could not find physical social support, they could benefit from social support from their virtual environments (Usher et al., 2020). According to studies, individuals in the process of grief use the virtual world for various purposes such as online gatherings, online support groups, writing blog sites, posting social media sites (Bouc et al., 2016; Finlay & Krueger, 2011). This use appears to have both positive and negative effects on bereaved individuals. Positive effects could be continuing the bond with the deceased, finding support from others, and negative effects could be reading disturbing comments from others (Pizzoli et al., 2021). In today's conditions, where the use of social media is becoming more and more widespread, with the increase in the number of deaths with COVID-19 and the possible limitation of social support because of social isolation, the role of social media in the grieving process generated research interest.

The mourning process is culturally and religiously diverse across societies (Shear et al., 2011), and which social media platforms are used among the population may differ from society to society. In the Turkish sample, it is not known whether the use of social media experienced by the bereaved individuals or not. For instance, studies have mentioned that bereaved individuals using social media consider the continuity of bonds with the deceased person (Neimeyer et al., 2006; Pizzoli et al., 2021).

Additionally, there are studies that mentions social media usage during bereavement encompasses meaning reconstruction or emotion regulation (Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore et al., 2019). Since the experience of grief and mourning rituals are culturally sensitive and each community has its own way of experiencing grief, this study assumes that different results might emerge from different sample groups (Aksöz-Efe et al., 2018; Stroebe & Schut, 1998). Based on this, with the use of social media in the grieving process, it is not known how or at what level such situations were experienced by individuals who have experienced loss in Turkey.

Considering the cultural differences of the grieving process, the rapid increase in deaths with COVID-19, the decrease in physical social support with social isolation, and the assumption that decreased social support may have increased the use of social media, this study seeks to examine the grieving experiences in this process. One purpose of this study is determining how the grieving process progresses in the social media and in which situations it is experienced positively or negatively in the Turkish sample. The research identifies impacts and experiences of the virtual environment on the bereaved individuals in the time of COVID-19.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, four research questions were determined.

1.3. Research Questions

1. In what ways bereaved individuals are using the social media for the grief process in the time of COVID-19?

2. In what ways social media usage have experienced by bereaved individuals in the time of COVID-19?

3. In what ways do the continuing bonds are met with the deceased person in the social media?

4. To what extent does the social media contribute to the search for reconstruction of meaning of bereaved individuals?

1.4. Significance of the Study

With the integration of COVID-19 into our lives and social isolation around the world, research shows that bereaved individuals have different experiences of grieving (Zhai & Du, 2020). These studies observed that the shares related to the loss experience of the bereaved individuals and the difficulties of the COVID-19 related to their losses were shared with their network via social media tools. (Wallace et al., 2020). With the widespread use of social media, individuals have begun to reflect critical events in their own lives through social media channels (Pizzoli et al., 2021). However, there is still a lack of norms for social media use in terms of grieving within society. Therefore, it is very open to interpretation and more studies are needed. There are not enough studies to create a theoretical infrastructure on the experience of grief through social media. Additionally, the experiences of social media use in the grieving process have not been studied in the Turkish context as well. Since grief is culturally sensitive (Stroebe & Schut, 1998), it is important to examine it in the Turkish sample. The experiences of grief experiences through social media have not been studied with this sample group. According to the results obtained, this research is important for mourning individuals to carry out their processes with healthy guidance.

According to some studies, it has been stated that the use of social media in the process of grieving could have positive effects on people in terms of emotion regulation or restructuring of meaning (Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore et al., 2019). However, because this topic has not been studied in the Turkish sample group, it is not known how, in what way, or at what level bereaved individuals experience the use of social media in the grieving process. According to the results of this research, it is aimed to direct people who use social media during the mourning period to areas where they could receive positive effects and to protect them from areas where they could receive negative effects. In addition, based on the findings, how people utilize social media could be determined as a contribution to the coping strategies of grieving individuals. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine social media's benefits, difficulties, obstacles on grieving individuals in Turkey. With the widespread use of social media today, and with the knowledge of the negative effects that might occur

for the bereaved individuals during their social media usage. Moreover, the possible harms of social media for the bereaved social media users could be minimized.

Secondly, the theory of continuing bonds in making sense of the grieving experience is considered during the bereavement process (Neimeyer et al., 2006). However, according to Neimeyer et al. (2006), more studies should be done on this theory in terms of meaning-making and continuing bonds on bereavement process. According to some studies, the presence of the deceased person on social media shows the continuity of the bonds between the deceased and the grieving person (Brubaker et al., 2013). It is still being researched whether the traces left in the digitalized world such as social media accounts of the deceased maintain continuity of the bonds with the deceased. The aim of this research is to understand whether the social media accounts of the deceased person which are still open and being interacted with contribute the continuity of the bonds. Another aim is to understand the experiences of social media on the bereaved individuals' continuity of the bonds. Possible benefits and harms could be considered and appropriate arrangements could be made on social media tools in a way that benefits the bereaved individuals.

The impact of social media on daily life is increasing, and it is known that social media is not only a personal area, but also an area affected by the environment (Schau & Gilly, 2003), as a result of this study is important in order to minimize the possible damage of environment and concerns of bereaved individuals in terms of social media usage. Apart from grieving individuals, relatives of bereaved individuals, grief counsellors, and even every person using social media could benefit from the study findings. In this way, this study could contribute to a more conscious use of social media usage, which is becoming quite common today, from the view of grieving individuals.

Overall, the aim of this study is to determine how individuals grieving during the COVID-19 period use social media and how they are experienced positively or negatively by this use. At the same time, it is to investigate the contribution of social media tools to the support of the function of continuity of bonds and the reconstruction of meaning.

1.5. Definition of Terms

Bereavement: Bereavement is the state of losing a loved one to death. The bereaved person may experience emotional pain and distress and may or may not express this distress to others, and individual grief and responses to grief may vary (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.).

Grief: Grief is the suffering experienced after a significant loss, usually the death of a loved one. Not all bereavement results in a strong grieving response, and not all grieving is expressed publicly. Grief often includes physiological distress, separation anxiety, confusion, longing, obsessing over the past, and worries about the future. It can become life-threatening through intense grief, impaired immunity, self-neglect, and suicidal thoughts (APA, n.d.).

Mourning: Mourning is the process of grieving or expressing the death of a loved one, or the period during which it occurred. It typically includes apathy and pessimism, loss of interest in the outside world, and decreased activity and initiative. These reactions are similar to depression but less persistent and are not considered pathological. Mourning reactions may include anger (toward the deceased for dying), a sense of relief (deceased is no longer suffering), physical signs (APA, n.d.).

Continuing bond: Continuing bond refers to the emotional bond that a bereaved continues to maintain with the deceased long after death (APA, n.d.).

Social media: Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

1.6. Summary

As with other pandemics, COVID-19 has changed the way of life. Many restrictions were imposed to prevent the rapid spread of the disease and to prevent the increase in existing deaths. With the introduction of restrictions, people were deprived of many situations at the same time. The most important of these deprivations was social

isolation and reduced social support. As people's social circles have diminished due to social isolation, the frequency of their use of online platforms increased in daily life. Workplaces, schools, and daily life activities have been compressed behind the screen. By using online platforms for socializing alongside work and school activities, people have created an environment where they could express themselves during the important events in their lives and seek the social support they need.

The most visible change brought about by COVID-19 was the rapid increase in deaths and the constant media and social media coverage about these deaths. People who were experiencing with grief were impacted by the following multiple factors: the rapid spread of the disease, the fact that multiple losses could occur in the same family at the same time, the anxiety-causing high number of deaths, and experiences from restriction-related multiple symbolic losses. They had to develop new strategies and coping mechanisms. One of the strategies was the active use of social media during periods of mourning.

The increased use of social media during COVID-19 and the active sharing of grief experiences fulfill the function of finding social support. The research examples observed that the use of social media in mourning is beneficial not only for social support motivation, but also for ensuring the continuity of bonding with the deceased and contributing to the emotion regulation function (Bouc et al., 2016; Brubaker & Heyes, 2011). However, Neimeyer et al. (2006) suggested that the studies on social media use during bereavement are insufficient and should be continued. This study, which was prepared to address this need, investigates how social media is used by Turkish individuals in the mourning process during the COVID-19 period, how they are affected by this use, whether this use ensures the continuity of bonds, and whether this use contributes to the reconstruction of meaning.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, explanation of grief, grief reactions, and grief theories; how grief is experienced during COVID-19, and how grief experienced virtually is represented respectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes to people's daily lives. For instance, restrictions were introduced to reduce the spread of the disease and associated deaths. These restrictions were meant to ensure that people avoided public places. Schools switched to online, workplaces went online as much as possible, and cinemas, theaters and cafes closed. Curfews were imposed, forcing people to stay at home. But despite all these measures, the disease did not disappear from lives immediately and deaths continued (Ministry of Health, 2022). Deaths from the disease became more frequent and visible, causing people to experience constant anxiety (Torrens-Burton et al., 2022). As the disease spread within the same family, there were multiple deaths. There were also secondary losses caused by the restrictions. These secondary losses included loss of economic order, loss of freedom, and loss of work. The experience of multiple deaths, the lingering impact of secondary losses and the uncertainty of when the disease would end caused anxiety among mourners (Breen, 2020). With the combination of all these, grief was postponed, could not be experienced, and could not be shared with other people (Wallace et al., 2020). The fact that it could not be shared with other people also led to a lack of social support during the grieving process. Normally, in the Turkish tradition, events such as condolence visits and prayer meetings were organized, and the grieving family was not left alone (Aksöz-Efe et al., 2018). However, the prohibitions and social isolation during the COVID-19 period affected grieving individuals. They could not receive in-person social support. Since

social support could not be received in-person, grieving individuals mourned through social media by sharing many posts and they received social support through these posts (Wallace et al., 2020).

This study aims to research the ways of using social media during the grieving process in the COVID-19 pandemic and how the bereaved individuals are experienced this usage. Because of the possible struggle of finding physical social support during the COVID-19 era, social media sites might be a place where bereaved individuals find support around them. However, there is not sufficient study which explains the experiences of social media sites during bereavement. This chapter explicates the grief process, the struggles during COVID-19, and the ways social media sites were utilized. The content of this chapter begins with explaining grief and grief reactions in general. It continues with grief theories by explaining the process of bereavement and describes the changes and challenges in grief practices because of COVID-19. It concludes with virtual grieving ways, particularly social media grieving.

2.1. What Is Grief?

In order to understand the results and course of this study, it is important to understand the meaning of loss and grief. Loss and grief are inevitable facts of life. Death alone is one type of loss individuals experience in their lifespans. Legitimate grief experience is generally expected through the loss of a person's death. All kinds of transitions and differentiations in human life could bring the process of grieving. Loss is defined as deprivation of something owned, or a harm or disadvantage due to the inability to retain or obtain (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). The pain and suffering experienced after the loss is called grief and the time period in which grief reactions are observed is called mourning (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Lastly, responses to the loss of a close bond are called bereavement (Raphael, 1983).

The individual, who encounters the emotions and pain brought about by the loss experience, gains a new cognitive and physical identity over time, and creates a new life form. This new life does not develop suddenly, furthermore, it does not occur sequentially in the process (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007; Parkes & Prigerson, 2013). Painful returns may be experienced, and grief outcomes may be experienced

cyclically. The experience of loss is not simply a single case. It could be experienced in different intensities through a combination of past experiences (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Individuals do not go through a single grieving process. The stages of grief may differ for everyone and is unique for each person. Not every individual has the same grief reactions during the grieving process (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Parkes & Prigerson, 2013). Sharing unwanted grief reactions may create the perception that a person has a problem (Parkes & Prigerson, 2013).

The reactions given during the grieving process, the duration and intensity of the grieving process may vary depending on the type of death and the way it was experienced (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008). The roles in life of the deceased affect the grieving individual's adjustment in the grieving process. For example, for a woman who lost her husband, it may require a series of adaptations due to the lack of economic income, the absence of her partner at home, and the fact that she has to take care of the repair work in the house. Thus, new life roles need to be acquired by the individual who has experienced a loss (Parkes & Prigerson, 2013).

In addition to mourning the absence of the lost individual, stigma and deprivation also affect the reactions shown during the grieving process. Stigma is the negative label given by society. Societies generally tend to pity the person who has just experienced a loss. Social communities tend to ignore the grieving individuals without realizing it because they do not know that withdrawal is part of the process of experiencing a loss. Secondly, deprivation is the disappearance of the benefits that existed when the person was alive. Loneliness, poverty, loss of roles, lack of security resulting from the sharing of responsibilities are some of the ongoing feelings that stem from deprivation (Parkes & Prigerson, 2013).

2.1.1. Grief Reactions

There are several possible reactions that could be seen in people in the grieving process. Grief is the transition process between the lives of individuals before and after the loss. In this process, individuals show different psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions (Worden, 2018). While immediate reactions are shock, disbelief, confusion, obsessive thoughts about the deceased; sense of deceased's

presence, hallucinations, and numbness, cognitive inability to accept reality, feeling like in a dream, or feeling like being in a movie could be experienced (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Walsh, 2021; Worden, 2018). Hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest and throat, oversensitivity to noise, breathlessness, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy and dry mouth are bodily reactions during loss (Worden, 2018). The continuation of the first body reactions, which may be manifested as shaking, palpitations, nausea, chills, or dizziness for a few more days is seen as normal due to the effect of loss of appetite and irregular nutrition (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008). After the immediate reactions, the long-term ones are often a sense of loss, sadness, yearning, pain, blame, physical ailments, self-reproach and guilt, irritation and anger, sleep disturbances, anxiety, vulnerability, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, reliving the events surrounding the death, lack of concentration, memory problems, emancipation (positive feeling after death), and relief (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Walsh, 2021; Worden, 2018). Sleep disturbances, eating disturbances, social withdrawal, avoiding reminders of the deceased, searching, and calling out for the deceased, sighing, restless hyperactivity, crying, visiting places as reminder and carrying objects of the deceased are common behavioral experiences during grief process. These reactions are considered as non-pathological and are expected to fade over time (Walsh, 2021; Worden, 2018).

According to Worden (2018) sadness is the most common feeling. Suppressing the sadness because of being afraid to experience it might complicate the situation. Frustration due to the inability to prevent death, and a regressive experience after the death could cause anger, panic, and anxiety (Worden, 2018). In such cases, it could be dangerous for the grieving individuals to turn the anger on themselves. The persons' return of anger to themselves may be due to the persons' self-blame. Additionally, loneliness could appear in two ways during the grieving process: social loneliness and emotional loneliness. While social loneliness might be resolved with social support, emotional support may need to be re-established with an attachment (Worden, 2018). This situation shows the importance of being able to access social support while experiencing the grief.

People who are grieving may not always feel intense sadness and loneliness in the first place. If the deceased has caused difficulties in the life of the grieving individual, emancipation may be experienced after the loss experience. If the deceased's illness has been severe, or if the deceased has suffered in the latter part of her/his life, the bereaved person may experience relief after the death. Finally, besides all these feelings, the grieving persons may turn into a state of numbness because they could not cope with their overall feelings immediately after the death experience (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Walsh, 2021; Worden, 2018).

The experience of loss is not something that could be accepted immediately in the beginning. Not being able to accept the situation after receiving the news of death is a normal cognitive experience (Worden, 2018). Inability to gather thoughts, forgetting what has been said immediately, being in complex thoughts are frequently seen grief reactions at the beginning of the grieving process. Additionally, constantly thinking about the deceased or even feeling their presence are other cognitive experiences (Walsh, 2021). The feeling of the deceased's presence could be comforting for some mourners, while for others it could be uncomfortable and even frightening. Hallucinations of the grieving individual as images or sounds are also stated as normal mourning reactions in the weeks or months following the loss (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008; Walsh, 2021).

In the grieving process, besides cognitive reactions, physical reactions could also be seen. It is common to experience sleeping problems in the early stages of the grieving process. Although medical intervention could be provided, they usually tend to resolve over time. Likewise, difficulties are seen in the eating pattern. Irregularities such as eating too much food or loss of appetite may be encountered (Worden, 2018).

2.1.2. Grief Theories

After the above overview of what grieving means and what are the generally accepted as normal and common grief reactions, this section examines how theorists explain grieving. Each theorist's way of explaining grief, ways of coping with it, and suggestions to manage the grief process differs. Examining the theories of grief contributes to making sense of the death experience. As far as the literature shows, the

theory of continuity of bonds and the theory of restructuring of meaning are linked to the functions of social media use in the grieving process (Brubaker et al., 2013; Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore et al., 2019 Neimeyer et al., 2006). However, as suggested by Neimeyer et al. (2006) more studies are needed in these areas.

With COVID-19 in our lives, changes in mourning rituals were inevitable. Grave visits, gatherings with other people to commemorate the lost person, which were held before COVID-19, could no longer be held. Considering that these rituals ensure the continuity of the bonds with the deceased, the function of social media might be in question because these rituals that cannot be performed during the COVID-19 period. One of the aims of this thesis is to consider the theory of continuity of the bonds and the extent to which the continuity of bonds could be maintained through social media due to the absence of rituals and gatherings that normally take place.

The sudden changes of COVID-19 in human life may have caused differentiation in the meaning of grief on bereaved individuals. Their perspectives on life may have changed with the addition of constant anxiety of disease, inability to perform normal rituals after death, being forced to socially isolate, restriction of freedom and loss of job, economic loss. With the use of social media during COVID-19 the meaning of grief may have been reconstructed through social media. The scope of this thesis is the extent to which social media posts contribute to the reconstruction of meaning during the COVID-19 period.

Furthermore, this thesis studied the outcomes of reflecting grief experiences on social media, and the extent that the continuity of bonds and the reconstruction of meaning are ensured through social media. This section contains Meaning Reconstruction and Continuing Bonds theories. Additionally, in order to understand the continuity of bonds, John Bowlby's bond theory is also explained.

2.1.2.1. Meaning Reconstruction

The restructuring of meaning model used the concepts of contemporary constructivism and narrative when describing the grieving process (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Constructivism is a postmodern approach that emphasizes individuals should attribute

meaning to their own life experiences (Neimeyer et al., 2010). In order to preserve the perception of a safe life, and the predictability of life, which has been shaken with the loss of significant others, people tend to look for reasons for life. According to constructivist approaches, the basis of the grieving experience is formed by individuals' questioning because of their loss experience, obtaining new meanings, and making sense of their grieving experiences (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). The limitations of 20th century theories in defining the grieving process as leaving attachments, moving on, and finally returning to normal life have been criticized. According to this theory, people should look for their own self narratives in order to create meaning for the changes in their lives (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Self-narrative is defined as "an overarching cognitive-affective behavioral structure that organizes the 'micro-narratives' of everyday life into a 'macro-narrative' that consolidates our self-understanding, establishes our characteristic range of emotions and goals, and guides our performance on the stage of the social world'' (Neimeyer et al., 2010). The loss of places, individuals, objects, or projects that are important to individuals creates a struggle over people's sense of identity and sense of narrative coherence. This is because significant others validate the sense of identity of individuals. Individuals' own life stories are interrupted as they change with the loss experience (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). In addition, individuals who experience loss tend to question how much control they have over their own lives, as they experience the inevitable death and pain (Neimeyer et al., 2010). For this reason, bereaved individuals need to reconstruct their continuity of stories by logically linking their past and future life stories (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Positive changes, called post-traumatic growth, could be observed in individuals who develop adaptive responses after a loss experience. Improvements could be observed in sense of self, resilience, and self-confidence. These people might show progress in acquiring new life roles and in accepting the fragility of life more easily (Tedeschi et al., 1998). According to a study of 1,022 participants who are at least 18 years old and have experienced the loss of a close friend or loved one in the last two years, individuals who create meaning from their loss experiences and who could find benefit from their experiences have less complicated grief reactions (Holland et al., 2006).

The restructuring of meaning has been evaluated in some studies in the literature on the experience of grief in social media. For example, in the study of Finlay and Krueger (2011) the posts of mothers who experienced sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) on 20 different sites were examined. As a result of the literary and visual examinations, it was determined that a meaningful language was formed among the bereaved mothers. Within this community, they understood and supported each other, educated each other on the issues they discussed, and they developed relevant coping skills during their grieving process. In addition, in another study that included social media shares of mothers who lost their children on 40 different sites, it was determined that these shares were made to give meaning to the loss they experienced (Frizzo et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the study of Marwick and Ellison (2012) in which the accounts of 37 people among Facebook users were examined, it was discovered that conveying the grief experience to society by sharing through social media was usually centered on how much the lost person meant to them.

When the infrastructure of the theory and the current studies were examined, it was seen that social media has the function of restructuring the meaning in the grieving period. There are missing and insufficient information that necessitates the need for further studies. The sample is only examined in limited number of countries, and the studies examining the experience of mourning related to the increasing use of social media are not up to date. In this study, it will examine how social media contributes to restructuring the meanings of people who experience grief in today's conditions.

2.1.2.2. The Theory of Continuing Bonds

Unlike other theories, the theory of continuing bonds opposes the complete detachment of bonds and the formation of new bonds accordingly. Instead, it proposes that it is not necessary to completely break the former bonds in order to reconstruct new identity (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). In this theory, the mourning process is managed by keeping the memories of the lost person, perhaps forever (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007; Klass et al., 2014). Maintaining these bonds and an internal representation acknowledges that contentment with the relationship changes with death, but new sources of contentment emerge and develop throughout the adjustment process. Thus, the grief process is an internal system that continues to focus on the

person who is no longer physically present (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). The theory of continuing bonds proposes a process of adaptation and change in the post-mortem relationship and the building and rebuilding of new connections. Rather than emphasizing letting go, it suggested that the emphasis should be on negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of loss over time. Although death is permanent and immutable, the process is not. Grief is regarded as a cognitive process as well as an emotional process that takes place in a social context where the deceased is included. The process does not end, it affects the grieving person in different ways for the rest of their life. Individuals are changed through experience and the change is a transformed by an ongoing relationship with the deceased (Klass et al., 2014).

Research clearly reveal that the continuity of bonds is provided through social media sites. In the study conducted by Bouc et al. (2016) 2533 Facebook messages were analyzed in the sharing of mourning experiences of the bereaved sample towards the deceased. The content analysis uncovered that one of the main themes was ensuring the continuity of the bonds with the deceased person. Moreover, according to this study, there was an increase in the number of these posts made to maintain bonds over time. In a similar study by Döveling (2015) it was seen that this online sharing provided continuity of bonds. This conclusion was the result of a qualitative analysis of 2127 shares examined in the social media accounts of 318 different bereaved individuals. Brubaker and Hayes (2011) analyzed the social media accounts of 1369 deceased persons where 205,068 comments and discovered that the mourners maintained their bonds with the deceased through online sharing, and that social media ensured the continuity of bonds. Similarly, according to the analysis of interviews with 11 people who lost a loved one to suicide, the most common motivation for using social media and creating a blog site was to perpetuate the presence of the deceased. The need to feel the presence of the deceased and the motivation to keep the deceased alive suggested that bereavement activities on online sites were intended to ensure the continuity of bonds (Bailey et al., 2015).

According to Stroebe et al. (2010), grieving individuals who were attached differently show different grief reactions. Securely-attached individuals would be able to maintain attachment to a deceased person and use an ongoing connection with the deceased by

acknowledging the loss. For example, these individuals would maintain their bonds with the deceased person. On the other hand, others would gradually let go and relocate over time. Relocating expresses withdrawal, and, at the same time, expresses ongoing remembrance. These situations express healthy mourning. For the insecure-dismissive/avoidant attached individuals, maintaining any tie was absent. They tended to keep their distance from any reminders of the deceased. On the contrary, insecure-preoccupied individuals held on the tie firmly. Unlike securely-attached individuals, they yearned and longed persistently. In this attachment style there was no or little relocating the deceased. Furthermore, lost attachments tended to dominate other ongoing relationships. It was possible to be overwhelmed by thoughts and worries and the unresolved effort to maintain the intense attachment. Lastly, fearful/disorganized attached individuals attempted both to maintain the bond, and to abandon it and move on. They tended to have complicated thoughts and lacked a clear strategy (Stroebe et al., 2010). In order to understand the bonds of continuity through social media, it is necessary to examine the attachment theory. Therefore, John Bowlby's attachment theory is explained below.

2.1.2.3. John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Attachment is defined as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194 as cited in Mcleod, 2022). John Bowlby, while determining the behavioral patterns formed by attachment, conducted studies based on infants and their mothers. Behaviors such as smiling, babbling, clinging, and following were observed in infants wanting to ensure the maintain attachment. Behaviors such as crying and searching behaviors were observed in children because they wanted to be with the mother again when the mother left the environment. These behaviors increase the child's chances of survival and protect them from the dangerous world (Parkes & Prigerson, 2013). The attachments formed with the individual at early stages of life are vital and form the basis of the individuals' trust in the world across their life span (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Forming an attachment is normal and healthy for an individual. Even when there are no pleasurable associations such as with an abusive parent, attachment still occurs. (Cassidy & Shaver, 2002).

Ainsworth et al. (1978), identified the three major patterns of infant-mother attachment as resistant, avoidant, and secure (Cassidy & Shaver, 2002).

Resistant Infants: When the mother leaves the environment, children with resistant attachment do not play with the toys around or gather their focus on one object. The child gravitates towards the outgoing attachment figure and refuses to calm down, even when the mother reappears. In other words, after a minor grieving experience, they experience high-level anxiety over separation (Cassidy & Shaver, 2002).

Avoidant Infants: In avoidant attached children, when the mother leaves the environment, the child becomes unresponsive, having nonchalance to the attachment figure. This situation continues with the reintegration of the mother into the environment. No separation anxiety or anger is observed due to loss of the attachment (Cassidy & Shaver, 2002).

Secure Infants: Children with secure attachment react to the separation of the attached figure from the environment, and they could easily adapt to the situation when the person is reintegrated into the environment (Cassidy & Shaver, 2002).

Although the behavioral reactions brought about by attachments are mostly seen at the early ages, they could be observed throughout life, especially in stressful situations (Bretherton, 1985) such as experiencing loss (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). This is because absence of the attachment causes separation anxiety. According to attachment theory, separation anxiety is determined as a normal human reaction when these attachments are endangered or broken, such as the person's absence from the environment or that person's death (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). Attachment theory explains the separation anxiety and emotional distress that occurs after a loss experience. This theory states that attachment behavior is instinctive and mediated by a behavioral system that develops in the early stages of life. This system is purposeful and functions to sustain attachments. Attachment behavior has the potential to remain active across one's life span and is frequently seen in individuals dealing with loss and bereavement who fill the painful gaps and make new attachments (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007).

2.2. Grief During COVID-19 Era

There are relatively normal reactions during the mourning process, but the mourning process has external factors (Hibberd et al., 2010). During a pandemic, the mourning process seems to be highly affected (Stroebe & Schut, 2021; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2020). As has been seen throughout history, pandemics have brought great impact on loss of lives (Hays, 2005; Huremovic, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2019 and continues to persist, has also caused a significant number of deaths (Ministry of Health, 2022). Mourners felt they experienced injustice because of the following factors: prohibitions and measures imposed due to the increase in death cases and the rapid spread of the disease; experiencing mourning while wearing protective clothing, communicating while wearing face masks, social distancing, curtailed funerals, postponed death rituals, having limited or no opportunity to say goodbye, regrets about the possible preventability of the disease (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). Compared to mourners in other periods, mourners during the COVID-19 period had a more complicated experience because they could not receive physical closeness such as hugs, handshakes and sitting next to each other, and they were not able to socialize after funerals (Burrell & Selman, 2022; Maddrell, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020).

The mourning experiences were affected by the COVID-19 bans, multiple losses, and the unpredictability of how long the pandemic would last. According to Horowitz (1990) having enough time in the grieving process is one of the important factors for a healthy experience of grief. The fact that people do not know how long the pandemic will last creates long-term stress. The long-term stress may lead to postponing the mourning process or not allocating enough time (Eisma et al., 2021; Marazziti et al., 2020; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022).

Another situation brought about by social restrictions and measures is that individuals experience more than one grief experience at the same time (Breen, 2020; Kartseva & Kuznetsova, 2020). Changes in the economic order, loss of job, restriction of freedom, etc. could make already difficult experiences of grief even more difficult (Mayland et al., 2020; Mercer & Evans, 2006; Wallace et al., 2020). Moreover, with the rapid spread of the virus, it seems likely that experiences of loss may be experienced by

more than one person in the same family. When all these losses come together, it is possible that the grief experiences during the COVID-19 period may differ from the normal order of losses in life.

Even in pre-COVID-19 times, more complex grief reactions have been observed in bereaved individuals who lost a loved one who died in a hospital or in an intensive care unit. A prospective, longitudinal, multisite study ($n=342$ pairs) of patients with advanced cancer and their caregivers found higher emotional distress in the grieving individuals. This was associated with an increased likelihood of prolonged grief disorder (Wright et al., 2010). In another study, an online survey of 965 families with a deceased relative in the intensive care unit found that not being able to say goodbye to the deceased relative was associated with more complex grief reactions (Otani et al., 2017). Similarly, the high rate of hospitalization during COVID-19 and the inability to say goodbye to the deceased could express the difficulty of the grief process during this period. In a study comparing bereavement experiences of natural-cause deaths ($n=1182$), unnatural-cause deaths ($n=210$) and COVID-19-related deaths ($n=49$), higher complex and prolonged grief reactions were measured in bereavements of COVID-19 related deaths compared to bereavements of natural-cause deaths (Eisma et al., 2021).

A qualitative analysis of 881 respondents' online survey results revealed that their complexities on bereavement experiences during COVID-19 could be classified under six themes: troubled deaths; mourning, memorialization and death administration; mass bereavement, the media and the ongoing threat of the pandemic; grieving and coping; work and employment; and support from the health and social care system (Torrens-Burton et al., 2022). As a result of the qualitative analysis made by applying thematic synthesis, multiplicity of loss, uncertainty, disruption of connectiveness and autonomy, and factors influencing bereavement outcomes were determined (Mayland et al., 2020). When the results of the analysis of these studies were examined, it was seen that there is a struggle to perform death rituals compared to normal times; the losses were frequently mentioned by the society, and these losses were frequently taken into consideration through the media. Not knowing how long the pandemic process will last, this anxiety postponed the mourning experience. Experiencing many

losses at the same time, such job loss, economic loss and loss of freedom, and being deprived of physical support led to a mourning experience that is more difficult than in normal periods.

2.3. Virtual Grieving

During COVID-19 social isolation, people turned to social media tools (Wallace et al., 2020). Social media tools are used in the grieving process, and these uses have many different effects on individuals who are grieving. Additionally, the interpretation of grief experiences by some theorists is also evaluated within the framework of social media such as continuing bonds and meaning reconstruction (Bouc et al., 2016; Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore et al., 2019). In this section, the aspects of digital tools that are used or could be used in the grieving process, and which areas of the theories contribute to the grieving experience are examined according to the literature. The general use of social media tools and then to what extend the use of social media affects the grieving process are explained below.

Social media sites give opportunity to share emotional states such as happiness, sadness, insecurity, loss, grief, etc. (Thomas, 2007; Wong et al., 2021). On their social media accounts, individuals reflect on their identity and share everyday activities, the places they have been, their loved ones and the things they are thankful for (Thomas, 2007). Social media sites are a way to create virtual social surrounding (Dilmaç, 2014). Thus, individuals are motivated to share their everyday life incidents (Odom et al., 2012). Users of virtual world considers social media as a living platform, accordingly, being seen in the public eye means being alive. Sharing posts and updating the pages communicates to the other users that the page owner is still around alive and well. In that way, users are confirming their existence with updates of posts and accounts (Dilmaç, 2018; Kruzan, 2014).

The use of social media accounts during bereavement is not only an adult use. It is also common among earlier age groups that social media is being used to express themselves during grief processes. According to research with 20 online social network profiles of bereaved adolescents by Williams and Merten (2009) bereaved adolescents used social media for mourn to their deceased peer. They directed

comments to the deceased, wrote memorial sentiments, updated them for current events, discussed about how they died and question their religious beliefs. These comments decreased with time, but there were still some individuals who maintained the relationship for months. Celebrating specific dates, birthdays, first day of school, prom, graduation, weekly, monthly, yearly anniversary of death were the ways of continuing the relationship. The bereaved adolescents showed emotional reactions as depression, anger, and guilt but they stated that this connection through social media made them feel better emotionally.

Rituals are organized for deceased individuals according to their own culture, but by being buried or cremated, the deceased are no longer visible to the bereaving individuals. However, in online communities, their existence is on display to others anytime and almost anywhere through digital appliances. Because of the virtual world, mourners were no longer limited to tombstone inscriptions but now had unlimited opportunity (Moore et al., 2019). Before, this process was different. Individuals had possessions such as clothes, creations, art works, journals and similar items which expressed the identity of the deceased and functioned as reminders of them. These items reflected individuals' accomplishments, social surroundings and even the individuals' sense of immortality (Belk, 1988). However, with the digitalized world, the social media accounts of individuals became the replacement to the physical items (Belk, 2013). Social media accounts are seen as users' digital legacy and, even with the death of the user, this legacy existed (Carroll & Romano, 2010). Existing is closely related to recognition. That is why, even after death occurred, if the users' accounts were in the public eye, this might mean that they continue to be alive (Dilmaç, 2014).

However, this continuance of being alive brought unpleasant situations in some cases. For instance, when a bereaved individual published an image of the corpse, visitors' comments could be unpleasant. Displaying the deceased person almost anywhere gives the sense that they were never gone. Thus, bereaved individuals could learn to communicate and to be connected with deceased ones through the deceased's digital possessions such as social media accounts (Kruzan, 2014). These rituals of aiming to be connected with the deceased is generally common among bereaved individuals as

seen in rituals of visiting the grave site and checking the memorial books and similar activities. (Klass, 2006).

The concept of "letting go" of a deceased person is affected by a different perspective in the virtual world. In social media sites, it is easy to "defriend" someone. It takes only one click to get rid of that person from your account. If these people are still around, adding them back quickly is possible if they approve your request. However, if that person is passed away, it is not possible to undo the action of defriending. Therefore, this situation could create complicated feelings about "letting go" the individual (Sas et al., 2016). According to the results of 43 in-depth qualitative interviews with bereaved adolescents by Pennington (2013) bereaved adolescents were cautious with defriending. Their general opinion is that one shouldn't defriend someone because that person died.

2.3.1. Functionality of Virtual Environment During Bereavement

One reason for the frequent use of social media platforms during bereavement was that some of the features were useful to the person utilizing it. This usefulness seems to have increased after a certain period of time as social media platforms updated their algorithms to include the deceased individuals' information. At first, mortality wasn't considered in social media platforms original design (Kruzan, 2014). However, with the increasing number of users, the "dead" population took its place in social media sites. To adjust with the situation, social media corporations were adding new features to their sites to enable bereavement. For instance, Facebook added new "memorialization" feature in 2009. With this feature, profile owners could nominate a "Legacy Contract" to assign to someone who would be responsible for the page when the owner passed away (Nansen et al., 2017).

In addition to social media platforms, virtual reality tools encountered with the developing technology have also been instrumental in the benefit of people experiencing bereavement. VR technologies could be used for education, slow breathing training, exposure, cognitive restructuring, and mindfulness strategies during bereavement. It gave bereaved individual a chance to visit the cemetery, talking with their social surroundings about their deceased person. This environment created

a special place for bereaved individual to express their emotions (Botella et al., 2008). In some cases, individuals could experience funerals or last words to a deceased person (Pizzoli et al., 2021). Knowles et al. (2017) compared VR support groups and grief educational website in terms of depression, grief intensity, grief cognition, yearning, loneliness, perceived stress, and sleep quality during bereavement. As a result of 30 widowed individuals' eight-week VR support group experience, the widowed mourners showed significant improvement in depression and a higher level of social support. Additionally, both groups showed significant decrease in grief severity, grief cognitions, loneliness, yearning, perceived stress, and increase in sleep quality.

2.3.1.1. Continue the Connection with the Deceased

When the functionality of virtual environments was considered, one of the main factors seemed to be the continuity of bonds with the deceased person. For instance, Facebook allowed bereaved individuals to say goodbye to loved ones and create a communication with them. Moreover, for some bereaved individuals, it was easier to express grief in writing rather than verbal communication. Social media sites allowed bereaved individuals to spend private time through memories, posts, and messages (Lewis, 2014; Moreman & Rizk, 2018). Social media platforms allowed bereaved individuals to mourn together and create a social support (Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Even though these activities' frequency decreased over time, digital platforms gave opportunity to express feelings over a long time (Bouc et al., 2016; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). According to a content analysis of 2533 of ten deceased individuals' Facebook profiles by Bouc et al. (2016), bereaved individuals were continuing to communicate with the deceased directly via Facebook page of the person who died. Through this way, as individual kept writing to the profile, the relationship with the deceased and bereaved individual continued. The important part of virtual grieving was, bereaved individuals could create a balance between continue the bond with the deceased and work with loss orientation, and process the grief, adapt the new life and work with restoration orientation. According to the results of Facebook profiles' content analysis, three themes of Facebook comments were examined in deceased's profile. These were processing the death, remembering the deceased, and continuing the connection. Processing the death and remembering the deceased peaked immediately after loss and

decreased frequently in time with the feeling of shock and disbelief. However, continuing the connection increase in time. Because of the social media automated feature, friends of deceased were getting notification about birthdays, and it influenced continuing the relationship with the deceased. Additionally, at anniversaries, birthdays, and notable holidays the frequency of messages increased. Processing the death contained explicit emotional expressions such as negative emotions (sadness, confusion, pain, despair), positive emotions (acceptance, happiness, gratitude), conflicting feelings (spirituality), creative expressions (poetry, lyrics), and asking questions (why?). Remembering the deceased contained shared memories, relationship before death, deceased's character, and dedication to the deceased. Continuing the connection contained checking in (stopping by to say "Hi", making promises for future visits), updates (important news), making requests (please watch our family), and eventual reunion in afterlife. General messages were seen as directed toward the deceased individual.

Regardless of the type of the behavior, bereaved individuals sought continuing connection with the deceased. These activities could be going to the cemetery, keeping photographs, seeking guidance of the deceased in life, or creating a memorial page in internet (Moss, 2004). In any cases, the main motivation under these activities was wanting and needing to talk with loved one while the deceased was in the afterlife and eventually anticipating a reunion with them in afterlife (Hogan et al., 1996). As a shared common feeling, the grieving authors stated that they have the feeling that the deceased loved one could see them grieving through online ways (Moore et al., 2019). Bereaved individuals felt part of a community as they were together in these sites. They were in connection with the deceased person, and acted together (Linden, 2021). When parents were questioned about terminating the memorial page, the answer was that it would feel like abandoning their deceased child, ending a form of parenting, and severing the ongoing relationship (Mitchell et al., 2012). Bereaved individuals were seeing virtual space as a place where the deceased lived on and they were afraid of losing them again (Lingel, 2013).

In rare cases, comments and messages were directed to the community, such as giving information about funeral details or other information (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011).

According to an online survey on Facebook of the 100 respondents by Carroll and Landry (2010) after the death of an individual, most Facebook users visited the page. Additionally, almost half of them joined the groups formed around the dead person. Some bereaved individuals changed their profile photo to that of the deceased or put a ribbon to honor the deceased.

2.3.1.2. Easiness of the Virtual Environment Tools

Another functionality of virtual environments is that they are easy to use and are always accessible . For instance, the mourner could create a blog site or memorial page on behalf of deceased person on an online platform. These sites have been used since 1995 and have advantages such as flexible, easy and repeatable access, a permanent record, and the ability to be shared with others via social media (Roberts & Vidal, 2000). In these sites, bereaved individuals were able to add music, photos, comments, and updates. In some options, they lit a candle for the soul of the deceased person. The practice of individual rituals had a strong correlation to grief reactions (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2019). In the research results of 558 participants' online questionnaire answers, after three years of loss, around 85% of the participants engaged in individual rituals such as lighting a candle, visiting gravesites or graveyards. They were found moderately helpful to them. Practicing ritual experiences tend to be higher especially among those who lost a child or partner unexpectedly (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2019). A content analysis of 244 online memorial sites revealed that women were the largest demographic of the content creators and the majority of them lost a child (De Vries, & Rutherford, 2004; Finlay, & Krueger, 2011). Bereaved individuals were motivated to use these sites to share information, discuss the deceased's death, create a broader mourning community, and continue the connection with the deceased (Moore et al., 2019). The aspects of expressing grief via an online blog include experiencing mutual understanding based on similar experience, sharing a feeling of community, and seeking to communicate with the deceased person (Döveling, 2015; Frizzo et al., 2017). DeGroot and Carmack (2013) explored parental grief as expressed on the blog site of a parent named Ambrusko who publicly expressed his private experience with grief. He explained that "I just needed to share these dark thoughts, so they hopefully will not bother me anymore and I will no longer have to experience them alone."

2.3.1.3. Social Connectedness

Blog sites created a feeling of connectedness (Finlay & Krueger, 2011). For instance, when bereaved mothers met each other because of having a child with the same name or same cause of death, or same birthday, they tended to mourn together. Even when the mother encountered another mother, they wanted to get know each other. (Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Moreover, they were imagining an afterlife where the deceased children were getting together and playing together. In these comments and pictures, the deceased children were represented as a hero, angel, prince, or princess. In the pictures, the child generally appeared very healthy and alive. The deceased child was represented as a perfect child with little or no disobedience. In general, only a few funeral pictures or graveyard images were posted (Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2012). The common hope of the bereaved parents was that their child was safe and happy in the afterlife, because of that they were motivated to share these comments and to secure approval from others (Finlay & Krueger, 2011). The common reaction among bereaved individuals was that the more people visited the site and wrote comments, the more the deceased person was receiving love from others. So, it was concluded that online blog sites motivated bereaved individuals to share and gain support from others (Marwick & Ellison, 2012).

In some cases, a bereaved individual might find it difficult to express feelings and emotions face-to-face. On the other hand, online blog sites gave opportunities to talk more and feel more accepted because of the mutual experiences. The term for this is "collective grieving" and collective grieving gave mourners a chance to mourn with a global community. (Moore et al., 2019). It was also useful for learning coping mechanisms from others who had faced the same or similar experiences (Hogan et al., 1996). For instance, the sudden death of an infant is an unusual experience. This experience could leave the family feeling isolated and lonely and processing their grief and naming their emotions could be difficult. For them, the internet could be a place to find others who faced the same situation and to share emotions and experiences with them. As a result, instead of staying isolated, bereaved parents could connect with others and this led to restoration-orientation task for adaptive coping in grief (Finlay & Krueger, 2011). In addition, online blog sites help the bereaved parent to manage

the cycles of adapting to grief, coping with loss, and guiding others with reconstructing their life and social relations (Frizzo et al., 2017).

Bereaved individuals also use blog sites as a tool for social activism (Frizzo et al., 2017). Because of the unexpected or sudden death of a loved one, a bereaved individual tried to make meaning from this separation. To create a sense and meaning for themselves, some adopted the role of educating others (Finlay & Krueger, 2011). While they were creating a sense for why the loss entered their lives, they gained a desire to extend themselves to others and dedicate their energy to create a new future (Hogan et al., 1996). For instance, some reframed the death of their children as motivation for social action. They initiated scholarships, raised funds for animal shelters, and created public awareness campaigns for specific diseases. These actions were observed in the comments directed toward others. Other comments were directed toward the deceased individual (Mitchell et al., 2012; Williams & Merten, 2009). Directing comments to the deceased reflected their relationship with the deceased person and these interactions gave the bereaved individual unlimited freedom (Williams & Merten, 2009).

Bereaved individuals also join online support groups for feeling connected, and for being a part of a community (Eaglesham, 1996). When bereaved individuals experienced loneliness, lacked family or a friendship support system, or had limited time, online support groups were a way to engage with others. Online social support groups are good substitutes for face-to-face groups. According to an analysis of 185 active online support group members' responses by Hartig and Viola (2016) when mourners joining online support groups, they reported less psychological distress. In the research findings, almost half of online support group participants reported less severe grief reactions. As the result, the longer the time the individual participated in a group, the bigger the decrease of their responses to grief. Groups with the same backgrounds received more positive changes in terms of attraction and commitment (Lieberman et al., 2005). The opportunity to share experiences was seen as the main reason for joining groups. Furthermore, it gave the bereaved individual a sense that their experience was not something strange and unusual. This feeling brought courage to deal with the current challenge in their lives (Eaglesham, 1996). Giving and

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receiving information, helping others, gaining confidence, having their feelings validated, imitating of solutions, establishing friendships, and venting of feelings are general benefits of online support groups. Anonymity and flexibility of time and place were seen as facilitative features of online groups. However, there were also some concerns about incorrect information, risk of loss of confidentiality, and physical distance (ex. inability to receive hugs) (Campbell et al., 2001; Eaglesham, 1996).

Another way for dealing bereavement is Virtual Reality (VR) technologies. The goal of this technology is improved well-being of individuals and preserve their social connectedness. VR is not for solving complex mental health issues. In recent times, VR is commonly used for decreasing the fear of coronavirus, increase social connectedness and increase feelings of closeness to contacts (Riva et al., 2020). One South Korean mother's experience was an example for virtual reality technology. In that video a mother met her deceased child in virtual environment. Thanks to the technology, the mother felt like her child is beside her. She was able to talk with her child and tried to touch her repeatedly, but she couldn't achieve it during the meeting. The child appeared realistic and said to her mother that she was in a good condition. They celebrated the child's birthday together and afterwards the child transformed into a butterfly and flew away. After the experience, the mother gave an interview. She mentioned her thankfulness for this technology. However, the long-term experience was unknown. When the comments of the video were examined, some people were thankful for such a technology. At the same time, other people expressed concerns about the eventual negative consequence or even a dependence on the experience. (Pizzoli et al., 2021).

2.4. Summary

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, people had to adapt to changing conditions in almost every area. Primarily, people were expected to isolate themselves to prevent the rapid spread of the disease. In order to ensure that, social distancing rules were introduced. Large gatherings were not allowed. Curfews were imposed, cafes were closed, and social activities such as attending the cinema and theater were restricted to prevent attendance in crowded environments. Social lives were curtailed. People lost their freedom, some lost their jobs, and many suffered economic hardship.

However, despite all these measures, the disease continued to spread, and deaths increased daily (Ministry of Health, 2022). The disease spread within a family, and multiple deaths began to occur in the same family. With the combination of all these primary and secondary losses, mourning during COVID-19 became more difficult compared to normal times (Stroebe & Schut, 2021; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2020).

Restrictions on social life increased people's use of online social media (Wallace et al., 2020). Business meetings were conducted online, education transitioned to online, and daily life events were posted on social media instead of face-to-face. People shared the sudden changes in their lives on social media and their experiences of grief. Research showed that even before COVID-19, people were sharing their grief experiences on social media (Botella et al., 2008; Carroll & Romano, 2010; Moore et al., 2019; Thomas, 2007; Williams & Merten, 2009). The role of social media in providing social support for grieving individuals is supported by research (Botella et al., 2008; Knowles et al., 2017; Lieberman et al., 2005; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Frizzo et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2020; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Another conclusion revealed by a research is that sharing grief experiences on social media is not only for social support, but for the reconstruction of meaning and the continuity of the bonds with the deceased. (Brubaker et al., 2013; Bouc et al., 2016; Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore et al., 2019; Neimeyer et al., 2006). According to the meaning reconstruction model, change occurs in the life course of an individual who has experienced grief (Neimeyer et al., 2010). Their perspective on life changed and their understanding of the meaning of life is disrupted (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Overcoming the grief period with reinterpretation is important for the individual in order to create meaning for the changes in their lives (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007). According to the continuity of bonds theory, the ties between the deceased and the grieving individual are maintained by certain rituals, memories, or objects (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007; Klass et al., 2014). This theory explains bereavement as a process of adaptation and change in the post-death relationship and of the establishment and rebuilding of new bonds. Instead of releasing the loss, the emphasis is on negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of loss over time (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 2007; Klass et al., 2014). According to research, it seems possible that the continuity of bonds is ensured through

social media (Bailey et al., 2015; Bouc et al., 2016; Brubaker & Hayes, 2011; Döveling, 2015).

Many factors contribute to the need for this thesis. Opposite of being a positive effect for grieving individuals, social media may also have some negative effects (Klass, 2006; Pennington, 2013; Kruzan, 2014; Sas et al., 2016). However, this has not been emphasized much in research. At the same time, it is generally observed that the sample of studies examining the experiences of mourning through social media is selected from European countries or the U.S.A. A sample population in Türkiye has never been studied, and the negative aspects of grief experiences on social media have been thus revealing the need for this study. Additionally, researchers recommended the continuance of studies on the reconstruction of meaning and the continuity of bonds (Neimeyer et al., 2006). Considering that people have intense grief experiences during the COVID-19 period and that the frequency of social media use has increased, the reason for this research emerged. The aim of this study is to determine the areas of social media use of individuals who are grieving during the COVID-19 period, how they are experienced positively or negatively by this, and how the model of continuity of bonds and reconstruction of meaning grows during social media use.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In this chapter, design of the study, sampling method and participants, data collection procedure, data analysis, and limitations are presented.

3.1. Design

To examine the experiences of bereaved individuals in virtual environments in times of COVID-19 pandemic, a qualitative research methodology was selected. In this research, the common experiences, and impacts of virtual grieving on bereaved individuals during COVID-19 era were examined. More specifically, the ways in which the individuals used social media during their grieving process, to what extent the continuity of bonds could be provided using social media, and what experiences this use had on the meaning reconstruction were explored in depth. To identify the commonalities of experiences of the grief process during COVID-19 era in social media, the phenomenological research design was selected (Patton et al.,2015).

In qualitative research, the concept of purposive sampling is used among researchers. Purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy where the researcher selects participants and places for the study, in that way they could purposefully describe an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Before choosing a purposeful sample, an inclusion and exclusion criterias for the sample was determined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The criterion sampling is considered suitable for phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, participants were selected based on a purposeful sampling and snowball sampling method and criterion-based case selection strategy.

For this research, the sampling criteria were set as below:

1. The grief reactions' sensitivity and specificity tend to decline in the interval between 6 months to 14 months (Horowitz et al., 2003). Thus, at least 6 months must have passed since the loss.
2. This research aims to identify virtual grief reactions during the time of COVID-19. Therefore, the loss experience must have occurred after March 2020.
3. The degree of closeness of the individual with whom the loss has been experienced should be the relationship with a mother, father, spouse, child, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, close friend, or teacher.
4. The participant and the lost person must have used or are using at least one social media account (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok).
5. Participants must be at least 18 years old.

3.2. Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants, 6 females and 4 males, who were reached through purposive sampling, and snowball sampling technique. Participants complied with all the criteria. They and their deceased relatives had at least one social media platform, and they were still active. At least seven months have passed since their bereavement experience and each of participants were over 18 years of age. The demographic information of each participant was presented below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1.

Demographic Information of the Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Time since the Loss (month)	Degree of Proximity	Reason of Death	Social Medias Using by Participants	Social Medias Used by the Deceased
P1	Female	26	7	Grandfather	Diabetes	WhatsApp Instagram	WhatsApp Instagram
P2	Female	44	13	Close Friend	Cancer	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook
P3	Female	33	11	Mother	Heart Attack	WhatsApp Instagram Twitter	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook
P4	Female	25	7	Close Friend	Suicide	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook Twitter YouTube	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook
P5	Male	44	10	Mother	COVID-19	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook Twitter	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook
P6	Male	58	8	Father	COVID-19	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook Twitter	WhatsApp Facebook
P7	Male	24	10	Father	Cancer	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook Twitter	WhatsApp
P8	Male	31	8	Close Friend	Cancer	WhatsApp Instagram Twitter YouTube	WhatsApp Instagram Twitter YouTube
P9	Female	34	11	Close Friend	COVID-19	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook Twitter	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook
P10	Female	28	18	Husband	Heart Attack	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook	WhatsApp Instagram Facebook

3.2.1. Detailed Description of the Participants

In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, they are mentioned with the participant number (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10). The deceased ones were assigned their own code with the participant's number (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D8, D9, D10).

P1

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's office. The first participant, aged 26, has bachelor's degree. She works as a preschool teacher and lives in Antalya. She lost her grandfather about 7 months ago due to the effects of many diseases related to diabetes. Currently, the participant, who only uses WhatsApp, has been actively using Instagram before. She has turned her Instagram off recently. The participant's use of social media in her daily life is for having fun, spending time, following the daily news, and communicating with others. The participant, who complained about the artificial atmosphere created by social media, temporarily closed her Instagram account, claiming that the social media took her time unnecessarily. Her grandfather, whom she lost, was actively using WhatsApp and Instagram before. The participant, who temporarily closed her Instagram, was still following her grandfather before closing it. Stating that she couldn't help unfollowing her grandfather's account, the participant said that since she could not bear to see him constantly, she wanted the have the option of automatically delete the account when her grandfather passed away.

P2

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's office. The second participant, aged 44, has bachelor's degree. She works as a bank employee and lives in Antalya. She lost her close friend about 13 months ago due to cancer. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram actively. The participant's use of social media in her daily life is about following the daily news, being aware of the birthdays of her friends and celebrate them. The participant, who closed her accounts for a while due to the unnecessary use of social media, later opened it again because she was bored and continued to use it. Her close friend, who she lost, was actively

using WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram before. D2, who is still on the friend list on Facebook, has been unfollowed on the Instagram list by the participant. Later, the participant renewed his Instagram address for different reasons. The participant, who stated that seeing her deceased friend on the following list all the time hurts her, later stated that she regretted removing D2 from the following list because she could not add it again because it was a private account.

P3

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's office. The third participant, aged 33, has bachelor's degree. She works as a bank employee and lives in Antalya. She lost her mother about 11 months ago due to a heart attack. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in her daily life is for following the daily news, communicating with others, and to satisfy her curiosity about her friends. Her mother, whom she lost, was actively using Facebook and Instagram. The participant still follows the Instagram account of her deceased mother and claimed that she is happy to see her there all the time, that she would be very upset if it was closed, and that it was very important to her. She often stated during the interview that she looked at her pictures from time to time and that made her very pleased. While she was talking about how her mother used to love using social media so much, the participant said that she was happy to share posts containing her mother after her mother's death.

P4

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's home. The fourth participant, aged 25, has bachelor's degree. She works as a flight attendant and lives in Antalya. She lost her close friend about 7 months ago due to suicide. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in her daily life is for collecting memories, sharing, and gaining information, posting pictures, saving pictures, tweeting to open her heart. Her close friend, whom she lost, was actively using WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. The participant still follows the Facebook and Instagram accounts of her deceased friend. While stating that it was very important for her to save her memories

on her social media accounts, the participant stated that it was important for her to open her heart about her friend's death after D4 died. When she returned and looked at her own accounts again, she stated that seeing the commemorative tweets she had written was a guarantee that she would never forget her lost friend.

P5

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's home. The fifth participant, aged 44, has bachelor's degree. He works as a building contractor and lives in Antalya. He lost his mother about 10 months ago due to COVID-19. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in his daily life is for collecting memories, gaining information, following the daily news, and following the exchange rates. His mother, whom he lost, was actively using Instagram, and Facebook. The participant still follows the Facebook and Instagram accounts of his deceased mother. The participant, who stated that he did not even delete the phone number of his lost mother, still follows her from both social media accounts. Stating that it was difficult to accept the loss he experienced, he was able to grasp the reality of the situation after the messages he received after announcing his loss on social media. The participant, who said that the existence of the deceased mother's accounts did not harm him, stated if he removed her from social media or deleted her phone number, then he would have completely buried his mother.

P6

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's home. The sixth participant, aged 58, has bachelor's degree. He works for an insurance agent company and lives in Antalya. He lost his father about 8 months ago due to COVID-19. Currently, the participant uses Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in his daily life is for job-related activities and sharing memories. His father, whom he lost, was actively using Facebook. The participant still follows the Facebook account of his deceased father. The participant stated that although he thought about closing his father's account from time to time, he could not do it. The participant, who had his father's phone number turned off as a result of phone

calls by people who were aware of his father's death and by those who were not aware, stated that even with turning the phone number off, he could not recover from the loss for a long time.

P7

The interview was conducted via Zoom meeting platform. The seventh participant, aged 24, has a master's degree. He works as an academic researcher and lives in İstanbul. He lost his father about 10 months ago due to cancer. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in his daily life is for opening his heart, sharing his daily activities, spending time to recover from the tiredness of the day, and practicing activism to create awareness. His father, whom he lost, was actively using WhatsApp. The participant stated that they had to reset the deceased father's phone because they had to reactivate the phone unexpectedly. He stated that he could not delete the messages left by his father in his own message box and did not touch them even if he cleared all the messages. He talked about how he would feel like a piece of himself had been ripped out if he deleted them from there.

P8

The interview was conducted via Zoom meeting platform. The eighth participant, aged 31, has bachelor's degree. He works as a software engineer and lives in Ankara. He lost his close friend about 8 months ago due to cancer. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Discord actively. The participant's use of social media in his daily life is for gaining information about others, communicating with others, job-related activities, following exchange rates, following sports. His friend, whom he lost, was actively using WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Discord before. The participant stated that his deceased friend is still in his followers list in every account, he did not delete the old messages from the deceased and did not leave the common groups with the deceased. According to the participant's opinion, commemoration activities in the time when the internet was not so common such as grave visits, verbal disclosures are similar to the social media commemorations of today. The participant said that his deceased friend still exists on his phone in speed

dials. He could not delete the number from the list because he knew that even though D8 does not exist in the physical world anymore, they are still friends.

P9

The interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's home. The ninth participant, aged 34, has a bachelor's degree. She works as a bank employee and lives in Antalya. She lost her close friend about 11 months ago due to COVID-19. Currently, the participant uses WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter actively. The participant's use of social media in her daily life is for communication with others, getting information from others, following daily life, sharing memories. Her friend, whom she lost, was actively using WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. She is still actively following the social media accounts of the person she lost. Additionally, she stated that she added the wife of her lost friend from her social media accounts after his death, and that she wanted to be informed about their current situation. The participant, who said that it was not for her to share her emotional pain on social media in general, added that she did not use social media in her previous loss experiences. The participant, who lost her mother years ago, said that she is not even posting anything on Mother's Day anymore.

P10

The interview was conducted via Zoom meeting platform. The tenth participant, aged 28, has bachelor's degree. She works freelance and lives in Bursa. She lost her husband about 18 months ago due to heart attack. Currently, the participant uses Whatsapp, Instagram, and Facebook actively. According to P10, her usage of social media in her daily life is for everything, especially for business and to memorialize her moments with her young son. Her husband, whom she lost, was actively using WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook before. She is still actively following the social media accounts of the person she lost. The participant, who still followed her husband's accounts, stated that she was disturbed by the sudden encounters of the people's posts about her husband. She added that during the use of social media, she received a lot of comments from her followers on her general posts, and that these posts made her very uncomfortable. In addition, she added that she connected with people who shared a

common experience with her through social media, that she shared experiences with them, and that this had a very positive contribution to her grief process.

3.3. Instrument: Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed after the existing literature was examined and restructured with the cooperation of four academicians who are specialists on grief counseling and social media. After the interview protocol was established, a pilot interview was conducted with two interviewees, and they were asked whether there were any uncomfortable questions or questions that they did not want to answer. In line with the answers given, the questions were revised, and the interview protocol was finalized. The interview protocol consisted of three main sections. These sections sought information on demographic characteristics of participants (age, gender, and basic information about the loss experience such as time since death, degree of closeness etc.), their social media usage and digital grief experiences during COVID-19. Participants were also asked which social media accounts were used by the participant and the lost person used. During the interview, the experiences of COVID-19 on bereavement process was given special emphasis.

In the section of social media use, how people use social media in their daily lives, whether they share or make announcements about the person they lost were examined. Questions were asked about the activity of the social media accounts of the person who lost their lives, whether the accounts were closed or whether they were intended to be closed. In addition, how the participant perceives grieving over social media and how they perceive other people grieving over social media were examined.

Finally, in the closing section, the participants were asked what they thought about the accounts staying active after death and their thoughts about the memorialized accounts. The interview protocol is represented in Appendix D.

3.4. Data Collection

Necessary ethical permissions were obtained from Human Subjects Ethics Committee (HSEC) of Middle East Technical University (METU). The permission is presented in

Appendix A. After the permission was obtained, the announcement text was shared via social media channels. The announcement text is presented in Appendix B. The potential participants were contacted, what was expected from them in the study was presented, and then the place and time for the interview was determined.

An informed consent form was signed by the participants before the interviews. The informed consent form is presented in Appendix C. Participants were interviewed after signing the informed consent and participated voluntarily. Information was given about the purpose of the interview, and assurance was given that identity information would not be used outside of the purpose of the study. Participants were informed before the interview that they have right to end the interview if they feel disturbed and they could stop answering the questions if they do not want to answer. The confidentiality of the interviews and anonymity of the names of the participants and the lost person were provided to participants before the interviews. Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and afterwards transcribed by the researcher. Participants were informed that the audio recordings are going to be destroyed after conducting the research.

Three participants were interviewed in their offices, four participants interviewed in their homes, and three participants were interviewed via Zoom application. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes in total. All the interviews were recorded. Before the recordings, the participants were explained about the content of the study, and the expectations from the participants. Their right of withdrawal was reminded during the interview. They were told that the interview to be held was not a psychological counseling session. And finally, if they had questions about the study, the researcher listened. Then, the interview questions were started with the audio recordings. All the participants candidly expressed their experiences and commented on their processes. After the recording was over, several participants continued to express their opinions. These comments were noted. Then, audio recordings and notes were combined and prepared for analysis.

3.5. Researcher's Reflection

For a research to be conducted, the subject of the study should be adopted by the researcher. As a psychological counselor and a researcher, grief and death issues have become a point of interest both with my clients and in my research. At the same time, the social traumatic events in my geography have also presented me with the necessity of working on these issues. Grief and death are concepts that people usually avoid. As a matter of fact, death and grief cannot be avoided in the natural course of life. I am one of those who think that this concept, which every living being will eventually experience, should be further normalized, and integrated into the ordinary flow of life. In order to integrate the concept of death into daily life and to overcome mourning in a healthy way, the reactions of people who will support the grieving individual are important.

In addition, I have personally experienced the intense integration of social media into our lives. The transition of schools to online platforms, meetings taking place via remote video chat platforms have become permanent in our lives during and after the COVID-19 period. As a school counselor actively working in the primary-school, I also observe that students and teachers are also using online platforms extensively. Based on my observations and my social media friends' interactions, I could say that social media accounts and online platforms are not only used for educational, social and business purposes. At the same time, people also announce their loss experiences through social media. Social media is actively used by individuals who not only announce but also mourn on special occasions and in times of emotional intensity. It is not sufficiently known in which areas this use contributes, what it serves and whether mourning individuals have negative effects as a result of this use. With this study, it is aimed to share the results that will shed light on grieving individuals, their relatives, grief counselors, teachers, and every social media user.

As a researcher who still feels the negative impact of the pandemic-induced bans, disease anxiety and limited freedom, I felt the intensity of witnessing first-hand the difficulties experienced by bereaved individuals during my research. I also witnessed how strong they were and how they developed coping strategies to deal with the grief

they experienced during an extraordinary time such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This was especially important for me to continue my research.

3.6. Analysis

Qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA 2022 is used to complete content analysis of the results. The audio recordings obtained from the interviews and the information added by the participants after the recordings were brought together and were converted into electronic written format via a personal computer. The MAXQDA 2022 is used to code the interviews. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, content analysis results were examined by independent academic researcher who is a doctoral student. First, the results of the analysis were sent to the academic researcher, who then interpreted her own analysis results in the light of the analysis and provided feedback. According to this feedback, the titles and coding content were adjusted. All transcripts were read carefully to code significant life experiences of bereaved individuals on social media. The transcripts were revised to combine specific issues to create categories. Common categories between transcripts were identified. Finally, the codes and categories were reported as part of preparing a comprehensive result. Expressions from the interviews were used to make connections between codes and data to increase the reliability and credibility of the results. The emerging themes are explained in the result section with the best summarizing quotations.

3.7. Limitations

Studies on how bereavement experiences in social media and how bereaved individuals are affected by these experiences are still ongoing and there are currently not many examples. Therefore, there are not many sources for comparing and discussing the results. It is not possible to compare the results of this study for the Turkish sample since there are no study containing social media grieving. As the studies to be conducted on this subject progress and expand, the results would be discussed much more clearly.

In this study, grief experiences on social media were determined solely on the basis of participants' own verbal expressions. Analyzing social media accounts was not within

the scope of the study. For this reason, there might be situations that the participants forgot to say or hesitated to share.

In the sample of the study, face-to-face interviews could not be conducted due to the fact that some participants were out of the city. Thus, interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform (3 participants). Possible differences in the interviews conducted face-to-face or on the online platform were not evaluated within the scope of this study.

The sample size of the study was realized as 10 people. A specific age group, gender group or a specific type of death was not studied. Among the limitations of the study, the sample size could be considered as not being limited to a specific age group, gender group or bereavement over the type of death.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The main goal of the present thesis is to determine the usage of social media during bereavement process and understand the positive/negative experiences of this usage. In addition, it was determined whether the use of social media during bereavement ensures the continuity of bonds and contributes to the reconstruction of meaning. In order to reach this goal, 10 bereaved individuals were interviewed and interviews transcribed into electronic format. In this chapter, results of the content analysis of the interviews were presented. The findings of the study were revealed four themes as (1) Grief in Times of COVID-19, (2) Social Media Usage During Bereavement, (3) Positive Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement, and (4) Negative Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement. For each of themes several categories and sub-categories were revealed. Each theme was provided with a flowchart that visualizes relevant categories as well as the sub-categories. All themes, categories and sub-categories were explained in detail during this chapter and a sample quotation is provided when presenting the lowest level unit of findings. General flowchart of the results is represented in the Figure 4.1 below.
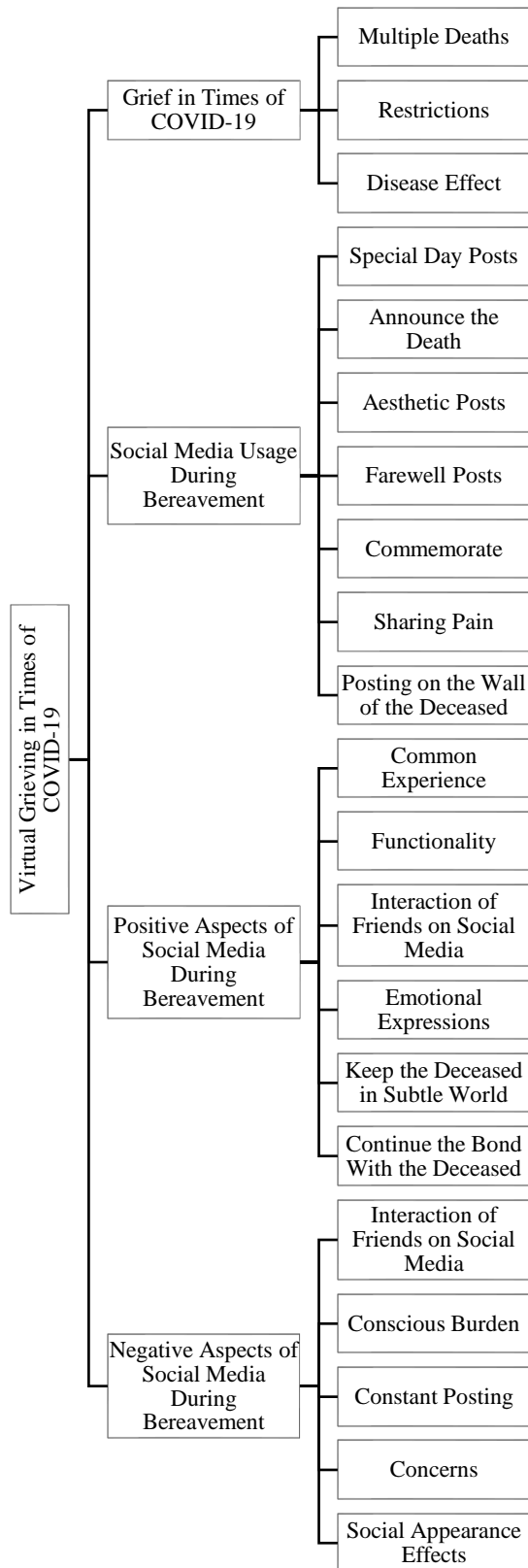
Figure 4.1. Flowchart of the results: Themes and categories

4.1. Grief in Times of COVID-19

"Grief in Times of COVID-19" was the first theme emerged from the data analysis. This theme with its three categories describes grieving experiences of individuals and divulges the impact of pandemic conditions on grief process. This theme outlines that COVID-19 brought to our lives, a) noticeable increase in the number of people who died, b) the restrictions that changed the way we live our lives, and c) the induced high level anxiety of catching the COVID-19 and infecting the disease to the loved ones seem to have created changes not only in the perceptions of grieving but also the changes in the grieving practices.

Three categories of this theme was named as (1) Multiple Deaths, (2) Restrictions, and (3) Disease Effect.

The categories and their subcategories displayed below in Figure 4.2.
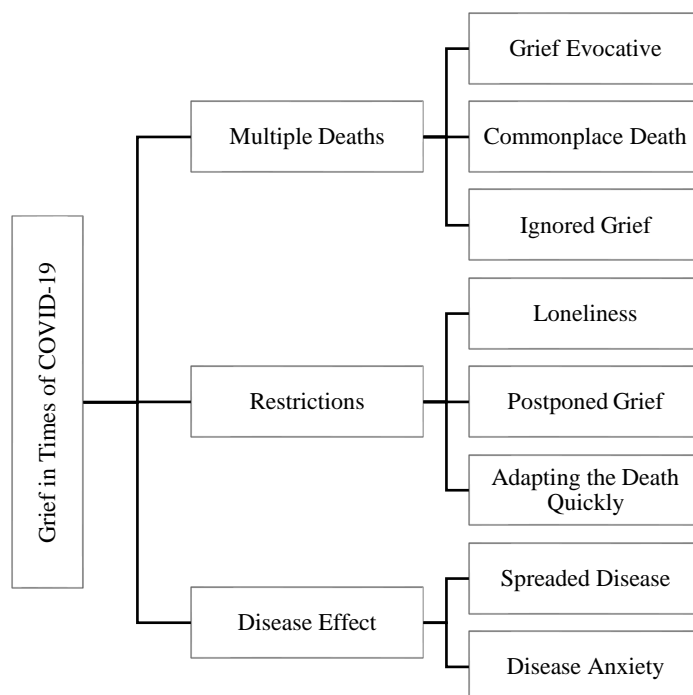
Figure 4.2. Grief in times of COVID-19: Categories and subcategories

4.1.1. Multiple Deaths During COVID-19

According to the participants' responses, the effects of unavoidable multiple deaths during COVID-19 on mourners are as indicated: grief evocative, commonplace death, and ignored grief.

a. According to P9, COVID-19 meant *evocative grief* to them:

> Whenever someone mentions about Covid period and loss, D9 comes to my mind. Because we lost him from Covid. There were those who died during the Covid period, but they were not Covid, only the difficulty was not being able to reach them. But D9 died from Covid.

> Hala Covid dönemi ve kayıp dediğin zaman D9 önceliğim geliyor yani. Çünkü onu Covid'den kaybettik. Covid döneminde vefat edenler oldu ama onlar Covid değildi, sadece zorluğu ulaşamamak oldu. Ama D9 Covid'den öldü.

b. The P7 stated that the feature of the *grieving process was ignored* due to COVID-19 and death became ordinary in everyday life:

> I felt from time to time that this process would have been more special for me if it weren't Corona. In the pandemic, people started to die constantly, and dying became like a natural thing now. It was at that point that I realized I had not felt sufficiently taken care of my father. I've noticed people do this. Death became ordinary.

> Ara sıra hissettim ki sanki Corona olmasaydı bu süreç benim için daha özel olabilirdi. Pandemide insanlar sürekli ölmeye başladı ve ölmek artık doğal bir şey gibi oldu. O noktada babama yeterince üzerine düşülmemiş hissettiğimi fark ettim. Ölüm basitleşti.

No matter how precautionary the mass funerals and home visits were made after the death experience, all the participants were concerned about the spread of the disease during the organizations. At the same time, some participants stated that they were exposed to COVID-19, the disease spread, and the reason for this, the *grieving process was left aside* as P1 stated:

> It was a little troublesome after the funeral, we became Covid. Will people come or not? Obviously, it was a bit of a turmoil. The bereavement was put aside after that. It was like we were in our own trouble. Because my

grandmother turned into pneumonia because of the Corona she caught at the funeral. We were rather dealing with her treatment. That's why the grieving process seemed to be left on the sidelines a bit.

Cenaze sonrası biraz sıkıntılı oldu, biz Covid olduk. Gelenler olacak mı, olmayacak mı? Açıkçası biraz hengâme oldu. Cenaze bir kenara bırakıldı sonrasında. Kendi derdimize düştük gibi oldu. Çünkü anneannem zatürreye çevirdi cenazede kaptığı Corona yüzünden. Daha çok onun tedavisi ile ilgilendik. O yüzden yas süreci biraz kenarda kaldı gibi oldu.

4.1.2. Restrictions During COVID-19

All the participants reported that, one of the most important factors that cause differences in the grieving process during the COVID-19 period appears to be the restrictions imposed. According to the participants' responses, the effects of restrictions during COVID-19 on mourners are as indicated: loneliness, and postponed grief, adapting the death quickly.

    a. Participant P2's statement summarizes both the *loneliness* created by the restrictions and their *inability to fully experience their grief*:

> My father's death coincided with the 17-day shutdown, the first day. There was a military ceremony. But 20 people were able to attend the military ceremony. D2's funeral was 3 days before the 17-day shutdown. There was also a limited number of people. So, no one could attend the funeral and mourn as they wished. We couldn't even mourn, let me tell you, we couldn't even experience our pain. It was bad in that sense. We could not visit the graves for a long time, especially since it coincided with the 17-day closure. When someone close to you passes away, you always want to go. You want to go even every day, but we could not go because of the curfew.

> Babamınki 17 günlük kapanmaya denk geldi, ilk günü. Onda askeri tören yapıldı. Ama 20 kişi katılabildik mesela askeri törene. D2'nun ölümü 17 günlük kapamadan 3 gün önceydi. Onda da yine sınırlı sayıda olabiliyordu. Kimse cenazeye katılıp istediği gibi yas tutamadı yani. Yasımızı bile tutamadık öyle söyleyeyim, acımızı bile yaşayamadık. O anlamda kötüydü. Özellikle 17 günlük kapamaya denk geldiği için mezar ziyareti yapamadık uzun süre. En yakınınızdan biri vefat ettiğinde sürekli gitmek istiyorsunuz. Her gün bile gitmek istiyorsunuz ama yasaklardan dolayı gidemedik.

    b. Visits to the deceased's home were restricted due to prohibitions and not wanting the disease to spread further. Both positive and negative aspects of this

situation were expressed by the participants. While the majority of the participants stated that they could not share the pain and feel lonely, some participants said that these prohibitions were more positive for them because they could *adapt to the loss experience* they had more quickly as P3 stated as "Of course, you feel alone during the grieving process, but I think it's very good because one day you will be alone. It's better that those people weren't there in the first place. In this respect, it was good, we adapted quickly."

4.1.3. Disease Effect During COVID-19

No matter how precautionary the mass funerals and home visits were made after the death experience, all the participants were concerned about the spread of the disease during the organizations. At the same time, some participants stated that they were exposed to COVID-19.

a. The *spread of the disease* has caused anxiety about organizing post-mortem activities as P3 stated, "Many people got Covid at the funeral. Whether it was Mevlut, or any other visitations, I don't know, was limited. We couldn't gather people, people wanted to come, we refused. At the end, we were alone in this process."

b. The *possibility of the spreading disease* has also caused anxiety among mourners. For this reason, post-mortem events were not organized, crowds were not wanted, and even people who wanted to come were met with apprehension. As P6 stated:

> Because it was Corona, precautions were taken for funerals and burials. We took precautions. They say that grief is experienced with the community, but we didn't want them to come. People wanted to come anyway, but we told them not to. We didn't want any more losses.

> Korona olduğu için cenaze ve definde tedbirler uygulandı. Tedbirler alarak yaptık. Acılar toplulukla yaşanır derler ama biz gelmelerini istemedik. Gelenler yine oldu ama gelmeyin dedik. Başka kayıp vermek istemedik.

Overall, the constant occurrence of deaths in society has made the experience of death less private and more of an everyday event. In some cases where multiple deaths occurred in the same family caused the mourning process not to be fully experienced. Additionally, post-mortem rituals were not performed or postponed because of the restrictions imposed. The participants could not attend the funerals or could not reach the people they wanted with them. At the same time, curfews restricted people's visit to cemeteries who has recent funerals. This has made the current grieving process even more difficult. In general, limited visits due to restrictions experienced negatively as feeling lonely and not share the pain. Combined with the spread of the disease during the loss, and the anxiety that it was still spreading, made it difficult to come together with other people and prevented communal grieving. Considering all these situations, it is apparent that the grief experienced during the COVID-19 period is different from other times.

4.2. Social Media Usage During Bereavement

"Social Media Usage During Bereavement" was the second theme emerged from the data analysis. This theme with its seven categories describes usages of social media of bereaved individuals. This theme outlines that individuals who lost a close one uses social media about their bereavement process and about their close ones as follows: a) post on special days such as deceased's birthday, religiously important days, valentine days, anniversary days with the motivation of deceased can see them, b) post on the day when the close one dies to announce the death others, c) aesthetic posts to feel closer to the deceased, d) farewell posts to acknowledge the reality of the death, e) posts to only commemorate the deceased to feel relief, f) sharing pain to discharge when overwhelmed by thoughts, and g) posting on the wall of the deceased to feel the existence of the deceased more.

Seven categories of this theme were named as (1) Special Day Posts, (2) Announce the Death, (3) Aesthetic Posts, (4) Farewell Posts, (5) Commemorate, (6) Sharing Pain, (7) Posting on the Wall of the Deceased.

The categories displayed below in Figure 4.3.
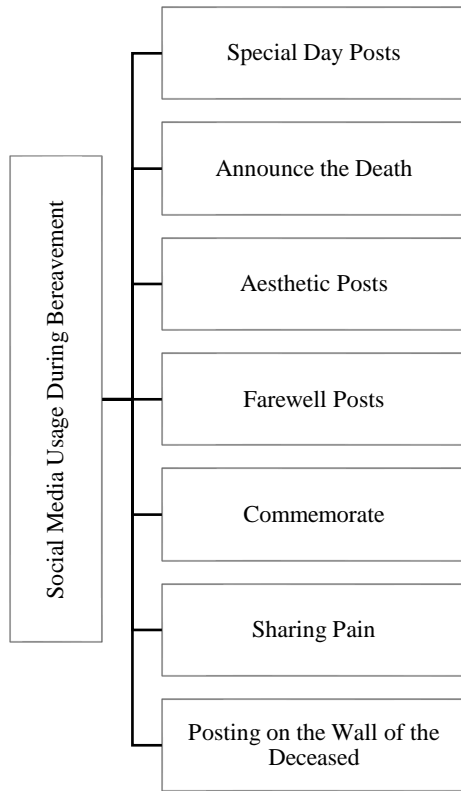
Figure 4.3. Social media usage during bereavement: Categories

4.2.1. Special Day Posts

Almost all the participants share posts about their lost ones *on special days* such as birthday of lost one, the first year of the loss, or holidays. Particularly, according to P3's statement, these posts seem to be seen by her deceased mother and make her happy. Stating that her deceased mother used to use social media very actively and that she used to enjoyed it very much, P3 also states that she is happy to continue posting:

> Like I said, it's like I'm happy because it feels like she can see my posts. Because my mother was a very social person. She was also a person who shared a lot. At that moment, she sees them, and it is making me happy. She's reacting to me; it feels like she's happy. On women's day, on Valentine's Day, I share my mother on all of them, I do not skip. I share my mom on every special day.

> Dediğim gibi o, onları görüyormuş gibi mutlu oluyorum. Benim annem çünkü çok sosyal bir insandı. Kendisi de çok paylaşım yapan bir insandı. O sırada o onu görüyor ve mutlu oluyor hani. Bana tepki veriyor, seviniyormuş gibi

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geliyor. Kadınlar gününde, sevgililer gününde, hepsinde annemi paylaşıyorum, atlamıyorum. Her özel günde annemi paylaşıyorum.

In the example of participant P2, it is also seen that there is a feeling that the deceased person will see these posts as stated, "I post photos on Instagram on his birthday. I wrote on his wall on Facebook too. So, they see them, they read them, it affects you positively because you feel that way."

According to the P8 user, posting about the deceased on special occasions gave him a sense of relief, "Then I posted a post on his birthday, and I felt a little bit relieved, and for my part, I had to do something like that."

4.2.2. Announce the Death

Secondly, almost all of the participants stated that *announcing the death* from social media is quite functional because they do not have to call and announce the death one by one like it used to be. Now, with the social media they could reach everyone with one single announce and this seems to enable them to get through this responsibility easier. P6, who uses this function of social media for events to be held after the deceased, expresses this situation as follows:

> I announced the death of my father on social media. It got a lot of interaction. My father was a well-known person in Antalya. My phone was locked the moment I posted it on Facebook. I gave my thanks, announced the ceremony, we held a lokma event, I announced it. I couldn't call anyone on the phone, I didn't have time anyway. It was also very difficult to talk on the phone at that time. I was able to share it with help on Facebook. Many people have seen it on Facebook. They published it and shared the announcement I wrote directly.

> Babamın vefatını sosyal medyada duyurdum. Çok etkileşim aldı. Babam tanınan da bir insandı Antalya'da. Facebook'ta yayınladığım an telefonum kitlendi. Teşekkürümü yaptım, mevlüdünü duyurdum, lokma etkinliği yaptık onu duyurdum. Kimseyi telefonla arayamadım zaten vaktim yoktu. O durumda zaten telefonla konuşmak da çok zordu. Facebook'ta da yardım alarak paylaşabildim. Birçok insan görmüş Facebook'tan. Yayınlamışlar, direkt benim yazdığım yazıyı paylaşmışlar.

P8 participant's motivation for announcing the loss was that he wanted other people to be aware of the death as "In the early days, I posted to let people know about my loss.

I wanted people to know about my loss because it was their loss too, I received a lot of condolence messages."

4.2.3. Aesthetic Posts

According to one participant, sharing *artistic posts* is among the uses of social media during bereavement. The participant, who also shared the song he composed for his deceased father on social media tools, mentioned that sharing artistic works motivated him. As P7 stated:

> Right now, I had to write a song for an assignment, I thought about my father's process and wrote a song about him. I shared it. Not to show something to people, not to show something to myself either. I miss my father and I look at social media as my memories, especially Instagram. They are my memories, and I can open and see them whenever I want. I shared them wanting to keep the memories.

> Şu an ise geçen bir ödevim için şarkı yazmam gerekiyordu, babamın sürecini düşündüm ve onunla alakalı bir şarkı yazdım. Onu paylaştım. İnsanlara bir şey göstermek değil, kendime de bir şey göstermek değil. Hem babamı özlemek, hem de sosyal medyaya ben benim anılarım olarak bakıyorum özellikle Instagram'a. Benim anılarım ve ben onları istediğim zaman açıp görebilirim. Anı kalsın isteyerek paylaştım onları.

4.2.4. Farewell Posts

In the posts made after the loss experience, one participant stated that he felt as if he was *saying goodbye* to the deceased person. According to the P7 participant, this was expressed as follows:

> There are some friends who were supportive, you can't notify each of them at that moment. I made my farewell there. It was as if I had given the news when I said goodbye. I remember the thing, I found out the day he passed away and when I finished the post, I really felt like saying goodbye. So, I felt relieved for a while.

> Destek olmuş arkadaşlar var, her birine o an haber veremiyorsun. Vedamı da oradan yaptım. Veda ederken haber vermiş gibi oldum. Şeyi hatırlıyorum, vefat ettiği gün öğrendim ve paylaşımı tamamladığımda gerçekten veda etmiş gibi hissettim. Yani, biraz rahatlamış hissettim.

4.2.5. Commemorate

Almost all of the participants are sharing their posts on the honor of their deceased ones to *commemorate* them. It feels good to see these memories of the deceased on social media sites permanently. As P5 stated, sharing commemoration posts has a supportive effect because of the comments under them:

> Of course, I shared posts about my mother. Since I was affected by her death, I tried to use mother-specific words with the sadness of losing my mother. There, I tried to explain what a mother means to the people. Because I don't know how much the impact of someone who has experienced loss can have on someone who hasn't, but I still wanted them to know. I made posts about my mother for a while because I wanted them to know. I wrote it in honor of my mother, all my friends were affected, I understood it from their wishes they wrote it under it.

> Annem üzerinden paylaşım yaptım tabi. Vefatından etkilendiğim için, annemi kaybetmenin üzüntüsüyle anneme özgü sözler kullanmaya çalıştım. Orada da annenin ne demek olduğunu anlatmaya çalıştım karşıdaki insanlara. Çünkü kayıp yaşamış birinin yaşamamış birine olan etkisi ne kadar olabilir bilmiyorum ama yine de bilmelerini istedim. Bilmelerini istediğim için annemle ilgili paylaşımlar bir süre yaptım. Anneme ithafen yazdım, bütün arkadaşım olan insanlar etkilenmiştir, onu da altına yazmış olduklarından, dileklerinden anladım.

As P4 stated, the permanence of memorial posts is important because these posts are preventing the deceased from being forgotten:

> Occasionally, I go back and look at what I've been through on Twitter, I read about it. I think people are forgotten after a while, even after they die. But I realized that he will always be there, after I tweet, and I want to remember him there when I look back. I like him being there, I remember him.

> Arada bir dönüp Twitter'dan neler yaşadığıma bakarım, okurum. İnsanlar öldükten sonra da bir süre sonra unutulduklarını düşünüyorum. Ama onun orada, Tweet attıktan sonra hep orada var olacağını, geriye dönüp baktığımda yine onu orada hatırlamak istediğimi fark ettim. Onun orada durması benim hoşuma gidiyor, hatırlıyorum.

P8 is also stating the importance of being remembering the deceased permanently:

> We could have visited the grave before that, but we have brought it to the digital realm. It feels good to say that we have not forgotten him, that we have

not forgotten his existence and his loss, and it feels good to look and see that we have made a commemoration. I want to leave a mark there, to see that I did something on that date.

Öncesinde de belki mezar ziyareti yapabilirdik. Bunu dijitale taşımış olduk. Onu unutmadığımızı, onun varlığını ve kaybını da unutmadığımızı belirtmek, arada da bakıp bir anma yaptığınımızı görmek iyi hissettiriyor. Oraya iz bırakmak, o tarihte bir şeyler yaptığımı görmek istiyorum.

4.2.6. Sharing Pain

The majority of the participants defend the view that *sharing their pain* on social media reduces their pain. P4 is stating the reduced pain effects of posting emotional posts:

Everyone has a different way of experiencing their pain. If they are not bothered by the questions posed to them, if they can find the strength to answer them, then they can share. Some pain lessens with sharing, if social media is a way of relieving pain for them, it makes sense. Why would it not make sense?

Herkesin acısını yaşama şekli birbirinden farklı. Eğer onlara yöneltilen sorular onların canını sıkmıyorsa, cevap verme gücünü kendilerinde bulabiliyorlarsa paylaşabilirler sonuçta. Bazı acılar paylaştıkça azalır, eğer sosyal medya onlar için bir acıyı giderme yöntemiyse mantıklı. Neden mantıksız olsun ki?

P10 refers to the pain-reducing effect of sharing with other people:

Then I started sharing on social media with people who have been through something like me. I am now in contact with many people who have lost their spouses, who have lost their parents. This has been very good for me. In that respect, for example, I use social media. Because the more you share, the lighter it gets.

Daha sonra sosyal medyada benim gibi şeyler yaşayanlarla paylaşmaya başladım. Şu anda eşini kaybetmiş, annesini babasını kaybetmiş birçok insanla kontak halindeyim. Bu da bana çok iyi geldi. O yönden de mesela sosyal medyayı kullandığım oluyor. Çünkü paylaştıkça daha çok hafifliyor.

4.2.7. Adding Relatives of the Deceased

According to one participant, adding people who were in the deceased person's life on social media after the death occurred was done in order to be informed about the events

that took place after the death. This is related to the use of the information exchange function of social media. According to P9's statement:

> I'm looking. I look at D9, of course there was no sharing after a certain point. His wife was not my friend, I was curious, frankly, I added his wife. I looked at their daughter, their daughter makes me very sad, they are at similar age, she, and my daughter. I don't know, maybe I'm sensitive, I added his wife, that's it.

> Bakıyorum. D9'a bakıyorum, tabii belli bir yerden sonra yoktu paylaşım. Eşi arkadaşım değildi, merak ettim açıkçası eşini ekledim. Kızına baktım, kızı çok üzüyor beni, tam benim kızımla arasında bir yaş var ne bileyim ondan belki de hassasım, eşini ekledim, öyle.

4.2.8. Posting the Wall of the Deceased

One participant stated that he wrote on the wall of the deceased person. The purpose of this was to connect with the deceased person and the deceased person felt as if they were seeing these posts. P2 stated this sharing as "I post photos on Instagram on her birthday. On Facebook, I wrote on her wall, yes. So, they see them, they read them, it affects you positively because you feel that way."

Overall, participants use social media during periods of bereavement to share special occasion posts, posts to publicize the loss, aesthetic posts, farewell posts, memorial posts, posts expressing their feelings, interaction with relatives of the bereaved, and posts on the deceased's wall. Especially the fact that these posts are permanent is effective for grieving individuals to make such posts. The healing effect of emotional sharing is among the positive aspects of sharing. After these posts, the positive and negative experiences of making such posts on social media are important. In the next section, the positive and negative experiences are explained respectively.

4.3. Positive Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement

"Positive Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement" was the third theme emerged from the data analysis. This theme with its six categories describes the positive aspects of social media usage during bereavement process. This theme outlines that usage of social media during bereavement experienced by them positively as follows: a) finding

common experiences with others, b) the functionalities of social media sites, c) being able to interact with others, d) sharing emotional expressions, e) feeling as keeping the deceased in subtle world, and f) sustaining the continuing bond with the deceased.

Six categories of this theme were named as (1) Common Experiences, (2) Functionality, (3) Interaction of Friends on Social Media, (4) Emotional Expressions, (5) Keep the Deceased in Subtle World, (6) Continue the Bond With the Deceased.

The categories and related sub-categories are displayed below in Figure 4.4.
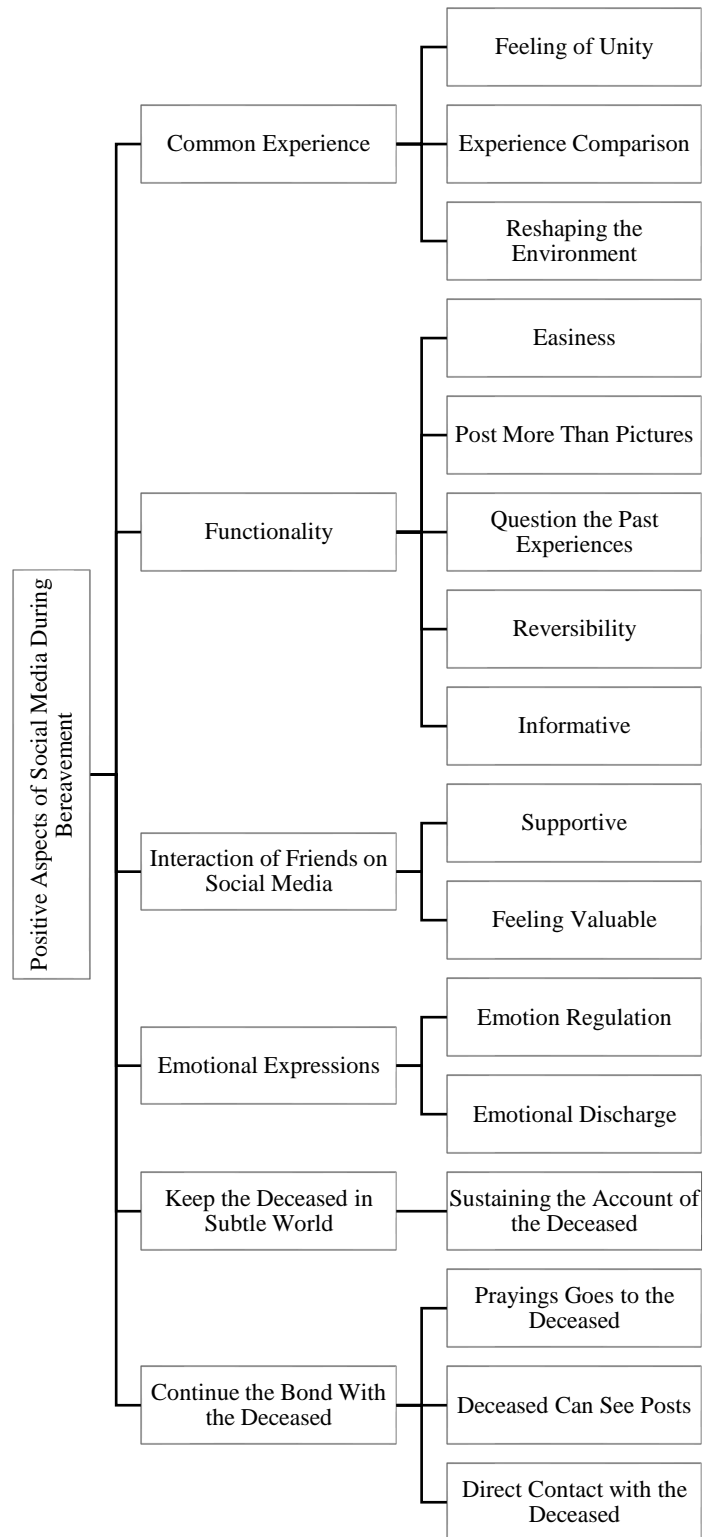
Figure 4.4. Positive aspects of social media during bereavement: Categories and subcategories

4.3.1. Common Experience

According to the participants, the positive effects of the accessibility of shared experiences through social media are as follows: feeling of unity, experience comparison, and reshaping the environment.

a. According to P7, the fact that grief experiences are shared on social media and being able to follow them creates the feeling that the grieving individual is not alone and *feels a sense of unity*, "It's triggering at first. I remember my own loss, but then there's a feeling that I'm not alone. The person sharing this is not alone. It makes you feel a unity."

b. According to P5, having access to common experiences helps to question one's own experience and *compare it with other experiences*:

> I am comparing what I went through with what they went through. Some people can experience more intensity of emotion. Some people accept it. When I look at people who experience emotional intensity, I compare it with my own experiences. I think that I have done too much on one side and they have done too little on this side. When this happens, of course, people get emotional. They talk about what they did with their mother, you talk about what you went through with your mother. Especially if there is a process that their mother has gone due to illness, they can understand your pain and you can understand their pain.

> Benim yaşadıklarımla onun yaşadıklarını karşılaştırıyorum. Bazı insanlar duygu yoğunluğunu daha fazla yaşayabiliyorlar. Bazıları da kabullenmiş oluyor. Duygu yoğunluğunu yaşayan insanlara baktığım zaman kendi yaşadıklarımla karşılaştırıyorum. Ben bir tarafı fazla yapmışım, o bu tarafı eksik yapmış gibi düşünüyorum. Böyle olduğu zaman da insan tabi ki duygusallaşıyor. O işte annesiyle yaptıklarını anlatıyor, sen annenle yaşadıklarını anlatıyorsun. Hele ki hastalıktan dolayı geçirdiği bir süreç varsa, o senin acını sen de onun acısını anlayabiliyorsun.

c. According to P3, capturing common posts on social media leads to a *reshaping of the grieving individual's environment*:

> I like it very much. Because you always find something in common. And the people around you start to take shape accordingly. After a while, you start to get along better with people who have suffered loss. Because they understand you. Someone without a loss cannot understand you anyway.

Çok hoşuma gidiyor. Çünkü ortak bir nokta buluyorsun mutlaka. Zaten çevrendeki insanlar da ona göre şekillenmeye başlıyor. Kaybı olan insanlarla daha iyi anlaşmaya başlıyorsun bir süre sonra. Çünkü o seni anlıyor. Kaybı olmayan birisi seni anlayamaz zaten.

4.3.2. Functionality

Participants positively experienced from the usage of social media during periods of bereavement because these sites are functional. According to the participants, these functionalities are as follows: easiness of applications especially being able to reach people at the same time, being able to post more than just pictures, being able to question past experiences, reversibility of comments, and being able to gain information about others.

a. According to participant P4, announcing the news of death saved time when done through social media. Many people were reached through social media accounts more *easily* than usual:

> It was not possible for me to reach everyone individually. Since I was already working and trying to carry out this process simultaneously, I had very little opportunity to talk to people on the phone. It was more advantageous for me to announce it from there.

> Tek tek herkese ulaşmam mümkün değildi. Zaten hem çalışıp hem bu süreci eş zamanlı yürütmeye çalıştığım için insanlarla telefonda konuşma olanağım çok azdı. Oradan duyurmak benim için daha avantajlı oldu.

b. The fact that the deceased person's social media accounts *not only store photographs*, but also include articles written, songs liked, book excerpts, makes these accounts more functional. Unlike the photo albums in the classical period, now all writings, pictures, and memories could be collected under one page. As P2 stated:

> It just makes my job easier. It's in my hand, come and see. Otherwise, I would go back and look at the photos. But of course, social media gets better because she also has posts other than photos. You can look back at them too. You see her happy days, be glad that she lived, be glad that she traveled. I don't know, maybe a quote she shared. In that sense, it is better to have a social media account. I wish my father had an account like that too.

İşimi kolaylaştırıyor sadece. Elimin altında, gir bak. Öteki türlü de olsa dönüp fotoğraflara bakardım. Ama tabi sosyal medya daha iyi oluyor çünkü onun fotoğraflar dışında da paylaşımları oluyor. Onlara da dönüp bakabiliyorsun. Mutlu günlerini görüyorsun, iyi ki yaşamış, iyi ki gezmiş. Ne bileyim işte paylaştığı bir yazı. O manada sosyal medyası olması daha iyi. Keşke babamın da olsaydı.

c. Participants states that they had the chance to *reconsider their past experiences* by taking advantage of the permanence of the social media, furthermore, they could confront and question their memories with the deceased. As P5 stated:

Sometimes I go to her account and look at her photos, sometimes I see our past posts. When I look at them, my emotions run high, and I wonder if there were any moments when I missed or offended her. I struggle with them, I question myself.

Bazen hesabına girip onun fotoğraflarına bakıyorum, bazen geçmişe dönük yaptığımız paylaşımları görüyorum. Onlara baktığım zaman duygularım depreşiyor, acaba eksik yaptığım, onu kırdığım anlar var mıydı diye düşünüyorum. Bunlarla mücadele ediyorum, onu sorguluyorum.

d. According to P6 among the participants, the fact that the comments made on the posts about the deceased remain there is also a positive feature. Stating that he could not return to phone calls as a result of the shock and turmoil experienced at the time of death, the participant stated that he was able to thank these comments later, and that this was something he cared about. Here, the importance of the *reversibility* feature of social media is revealed:

Facebook has been good at this point. I was in no condition to call anyone on the phone. For example, I could not look at the callers on the phone, I could not return. But I went back to those who wrote on social media, then I read them all. People wrote what they felt. I saw it one day later, I saw it two days later, but as a result, I was able to return. In a manner, we are in a society, everyone who loves, counts, and knows him has heard about the situation.

Facebook bu konuda iyi oldu. Telefondan arayacak halde değildim kimseyi. Mesela telefonla arayanlara bakamadım, dönemedim. Ama sosyal medyaya yazanlara sonra döndüm, sonra hepsini okudum. İnsanlar içinden gelenleri yazmışlar. Ben bir gün sonra gördüm, iki gün sonra gördüm ama sonuç olarak dönüş yapabildim. Sonuç olarak bir toplum içindeyiz, onu seven sayan, tanıyan herkes aşağı yukarı haberleri oldu.

e. Particularly during the COVID-19 period, the ability of social media to be *informative* in the event of death, in moments where people cannot communicate with the people around physically, is emphasized by participants. As P6 stated:

> It is good to inform and share, especially during the pandemic period. It's nice that people are showing interest. Of course, according to our traditions, people in mourning should not be left alone. Wherever you are, you to them normally. For example, I couldn't go to my aunt's funeral. Of course, people appreciate when you report and give information on social media. When a relative dies and the people around you find out later, people are reacting. They say, at least you could have given us information, that's why it's essential to at least announce when your loved one dies.

> Özellikle pandemi döneminde haberdar etmek, paylaşmak iyi oluyor. İnsanların ilgi göstermesi güzel. Tabi ki bizim geleneklerimize göre yasta insanın yanında olması gerekir. Nerede olursan ol çıkar yanına gidersin. Teyzemin vefatına gidemedim mesela. Sosyal medyada bildirdiğin, bilgi verdiğin zaman insanlar takdir ediyor tabi. Bir yakının öldüğü zaman çevrendekiler sonradan öğrendiği zaman insanlar sitem ediyor. Bir haber verseydiniz diyorlar. Bu yüzden yakının öldüğü zaman en azından duyuruyor olmak zaruri bir şey yani.

4.3.3. Interaction of Friends on Social Media

According to the results obtained from the participants, the fact that their posts are interacted with by other social media friends positively affects them. These effects were identified as being supported by others and feeling valued.

a. As P10 states, when there is no environment that can tolerate the loneliness of having lost a loved one, social surroundings on social media can come to the fore, especially due to the restrictions brought by COVID-19:

> So, it's lonely. There is a great loneliness and emptiness, and as you said, since it is a pandemic period, you cannot be in contact with people in person. That is why social media contributed one click to my recovery process.

> Çok büyük bir yalnızlık ve boşluk oluyor ve senin de dediğin gibi pandemi dönemi olduğu için birebirde insanlarla kontak halinde olamıyorsun. O yüzden sosyal medya bir tık daha iyileşme sürecinde bana katkı sağlamıştı.

Additionally, according to P5, *support* is something you search for on online platforms:

> For example, your mother dies, I do not think that such a post will be made to agitate themselves or to make themselves feel important. For example, there comes a time when there is no one left to share it with, one seeks support through social media. Then you try to support as much as you can, according to the degree of sincerity. I find it normal. Because the pain of loss is very difficult.

> Anneniz mesela, bunu kendini acındırmak için ya da kendini önemli hissettirmek için böyle bir paylaşım yapılacağını düşünmüyorum. İllaki mesela öyle bir an geliyor ki hiç çevresinde paylaşacak insan kalmadığı zaman bunu sosyal medya aracılığıyla kendine destek arıyor insan. O zaman da sen elinden geldiğince, samimiyet derecene göre destek olmaya çalışıyorsun. Ben de bunları normal karşılıyorum. Çünkü kaybedilmişliklerin acısı çok zor.

b. Shared comments are coming to meaning of *being valued* if comes from sincere people as P5 stated:

> Of course, sincere people, my circle is quite wide, they wish as much as possible, they say their best wishes. May God have mercy on her, may her place be heaven, like. I mean, this kind of talk is classic. Writing these means they value you. Because they could not be written anything. If she's dead, they could have said she's dead anyway, after all, she is your mother. But when they write them without leaving it blank, it shows that you mean something to them. This has happened for me.

> Tabi ki samimi olan, benim çevrem bayağı bir geniş, olabildiğince temennide bulunuyorlar, iyi dileklerini söylüyorlar. Allah rahmet eylesin, mekânı cennet olsun, gibi. Yani klasik bu tarz laflar. Bunları yazmaları da sana kıymet verdikleri anlamına geliyor. Çünkü hiçbir şey yazmayabilirler. Öldüyse öldü de diyebilirler. Her neticede senin annen de diyebilir. Ama bunları boş geçmeyip yazdıkları zaman senin onlar için bir anlam ifade ettiğini gösteriyor. Benim için bu olmuş oldu.

4.3.4. Emotional Expressions

Participants shared their own emotional states during the grieving process on social media. Furthermore, social media posts played an active role in regulating their emotional states and discharging their emotions.

a. P10 talks about the healing effect of sharing pain with other people. She says that sharing emotions on social media has a healing effect on coping with these emotions:

> I think it's a very healing thing. I mean, for me, I don't know how others do it. But I always say that sharing pain is good. Everything should be shared, but pain is more precious when experienced together. I am now in contact with many people who have lost their spouses, who have lost their parents. This has been very good for me. In that respect, for example, I use social media. Because the more I share, the lighter it gets.

> Bence çok iyileştirici bir şey. Yani benim nezdimde yani başkalarını bilmiyorum nasıl yapar da. Acıyı paylaşmak iyi geliyor hep bunu söylüyorum ama. Her şey paylaşılmalı ama acı birlikte yaşandığı zaman daha kıymetli. Şu anda eşini kaybetmiş, annesini babasını kaybetmiş birçok insanla kontak halindeyim. Bu da bana çok iyi geldi. O yönden de mesela sosyal medyayı kullandığım oluyor. Çünkü paylaştıkça daha çok hafifliyor.

Additionally, P5 states that whenever he felt emotionally intense, he shared posts on social media, "I shared it mostly on Instagram and Facebook, starting from the day of the funeral and after the funeral when I felt emotionally intense."

b. According to the P7, emotional discharge and emotion regulation effects are among the facilitating and beneficial aspects of sharing grief experiences on social media:

> It allowed me to experience catharsis. Because it was a bit difficult to talk in the family. Everybody was broken. You need to release your emotions from somewhere. There are friends who have been supportive, you can't inform every one of them at that moment.

> Katarsis yaşamamı sağlıyordu. Çünkü aile içinde konuşmak biraz zordu. Herkes çökmüş durumdaydı. Duygularını bir yerden boşaltman gerekiyor. Destek olmuş arkadaşlar var, her birine o an haber veremiyorsun.

4.3.5. Keep the Deceased in Subtle World

Participants on the opinion that social media accounts have become identities. Removing these identities from accounts leads to regret, while deleting them is perceived as a complete removal from life. For example, as P8 puts it,

They are now like our digital identity. Especially Instagram is where it is now. It changes from time to time, once it was Facebook, now it is Instagram. Psychologically, I wanted my identity there to show that I had such a friendship, such a loss.

Artık oralar bizim dijital kimliğimiz gibi. Özellikle Instagram şu anki konumda. Bu zaman zaman değişiyor, bir zamanlar Facebook'tu şimdi Instagram. Oradaki kimliğimde de öyle bir dostluğumun, böyle bir kaybımın olduğunu görünmesini istedim psikolojik olarak.

a. The fact that the accounts of deceased people are not deleted, that they are still on the friends list, and even that their deletion and removal causes anxiety and regret, shows that these people are *still held in the tangible world* by grieving individuals. For example, P2 felt regret as she removed her deceased relative from social media:

At that moment, I unfollowed in order not to spoil my own psychology any more, because I was upset. I did, and then I regretted it, to be honest. For example, I can't add her anymore because she's a secret account. There's no one to approve when you follow. That's why I wouldn't unfollow. I wish it had stayed. This time I feel like I was disloyal, but of course I didn't remove it with that psychology. When I removed it, it was only so that my sadness would not be constantly renewed.

İşte o an kendi psikolojimi daha fazla bozmamak adına çıkardım. Üzüldüğüm için. Çıkardım, sonra da pişman oldum açıkçası. Mesela gizli hesap olduğu için ekleyemiyorum artık. Takip ettiğinde onay verecek kimse yok. Çıkarmazdım o yüzden. Keşke dursaydı. Bu seferde vefasızlık yapmış gibi hissediyorum. Ama o psikolojiyle çıkarmadım tabii ki. Çıkartırken sadece üzüntüm sürekli tazelenmesin diyeydi.

It was also determined that the possibility that the accounts would be closed caused anxiety among the participants. As P4 stated, "I woud feel so sad. I think that he has been erased, as if he never existed. It's like erasing a person you tried to keep alive, it makes me very sad."

Additionally, as P5 states, when a deceased person's account disappears, it means that the person has completely disappeared from life:

Unfollowing now would be like shutting her out. It would be like cutting her out of my life. I still can't believe my mom's dead. I feel like she's going to walk out the door. I couldn't get her number off the phone. Why? You know

she won't call. But keeping that phone gives you a little bit of strength. Then I'd have buried her completely. You've already buried her, it would be burying her completely deeper.

Şimdi bırakmak, sanki onu dışlıyormuş gibi olur. Hayatımdan çıkarmış gibi olacağım. Ben annemin öldüğüne hala inanamıyorum. Kapıdan çıkıp gelecekmiş gibi geliyor. Telefondan numarasını silemedim. Niye, aramayacağını biliyorsun. Ama o telefonun durması sana bir nebze de olsan güç veriyor. O zaman onu tamamen gömmüş olurum. Zaten gömdün, tamamen derine dönüyorsun.

4.3.6. Continue the Bond with the Deceased

Participants believe that the prayers in the comments go to the soul of the deceased. They believe that their memorial posts are seen by the deceased. Moreover, they communicate directly with the deceased.

a. According to the P2 participant, the prayers and good wishes under the posts *go to the soul of the deceased*. The community formed in this way makes the grieving individual feel more comfortable. At the same time, the deceased person feels as if they are seeing them. In this way, the existence of the deceased person continues:

> It's such a thing that when you write it, when you put it, you feel like they see it. Maybe it's absurd. It relaxes you at that moment. As if you are sharing it with them, as if they are hearing it. It is as if the prayers of the people who pray under the things you put are going to them; may her place be in heaven, may God have mercy on her. We have classical wishes, as if these comments were going to her. So, you get into that kind of psychology. For example, I shared, I missed you daddy, I missed you so much my dear friend. For example, I shared a photo of my friend, saying that It's been a year since you died. I wrote in her first year. I believed that the comments written under that photo went to them as a prayer. Thanks to these comments under posts, you feel comfortable because those prayers came to them.

> Öyle bir şey ki o, yazdığında, koyduğunda, onlar görüyor gibi hissediyorsun. Saçma belki ama. O an seni rahatlatıyor. Sanki onlarla paylaşıyormuşsun, onlar duyuyormuş gibi. Senin koyduğun şeylerin altına dua eden insanların duası onlara gidiyormuş gibi. Mekânı cennet olsun, allah rahmet eylesin gibi. Klasik temennilerimiz var ya, sanki onlara gidiyormuş gibi. Öyle bir psikolojiye giriyorsun yani. Mesela paylaşmışım, seni çok özledim babacım, seni çok özledim arkadaşım. Mesela bir fotoğrafını paylaşmışım, sen öleli

olmuş 1 sene. Senelerinde yazmışım. O yazımın ya da fotoğrafın altına yazılan yorumların onlara dua olarak gittiğine inandım.

b. Among the participants' motivations for sharing was the belief that the *deceased would be able to see these posts*. According to the participant's statement, in this way, they feel as if they are establishing a bond with the deceased as P3 states:

If I make 10 posts, 7 of them are about my mom, 3 of them are about my personal life. I share it as if she is looking at it, as if she sees it and feels happy. Otherwise, I don't want anyone to comment. I share it for her to see it. I feel happy because I feel like she sees it. I feel happy when I share something about her too. I feel happy when I see her picture or something. It's like a thing. It feels like there is a connection. Actually, of course, there is no such thing.

10 paylaşım yaptıysam 7'si annemle ilgilidir, 3'ü özel hayatımla ilgilidir. Sanki o bakıyormuş gibi paylaşıyorum. Sanki o görüyor da mutlu oluyormuş gibi. Yoksa herhangi birinin yorum yapmasını istemiyorum. O görsün diye paylaşıyorum. O görüyor gibi hissettiğim için mutlu oluyorum. Ben de onunla ilgili bir şey paylaşınca mutlu oluyorum. Seviniyorum onun resmini görünce falan. Şey gibi oluyor. bir bağ kuruluyormuş gibi geliyor. Aslında öyle bir şey yok tabi ki.

c. It is among the forms of use in which the participants *communicate directly with the deceased person*. In this way, the person experiences the feeling of being one-on-one with the deceased individual as P2 stated:

You don't think about the environment when you write them. You are there with your father, your aunt, your deceased relative and only they are there, in your head and in your heart. They see it, they read it, when people write a pray under it, it goes to them. Maybe it's absurd, but this kind of thing comforts people. Let's say out of desperation.

Sen onları yazarken çevreyi düşünmüyorsun zaten. Sen orda babanlasın, yengenlesin, vefat eden yakınınlasın ve orada sadece onlar var. Kafanda da, kalbinde de. Onlar bunu görüyor, okuyor, altına dua yazıldığında onlara gidiyor. Saçma belki ama bu tarz şeyler insanı rahatlatıyor. Biraz çaresizlikten diyelim.

In another example, it is seen that the participant was in direct communication with the deceased person and reached the deceased person through the sharing. According to P7 participant,

> At first, when I thought about the mourning process, sharing photos, sharing videos during the acceptance process was to give the feeling that you are actually here, you are not dead. I remember, I found out the day he passed away and when I completed the post, I felt like I had actually said goodbye. So, I felt relieved for a while.

> İlk başta yas sürecini düşününce, kabullenme sürecinde fotoğraflar paylaşma, videolar paylaşma, aslında buradasın ölmedin duygusunu vermekti. Vedamı da oradan yaptım. Veda ederken haber vermiş gibi oldum. Şeyi hatırlıyorum, vefat ettiği gün öğrendim ve paylaşımı tamamladığımda gerçekten veda etmiş gibi hissettim. O yüzden rahatlamış hissetmiştim bir süre.

Overall, there are many positive experiences of using social media during bereavement. One of the most important of these is the mutual sharing of similar experiences. These shares provide the benefit of comparing the experience with other people. In addition, a sense of unity is created and the environment is renewed. The usefulness of social media tools is another positive feature. Factors such as easy use, being able to reach other people at the same time, the ability to upload not only photos but also a wide range of content, and the ability to go back are the most frequently mentioned areas in the field of usefulness. Especially during the COVID-19 period, people who could not get news from their surroundings due to restrictions were easily informed about other people thanks to social media. In addition, interacting with other people through social media helped bereaved individuals gain social support. With this support, individuals felt valuable. Users who experienced emotional intensity during the mourning period conveyed their own emotional expressions by sharing and experienced emotional discharge. This situation contributed to their emotional regulation. In their posts, mourning individuals communicated directly with the deceased person and tended to maintain their physical presence. This shows that the bonds with the deceased person are not severed, but maintained through social media accounts. The participants made their posts on the assumption that the deceased person could see them, which maintained their bonds and developed a sense of relief.

4.4. Negative Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement

"Negative Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement" was the final theme emerged from the data analysis. This theme with its five categories describes the negative aspects of social media usage during bereavement process. This theme outlines that usage of social media during bereavement experienced by them negatively as follows: a) unwanted interactions of others, b) feeling of conscious burden to deceased about social media posts, c) facing constant postings of others, d) concerns about social media usage during bereavement, and e) social appearance effects on online sites.

Five categories of this theme were named as (1) Interaction of Friends on Social Media, (2) Conscious Burden, (3) Constant Posting, (4) Concerns, (5) Social Appearance Effects.

The categories and related sub-categories are displayed below in Figure 4.5.
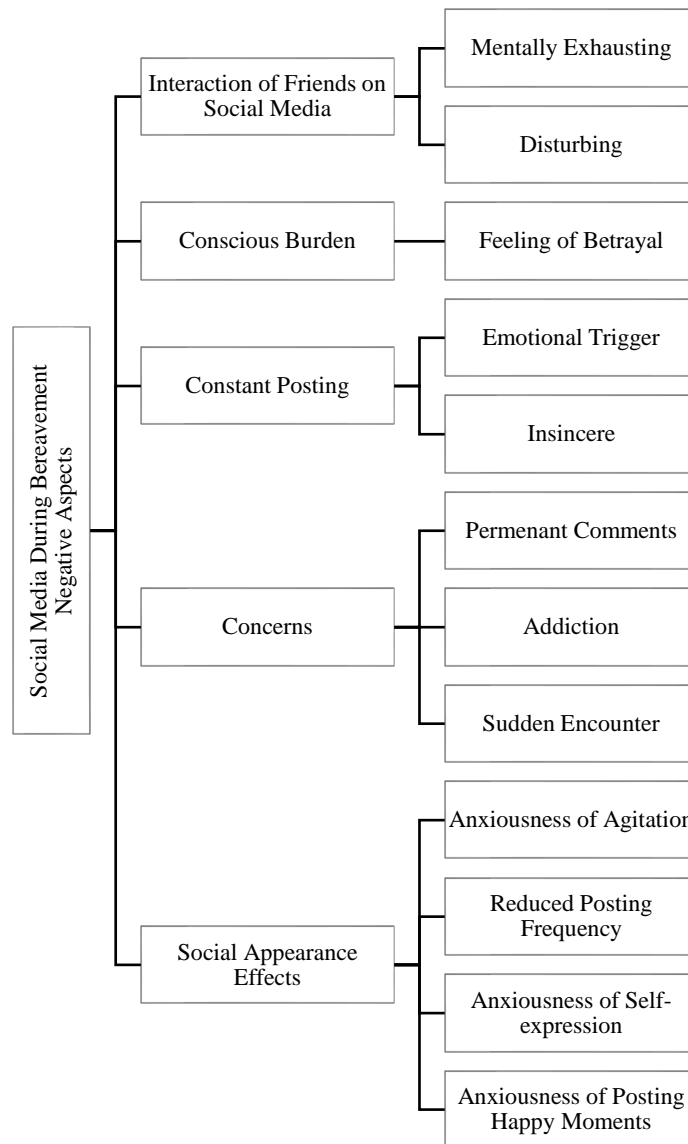
Figure 4.5. Negative aspects of social media during bereavement: Categories and subcategories

4.4.1. Interaction of Friends on Social Media

In addition to the positive experiences created by the interactions of the online environment while using social media in the mourning process, negative experiences were also expressed by the participants. Participants who found the comments written by their social media friends under their grief posts mentally exhausting also stated that they felt uncomfortable at the same time.

a. Especially the feature of comments to be stay permanent, makes bereaved individuals feel disturbance. According to the P10 participant, the negative comments from other people on posts unrelated to the loss after the loss experience have created *mentally exhausted* effect:

> Such comments came like, here her husband passed away, she is still dancing, laughing and having fun, she did not love her husband at all. Later, there was a video about my job, for example, where I wore red lipstick and introduced it. Then, I saw a comment like, oh look, her husband died, like what she's trying to do by putting on red lipstick! Or my son, for example, in a video, we're always together, so there's no one to leave, and here's comments like, she's using her son in the video. This was very frustrating for me at that time. It has been a year since that, I made these shares a year later after my loss. There are still comments like this.

> Hemen yorumlar geldi. İşte eşi vefat etti, hala dans ediyor, gülüp eğleniyor. Eşini hiç sevmiyormuş meğerse gibi böyle bir yorum geldi. Daha sonra bu işle ilgili mesela kırmızı ruj sürdüğüm ve onu tanıttığım bir video vardı. Aa bak eşi öldü, kırmızı ruj sürüp ne yapmaya çalışıyor gibi, veya oğlumu mesela bir videoda, biz sürekli birlikteyiz yani bırakacak kimse yok, ve işte oğlunu kullanıyor videoda gibi böyle yorumlar geldi. Bunlar beni çok yıpratmıştı o süreçte. Ki üzerinden bir sene geçmişti, bir sene sonra yaptım bu paylaşımları. Hala böyle yorumlar geliyor.

b. Comments published from outside on the wall of the deceased after the death are perceived as *disturbing* for P3, and this seems to have negatively affected her:

> My mom has a few unnecessary friends like that. There were those who wrote why did you leave us. I'm angry. So, what's the need! Will my mother answer you? There were those who did so because they were ignorant. Some even texted my mother. There were some people who wrote nonsense about "How you died." You became nervous. You're already upset with the situation, and now you're angry with them.

> Annemin gereksiz birkaç arkadaşı var böyle. Oraya bizi neden bıraktın gittin diye yazanlar oldu. Sinirlendim. Ne gerek var yani. Annem size cevap mı verecek. Cahil oldukları için öyle yapanlar oldu. Anneme mesaj atanlar bile oldu. Nasıl öldün falan diye saçma sapan yazanlar oldu. Sinirleniyorsun. Üzülüyorsun zaten bir de onlara kızıyorsun.

4.4.2. Conscious Burden

Participants who post on social media sites during bereavement, think as if they do not share about the deceased after the death, creates a conscious burden. Moreover, they cannot share something irrelevant to the deceased at the beginning of the grieving process. As P1 stated, "Because when I wanted to share something, I usually wanted it to be about my grandfather. Because there is a burden of conscience inside."

As P8 stated:

> I wanted to share for a while, there were posts I saw from his close friends, wife, brother, I saw posts that describe him and mention him. I wanted to do something like this, but I couldn't help it. As I said, I couldn't post and share in that acceptance process. I even felt the conscience of it. I thought on the outside if I looked like I wasn't upset at all. But I was also affected by the posts shared by others, I was emotionally affected. Later, I made a post on his birthday and got some relief. I had to do something like this myself.

> Bir ara paylaşım yapmak istedim, yakın arkadaşlarından, eşinden, abisinden gördüğüm paylaşımlar oldu, onu anlatan, onu anan paylaşımlar gördüm. Böyle bir şey yapmak istedim ama elim gitmedi. Dediğim gibi o kabullenme sürecinde bir post atıp paylaşamadım. Hatta bunun vicdanını da yaşadım. Dışarıdan sanki hiç üzülmüyormuşum gibi mi görünüyorum diye düşündüm. Ama işte diğerlerinin paylaştığı postlardan da etkilendim, duygusal olarak etkilendim. Daha sonra onun doğum gününde bir paylaşım yaptım ve biraz rahatladım. Kendi açımdan da böyle bir şey yapmam gerekiyormuş.

c. Another event that participants experienced a burden of conscience was the possibility of closing the account of the deceased person in addition to sharing posts. This possibility causes the mourner to feel as if they are *betraying the deceased.* According to the P4 participant, deleting the account of a deceased individual is expressed as an important situation. Moreover, it is stated that such a situation may be to ignore the deceased person, "I would be quite sorry. I think he was deleted, as if he never existed. It saddens me a lot, like the deletion of a person you tried to keep alive."

Participants may think that in the account deletion process to be done with their own hands, a disloyalty has been committed against the deceased person. Although it is desired to delete the account by P1, the fact that she would be the one who do this can

make her feel betrayed. Therefore, the grieving individual wants it to happen spontaneously, without her own will. As stated:

> Closing the account would have a positive effect for me. A power other than me closing the accounts. For example, if the deceased person's account is automatically deleted. It would have a more relaxing effect. Because you cannot do this, no one in the family can do it at that moment. And afterwards. It feels like you are betraying that person. So, I wish it was shut down by another power. If it's automatic.

> Pozitif bir etki olurdu. Benim haricimde bir gücün hesapları kapatması. Mesela vefat eden kişinin hesabı otomatik silinse. Daha rahatlatıcı bir etkisi olurdu. Çünkü bunu siz yapamıyorsunuz, aileden kimse yapamıyor o an. Ve sonrasında da. O insana ihanet ediyormuş hissi oluyor. O yüzden keşke başka bir güç tarafından kapatılsa keşke. Otomatik olsa.

Social media accounts seem to be a reflection of people's lives. As an example of this, we can attribute the closure of the accounts of the deceased people to the feeling as if they are completely removed from our lives. As P5 stated:

> I would be quite sad if my mother's accounts were closed. Like I said, it's like she would be gone out of my life completely. There are some certain people who can close my mother's accounts, and I don't think they would do such a thing without my knowledge.

> Annemin hesaplarının kapatılmasına üzülürüm. Dediğim gibi hayatımdan tamamıyla sanki çıkmış gibi olur. Bunu kapatacak insanlar belli, onların da benden habersiz böyle bir şey yapacaklarını zannetmiyorum.

4.4.3. Constant Posting

Frequent mourning posts on social media could be seen as insincere and emotionally triggering. This is the case for individuals who grieve when they see someone else's posts. According to users, the inauthenticity of social media, and they do not match with their daily life behaviors cause mourners to feel this way.

a. For some participants, seeing or posting grief constantly could be perceived as *insincere* as P1 stated, "Sharing the collapse of emotion all the time seems a little unrelated to social media, it seems fake to me."

In addition, the fact that these posts are coming from those who do not interact while the deceased is still alive, or who do not deal with the grieving individual after the death, creates discomfort and does not seem sincere. As P10 stated, "And as I just mentioned, it made me sad to see people who didn't show any interest while he was alive, or people who never contacted me after he died, making posts like this."

b. Participants stated that seeing the posts made by other users caused different thoughts on themselves. While some participants wished that others had not interacted at all, other participants said that these posts perpetuate grieving. Additionally, according to participants there could be some posts that it turns into a show-off, and that is disrespectful to the deceased. Moreover, they added that they were *emotionally triggered* by these posts especially when encountered suddenly.

As P1 stated, the fact that family members interact with the deceased person's account and are upset because of this causes the grieving participant to be more affected, "Actually, I wish I wouldn't interact, no one would. That would be something more soothing to me. Because my mom interacts more than I do. The more she looks, the more she gets sad, the more it affects me."

In another statement of the P1 participant, the constant sharing of grief by other people creates an ongoing state of sadness on the person, "But to do this all the time, frankly, I do not want to see a person constantly grieving. Because now it's a process that makes me sad too. That's why it's something that I don't like to share all the time."

4.4.4. Concerns

The use of social media during the mourning period and the fact that the social media accounts of the deceased are still in place have both positive and negative aspects as well as concerning aspects for users. These include the persistence of comments under the posts made to the account of the deceased, the concern that posting or checking the account of the deceased during the mourning period might be addictive, and the sudden appearance of posts reminding of grief in the daily flow of life.

a. According to the P1 participant, comments made from others will be *permanent there*. Because of that she feels uncomfortable with them. The fact that she cannot delete them, and cannot predict what may be written has a negative effect on her:

> Photographs and memories of the deceased still remain with us. But for example, if it's on Facebook or social media, people can comment on it as they wish, even if they are relatives, it's just disturbing. Because that comment stays there. As far as I understand, until the person who made it can remove it. Unfortunately, we can also encounter disturbing things. Just this part, the rest is normal stuff anyway.

> Ölen kişinin fotoğrafları, anıları hala bizde kalıyor. Ama mesela, bunun Facebook'ta ya da sosyal medyada olması ve etrafın buna istediği gibi yorum yapabilmesi, akrabalar da olsa, bu rahatsız edici sadece. Çünkü o yorum orada kalıyor. Yapan kişi kaldırana kadar anladığım kadarıyla. Maalesef rahatsız edici şeylerle de karşılaşabiliriz. Sadece bu kısmı, geri kalan kısmı zaten olağan şeyler. Dijital platformda da olması rahatsız edici değil bence.

The fact that the deceased person's account remains, and that other people's posts and additions to the wall also persist, raises concerns about how the deceased person will be remembered later. According to P10 participant:

> Just this kind of posts, posts on the Facebook wall, for example, I'm thinking now how my son will feel when he sees it. Maybe that's why I would prefer it to be turned off. It's nice to see the photos that the person used to post, but it can be bad to see what people have written after their death and it can be such a bad reminder.

> Sadece bu tarz paylaşımlar, Facebook duvarına yapılan paylaşımlar, mesela şu an düşünüyorum oğlum gördüğü zaman ne hisseder. Belki bu yüzden kapatılmasını tercih edebilirim. Önceden kişinin paylaştığı fotoğrafları görmek çok güzel, ama insanların onun ölümünden sonra yazdıkları şeyleri görmek ve bunun böyle hatırlatıcı olması kötü olabilir.

b. The permanence of the deceased's accounts is considered alarming by some users. They may constantly check these accounts and worry that they have a *binding effect*. According to P8 participant:

> If someone is an active user, I think it's good to look at what we were doing there at that time, since most of our lives are spent there, like our CV. Just like the albums we leave at home. Or like notebooks, like notes. Twitter can

be thought of that way. But if people are very affected by it and psychologically obsessed with it and check it every day, either that person can be blocked from seeing it or the accounts should be removed. Sometimes this kind of work, being attached to an object, a memory, a photograph, can cause us to miss the life of the moment.

Eğer aktif kullanan biriyse, CV'miz gibi hayatımızın büyük kısmı orda geçtiği için, o tarihte şurada ne yapıyorduk diye bakmak için güzel bence. Tıpkı evde bıraktığımız albümler gibi. Ya da defterler gibi, notlar gibi. Twitter o şekilde düşünülebilir. Ben o yüzden durması taraftarıyım. Ama bundan çok etkilenip psikolojik olarak takıntı haline getirip her gün kontrol ediyorsa, ya o kişinin görmesi engellenebilir ya da hesapları kaldırmak gerekir. Bazen bu tarz işler, eşyaya, bir anıya, bir fotoğrafa bağlı kalmak o anki hayatı kaçırmaya çok sebep olabiliyor.

c. It seems to have been a very difficult situation for the P10 participant, especially when the photos of the deceased *suddenly appeared* in front of her while life was going on in its own flow:

But this one hurt me a lot, in his first year, of course, D10's photos were very popular on social media. You're having a bad day that day anyway, and he suddenly comes across you. It seemed very sad to me that a person who has never called or asked about me, writes such a lot about my husband, that how much they miss and love him so much. I was very bad on the anniversary of his death. It was a very bad day for me. In a way, I gave myself to dissipation. Whether it's not focusing on him, taking care of my son, or watching more ridiculous things on social media, it's that kind of thing, and all of a sudden, they popped up.

Ama şu beni çok yaralamıştı, ilk yani birinci yılında, D10'un tabi fotoğrafları çok fazla sosyal medyada döndü. Zaten o gün kötü bir gün geçiriyorsun ve birden karşına o çıkıyor. Hiç seni arayıp sormamış, hal hatır sormamış bir insanın eşimle ilgili böyle çok bir şeyler yazması, çok sevdiğini, çok özlediğini yazması bana çok üzücü gelmişti. Ölüm yıldönümünde çok kötüydüm. Çok kötü geçiyordu o gün benim için. Bir şekilde kendimi dağıtmaya vermiştim. Ona odaklanmamaya, oğlumla ilgilenmeye ya da sosyal medyada daha gülünç şeyler izlemeye, bu tarz bir şey ve birdenbire karşıma onlar çıktı.

4.4.5. Social Appearance Effects

All of the participants seem to be affected by what people around them think or could think while using social media in their grief process. The participants' the concern that they feel like they are sharing too much and agitating themselves against people

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outside, their tendency to reduce their postings about their grief in response to the thoughts of others, concern about expressing themselves outside, and the anxiety of sharing any happy moments after the death, are experiencing.

a. More than half of the participants are a*nxious about agitating themselves to other people's eyes* by sharing too many posts. According to P5, this anxiety led him to share posts about his loss carefully:

> I didn't post on my mother's wall because I don't like the exploitation of emotions. That's why I didn't. There is already a loss. I didn't want to poke it further and make it seem like I was pitiful to people. I didn't want to agitate myself either. Because the messages to be written are clear, may her place be heaven. The responds you will receive are clear. It doesn't take your pain away. Saying this all the time is playing with your own feelings, I think. So, I didn't need it.

> Onlarla ilgili yapmadım, çünkü duyguların sömürülmesi benim hoşuma gitmiyor. O yüzden yapmadım. Zaten ortada kaybedilmişlik var. Bunu daha fazla dürtüp de sanki insanlara karşı acınacak hale düşmek istemedim. Kendimi acındırmak da istemedim. Çünkü yazılacak mesajlar belli, başınız sağ olsun, mekânı cennet olsun. Alacağın karşılıklar belli. Bu senin acını karşılamaz. Bunu devamlı dile getirmek kendi duygularınla oynamak oluyor bence. O yüzden gerek duymadım.

b. For some participants, they *reduce their sharing frequency* due to the anxiety of using the situation they experience due to the thoughts they receive from the environment. As P7 stated:

> At first, I wondered, for purely personal reasons and sensitivity, there was a period when I was manipulated, and I was repressing myself. While I wanted to share more, I couldn't. If there is a circle of 500 people, I wondered if I share too much because of the 2 people between them, I wondered if people think that I am using my father's death right now.

> Ben başta tamamen kişisel sebepler ve hassasiyetten dolayı acaba, yani manipülasyona uğradığım bir dönem olmuştu ve kendimi bastırıyordum. Daha çok paylaşmak isterken yapamıyordum. 500 kişilik bir çevre varsa arasındaki 2 kişi yüzünden acaba çok paylaşıyor muyum, acaba insanlar şu an babamın ölümünü kullandığımı düşünüyor mu duygusu gelmişti.

For another participant, other people's opinions resulted in a reduction in their own sharing. According to participant P3, "I used to share more, now my mom's friends

say don't share, we are getting sad, so now I share about twice a month. I used to share every week. They are getting less and less."

    c. P8 stated that he was worried that not sharing any post related to his deceased friend after the loss was experienced, leading the *anxious of not be appearing sad enough* by his friends:

> At one point, I wanted to make a post, there were posts I saw from his close friends, his wife, his brother, I saw posts telling about him, commemorating him. I wanted to do something like that, but I couldn't help it. As I said, during that process of acceptance, I couldn't post and share it. I even felt guilty about it. I thought on the outside if I looked like I wasn't upset at all. But I was also affected by the posts shared by others, I was emotionally affected.

> Bir ara paylaşım yapmak istedim, yakın arkadaşlarından, eşinden, abisinden gördüğüm paylaşımlar oldu, onu anlatan, onu anan paylaşımlar gördüm. Böyle bir şey yapmak istedim ama elim gitmedi. Dediğim gibi o kabullenme sürecinde bir post atıp paylaşamadım. Hatta bunun vicdanını da yaşadım. Dışarıdan sanki hiç üzülmüyormuşum gibi mi görünüyorum diye düşündüm. Ama işte diğerlerinin paylaştığı postlardan da etkilendim, duygusal olarak etkilendim.

    d. One of the situations where the participants are worried about the thoughts coming from the environment is that they experience the *anxiety of sharing a happy moment* after the death experience. As P7 stated, "I was thinking like I shouldn't post right now, do I have the right to be happy, should I share something that I seem happy about. After going through that process, it is good for me to share on social media about my experiences."

According to P10, sharing sad posts is what is expected from the environment after experiencing loss, "When you experience such pain, people always want you to be sad like this, to share your pain there, to be in a ruined state. I never shared it that way either because I have a child. I'm trying to draw a stronger profile there.".

Overall, in addition to the positive aspects of using social media in the grieving process, there are also negative effects. Other people's interactions could be supportive but could also be mentally intense or disturbing. Especially constant posts have the feature of being an emotional trigger for grieving individuals. Even these posts do not

seem sincere to the grieving individual. Moreover, the fact that the comments written by other people under the grief posts are permanent and cannot be deleted is worrying for grieving individuals. The fact that other people's posts suddenly appear in the flow of daily life is also worrying and disturbing for grieving individuals. The accounts of deceased people are permanent is another point of concern for grieving individuals that it might be an obstacle in the flow of daily life and might create addiction. In addition, grieving individuals are interested in what other people might think while posting during this period, and this creates anxiety for them. They reduce the frequency of sharing due to the anxiety of feeling sorry for themselves. At the same time, they might experience anxiety that they cannot express themselves sufficiently and feel uneasy about sharing their happy moments.

4.5. Summary

The findings of the study were revealed four themes as (1) Grief in Times of COVID-19, (2) Social Media Usage During Bereavement, (3) Positive Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement, and (4) Negative Aspects of Social Media During Bereavement. Differences in grief experiences during COVID-19 were categorized as multiple deaths, restrictions and the disease itself. The experience of multiple deaths creates the idea that these deaths are not given enough importance and that mourning is ignored. The experience of multiple deaths creates the idea that these deaths are not given enough importance and that mourning is stepped aside. The measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease, on the other hand, caused mourners to feel lonelier and mourning rituals could not take place, resulting in postponed mourning. The spread of the disease and the anxiety caused by this was another area where mourners had difficulty during the COVID-19 period.

While COVID-19 was ongoing, grieving individuals used social media for their own grief experiences. Social media usage during bereavement was categorized as special day posts, announce the death, aesthetic posts, farewell posts, commemorate, emotional expressions, adding relatives of the deceased, and posting on the wall of the deceased. This use often included sharing special occasions and announcing the loss. In addition, artistic posts and farewell posts were made. Social media contributed to

individuals who expressed their emotional intensity through posts in terms of regulating their emotions.

There were positive and negative experiences of social media use during bereavement. Social media during bereavement positive aspects were categorized as common experience, functionality, interaction of friends on social media, emotional expressions, keep the deceased in subtle world, and continue the bond with the deceased. Gaining social support and being able to share other people's experiences are among the positive experiences. In addition, the functionality of social media tools also positively experienced by the use during the mourning period. Especially during the COVID-19 period, when communication decreased due to isolation from people, social media was functional for informational purposes. According to the statements of the participants, there was direct communication with the deceased while sharing social media posts during mourning. This situation creates the feeling that the bonds between the mourning individuals and the deceased person continue. This feeling creates comfort in mourners. According to the participants who did not find it right to close the social media accounts of the deceased, the existence of these accounts could maintain the deceased's presence in the physical world.

In addition to the positive experiences of using social media during the mourning period, there are also negative experiences. Social media during bereavement negative aspects were categorized as interaction of friends on social media, conscious burden, constant posting, concerns, and social appearance effects. As the intensity of other people's interactions increases, it could be mentally exhausting for grieving individuals and even seem insincere. When it comes to closing the accounts of the deceased or unfriending them, all of the participants agreed that this could be disrespectful to the deceased and that they could not even feel comfortable in good conscience. Participants who actively used social media during grief were influenced by other people's thoughts during this use. They experienced anxiety about expressing self-pity to others and anxiety about expressing their own feelings correctly. They experienced anxiety while sharing their happy moments, and these situations affected the frequency of their posts.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research is to examine how bereaved individuals use social media, how they are positively or negatively experienced by its use, whether social media sites contribute to the continuity of bonds, and finally whether it influences the restructuring of meaning or not. A total of ten bereaved individuals were interviewed and the content analysis of the data was completed in a qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA 2022. The ways in which the participants reflected their losses they experienced during the COVID-19 period on social media and how the usage were experienced positively or negatively by this use were examined. As stated in the literature before, it was tried to determine whether the use of social media ensures the continuity of bonds (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Bouc et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2012; Williams & Merten, 2009). At the same time, it was also examined whether it contributes to the reconstruction of meaning mentioned in the literature (Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Frizzo et al., 2017; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). According to the results obtained, sharing the grief during the COVID-19 period on social media experienced by grieving individuals both positively and negatively. At the same time, the social media accounts of the deceased person ensure the continuity of bonds. Experience comparisons made through social media and being in contact with those people contribute to the reconstruction of meaning. Further examination was presented below.

5.1. Discussion of the Main Findings

As studies have supported, grieving during COVID-19 is different from grieving in normal times (Breen, 2020; Eisma et al., 2021; Kartseva & Kuznetsova, 2020; Marazziti et al., 2020; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022). According to the findings of the study, multiple deaths, bans imposed, and anxiety about the spread of the disease

affected the mourning process as mourning intensified one after another, but due to prohibitions, mourning rituals could not be performed and mourning could not be fully experienced. Studies in the literature also support these findings (Burrell & Selman, 2022; Stroebe & Schut, 2021; Maddrell, 2020; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2020). In addition to other studies, according to the findings obtained in this study, the mourning evocative feature of COVID-19 was determined. At the same time, the fact that multiple deaths occur one after the other in the same family causes the mourning process to be tried to be overcome quickly and therefore the mourning is ignored. Additionally, the inability to perform mourning rituals due to the prohibitions has also caused mourning not to be fully experienced. The fact that mourning cannot be fully experienced supported by other studies (Eisma et al., 2021; Marazziti et al., 2020; Torrens-Burton et al., 2022). As a result of these experiences of grieving individuals, social media accounts seem to have come to the forefront in terms of expressing their grief and pouring their heart out.

Studies suggest that social media tools have the function of collecting or sharing good moments with others (Bouc et al., 2016; Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Carroll & Landry, 2010; Döveling, 2015; Gil-Egui et al., 2017; Hogan et al., 1996; Kruzan, 2014; Lingel, 2013; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2019; Williams & Merten, 2009). In other words, people share their moments of joy and happiness on social media. However, they also often feel the need to share those negative and unhappy moments in their own lives such as their mourning or commemorating the deceased as the results of this study reveals. With this function of social media, today social media sites are no longer just a place to share happy memories, but rather a platform where feelings are expressed, support is received, common experiences are shared, and benefits are made from.

The results of the study suggest that social media plays several different roles in the grieving process. Grieving individuals took advantage of social media to reach many people in a very short period of time by announcing their lost as well as sharing their thoughts and feelings about their lost. People post to share their grief in anniversaries, and they receive many condolence messages. It should be noted that the posts left by the others have played equally important roles in the grieving process. Especially,

during the COVID-19 pandemic, the sharing and receiving support through social media appear to be helping individuals to ease their grieving. Many bereavement rituals took place in virtual environments due to the pandemic induced physical restrictions. Instead of physical visits, for example, people offered their condolences via social media.

In this sense, social media and online platforms have played an active role in expressing people's emotions. The expressing of emotions through social media accounts has enabled the function of emotion regulation. In the light of the findings, participants who could not completely fulfill their grief experiences, made expressions of grief and shared posts about the person they lost on social media. This study clearly shows that social media is frequently utilized for a several different purposes and created alteration in individuals grieving process in both negative and positive ways. These experiences are important in terms of shedding light on the use of social media accounts, which frequently used in daily life by grieving individuals and people around them. Therefore, the reflection of grief on social media is quite common worldwide and affects the grief process.

As seen in other studies, participants of this study used social media in their mourning experiences by sharing special days, announcing the loss on social media, making commemoration posts, and writing on the wall of the deceased (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Carroll & Landry, 2010; Williams & Merten, 2009;). In addition, in parallel with the findings of other studies that the writings on social media accounts have made through direct communication with the deceased person (Bouc et al., 2016; Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2012; Williams & Merten, 2009). These shares made by the participants are not for other people to see or read, but rather to be alone with the deceased person. Direct communications on social media sites with the person who lost their lives seems to show that the continuity of the bonds with the deceased person in the Turkish sample as well. These direct conversations and posts are shared by the participants with the motivation that the deceased could see them. According to the information obtained from the participants, although there is no logical explanation for this situation for them, they said that these postings made them feel better. Direct communication includes saying goodbye to the deceased, sharing posts to

commemorate the deceased, and making emotional expressions about the deceased. Direct communication with the deceased through social media accounts might be due to the fact that grieving individuals perceive these accounts as personal identities. Our social media accounts are like diaries where we record what we do, feel and experience during our lives. And these accounts have been seen as the continuity of tangible existence. Therefore, as the results show, closing or unfollowing the social media accounts of deceased individuals has also become a matter of concern for mourners. In fact, according to the results, unfollowing the social media accounts of the deceased also creates a sense of regret on the grieving individual. This finding is in parallel with the finding of Sas et al. (2016). In addition, according to the results, unfollowing the account also develops a sense of betrayal for the bereaved individual. Considering the sense of betrayal created by the disappearance of the account and the anxiety caused by the possibility of its closure, together with the direct communication established through the accounts, it could be said that these accounts continue the tangible existence of the deceased. They maintain the bond established between the deceased and the mourner. This situation could be used as a coping skill for the grieving individual. The continuity of connection that develops with the existence of accounts facilitates the transition between daily life and the experience of grief. However, during the interviews, participants also had concerns about these accounts. As in other studies, the concern of addiction to virtual tools during the grieving process was also evident in the results of this study (Pizzoli et al., 2021). For this reason, when providing psychological support to people who are in the process of mourning, guidance should be given by taking into account their own needs and personal characteristics.

In the use of social media during the grieving process, grieving individuals received support from their social environment (Botella et al., 2008; Frizzo et al., 2017; Knowles et al., 2017; Lieberman et al., 2005; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Wallace et al., 2020; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Social support was also identified in the research results, but it was not valid for all participants. In addition, the search for common experiences of grieving individuals is another finding obtained from the participants. As in the results of similar studies in the literature, it was determined in this study that social media unites people through shared experiences and creates the opportunity to compare experiences (Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Hartig & Viola, 2016; Marwick &

Ellison, 2012; Moore et al., 2019). The exchange of experiences on social media has been effective in helping grieving individuals to make sense of their losses. According to the results of the study, which is similar to the literature, by communicating with people who shared new experiences, grieving individuals developed new coping strategies and made sense of their experiences (Frizzo et al., 2017; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). All these could be considered as the contribution of social media tools to the reconstruction of meaning in the grief process.

Besides all this, the results of the study identified the negative experiences and concerns of participants who used social media during the mourning period. Studies in the literature have generally focused on concepts such as lack of physical proximity or misinformation (Campbell et al., 2001; Eaglesham, 1996). In addition to the literature, this study also found that people who shared their grief experiences on social media experienced mental intensity and discomfort. In this case, it should be assumed that the comments and other people's posts have points that are disturbing to the grieving individual. In particular, sudden posts that fall into the stream and posts written on the wall of the deceased person cause the grieving individual to worry about the future. Anxiety about the future is particularly relevant when the deceased has children or other young relatives. So that, as any individual witnessing the bereavement, the close relatives of the deceased should be taken into consideration when posting or commenting on social media.

One of the most fundamental findings is the social appearance effect seen in the majority of participants who used social media during the mourning period. These experiences reduce the frequency and change the content of posts. It does not seem possible for people to reflect their own selves in a completely authentic way through social media accounts. The influence of the external environment is felt intensely. Especially the concern of self-pity was identified. People experience uneasiness while sharing their posts due to the concern that the external environment would pity them.

In addition, the expectations of the social environment also influenced the way mourners use social media. Firstly, the fact that the grieving individual did not post on social media accounts after the death creates anxiety. Mourners emphasize the possibility that other people might question the authenticity of their grief when they

do not post after the death. Secondly, another thing expected from the mourner after the death is not to share happy moments. Grieving individuals become silent on social media for a while after the death of their relatives. According to expectations, the bereaved individuals' posts should only be about the loss, and they should not share posts that they would normally share in daily life. In the opposite case, they receive criticism from the society. The expectations of the social environment on social media from people in the mourning process and the bereaved individuals who try to act to meet these expectations increase the emotional burden of the individual during the mourning process.

To sum up, the social support of social media in the grief process, which is frequently mentioned in the literature, was confirmed. In addition, the function of social media to discharge the grieving individual's emotional expressions towards the deceased was determined. This function showed that the posts made on social media accounts supported emotion regulation and emotional discharge of grieving individuals. At the same time, the fact that grieving individuals conducted research on the internet to reach common experiences and communicated with people with similar experiences shows that they developed coping skills through social media. By comparing common experiences and questioning the grieving individuals themselves, a contribution was made to the reconstruction of meaning. The study shows that grieving individuals communicate directly with the deceased. At the same time, they feel that they are alone with the deceased person while sharing these posts. This shows that social media accounts are highly personalized and adopted as a tangible part of existence. Another support for this situation is that the social media accounts of the deceased person are not wanted to be removed, and if this happens, it is experienced as a betrayal of the deceased person. These findings are the positive experiences on social media sharing during the grieving process, which improved the coping strategies of grieving individuals and contributed to their emotion regulation. The negative impact of social media in the mourning process is focused on the expectations created by the environment. The anxiety of the mourners to express themselves influenced their sharing and made their mourning process difficult at times. The important point to be considered here is that when sharing grief posts on social media, it is important to do so by taking into account the close relatives of the deceased person. As a result, the

social media use of individuals grieving during the COVID-19 period was found to be quite widespread and in different ways. This use includes expressions towards the deceased person contributed to the continuity of bonds. In addition, the preservation of the deceased person's accounts and the great concern about the disappearance of these accounts indicated the continuity of the tangible connection of social media accounts to the world. There is a contribution to the reconstruction of meaning created by common experiences. In addition to positive experiences such as social support and emotion regulation, the intensity of the posts made by the social environment and the expectations of the social environment on the grieving individual had a negative effect.

5.**2. Implications for theory, Research and Practice**

The findings of the results indicates that social media sites have the function of emotion regulation, emotional discharge, and promoting coping skills while grieving. Additionally, the bond with the deceased could maintain through social media accounts of the deceased. These functions of social media could lead a way to grief counselors, to teachers, and every individual who uses social media. In that way, individuals who are grieving could inform about the facilitating features of social media and could advantage them when needed. On the other hand, the close relatives of bereaved individuals could gain knowledge about what should be done to ease the bereaved one's pain and lead them to seek advantages of social media. In particular, grieving individuals should consider the impact of social media on strengthening coping skills by sharing common experiences and reaching out to other grieving individuals. Mental health professionals working with grief should consider providing the necessary guidance. In providing this guidance, workers should take into account the social appearance effect and work on developing coping skills to address this issue.

The social appearance effect of the research might contribute to grief counseling. The findings of the study show that the grieving individual takes into account the expectations of the environment whether or not he/she shares about the death situation and that causes anxiety. Individuals who shared social media posts during the grieving process experienced anxiety about showing self-pity, while those who did not share social media posts experienced anxiety about not being able to express their sorrow sufficiently. Mental health professionals who help grieving individuals should

consider the impact of social media tools on the person during the grieving period. Especially the environmental impact should be expressed and the concerns of the grieving individual should be worked on by structuring coping skills for individuals' needs.

5.3. Recommendations for Future Studies

In today's world where online channels have become quite widespread, it is inevitable that grief experiences in these channels have consequences on the individual. Especially with the sudden entry of COVID-19, daily life moved to online environments with the introduction of restrictions. Business meetings, education and social life started to be lived online while the COVID-19 pandemic continued. The settlement of online life continued to show its continuity in places after COVID-19. Although the daily use of social media is quite common and grief processes are now frequently shared through social media, studies are quite insufficient. First of all, it should be noted that there is a need for more research on this topic in future research.

Secondly, recommendations include that this study was conducted with relatively recent loss experiences (6 to 14 months) Therefore, how the use of social media in the experience of loss continues in the long term cannot be explained within the scope of this study. For future research, it would be possible to take into consideration whether individuals who have lost a loved one in the past still maintain the continuity of the bond through social media, whether posts are still made to commemorate the deceased in the long term, and if so, what they serve. Additionally, social media users whose loved ones have passed away are concerned about how posts written by others on the deceased person's wall would look in the future. Especially when the deceased person has a young child or a young relative, it is a matter of curiosity among mourners what these relatives might think when they see these profiles when they come to their senses. Another situation that is recommended to be investigated is how individuals who experienced loss during their early years are affected by the deceased person's social media accounts after they reach a level of consciousness.

Thirdly, there is a general curiosity about the classical norms in the use of social media in the mourning process. Although the experience of loss on social media is not a new

phenomenon, there are no general rules for its use. The fact that this situation does not have certain boundaries seems to cause confusion in the use of social media by grieving individuals. When it is determined whether there is long-term use or not, if there is use, there might be a chance to follow a path by finding out what this usage serves, so that generally valid information on the use of social media accounts during bereavement could be obtained. In addition, by examining these uses and setting certain boundaries, it could also be determined whether users getting obsession about the bond which social media created with the deceased.

Lastly, the prevalence of the number of people using social media and the results of the research show that the sharing of grief through social media brings with it an environmental effect. Comments made under the social media posts of grieving individuals should made by considering the psychological health of the grieving individual. At the same time, the relatives of the deceased person should be taken into consideration when making posts about the deceased person.

Theoretically, it is suggested that future studies should be conducted with a combination of data analysis of both participants' verbal statements and social media tools. In this way, the content could be enriched. In addition, it is seen that most of the studies conducted in this field are qualitative. Theoretical norms of the concept of grief experiences in social media could be established by generalizing the results of the research to the population with quantitative analysis.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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

Sayı: 28620816   /

20 MAYIS 2022

Konu   : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi   : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof. Dr. Özgür Erdur-BAKER

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Merve Hilal Karabulut'un "Virtual Grieving in the Time of Covid-19 / Covid-19 Döneminde Sanal Yas" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **0286-ODTUİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof.Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkan

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B. PARTICIPANTS DEBRIEFING FORM

Yüksek lisans kapsamında yürüttüğüm araştırma için Covid19 döneminde kayıp yaşantısı deneyimlemiş katılımcılara ihtiyaç duyuyorum. Bu çalışmanın amacı, yas yaşayan bireylerin sanal dünyayı ve çevrimiçi platformları yas süreçlerinde nasıl kullandıkları ve ne ölçüde etkilendiklerini belirlemeye yöneliktir. Araştırma için gerekli etik izinler alınmış olup size sunulacaktır. Etik izin ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından verilmiştir.

Bu çalışmaya katılmak için;

•18 yaş üstünde olmanız,

•Kayıp yaşadığınız bireyin yakınlık derecesi anne, baba, eş, çocuk, kardeş, büyükanne/büyükbaba, hala/teyze, amca/dayı, kuzen, yeğen, arkadaş ya da öğretmen olması,

•Kayıp yaşantınız Mart 2020 sonrasında gerçekleşmiş ve kaybınızın üzerinden en az 6 ay geçmiş olması,

•Sizin ve kaybettiğiniz kişinin en az bir sosyal medya hesabı (Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) kullanmış ya da kullanıyor olması gerekmektedir.

Araştırma kapsamında yürütülecek olan mülakat oturumları psikolojik danışma oturumu ya da terapi oturumu değildir.

Katılımcıların süreçte herhangi bir sebepten ötürü sonlandırma hakkına sahip olduğunu hatırlatmak isterim. Bunun için bana bilgi vermeniz yeterlidir.

Araştırmama gönüllü katılımcı olmak isterseniz lütfen bana aşağıda belirtmiş olduğum iletişim adreslerinden ulaşınız.

Araştırmaya katkı sağlayabileceğini düşündüğünüz tanıdıklarınıza bu bilgilendirmeyi ulaştırmanız çalışmam için verimli olacaktır.

Şimdiden katkılarınız için teşekkür ederim.

Merve Hilal KARABULUT
İletişim Bilgileri
E-posta: hilal.karabulut@metu.edu.tr

C. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı tezli yüksek lisans öğrencisi Merve Hilal Karabulut tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak yürütülmektedir. Araştırma ODTÜ Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı üyesi Prof. Dr. Özgür Erdur-Baker danışmanlığında gerçekleştirilmektedir.

Bu form size araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek üzere hazırlanmıştır.

Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir?

Araştırmanın amacı Covid-19 döneminde yas deneyimi yaşamış bireylerin sanal dünya kullanımı hakkındaki deneyimlerine yönelik bilgi toplamaktır.

Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz?

Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul etmeniz halinde sizinle bir mülakat geçekleştireceğiz. Yaklaşık olarak 45 ila 60 dakika sürmesi planlanan bu mülakatta size yas sürecinizde kullandığınız çevrimiçi platformlar ve sanal çevrenin üzerinizdeki etkileri ile alakalı sorular yöneltilecektir. Mülakat sırasında önemli noktaları atlamamak adına araştırmacı tarafından ses kaydı alınacaktır ve gerekli noktalarda notlar tutulacaktır. Mülakat bittikten sonra araştırmacı notlarını görmek istemeniz dahilinde bunu rica etmeniz yeterlidir. Ses kayıtları sadece bilimsel araştırma için kullanılacak olup araştırma sonrası imha edilecektir. Kayıtlar sadece araştırmacı ve gerekli durumlarda danışman tarafından dinlenebilecektir.

Sizden Topladığımız Bilgileri Nasıl Kullanacağız?

Araştırmaya katılmak için gönüllülük esastır. Sizden aldığımız kişisel bilgiler araştırma içinde hiçbir şekilde kullanılmayacaktır. Bütün katılımcılardan alınan bilgiler bir araya getirilecek ve sadece bu araştırma için kullanılacaktır. Mülakat

süresinde vermiş olduğunuz bilgiler ile gönüllü katılım formuna verdiğiniz kimlik bilgileri eşleştirilmeyecektir.

Katılımınızla İlgili Bilmeniz Gerekenler:

Çalışmada yas yaşantınızı sanal dünyada nasıl deneyimlediğinizle alakalı sorular yöneltilecektir. Mülakat sırasında sorulardan ya da başka bir nedenden dolayı rahatsızlık yaşamanız durumunda mülakatı sonlandırma hakkına sahipsiniz. Araştırmacıya bu talebinizi ifade etmeniz yeterlidir. Bu araştırma kapsamında yürütülecek olan mülakat oturumlarının psikolojik danışma oturumu ya da terapi oturumu olmadığı unutulmamalıdır.

Araştırmayla İlgili Daha Fazla Bilgi Almak İsterseniz:

Yüksek lisans tezi kapsamında yapılacak olan bu araştırmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz. Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz araştırmacı Merve Hilal Karabulut (E-posta: hilal.karabulut@metu.edu.tr) ya da ODTÜ öğretim üyesi Prof. Dr. Özgür Erdur-Baker (E-posta: erdur@metu.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu araştırmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

Adınız Soyadınız   Tarih   İmza

                                   …../…../……….

D. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Tarih:

Başlangıç / Bitiş Saati:

Görüşülen Yer:

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı tezli yüksek lisans öğrencisi Merve Hilal Karabulut tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak yürütülmektedir. Araştırma ODTÜ Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık Anabilim Dalı üyesi Prof. Dr. Özgür Erdur-Baker danışmanlığında gerçekleştirilmektedir.

Araştırma sırasında herhangi bir sebepten dolayı görüşmeyi sonlandırma hakkına sahip olduğunuzu ve cevaplamak istemediğiniz sorular olduğunda o soruyu cevaplamama hakkına sahip olduğunuzu hatırlatmak isterim. Bunun için sadece bana bilgi vermeniz yeterlidir. Bu oturumun bir psikolojik danışma oturumu ya da terapi oturumu olmadığını lütfen unutmayın. Teşekkür ederim.

Hazırsanız başlayabiliriz.

GÖRÜŞME SORULARI:

KİŞİSEL BİLGİLER

Cinsiyetiniz:

Yaşınız:

- Kaybınızdan itibaren geçen süre:
- Kayıp yaşadığınız kişi ile yakınlık dereceniz:
- Kayıp yaşadığınız kişinin hayatını kaybetme sebebi:
- Hangi sosyal medya kanallarını aktif olarak kullanıyorsunuz? (WhatsApp, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Tiktok)

- Kayıp yaşadığınız kişinin kullandığı sosyal medya araçları nelerdi?
- Kayıp yaşadığınız kişinin sosyal medya hesaplarını takip ediyor musunuz?
- Evet ise hangilerini?
- Hayır ise hangilerini takip etmeyi bıraktınız?
- Varsa daha önceki kayıp yaşantınız/yaşantılarınız:
- Önceki kayıp yaşantılarınızın üzerinden ne kadar süre geçtiğinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

SOSYAL MEDYA KULLANIMI

- Günlük hayatınızda sosyal medyayı hangi amaçlarla kullanıyorsunuz?
- Sosyal medya kullanımının günlük hayatınıza etkisi nasıl?
- Sosyal medya profillerinizin sizi nasıl yansıttığını düşünüyorsunuz?
- Sosyal medya hesaplarınızı kapatmayı düşündünüz mü?
- Düşündüyseniz sizi bu düşünceye iten neydi?
- Covid-19 sürecinin yas deneyiminiz üzerindeki etkisinden bahsedebilir misiniz?
- Varsa, pandemide yas tutmanın normal döneme göre kolaylaştırıcı/zorlaştırıcı yönlerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?
- Sosyal medyayı yas sürecinizde nasıl kullandınız?
- Kullanmadıysanız, nedenlerinden bahseder misiniz?
- Geriye dönüp baktığınızda, kullanmış olmayı ister miydiniz?
- Hangi amaçlarla kullanmış olmayı isterdiniz?
- Sosyal medyayı yas sürecinizde hangi amaçlarla kullandığınızdan bahsedebilir misiniz?
- En çok hangi sosyal medya hesaplarını kullandınız?
- Kolaylaştırıcı/iyi gelen yönleri neler oldu?
- Zorlaştırıcı/zarar veren yönleri neler oldu?
- Kayıp haberini sosyal medyadan duyurdunuz mu?
- Evet ise, bu duyurunun yas süreciniz üzerinde ne gibi bir etkisi oldu? (Kolaylaştırıcı/Zorlaştırıcı)
- Geriye dönüp baktığınızda, kayıp haberini sosyal medyada duyurmayı tekrar tercih eder miydiniz? Evet/Hayır ise sebebini açıklar mısınız?
- Hayır ise, neden duyurmayı tercih etmediğinizi anlatır mısınız?

- Kayıp haberini duyurmamanın yas süreciniz üzerinde ne gibi bir etkisi olduğundan bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Kayıp yaşadığınız kişinin yıldönümleri, doğum günleri, veya özel günleri için sosyal medyayı kullandınız mı?

- Evet ise, bu paylaşımların yas süreciniz üzerinde ne gibi bir etkisi oldu?

- Geriye dönüp baktığınızda, bu paylaşımlarda bulunmayı tekrar tercih eder miydiniz? Evet/Hayır ise sebebini açıklar mısınız?

- Hayır ise, neden paylaşım yapmayı tercih etmediğinizin sebebini açıklar mısınız?

- Geriye dönüp baktığınızda, bu paylaşımlarda bulunmayı tercih eder miydiniz? Evet/Hayır ise sebebini açıklar mısınız?

- Kayıp yaşadığınız bireyin sosyal medya hesabı/hesapları şu an hala aktif mi?

- Eğer aktifse, hesabın var olmasının yas süreciniz üzerindeki etkilerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hesap hala sizin arkadaş listenizde/takip listenizde mi?

- Evet ise, hala arkadaşınız/takip ediyor olmanız yas sürecinizi nasıl etkiliyor?

- Hesabı arkadaşlıktan çıkarmak/takip etmeyi bırakmanın yas süreciniz üzerinde yaratacağı etkilerden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hayır ise, arkadaşlıktan çıkarmanızın/takibi bırakmanızın yas sürecinizdeki etkisi nasıl oldu?

- Geriye dönüp baktığınızda, arkadaşlıktan çıkarmayı/takibi bırakmayı tekrar tercih eder miydiniz?

- Bu hesap ile etkileşim kuruyor musunuz?

- Evet ise, bu hesap ile kurduğunuz etkileşimlerin yas süreciniz üzerindeki etkilerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hayır ise, kurmayı tercih etmemenizin nedenlerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Sizden başka kişiler bu hesap ile etkileşim kuruyor mu?

- Evet ise, bu kişiler kimler? Sizin yas süreciniz üzerindeki etkisi nedir?

- Hayır ise, bunun üzerinizdeki etkisinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hesabın kapatılmasının yas süreciniz üzerinde yaratacağı etkilerden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hesap kapatılmış ise, bu hesap ile artık etkileşim kuramıyor olmanız/hesaba erişemiyor olmanızın sizin üzerinizde yarattığı etkiden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Hesaba hala erişim sağlayabilmeyi ister miydiniz? Evet/Hayır ise sebebini açıklar mısınız?

- Hesaba hala erişebiliyor olsaydınız bu yas sürecinizi farklılaştırır mıydı? Evet/Hayır ise açıklar mısınız?

- Kaybettiğiniz kişinin bir sosyal medya hesabı olmasaydı bu yas süreciniz üzerinde bir farklılığa sebep olur muydu?

- Hiç tanımadığınız kişilerin kendi yas süreçleri ile ilgili deneyimlerini okumanın/görmenin/izlemenin sizin üzerinizdeki etkilerinden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Sosyal medya üzerinden paylaşılan yas deneyimlerinin çevreniz tarafından nasıl algılandığını/algılanabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz?

- Çevrenizdeki insanların kendi yas deneyimlerini sosyal medyaya aktarmaları hakkında neler düşündüğünüzden bahsedebilir misiniz?

KAPANIŞ

- Ölümden sonra sosyal medya hesaplarının varlığı konusunda ne düşünüyorsunuz?

- Anılaştırılmış hesaplar hakkında bilginiz var mı?

- Anıtlaştırılmış hesaplar, bir kişi vefat ettikten sonra kişinin arkadaşlarının ve ailesinin bir araya gelip anılarını paylaşmalarını sağlayan bir yerdir. Bir hesabın anıtlaştırılması ayrıca hesaba giriş yapılmasını engelleyerek hesabın güvende tutulmasına yardımcı olur. Bir hesap anıtlaştırıldığında, kişinin paylaştığı içerikler (ör. fotoğraflar, gönderiler) Facebook'ta kalır ve paylaşıldıkları hedef kitle bunları görebilir. Hesap sahibi bir hesap vârisi seçerse hesap vârisi anıtlaştırılmış hesapta kimlerin vefat eden kişiye saygı amaçlı paylaşımda bulunabileceğini ve bu paylaşımları kimlerin görebileceğini kontrol edebilir. Bu hesaplar, bir kişi vefat ettikten sonra kişinin arkadaşlarının ve ailesinin bir araya gelip anılarını paylaşmalarını sağlayan, bir nevi online taziye defteri işlevini görüyor. Bu hesaplarda, ölen kişinin profilinde adının yanında "Anısına" ifadesi yer alıyor.

- Kendiniz veya vefat eden kişinin dijital mirasının korunması için böyle bir talepte bulundunuz mu/bulunmak ister miydiniz?

- Sosyal medya araçlarının bir kısmı ölümden sonra hesabınızın silinmesi seçeneği sunmaktadır. Kendiniz veya vefat kişinin öldükten sonra dijital dünyadaki izlerini silme talebinde bulundunuz mu/ bulunmak ister miydiniz? Nedeninden bahsedebilir misiniz?

- Tüm bu deneyimlerinize bağlı olarak bir hikâye yazmış olsaydınız, başlığı ne olurdu?

- Tüm bu sorular sonrası nasıl hissediyorsunuz, neler düşünüyorsunuz?

- Konu ile alakalı önemli bulduğunuz ve eklemek istedikleriniz varsa lütfen paylaşınız.

Araştırmama katıldığınız ve zaman ayırdığınız için teşekkür ederim. Araştırmayla alakalı aklınıza takılan bir durum olursa lütfen size verdiğim adreslerden benimle iletişime geçmekten çekinmeyin.

E. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

COVID-19'un günlük hayata ani girişi ile birlikte birçok alanda farklılıklar meydana gelmiştir. Aslında, insanlık tarihi boyunca pandemiler meydana gelmiştir. Veba, çiçek hastalığı, İspanyol gribi, Kolera, SARS, Ebola ve Zika bu hastalıklara örnek olarak gösterilebilmektedir (Hays, 2005; Huremovic, 2019). Ne yazık ki pandemiler binlerce kişinin ölümü ile sonuçlanmaktadır (Hays, 2005). COVID-19 salgının yayılması ile birlikte 2021'in ortalarına doğru Türkiye'de yaklaşık 5 milyon vaka, 50.000 ölüm gerçekleşmiştir (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2022). COVID-19 salgını insanların günlük yaşamlarında pek çok değişikliği de beraberinde getirmiştir. Örneğin, hastalığın yayılmasını ve buna bağlı ölümleri azaltmak için kısıtlamalar getirilmiştir. Bu kısıtlamalar, insanların halka açık yerlerden kaçınmasını sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Okulların çevrimiçi eğitime geçmesi, işyerlerinin mümkün olduğunca çevrimiçi olması ve sinemaların, tiyatroların ve kafelerin kapanması sosyal izolasyonun getirileridir. Sokağa çıkma yasaklarının uygulanmasıyla insanların evde kalması gerekli hale gelmiştir. Ancak tüm bu önlemlere rağmen hastalık günlük hayattan hemen çıkamamıştır ve ölümler devam etmiştir (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2022).

Hastalıktan kaynaklanan ölümler daha sık ve görünür hale gelmiştir ve insanların sürekli endişe yaşamasına neden olmuştur (Torrens-Burton vd., 2022). Hastalık aynı aile içinde yayıldıkça, çoklu ölümler yaşanmıştır. Kısıtlamaların neden olduğu ikincil kayıplar da yer almaktadır. Bu ikincil kayıplar arasında ekonomik düzen kaybı, özgürlük kaybı ve iş kaybı yer almaktadır. Çoklu ölüm deneyimi, ikincil kayıpların kalıcı etkisi ve hastalığın ne zaman sona ereceğinin belirsizliği yas tutanlar arasında yüksek kaygıya neden olmuştur (Breen, 2020). Tüm bunların bir araya gelmesiyle yas ertelenmiş, deneyimlenememiş ve diğer insanlarla paylaşılamamıştır (Wallace vd., 2020). Diğer insanlarla paylaşılamaması da yas sürecinde sosyal destek eksikliğine yol açmıştır. Normalde Türk geleneğinde taziye ziyaretleri, dua etmek için yapılan toplantılar gibi etkinlikler düzenlenmektedir ve yas tutan aile yalnız bırakılmamaktadır

(Aksöz-Efe vd., 2018). Ancak COVID-19 dönemindeki yasaklar ve sosyal izolasyon yas tutan bireyleri yalnızlaştırmıştır.

COVID-19 döneminde yüz yüze sosyal destek alınamadığı için yas tutan bireyler sosyal medya üzerinden birçok paylaşım yaparak yaslarını tutmuş ve bu paylaşımlar üzerinden sosyal destek almışlardır (Wallace vd., 2020). Yüz yüze etkileşimin neredeyse sıfıra indiği bu günlerde, kişiler sosyal aktivitelerini sosyal medya hesapları aracılığı ile gerçekleştirmişlerdir (Pancani vd., 2021). Sosyal medya uygulamaları içerik üretilebilen, arkadaşlarla etkileşime girilebilen, profiller oluşturulabilen ve arkadaşların profillerinin takip edilebildiği araçlardır (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kişiler ne kadar çok etkileşime girer ve diğer insanları takip ederse, uygulamanın içeriği o kadar zenginleşmektedir. Bu hesaplar, kişiliğin birer dijital yansıması olarak görülmektedir (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Kişiler özellikle hayatlarını değiştiren kritik olayları sosyal medya hesapları üzerinden paylaşma eğilimi içerisindedir (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Sosyal medya siteleri mutluluk, üzüntü, güvensizlik, kayıp, keder vb. duygu durumlarının paylaşılmasına fırsat vermektedir (Thomas, 2007; Wong vd., 2021). Yakınların kaybı ile karşılaşmanın sıradan hayat akışını etkileyen bir olay olarak düşünüldüğünde, yas deneyimlerinin sosyal medya üzerinden paylaşılma ihtiyacı doğabilmektedir.

Sanal ortamların işlevselliği göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, temel faktörlerden birinin vefat eden kişiyle bağların devamlılığı olduğu görülmektedir (Willis ve Ferrucci, 2017). Örneğin Facebook, yas tutan bireylerin sevdiklerine veda etmelerine ve onlarla iletişim kurmalarına olanak sağlamıştır. Sosyal medya siteleri yas tutan bireylerin anılar, paylaşımlar ve mesajlar aracılığıyla özel zaman geçirmelerine (Moreman & Lewis, 2014), diğer insanlarla birlikte yas tutmalarına ve sosyal bir destek oluşturmalarına olanak sağlamıştır (Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Bu etkinliklerin sıklığı zaman içinde azalsa da dijital platformlar uzun bir süre boyunca duyguların ifade edilmesine fırsat vermiştir (Bouc vd., 2016; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Bouc vd. (2016) tarafından vefat eden 10 kişinin Facebook profilleri üzerinde yapılan içerik analizine göre, yas tutan bireyler vefat eden kişinin Facebook sayfası üzerinden doğrudan vefat eden kişiyle iletişim kurmaya devam etmektedir. Bu yolla, birey profile yazmaya devam ettikçe, ölen kişi ile yas tutan birey arasındaki ilişki devam etmektedir.

Bazı durumlarda, yas tutan bir birey duygularını ve hislerini yüz yüze ifade etmekte zorlanabilmektedir. Öte yandan, çevrimiçi siteler ortak deneyimler aracılığıyla daha fazla kabul görme fırsatı vermektedir. Bunun için kullanılan terim "kolektif yastır" ve kolektif yas, yas tutanlara küresel bir toplulukla birlikte yas tutma şansı vermiştir (Moore vd., 2019). Bu durum, yas tutan kişilerin aynı veya benzer deneyimlerle karşılaşmasıyla birlikte diğerlerinden başa çıkma mekanizmalarını öğrenme açısından da yararlı olmaktadır (Hogan vd., 1996). Örneğin, bir bebeğin ani ölümü alışılmadık bir deneyimdir. Bu deneyim aileyi izole edilmiş ve yalnız hissettirebilmektedir. Kederlerini ifade etmek ve duygularını adlandırmak zor olabilir. Onlar için internet, aynı durumla karşılaşan başkalarını bulabilecekleri ve onlarla duygu ve deneyimlerini paylaşabilecekleri bir yer olabilmektedir. Sonuç olarak, yas tutan ebeveynler izole kalmak yerine başkalarıyla bağlantı kurabilir ve bu da yas döneminde adaptif başa çıkma için restorasyon-oryantasyon görevini yerine getirir (Finlay & Krueger, 2011). Buna ek olarak, çevrimiçi siteler, yas tutan ebeveynin yasa uyum sağlama, kayıpla başa çıkma ve diğerlerine hayatlarını ve sosyal ilişkilerini yeniden inşa etme konusunda rehberlik etme döngülerini yönetmesine yardımcı olmaktadır (Frizzo vd., 2017).

Literatür incelendiğinde, bazı eksiklikler göze çarpmaktadır. Örneğin, yas süreci toplumlar arasında kültürel ve dini açıdan çeşitlilik göstermektedir (Shear vd., 2011) ve toplumlar arasında hangi sosyal medya platformlarının kullanıldığı toplumdan topluma farklılık gösterebilmektedir. Türkiye örnekleminde, sosyal medya kullanımının yas tutan bireyler üzerinde herhangi bir etkisi olup olmadığı bilinmemektedir. Örneğin, çalışmalar sosyal medya kullanan yas tutan bireylerin vefat eden kişiyle olan bağlarının devamlılığını göz önünde bulundurduklarından bahsetmektedir (Neimeyer vd., 2006; Pizzoli vd., 2021). Ayrıca, yas sırasında sosyal medya kullanımının anlamı yeniden yapılandırma veya duygu düzenlemeyi kapsadığından bahseden çalışmalar da bulunmaktadır (Döveling, 2015; Karuzan, 2014; Moore vd., 2019). Ancak yas deneyimi ve yas ritüelleri kültürel olarak hassas olduğundan ve her toplumun kendine özgü yası deneyimleme şekli olduğundan bu çalışma, farklı örneklem gruplarından farklı sonuçlar çıkabileceğini varsaymaktadır (Aksöz-Efe vd., 2018; Stroebe ve Schut, 1998). Buradan hareketle, bu çalışmanın

amacı yas sürecinde sosyal medya kullanımının Türkiye'de kayıp yaşamış bireyler tarafından nasıl ya da ne düzeyde deneyimlendiğin bilinmesidir.

Yas sürecinin kültürel farklılıkları, COVID-19 ile birlikte ölümlerin hızla artması, sosyal izolasyonla birlikte fiziksel sosyal desteğin azalması ve azalan sosyal desteğin sosyal medya kullanımını artırmış olabileceği varsayımı göz önünde bulundurularak bu çalışma, bu süreçteki yas deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bir amacı da Türkiye örnekleminde yas sürecinin sosyal medyada nasıl ilerlediğini ve hangi durumlarda yas tutan kişilerin olumlu ya da olumsuz deneyimler edindiğini belirlemektir. Araştırma, COVID-19 döneminde sanal ortamın yas tutan bireyler üzerindeki deneyimlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Bu deneyimleri araştırmak için dört farklı soru belirlenmiştir:

1. Yas tutan bireyler COVID-19 döneminde yas süreci için sosyal medyayı ne şekilde kullanmaktadır?
2. COVID-19 döneminde sosyal medyanın yas tutan bireyler tarafından olumlu ya da olumsuz deneyimleri nelerdir?
3. Sosyal medyada vefat eden kişi ile bağların devamlılığı hangi yollarla karşılanmaktadır?
4. Sosyal medya, yas tutan bireylerin anlamın yeniden yapılandırılmasına nasıl katkıda bulunmaktadır?

Yöntem

Yas tutan bireylerin sanal ortamlardaki deneyimlerini incelemek için, COVID-19 pandemisi zamanlarında bireylerin dijital yas deneyimlerini keşfetmek üzere nitel araştırma metodolojisi, COVID-19 döneminde sosyal medyada yas sürecine ilişkin deneyimlerin ortak yönlerini belirlemek için fenomenolojik araştırma deseni seçilmiştir.

Katılımcılar

Amaçlı örnekleme tekniği ile ulaşılan 6'sı kadın ve 4'ü erkek olmak üzere toplam 10 katılımcı ile görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar tüm kriterlere uymaktadır. Kendilerinin ve vefat eden yakınlarının en az bir sosyal medya platformu vardır ve hala aktiflerdir. Yas deneyimlerinin üzerinden en az yedi ay, en fazla 14 ay geçmiştir ve katılımcıların her biri 18 yaşından büyüktür.

Araçlar ve Veri Toplama

Gerekli etik izinler Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ) İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'ndan (İAEK) alınmıştır. İzin alındıktan sonra duyuru metni sosyal medya kanalları aracılığıyla paylaşılmıştır. Potansiyel katılımcılarla iletişime geçilmiş, çalışmada kendilerinden beklenenler sunulmuş ve ardından görüşme için yer ve zaman belirlenmiştir. Üç katılımcıyla ofislerinde, dört katılımcıyla evlerinde ve üç katılımcıyla da Zoom uygulaması aracılığıyla görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler toplamda yaklaşık 45 dakika sürmüştür. Tüm görüşmeler kaydedilmiştir. Kayıtlardan önce katılımcılara çalışmanın içeriği ve katılımcılardan beklentiler hakkında açıklama yapılmıştır. Görüşme sırasında cayma hakları hatırlatılmıştır. Yapılacak görüşmenin bir psikolojik danışma oturumu olmadığı söylenmiştir. Ve son olarak çalışma ile ilgili soruları varsa araştırmacı tarafından yanıtlanmıştır. Ardından görüşme sorularına geçilmiş ve kayıt başlatılmıştır. Katılımcıların tamamı deneyimlerini içtenlikle ifade etmiş ve süreçleri hakkında yorumda bulunmuşlardır. Kayıt bittikten sonra bazı katılımcılar görüşlerini ifade etmeye devam etmiştir. Bu yorumlar not edilmiştir. Daha sonra ses kayıtları ve notlar birleştirilerek analiz için hazır hale getirilmiştir.

Veri Analizi

Sonuçların içerik analizini tamamlamak için nitel veri analizi programı MAXQDA 2022 kullanılmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen ses kayıtları ve kayıtlar sonrasında katılımcılar tarafından eklenen notlar bir araya getirilmiş ve kişisel bilgisayar aracılığıyla elektronik yazılı formata dönüştürülmüştür. Analizin güvenilirliğini artırmak için içerik analizi sonuçları bağımsız bir akademik araştırmacı tarafından incelenmiştir. Tüm transkriptler, yas tutan bireylerin sosyal medyadaki önemli yaşam

deneyimlerini kodlamak için dikkatle okunmuştur. Transkriptler, kategoriler oluşturmak üzere belirli konuları birleştirmek için gözden geçirilmiştir. Transkriptler arasındaki ortak kategoriler belirlenmiştir. Son olarak, kodlar ve kategoriler kapsamlı bir sonuç hazırlamak için raporlanmıştır. Katılımcıların deneyimleri diğerleriyle karşılaştırılarak doğrulanmıştır. Ortaya çıkan temalar sonuç bölümünde en iyi özetleyici alıntılarla açıklanmıştır.

Sonuçlar

Çalışmanın bulguları (1) COVID-19 Döneminde Yas, (2) Yas Sırasında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı, (3) Yas Sırasında Sosyal Medyanın Olumlu Yönleri ve (4) Yas Sırasında Sosyal Medyanın Olumsuz Yönleri olmak üzere dört tema ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Elde edilen bulgulara göre, COVID-19 döneminde 1) Çoklu Ölümler, 2) Yasaklar ve 3) Hastalık etkisi adı altında üç tema belirlenmiştir. Çoklu ölümler yas çağrıştırıcı, sıradanlaşan ölüm ve göz ardı edilen yas olmak üzere üç kategori altında toplanmıştır. Toplumda ölümlerin sürekli olarak meydana gelmesi, ölüm deneyimini daha az özel ve daha çok gündelik bir olay haline getirmiştir. Aynı ailede birden fazla ölümün gerçekleştiği bazı vakalarda yas süreci tam olarak yaşanamamıştır: "Ara sıra hissettim ki sanki Corona olmasaydı bu süreç benim için daha özel olabilirdi. Pandemide insanlar sürekli ölmeye başladı ve ölmek artık doğal bir şey gibi oldu. O noktada babama yeterince üzerine düşülmemiş hissettiğimi fark ettim. Ölüm basitleşti."

Ayrıca, getirilen kısıtlamalar nedeniyle ölüm sonrası ritüeller gerçekleştirilememiş ya da ertelenmiştir. Katılımcılar cenazelere katılamamış ya da yanlarında olmasını istedikleri kişilere ulaşamamışlardır. Aynı zamanda sokağa çıkma yasakları da yakın zamanda cenazesi olan kişilerin mezarlık ziyaretlerini kısıtlamıştır. Bu durum mevcut yas sürecini daha da zorlaştırmıştır. Genel olarak, kısıtlamalar nedeniyle sınırlı ziyaretler, yalnız hissetmek ve acıyı paylaşmamak gibi olumsuz etkiler deneyimlenmiştir:

> Babamınki 17 günlük kapanmaya denk geldi, ilk günü. Onda askeri tören yapıldı. Ama 20 kişi katılabildik mesela askeri törene. D2'nun ölümü 17 günlük kapamadan 3 gün önceydi. Onda da yine sınırlı sayıda olabiliyordu. Kimse cenazeye katılıp istediği gibi yas tutamadı yani. Yasımızı bile

tutamadık öyle söyleyeyim, acımızı bile yaşayamadık. O anlamda kötüydü. Özellikle 17 günlük kapamaya denk geldiği için mezar ziyareti yapamadık uzun süre. En yakınınızdan biri vefat ettiğinde sürekli gitmek istiyorsunuz. Her gün bile gitmek istiyorsunuz ama yasaklardan dolayı gidemedik.

Kayıp sırasında hastalığın yayılması ve hala yayılmakta olduğu endişesi ile birleşince, diğer insanlarla bir araya gelmeyi zorlaştırmış ve ortak yas tutmayı engellemiştir. Tüm bu durumlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda COVID-19 döneminde yaşanan yasın diğer zamanlardan farklı olduğu aşikârdır:

> Cenaze sonrası biraz sıkıntılı oldu, biz Covid olduk. Gelenler olacak mı, olmayacak mı? Açıkçası biraz hengâme oldu. Cenaze bir kenara bırakıldı sonrasında. Kendi derdimize düştük gibi oldu. Çünkü anneannem zatürreye çevirdi cenazede kaptığı Corona yüzünden. Daha çok onun tedavisi ile ilgilendik. O yüzden yas süreci biraz kenarda kaldı gibi oldu.

Sonuçlardan elde edilen ikinci tema, Yas Sırasında Sosyal Medya Kullanımı olmuştur. Yas tutan bireyler, yas sürecinde sosyal medya hesaplarını farklı şekillerde kullanmışlardır. En yaygın kullanımlar özel günlerde yapılan paylaşımlar ve kaybı duyurmak için yapılan paylaşımlardır:

> Babamın vefatını sosyal medyada duyurdum. Çok etkileşim aldı. Babam tanınan da bir insandı Antalya'da. Facebook'ta yayınladığım an telefonum kitlendi. Teşekkürümü yaptım, mevlüdünü duyurdum, lokma etkinliği yaptık onu duyurdum. Kimseyi telefonla arayamadım zaten vaktim yoktu. O durumda zaten telefonla konuşmak da çok zordu. Facebook'ta da yardım alarak paylaşabildim. Birçok insan görmüş Facebook'tan. Yayınlamışlar, direkt benim yazdığım yazıyı paylaşmışlar.

Bunların yanı sıra sanatsal paylaşımlar, veda paylaşımları, kaybı anma paylaşımları, duygu ifadeleri, vefat eden kişinin yakınlarını ekleme ve vefat eden kişinin duvarına yazma gibi etkileşimler de söz konusudur:

> Annem üzerinden paylaşım yaptım tabi. Vefatından etkilendiğim için, annemi kaybetmenin üzüntüsüyle anneme özgü sözler kullanmaya çalıştım. Orada da annenin ne demek olduğunu anlatmaya çalıştım karşıdaki insanlara. Çünkü kayıp yaşamış birinin yaşamamış birine olan etkisi ne kadar olabilir bilmiyorum ama yine de bilmelerini istedim. Bilmelerini istediğim için annemle ilgili paylaşımlar bir süre yaptım. Anneme ithafen yazdım, bütün arkadaşım olan insanlar etkilenmiştir, onu da altına yazmış olduklarından, dileklerinden anladım.

Bu etkileşimlerin yas tutan bireyler tarafından olumlu ve olumsuz deneyimlenmiştir. Bu olumlu deneyimler yas tutan kişileri desteklerken, olumsuz deneyimler paylaşım konusunda kaygı yaratmaktadır. Olumlu deneyimler üçüncü tema olarak belirlenmiştir. Yas döneminde sosyal medya kullanımının pek çok olumlu yanı vardır. Bunların en önemlilerinden biri benzer deneyimlerin karşılıklı olarak paylaşılmasıdır. Bu paylaşımlar, yaşanan deneyimi diğer insanlarla kıyaslama faydası sağlar. Ayrıca birliktelik duygusunu yaratır ve çevreyi yeniden şekillendirir:

> Benim yaşadıklarımla onun yaşadıklarını karşılaştırıyorum. Bazı insanlar duygu yoğunluğunu daha fazla yaşayabiliyorlar. Bazıları da kabullenmiş oluyor. Duygu yoğunluğunu yaşayan insanlara baktığım zaman kendi yaşadıklarımla karşılaştırıyorum. Ben bir tarafı fazla yapmışım, o bu tarafı eksik yapmış gibi düşünüyorum. Böyle olduğu zaman da insan tabi ki duygusallaşıyor. O işte annesiyle yaptıklarını anlatıyor, sen annenle yaşadıklarını anlatıyorsun. Hele ki hastalıktan dolayı geçirdiği bir süreç varsa, o senin acını sen de onun acısını anlayabiliyorsun.

Sosyal medya araçlarının kullanışlılığı ise bir diğer olumlu özelliktir. Kolay kullanım, aynı anda başka kişilere ulaşabilme, sadece fotoğraf değil geniş bir yelpazede içerik yükleyebilme, geri dönebilme gibi faktörler kullanışlılık alanında en sık dile getirilen alanlardır. Özellikle COVID-19 döneminde kısıtlamalar nedeniyle çevresinden haber alamayan kişiler sosyal medya sayesinde diğer kişilerden kolayca haberdar olmuştur:

> Özellikle pandemi döneminde haberdar etmek, paylaşmak iyi oluyor. İnsanların ilgi göstermesi güzel. Tabi ki bizim geleneklerimize göre yasta insanın yanında olması gerekir. Nerede olursan ol çıkar yanına gidersin. Teyzemin vefatına gidemedim mesela. Sosyal medyada bildirdiğin, bilgi verdiğin zaman insanlar takdir ediyor tabi. Bir yakının öldüğü zaman çevrendekiler sonradan öğrendiği zaman insanlar sitem ediyor. Bir haber verseydiniz diyorlar. Bu yüzden yakının öldüğü zaman en azından duyuruyor olmak zaruri bir şey yani.

Ayrıca sosyal medya aracılığıyla diğer insanlarla etkileşime geçmek, yas tutan bireylerin sosyal destek kazanmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Bu destek ile bireyler kendilerini değerli hissetmiştir. Yas döneminde duygusal yoğunluk yaşayan kullanıcılar paylaşım yaparak kendi duygu ifadelerini aktarmışlar ve duygusal deşarj yaşamışlardır. Bu durum ifade edildiği üzere onların duygu düzenlemelerine katkı sağlamıştır: "Çok büyük bir yalnızlık ve boşluk oluyor ve senin de dediğin gibi

pandemi dönemi olduğu için birebirde insanlarla kontak halinde olamıyorsun. O yüzden sosyal medya bir tık daha iyileşme sürecinde bana katkı sağlamıştı."

Yas tutan bireyler paylaşımlarında vefat eden kişiyle doğrudan iletişim kurmuş ve fiziksel varlıklarını sürdürme eğiliminde olmuşlardır. Bu durum, vefat eden kişiyle bağların koparılmadığını, sosyal medya hesapları aracılığıyla sürdürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Katılımcılar paylaşımlarını, vefat eden kişinin kendilerini görebileceği varsayımıyla yapmış, bu da bağlarını korumuş ve rahatlama hissi getirmiştir:

> Öyle bir şey ki o, yazdığında, koyduğunda, onlar görüyor gibi hissediyorsun. Saçma belki ama. O an seni rahatlatıyor. Sanki onlarla paylaşıyormuşsun, onlar duyuyormuş gibi. Senin koyduğun şeylerin altına dua eden insanların duası onlara gidiyormuş gibi. Mekânı cennet olsun, allah rahmet eylesin gibi. Klasik temennilerimiz var ya, sanki onlara gidiyormuş gibi. Öyle bir psikolojiye giriyorsun yani. Mesela paylaşmışım, seni çok özledim babacım, seni çok özledim arkadaşım. Mesela bir fotoğrafını paylaşmışım, sen öleli olmuş 1 sene. Senelerinde yazmışım. O yazımın ya da fotoğrafın altına yazılan yorumların onlara dua olarak gittiğine inandım.

"Yas Sırasında Sosyal Medyanın Olumsuz Yönleri" veri analizi sonucunda ortaya çıkan son temadır. Beş kategoriden oluşan bu tema, yas sürecinde sosyal medya kullanımının olumsuz yönlerini tanımlamaktadır. Bu tema, yas sırasında sosyal medya kullanımının yas tutan bireyler üzerindeki olumsuz deneyimleri şu şekilde kategorileştirmektedir: a) başkalarının istenmeyen etkileşimleri, b) sosyal medya paylaşımları konusunda vefat edene karşı vefa hissetme, c) başkalarının sürekli paylaşımlarıyla karşılaşma, d) yas sırasında sosyal medya kullanımıyla ilgili endişeler ve e) çevrimiçi sitelerdeki sosyal görünüm etkileri.

Yas sürecinde sosyal medya kullanmanın olumlu yönlerinin yanı sıra olumsuz yönleri de vardır. Diğer insanların etkileşimleri destekleyici olabileceği gibi zihinsel olarak yoğun veya rahatsız edici de olabilir:

> Hemen yorumlar geldi. İşte eşi vefat etti, hala dans ediyor, gülüp eğleniyor. Eşini hiç sevmiyormuş meğerse gibi böyle bir yorum geldi. Daha sonra bu işle ilgili mesela kırmızı ruj sürdüğüm ve onu tanıttığım bir video vardı. Aa bak eşi öldü, kırmızı ruj sürüp ne yapmaya çalışıyor gibi, veya oğlumu mesela bir videoda, biz sürekli birlikteyiz yani bırakacak kimse yok, ve işte oğlunu kullanıyor videoda gibi böyle yorumlar geldi. Bunlar beni çok yıpratmıştı o

süreçte. Ki üzerinden bir sene geçmişti, bir sene sonra yaptım bu paylaşımları. Hala böyle yorumlar geliyor.

Özellikle sürekli yapılan paylaşımlar yas tutan bireyler için duygusal bir tetikleyici olma özelliğine sahiptir. Bu paylaşımlar yas tutan bireye samimi gelmemektedir. Üstelik yas paylaşımlarının altına başka kişiler tarafından yazılan yorumların kalıcı olması ve silinememesi de yas tutan bireyler için endişe vericidir. Günlük hayatın akışı içinde başkalarının paylaşımlarının aniden ortaya çıkması da yas tutan bireyler için endişe verici ve rahatsız edicidir:

> Ama şu beni çok yaralamıştı, ilk yani birinci yılında, D10'un tabi fotoğrafları çok fazla sosyal medyada döndü. Zaten o gün kötü bir gün geçiriyorsun ve birden karşına o çıkıyor. Hiç seni arayıp sormamış, hal hatır sormamış bir insanın eşimle ilgili böyle çok bir şeyler yazması, çok sevdiğini, çok özlediğini yazması bana çok üzücü gelmişti. Ölüm yıldönümünde çok kötüydüm. Çok kötü geçiyordu o gün benim için. Bir şekilde kendimi dağıtmaya vermiştim. Ona odaklanmamaya, oğlumla ilgilenmeye ya da sosyal medyada daha gülünç şeyler izlemeye, bu tarz bir şey ve birdenbire karşıma onlar çıktı.

Vefat eden kişilerin hesaplarının kalıcı olması, günlük hayatın akışında engel teşkil edebileceği ve bağımlılık yaratabileceği de yas tutan bireyler için bir diğer endişe noktasıdır. Ayrıca yas tutan bireyler bu dönemde paylaşım yaparken diğer insanların ne düşüneceği ile ilgilenmekte ve bu durum onlarda kaygı yaratmaktadır. Kendilerini acındırma kaygısı nedeniyle paylaşım sıklıklarını azaltma eğilimdelerdir:

> Ben başta tamamen kişisel sebepler ve hassasiyetten dolayı acaba, yani manipülasyona uğradığım bir dönem olmuştu ve kendimi bastırıyordum. Daha çok paylaşmak isterken yapamıyordum. 500 kişilik bir çevre varsa arasındaki 2 kişi yüzünden acaba çok paylaşıyor muyum, acaba insanlar şu an babamın ölümünü kullandığımı düşünüyor mu duygusu gelmişti.

Aynı zamanda, kendilerini yeterince ifade edemedikleri kaygısı yaşayabilirler ve mutlu anlarını paylaşma konusunda tedirginlik hissedebilirler:

> Bir ara paylaşım yapmak istedim, yakın arkadaşlarından, eşinden, abisinden gördüğüm paylaşımlar oldu, onu anlatan, onu anan paylaşımlar gördüm. Böyle bir şey yapmak istedim ama elim gitmedi. Dediğim gibi o kabullenme sürecinde bir post atıp paylaşamadım. Hatta bunun vicdanını da yaşadım. Dışarıdan sanki hiç üzülmüyormuşum gibi mi görünüyorum diye düşündüm.

Ama işte diğerlerinin paylaştığı postlardan da etkilendim, duygusal olarak etkilendim.

Tartışma

Diğer çalışmalarda da görüldüğü gibi, bu çalışmanın katılımcıları da özel günleri paylaşarak, kaybı sosyal medyada duyurarak, anma paylaşımları yaparak ve vefat eden kişinin duvarına yazı yazarak sosyal medyayı yas deneyimlerinde kullanmışlardır (Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Carroll ve Landry, 2010; Williams & Merten, 2009). Ayrıca, diğer çalışmaların bulgularıyla paralel olarak, sosyal medya hesaplarındaki paylaşımların vefat eden kişiyle doğrudan iletişim kurularak yapıldığı görülmektedir (Bouc vd., 2016; Brubaker & Heyes, 2011; Mitchell vd., 2012; Williams & Merten, 2009). Katılımcıların yaptığı bu paylaşımlar başkalarının görmesi ya da okuması için değil, vefat eden kişiyle baş başa kalmak içindir. Hayatını kaybeden kişiyle sosyal medya sitelerinde kurulan doğrudan iletişim, Türkiye örnekleminde de ölen kişiyle kurulan bağın sürekliliğini sağladığını göstermiştir. Bu doğrudan konuşmalar ve paylaşımlar katılımcılar tarafından vefat eden kişinin bunları görebileceği motivasyonuyla paylaşılmaktadır. Katılımcılardan edinilen bilgiye göre, kendileri için bu durumun mantıklı bir açıklaması olmasa da bu paylaşımların kendilerini daha iyi hissetmelerini sağladığıdır.

Sonuçlara göre, vefat eden kişinin sosyal medya hesaplarını takip etmeyi bırakmak yas tutan birey üzerinde pişmanlık duygusu yaratmaktadır. Bu bulgu Sas vd., (2016) tarafından yapılan araştırmanın bulgusuyla paralellik göstermektedir. Buna ek olarak, sonuçlara göre, hesabı takip etmeyi bırakmak yas tutan birey için bir ihanet duygusu da geliştirmektedir. Hesabın takipten çıkılmasının yarattığı ihanet duygusu ve kapanma ihtimalinin yarattığı kaygı, hesaplar üzerinden kurulan doğrudan iletişimle birlikte düşünüldüğünde, bu hesapların vefat eden kişinin somut varlığını devam ettirmesine yol açtığı söylenebilir. Vefat eden kişi ile yas tutan kişi arasında kurulan bağ sürdürülmektedir. Bu durum yas tutan birey için bir baş çıkma becerisi olarak kullanılabilir.

Yas sürecinde sosyal medya kullanımında, yas tutan bireyler sosyal çevrelerinden destek almaktadır (Botella vd., 2008; Frizzo vd., 2017; Knowles vd., 2017; Lieberman

vd., 2005; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Wallace vd., 2020; Willis & Ferrucci, 2017). Araştırma sonuçlarında sosyal destek de tespit edilmiştir ancak tüm katılımcılar için geçerli değildir. Ayrıca yas tutan bireylerin ortak deneyim arayışları da katılımcılardan elde edilen bir diğer bulgudur. Literatürdeki benzer çalışmaların sonuçlarında olduğu gibi bu çalışmada da sosyal medyanın paylaşılan deneyimler aracılığıyla insanları birleştirdiği ve deneyimleri karşılaştırma fırsatı yarattığı tespit edilmiştir (Finlay & Krueger, 2011; Hartig & Viola, 2016; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Moore vd., 2019). Sosyal medyada deneyimlerin paylaşılması, yas tutan bireylerin kayıplarını anlamlandırmalarına yardımcı olmada etkili olmuştur. Literatürle benzerlik gösteren çalışma sonuçlarına göre, yas tutan bireyler yeni deneyimler paylaşan kişilerle iletişim kurarak yeni başa çıkma stratejileri geliştirmiş ve deneyimlerini anlamlandırmıştır (Frizzo vd., 2017; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Tüm bunlar, sosyal medya araçlarının yas sürecinde anlamın yeniden yapılandırılmasına katkı sağladığı şekilde değerlendirilebilir.

Bütün bunların yanı sıra, çalışmanın sonuçları, yas döneminde sosyal medya kullanan katılımcıların olumsuz deneyimlerini ve endişelerini tespit etmiştir. Literatürdeki çalışmalar genellikle fiziksel yakınlık eksikliği veya yanlış bilgilendirme gibi kavramlara odaklanmıştır (Campbell vd., 2001; Eaglesham, 1996). Literatüre ek olarak, bu çalışmada da yas deneyimlerini sosyal medyada paylaşan kişilerin zihinsel yoğunluk ve rahatsızlık yaşadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Bu durumda, yorumların ve diğer kişilerin paylaşımlarının yas tutan bireyi rahatsız eden noktalara sahip olduğu göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır. Özellikle aniden akışa düşen paylaşımlar ve vefat eden kişinin duvarına yazılan yazılar yas tutan bireyin gelecek kaygısı yaşamasına neden olmaktadır. Gelecek kaygısı, özellikle vefat eden kişinin çocukları ya da diğer genç akrabaları varsa söz konusudur. Bu nedenle, yas sürecine tanıklık eden herhangi bir birey olarak, sosyal medyada paylaşım veya yorum yaparken vefat eden kişinin yakın akrabaları göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır.

Ayrıca sosyal çevrenin beklentileri de yas tutanların sosyal medyayı kullanma biçimlerini etkilemektedir. İlk olarak, yas tutan bireyin ölüm deneyimi gerçekleştikten sonra sosyal medya hesaplarında paylaşım yapmamış olması kendisinde kaygı yaratmaktadır. Yas tutanlar, ölüm deneyiminden sonra paylaşım yapmadıklarında

diğer insanların yaslarının gerçekliğini sorgulayabileceği ihtimalini vurgulamaktadır. İkinci olarak, ölümün ardından yas tutan kişiden beklenen bir diğer şey de mutlu anları paylaşmamasıdır. Yas tutan bireyler yakınlarının ölümünden sonra bir süre sosyal medyada sessizleşmektedir. Beklentilere göre, yas tutan bireylerin paylaşımları sadece kayıpla ilgili olmalı ve günlük hayatta normalde paylaşacakları paylaşımları yapmamalarıdır. Tersi durumda ise toplumdan eleştiri alacaklarını varsaymaktalardır. Sosyal medyadaki sosyal çevrenin yas sürecindeki kişilerden beklentileri ve bu beklentileri karşılayacak şekilde hareket etmeye çalışan yas tutan bireylerin yas sürecinde duygusal yüklerini artırmaktadır.

Elde edilen bulgular, sosyal medya sitelerinin duygu düzenleme, duygusal deşarj ve yas sırasında başa çıkma becerilerini destekleme işlevine sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, vefat eden kişi ile kurulan bağ, vefat eden kişinin sosyal medya hesapları aracılığıyla sürdürülebilmektedir. Sosyal medyanın bu işlevleri yas danışmanlarına, öğretmenlere ve sosyal medya kullanan her bireye yol gösterebilir. Böylelikle yas tutan bireyler sosyal medyanın kolaylaştırıcı özellikleri hakkında bilgi sahibi olabilir ve ihtiyaç duyduklarında bu özelliklerden faydalanabilirler. Öte yandan, yas tutan bireylerin yakınları da yas tutan kişinin acısını hafifletmek için neler yapılması gerektiği konusunda bilgi sahibi olabilir ve onları sosyal medyanın avantajlarından yararlanmaya yönlendirebilir. Özellikle yas tutan bireyler, ortak deneyimleri paylaşarak ve diğer yas tutan bireylere ulaşarak sosyal medyanın başa çıkma becerilerini güçlendirme üzerindeki etkisini göz önünde bulundurmalıdır. Yas konusunda çalışan ruh sağlığı uzmanları gerekli rehberliği sağlamayı düşünebilirler.

Sosyal medya kullanan kişi sayısının yaygınlığı ve araştırma sonuçları, yasın sosyal medya aracılığıyla paylaşılmasının çevresel bir etkiyi de beraberinde getirdiğini gösteriyor. Yas tutan bireylerin sosyal medya paylaşımlarının altına yapılan yorumlar, yas tutan bireyin psikolojik sağlığı göz önünde bulundurularak yapılmalıdır. Araştırmanın sosyal görünüm etkisi yas danışmanlığına katkı sağlayabilir. Araştırmanın bulguları, yas tutan bireyin ölüm durumuyla ilgili paylaşım yaparken ya da yapmazken bile çevrenin beklentilerini dikkate aldığını ve bunun kaygıya neden olduğunu göstermektedir. Yas sürecinde sosyal medya paylaşımı yapan bireyler kendini acındırma kaygısı yaşarken, sosyal medya paylaşımı yapmayanlar üzüntülerini

yeterince ifade edememe kaygısı yaşamaktadır. Yas tutan bireylere yardım eden ruh sağlığı uzmanları, yas döneminde sosyal medya araçlarının kişi üzerindeki etkisini göz önünde bulundurmalıdır. Özellikle çevresel etki dile getirilmeli ve yas tutan bireyin kaygıları üzerinde çalışılmalıdır. Bu çalışmalar neticesinde yas tutan bireylerin sosyal görünüm etkisine yönelik başa çıkma becerileri geliştirilmelidir.

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YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname   : Karabulut
Adı / Name   : Merve Hilal
Bölümü / Department   : Eğitim Bilimleri, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık / Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological Counselling

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