Research Article

Investigation of the impact of Instagram access restriction on individuals' psychological well-being, social and cultural perceptions, and adaptation strategies

Üstün Özen[1*], Handan Çam[2], Metin İpkin[1], Şahin Göktuğ Kaldırımcı[1]

[1] Ataturk University, Erzurum, 25030, Türkiye

[2] Gumushane University, Gumushane, 29100, Türkiye

* Corresponding author: Üstün Özen, uozen@atauni.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively examines the psychological impacts of the Instagram access ban implemented in Turkey between August 2, 2024, and August 10, 2024, how these impacts are reflected in social consequences and cultural perceptions, and also assesses the adaptation strategies that individuals develop in response to the ban. Data were collected from 80 participants residing in Erzurum through online surveys and analyzed using MAXQDA 24 software. The findings suggest that the access ban had various psychological effects, with some participants experiencing changes in their social relationships and difficulties in accessing information. The impacts on social bonds and solidarity varied among participants, with some cases showing intensified social interactions. In terms of cultural perceptions, changes were observed in individuals' views on freedom and expression rights. The study provides important insights into how social media access bans can influence individual perceptions and social structures, suggesting that these findings could contribute to shaping social media policies.

Keywords: Instagram Access Restrictions; Psychological Impacts; Social Impacts; Cultural Perceptions; Adaptation Strategies

1. Introduction

Media and communication technologies have become one of the cornerstones of modern societies, creating a new communication ecosystem by transforming traditional media structures. Social media platforms offer unique opportunities for users to express their thoughts and creativity freely. Besides personal communication, social media serves as a tool for non-governmental organizations and political groups to reach target audiences, interact with them, and spark social movements. This dynamic environment allows the internet to function as a public sphere, bringing a new dimension to social interactions.

Turkey has a rich background in the spread of the internet and the role of social media in social interaction. Since the increase in internet usage in the 1990s, new horizons in information access and freedom of expression have been opened. However, over time, restrictions on internet access and content regulations have emerged. Especially with the Law No. 5651, which came into effect in 2007, internet

monitoring has increased, leading to access bans on social media platforms at various times. The Gezi Park protests and the social movements that followed highlighted the impact of social media on social change, but these processes also sparked restrictions on these platforms.

In recent years, restrictions on social media platforms have intensified discussions about freedom of expression in Turkey. The Constitutional Court's decision in 2014 to lift the Twitter and YouTube bans was a significant turning point in this regard. However, incidents such as the access ban on Wikipedia in 2017 have brought back issues related to internet censorship and digital rights. These incidents emphasize the critical importance of protecting the internet as a free space in terms of fundamental human rights and democratic values.

This study was conducted between August 2, 2024, and August 10, 2024, during the Instagram access ban in Turkey. During this period, users had the opportunity to express their reactions to the restrictions directly and immediately. This situation enhances the relevance of the collected data, adding meaning and depth to the results. Users' fresh and raw reactions provide a clearer understanding of the real-time effects of social media platform access restrictions and offer valuable insights that can contribute to shaping policies and regulations in this area. Therefore, the findings are expected to play an essential role in discussions on freedom of expression and social media access restrictions.

In this context, the study examines the impact of the Instagram access ban on individuals' personal and cultural perceptions within the framework of demographic variables; it investigates the impact of the access ban on individuals' perceptions of personal freedom, social structure, and information sharing, and also analyzes the adaptation strategies developed following the ban. The research was conducted in Turkey, evaluating the effects of the Instagram access restriction across demographic variables such as age groups, education levels, gender, and political identity. The study's findings aim to provide a broader understanding of social media access restrictions and digital rights, offering recommendations for future regulations.

2. Literature review

Today, social media platforms have a significant impact on individuals and societies. Social media has become one of the most powerful tools for information flow, and access restrictions have occasionally led to social and legal debates[1]. In Turkey, access restrictions on social media platforms have been heavily discussed in the context of freedom of expression and digital rights. Arvas [5] stated that the access restrictions on YouTube, Twitter, and Wikipedia in Turkey damaged the country's reputation and restricted freedom of expression. Similarly, Karakaya[16] emphasized that the access restriction on Wikipedia negatively impacted freedom of expression and that imposing a ban on an entire site was inappropriate. Di Florio[12] and Tanash et al[29] examined the effects of social media censorship on user behavior in Turkey, finding that such censorship increased users' efforts to circumvent access restrictions. Akgül et al[2] evaluated Law No. 5651 in the context of internet censorship, noting that the European Court of Human Rights found such restrictions incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. Ayaz T[6] identified that internet access restrictions in Turkey generally contradicted the concept of liberal freedom and violated freedom of expression in terms of digital rights.

In recent years, the effects of social media bans have become a growing concern. Various studies have examined how these bans affect different aspects of society. For example, the TikTok ban in Nepal highlighted public reactions, emphasizing the need for strict regulations and solutions to address such actions[18]. Similarly, the attempt to ban WeChat among the Chinese diaspora revealed potential adverse

outcomes, such as economic impact and disruptions in community-building efforts[34]. These examples underscore the broader impacts of social media bans beyond the platforms themselves.

Internationally, social media censorship has been extensively studied, especially in Asian countries like China, Myanmar, and Indonesia. Bamman et al[7] and Chen[10] investigated the effects of social media censorship on user behavior and self-censorship mechanisms in China. Tai et al[28] analyzed the characteristics of censored content on China's WeChat platform, while Jiang et al[15] examined the selective impact of censorship on ideological groups. In Myanmar, Sharma et al[25] highlighted the gender-based violence risks associated with social media restrictions. Wildana et al[33] explored public attitudes toward social media restrictions in Indonesia.

In Africa, particularly in Nigeria, there has been extensive research on social media censorship. Anyim[4] and Moses et al[20] discussed the negative effects of the Twitter ban in Nigeria on freedom of expression, information sharing, and the economy, stating that these regulations harmed democratic processes. Mohammed[19] examined user reactions to the Twitter ban in Nigeria, revealing efforts to bypass these restrictions using tools like VPNs.

In Brazil, studies on judicial decisions to block social media applications emphasized that these restrictions arose due to regulatory frameworks that were inadequate in addressing innovative internet applications[11]. Ng et al[22] examined the psychological impact of cultural differences in response to the threat of social media censorship, finding that Iranian-Canadian individuals reacted more strongly to perceived threats from the government.

Some other studies on social media censorship have revealed a global increase in such practices, especially in countries like China, North Korea, Turkey, and Russia[26]. Aghababyan[1]examined the potential legal consequences of decisions to block social media platforms under international investment agreements (IIA), discussing whether the virtual assets of these platforms fall within the scope of IIA. İspir[14] and Karakaya[16] analyzed the balance between internet access bans and freedom of expression, arguing that these bans should be implemented in ways that minimally interfere with freedom of expression. Slutskiy[27] and Thomas et al[30] discussed the impact of social media platforms' content moderation policies on information access and freedom of expression from the perspective of property rights.

3. Significance of the research

This study is essential in understanding the effects of access restrictions on social media platforms on individuals and communities. Social media has critical functions in modern societies, such as information sharing, social interaction, and personal expression. Restricting access to these platforms can profoundly impact individuals' daily lives, social relationships, and access to information. This research contributes significantly by examining these effects within the framework of demographic variables, exploring how different social groups respond to social media restrictions and how these restrictions impact individuals.

Additionally, this study explores the impact of government-imposed social media restrictions on societal structure and individuals' perception of personal freedom, opening up discussions on the socio-cultural consequences of social media policies. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and provide a foundation for broader studies to understand the long-term effects of social media restrictions. By highlighting the critical role of social media platforms in individuals' and societies' lives, this study contributes meaningfully to debates on digital rights and freedom of expression.

4. Research methodology

This study was conducted during the Instagram access restriction in Turkey, which was in effect from August 2 to August 10, 2024, and took place three days before the restriction was lifted. Data were collected through a form with two main sections. In the first section, questions designed by the researcher aimed to determine participants' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, and political identity. The second section contained open-ended questions designed to examine in-depth the impact of the Instagram access restriction on individuals. This section included a total of 12 open-ended questions intended to measure the psychological effects of the restriction, personal and cultural perceptions, views on social impacts, and adaptation strategies of individuals. Each main topic contained three questions, developed with reference to related studies in the literature.

Participants in the study were residents of Erzurum. Data were collected using an online form created via Google Forms. Both convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used as sampling methods. Convenience sampling involved selecting participants whom the researcher could easily reach and who were thought to represent the research population. Snowball sampling aimed to reach new participants through referrals from existing ones. This combination allowed for a broader and more diverse participant profile.

The qualitative data collected were analyzed using MAXQDA 24 software. Themes and sub-codes were identified during the analysis, and these codes were visualized graphically. Additionally, the themes were correlated with demographic variables, providing a more in-depth understanding. In this way, the study sought to reveal how the Instagram access restriction impacted individuals from various perspectives and how these effects were shaped by different demographic characteristics.

5. Limitations of the research

Despite presenting significant findings, this study has certain limitations. First, the sample group comprises participants with a specific demographic profile, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study examined the views of individuals with a particular social and cultural context in Turkey. Therefore, similar studies conducted in different countries or cultural contexts may yield different results, underscoring the need for caution regarding the universality of the findings.

Secondly, the study only examines the effects of the access restriction on Instagram. Different results may be obtained regarding restrictions on other social media platforms. For instance, restrictions on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or TikTok may create different impacts on various user groups. Therefore, future studies could broaden the perspective on this issue by examining the effects of access restrictions on other social media platforms.

Thirdly, the participants' responses were based on their own perceptions, which may influence the research findings. Responses based on individuals' perceptions may differ from the experiences they actually had. This limitation reflects the constraints of data obtained through self-reporting. Future studies could address this limitation by using different data collection methods, providing more objective results.

Despite these limitations, this study presents important findings regarding the effects of the Instagram access restriction on individuals and provides a fundamental basis for understanding the social impacts of restrictions on social media platforms. Future studies should consider these limitations and be conducted with larger sample groups and different data collection methods.

6. Research questions

Social media platforms have become an indispensable part of modern social life, deeply impacting individuals' daily lives. Visual-centric platforms like Instagram have a broad influence, from social relationships to personal expression. However, restricting or blocking access to these platforms can bring significant changes to individuals' psychological states, social participation, and daily routines. Below is a detailed explanation, supported by literature, of why these research questions were selected.

6.1. Psychological effects

Social media platforms have become a tool that directly affects users' moods, social connections, and daily lives. Studies in the literature reveal both positive and negative effects of social media use on psychological well-being. Twenge et al[31] stated that intensive social media use could increase feelings of loneliness and depression. Additionally, Primack et al[24] found that social media use is associated with depression and anxiety. Understanding the impact of access restrictions on platforms like Instagram on individuals' moods and daily lives is critical to understanding the psychological effects of social media. Therefore, the questions formulated are designed to explore the psychological changes individuals experienced following the Instagram restriction. The following research questions were developed to determine the psychological effects:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your daily life and mood?

- After the Instagram restriction, did you feel isolated or disconnected from your social circle? What was this experience like for you?

- What psychological challenges did the inability to access Instagram bring regarding information access and sharing?

6.2. Social effects

Instagram plays an important role in organizing social events and movements. Van Dijck[32] and Castells[9] examined the effects of social media on social movements and political participation in detail. These platforms can contribute to strengthening social solidarity and social bonds. However, the impact of the Instagram access restriction on social movements has not been adequately researched in the literature. In this context, [13] examined the role of social media in social movements such as the Arab Spring, emphasizing the critical importance of these platforms for communication and organization. Therefore, the questions in this section are designed to understand the impact of the Instagram access restriction on individuals' social participation and social bonds:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your participation in social events and movements?

- How did your communication with friends and family change when Instagram was restricted?

- How did you observe the impact of the Instagram ban on social bonds and solidarity in society?

6.3. Individual and cultural perceptions

Social media is a powerful tool that shapes individuals' perceptions of personal freedoms and freedom of expression[23]. Additionally, Zuboff [35] detailed the effects of digital platforms on individuals' perceptions of freedom and social structures. Examining how the Instagram access restriction changed individuals' perceptions of these concepts is important for understanding how social media affects individuals' cultural and social structures. Moreover, a study by Allcott et al[3] highlighted social media's role in information sharing and misinformation. Investigating the social and cultural effects of restricting access to these platforms is critical to understanding the dynamics between digital media and society. Based on this

information, the following questions were formulated to explore the changes in individuals' personal and societal perceptions following the Instagram access restriction:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your views on personal freedoms and freedom of expression?

- How do you think the restriction on Instagram impacted changes in the cultural and social structure of your community?

- How did the Instagram access restriction change your perceptions of information sharing and misinformation in society?

6.4. Adaptation strategies

The literature contains many studies on digital dependencies and adaptation strategies developed by individuals when social media platforms are inaccessible[8]. Additionally, Kuss et al[17] presented significant findings on the challenges individuals face in digital media use and adaptation strategies. Understanding how social media access restrictions direct individuals toward developing alternative communication methods and ways of doing business is important for discovering individuals' adaptive capacities in the digital world. For example, Moskalenko et al[21] examined the psychological and behavioral strategies individuals developed to cope with the loss of access to social media platforms. The following questions were formulated to understand individuals' adaptation strategies following the Instagram access restriction and the effects of this situation on their daily lives:

- What strategies did you develop to adapt to the situation after the Instagram access restriction?

- How did you manage your time after the Instagram access restriction? How did this affect your daily routines and time management skills?

- Did you develop new methods of communication or ways of doing business to fill the gap created by the Instagram restriction?

7. Findings

7.1. Demographic information

Examining the demographic distribution of the 80 participants in this study, it is observed that 66.25% of the participants are female, while 33.75% are male. In terms of age groups, 30% of the participants are between the ages of 18-25, 27.5% are between 26-35, 17.5% are between 46-55, 15% are between 36-45, and 10% are 56 years and older. Regarding educational background, 48.75% of the participants are university graduates, 25% hold a postgraduate degree, 21.25% are high school graduates, and 2.5% have primary or elementary school education. Politically, 37.5% of the participants identify as nationalist, 22.5% as conservative, 20% as Kemalist, 10% as socialist, 6.25% as Islamist, and 3.75% as social democrat. These distributions indicate a wide demographic and political diversity among the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Information.

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	33,75
	Female	53	66,25
Age	18-25	24	30
	26-35	22	27,5
	36-45	12	15

		Frequency	Percentage
	46-55	14	17,5
	56 and above	8	10
Education Level	Primary School	2	2,5
	Secondary School	2	2,5
	High School	17	21,25
	University	39	48,75
	Graduate	20	25
Political Identity	Conservative	18	22,5
	Nationalist	30	37,5
	Ataturkist	16	20
	Islamist	5	6,25
	Social Democrat	3	3,75
	Socialist	8	10

Table 1. (*Continued*)

7.2. Themes and subcodes

This research, conducted on 80 individuals to reveal the impact of the Instagram access restriction imposed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) between August 2, 2024, and August 11, 2024, on individual perceptions, analyzed the collected data, which is presented in this section. The qualitative analysis conducted with MAXQDA 24 resulted in 12 sub-themes under four main themes, as shown in **Table 2**. A total of 984 sub-codes were identified. Additionally, analyses were conducted based on the participants' demographic information, including age, gender, education level, and political identity.

Table 2. Main theme- sub-theme relationship.

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
psychological effects	daily life and mood
	social environment relationships
	access to and sharing of information
social effects	social events and movements
	communication with close circles
	social bonds and solidarity
individual and cultural perceptions	personal freedoms and freedom of expression
	cultural and social structure
	information sharing and misinformation
adaptation strategies	personal adaptation strategies
	time management
	communication and business methods

7.2.1. Psychological effects

This main theme was created to identify the psychological effects experienced by individuals after the Instagram access restriction. In this context, participants were asked the following questions:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your daily life and mood?

- After the Instagram restriction, did you feel isolated or disconnected from your social circle? What was this experience like for you?

- What psychological challenges did the inability to access Instagram bring regarding information access and sharing?

Under the main theme of Psychological Effects, participants' views on how the Instagram access restriction affected their daily lives and moods were coded as "Daily Life and Mood," their experiences regarding social relationships were coded as "Social Environment Relations," and the challenges they faced in accessing and sharing information were coded as "Access to and Sharing Information." As seen in **Figure 1**, among the 259 codes applied to the responses from the 80 participants within this main theme, 103 belong to the "Daily Life and Mood" sub-theme, 87 to the "Social Environment Relations" sub-theme, and 69 to the "Access to and Sharing Information" sub-theme.
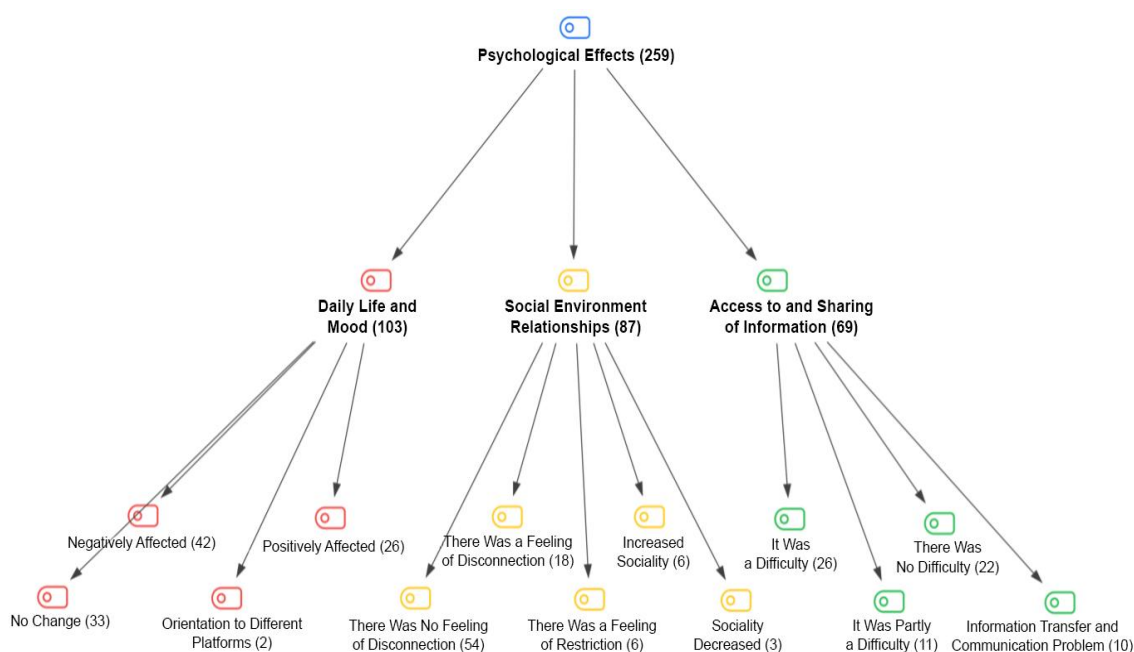
Figure 1. Hierarchical code-subcode model for the main theme of psychological effects.

In the "Daily Life and Mood" (103) sub-theme, a significant portion of the participants (42) stated that they spent their leisure time on Instagram, that the access restriction negatively impacted many factors in their daily lives, and that the restriction affected them negatively because they felt their freedom was restricted. Some participants (33) mentioned that Instagram and other social media platforms did not play a substantial role in their lives to the extent of affecting their daily life and mood, while other participants (26) said they welcomed the restriction as it helped them move away from these platforms, making their daily lives more organized and eliminating time wastage. A small number of participants (2) stated that they directed themselves to different platforms to avoid being affected. Below are some responses from participants:

P-14: "I feel like I'm in a void because we used to spend most of our free time there."

P-5: "It did not cause any change in my daily life or mood."

P-10: "I started using Twitter more actively instead of Instagram, so there wasn't much change in my mood or life as I replaced it with something else."

P-8: "I started using the time I gave to Instagram on more important things, and my mind feels more relaxed due to being away from the Reels clutter on Instagram."

In the "Social Environment Relations" (87) sub-theme, the majority of participants (54) expressed that their social environment was not related to Instagram, and they did not use the app as a tool in their relationships, thus stating that the access restriction did not cause any disconnection. However, some participants (18) said that their relationships were interrupted, and they felt disconnected from their social circle for such reasons. Some participants (6) said that the restriction increased their sociality as they disconnected from the virtual world and increased communication with the real world, while a few others (3) believed the restriction decreased their sociality. Additionally, some participants (6) expressed that the restriction created a sense of limitation toward their social environment. Below are some responses from participants:

P-57: "No, I didn't establish my social circle through Instagram; I only had a few distant friends I talked to on Instagram, and I couldn't communicate with them."

P-9: "I felt disconnected because I could see what everyone I knew was doing and stay informed, but now I can't. I felt like I was left with myself."

P-15: "Not being able to keep up with what my social circle is doing made me feel uncomfortable, but I didn't feel isolated or disconnected."

P-10: "Since my understanding of socializing is more about coming together in real life, I didn't feel disconnected in this way, but the topic of 'restriction' made me angry."

In the "Access to and Sharing Information" (69) sub-theme, many participants (26) mentioned that their access to news sources was cut off, forcing them to turn to alternative news sources and making it difficult to connect with reliable sources. Some participants (11) said they experienced only partial difficulty in such cases because they could partially overcome these issues through alternative platforms. A portion of the participants (10) described the cessation of information transmission, various posts, and communication on Instagram as an issue, while some participants who used Instagram less frequently (22) thought that the restriction did not pose a problem in terms of accessing and sharing information. Below are some responses from participants:

P-11: "I couldn't keep up with news, entertainment, and current events. I started looking for alternative sources, trying to use unfamiliar apps like X."

P-5: "I didn't have a problem accessing information, but I did face issues in sharing information with others."

P-10: "Since I don't use Instagram as a platform for accessing information, I didn't experience any difficulty in this regard."

P-3: "Other than not being able to learn about current issues specific to the city I live in, I don't think it caused much difficulty. It was a lack of news."

In **Figure 2**, the effects of the Instagram access restriction on individuals' daily lives and moods, social environment relations, and access to and sharing of information are classified according to demographic information. This theme has been divided into variables based on participants' age, gender, education level, and political identity, aiming to provide a detailed analysis of how these variables impact the theme.

	Male	Female	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 & Above	Pri. Sch.	Sec. School	High Sc.	University	Graduate	Conservative	Nationalist	Ataturkist	Islamist	Social Democrat	Socialist
Psychological Effects																		
Daily Life and Mood																		
Negatively Affected	11	31	12	16	9	3	2		4	8	23	7	7	1	14	10	1	9
Orientation to Different Platforms		2	2								1	1	1			1		
Positively Affected	9	17	10	9	1	6				9	11	6	6	3	5	10		2
No Change	13	20	8	4	6	9	6	2	1	8	14	8	6	2	17	6	1	1
Social Environment Relationships																		
Sociality Decreased	2	1		2			1				3		3					
Increased Sociality	1	5	1	1		3	1			2	1	3	2	1	3			
There was a Feeling of Restriction	1	5	6								3	3	3		2	1		
There was a Feeling of Discon.	4	14	3	10	1	3	1		1	1	11	5	3		5	7	1	2
There was No Feeling of Discon.	23	31	20	14	10	7	3	2		12	29	11	10	4	22	10	1	7
Access to and Sharing of Information																		
It was a Difficulty	5	21	10	7	5	1	3		1	6	16	3	7	1	6	4	2	6
There was No Difficulty	7	15	5	4	2	7	4	1	1	5	9	6	7	2	11	1		1
It Was Partly a Difficulty	6	5	2	4	2	3		1		1	5	4	1		4	5	1	
Info. Transfer and Com. Problem	5	5	4	3	1	1	1		1	3	4	2	1	3	4	2		

Figure 2. Distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics within the main theme of psychological effects

Figure 2 provides a comprehensive depiction of the psychological effects of the Instagram access restriction across demographic variables. Under the "Daily Life and Mood" sub-theme, a significant portion of participants reported being negatively affected (42). This negative effect is particularly prevalent among women (31) and participants in the 26-35 age group (16). University graduates (23) and nationalists (14) also stood out in experiencing this negative impact. On the other hand, among participants who reported being positively affected (26), the 18-25 age group (10) and university graduates (11) were notable.

In the "Social Environment Relations" sub-theme, the majority of participants (54) indicated that they did not experience any disconnection in their relationships with their social circle. This response was especially prominent among women (31) and those in the 18-25 age group (20). However, among those who felt a sense of disconnection in their social relationships (18), participants in the 26-35 age group (10) and university graduates (11) stood out.

Within the "Access to and Sharing of Information" sub-theme, participants who reported experiencing difficulties in accessing information (26) were mainly university graduates (16) and those in the 18-25 age group (10). Conversely, among participants who reported no difficulty in accessing information (22), those in the 46-55 age group (7) stood out. Additionally, among participants who expressed challenges in information transmission and communication (10), university graduates (4) and those in the 26-35 age group (4) were notable. Among participants who reported partial difficulty (11), those in the 18-25 age group (4), university graduates (4), and nationalists (4) stood out.

7.2.2. Social effects

This main theme was created to identify participants' views on the social effects of the Instagram access restriction. In this context, participants were asked the following questions:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your participation in social events and movements?
- When Instagram was restricted, how did your communication with friends and family change?
- How did you observe the effects of the Instagram ban on social bonds and solidarity in society?

Under the main theme of Social Effects, the impact of the Instagram access restriction on participants' involvement in social events and movements was coded as the "Social Events and Movements" sub-theme, their communication with friends and family as the "Communication with Close Circles" sub-theme, and the impact on social bonds and solidarity within society as the "Social Bonds and Solidarity" sub-theme. As seen in **Figure 3**, among the 198 codes applied to the responses from the 80 participants within this main theme, 68 belong to the "Social Bonds and Solidarity" sub-theme, 66 to the "Social Events and Movements" sub-theme, and 64 to the "Communication with Close Circles" sub-theme.

Under the "Social Bonds and Solidarity" (68) sub-theme, some participants felt that social solidarity decreased (17) and social bonds weakened (29) due to the access restriction, while others believed that the restriction increased social solidarity (7) and strengthened social bonds (5). Additionally, some participants (10) did not think that the restriction led to any changes in this regard. Below are some responses from participants:

P-10: "Instagram was the platform with the most impact on social solidarity. Especially, the official accounts of NGOs would give real-time updates on certain issues. People started moving to the Twitter platform, but they couldn't be as effective there since most of their audience was on Instagram."

P-24: "Instagram is ineffective. I don't think it plays a significant role in social solidarity. I believe X plays a more critical role in this regard."
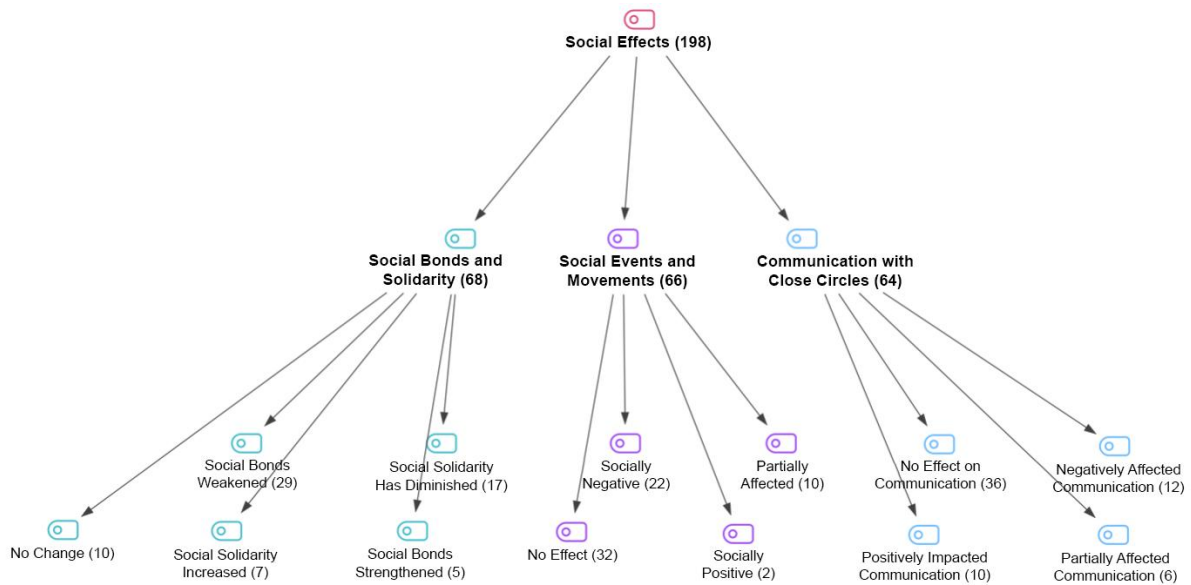

Figure 3. Hierarchical code-subcode model for the main theme of social impacts.

P-55: "I think it had a positive impact on marriages. No more flashy lives, no women pretending to be happy, no men seen as gentlemen. People faced reality a bit."

In the "Social Events and Movements" (66) sub-theme, most participants (32) stated that they were not left uninformed about social events and movements due to the presence of other social media platforms, and therefore, they were not significantly affected positively or negatively by the restriction. However, some participants (22) considered the restriction as a negative experience, as it left them uninformed about social events and movements, restricted their ability to express their opinions, and distanced them from issues concerning society. Meanwhile, some participants (10) managed to partially overcome this situation by turning to other social media platforms, thus experiencing limited effects. Below are some responses from participants:

P-5: "I don't think Instagram had much of an impact on social events, so it didn't affect me in this regard."

P-11: "I learned about many events late and missed opportunities to express my opinion or participate."

P-15: "Although I'm not someone who frequently participates, my trust in society decreased. I expected an uprising, and if there had been a gathering, I would have joined. Even if a march was planned, I couldn't find out due to the absence of Instagram."

P-24: "For instance, our athlete Yusuf Dikeç became very popular on the X platform. I would have liked to see content from foreign accounts about our athlete on Instagram, especially since it was the 2024 Paris Olympics."

In the "Communication with Close Circles" (64) sub-theme, most participants (36) stated that communication with their family and friends was not affected by the access restriction and that this communication was not related to social media. Some participants (12) said that they would not be able to maintain constant contact with their family and friends, whom they follow on Instagram, and therefore, the restriction negatively impacted their communication. On the other hand, some participants (10) indicated that they preferred to dedicate the time they spent on Instagram to their family and friends, which strengthened their communication. A few participants (6) mentioned that the restriction partially cut off communication with certain family members and friends, depending on the level of intimacy. Below are some responses from participants:

P-3: "I didn't experience any disruptions. I contact people in my circle about important matters outside of Instagram."

P-6: "I couldn't get any updates from friends without their phone numbers. It became frustrating, and my communication with my family decreased."

P-45: "I can't meet with my family and friends frequently due to my job. I used to stay updated through the photos and videos they shared on Instagram. Naturally, our connection weakened a bit."

Figure 4 illustrates participants' thoughts on the effects of the Instagram access restriction on social events and movements, social bonds and solidarity, and communication with close circles, classified according to demographic information. This theme was divided into variables based on participants' age, gender, education level, and political identity, aiming to provide a detailed analysis of how these variables impacted the theme.

	Male	Female	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 & Above	Pri. Sch.	Sec. School	High Sc.	University	Graduate	Conservative	Nationalist	Ataturkist	Islamist	Social Democrat	Socialist
Social Effects																		
Social Events and Movements																		
Partially Affected	3	7		5	1	3	1			1	5	4	1		5	4		
No Effect	14	18	8	12	4	7	1		1	5	16	10	8	3	11	7		3
Socially Negative	6	16	13	3	3		3		1	6	12	3	3	1	10	4	1	3
Socially Positive	1	1	1		1						1	1	1	1				
Communication with Close Circles																		
Positively Impacted Communication	2	8	2	3	1	4		1		3	3	3	1	1	5	2		1
Negatively Affected Communication	3	9	3	4	1	1	3		1	2	8	1	5		3	1	1	2
No Effect on Communication	15	21	12	10	6	5	3			7	15	14	5	3	16	8	1	3
Partially Affected Communication	3	3	2	2	2						2	1		1	3			1
Social Bonds and Solidarity																		
No Change	4	6	4	4	1	1				3	4	3		1	6	2		1
Social Bonds Strengthened	2	3	2	1	1	1		1		1	1	2		1	4			
Social Bonds Weakened	10	19	8	7	7	5	2		1	6	15	7	8	1	12	4	1	3
Social Solidarity Decreased	6	11	6	6	2	1	2			3	10	4	7		5	2	1	2
Social Solidarity Increased	2	5	5	1	1					1	3	3	2	1	1	3		

Figure 4. Distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics within the scope of the main theme of social impacts.

Figure 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the social effects of the Instagram access restriction across demographic variables. Under the "Social Events and Movements" sub-theme, the majority of participants (34) reported that the access restriction did not have a direct impact on social events. However, negative social effects were more prevalent among women (16) and participants in the 18-25 age group (13), indicating that younger people and women are more sensitive to social media access restrictions. Additionally, women who felt that the Instagram restriction had no effect (18) also stood out.

Under the "Communication with Close Circles" sub-theme, the majority of participants (36) stated that the restriction did not create a significant change in communication with their close circle. This view was particularly common among university graduates (15) and nationalists (16). However, some participants (12)

emphasized the restriction's negative impact on communication, a view particularly notable among women (9) and individuals in the 26-35 age group (4).

In the "Social Bonds and Solidarity" sub-theme, the prevailing view was that social bonds weakened (29) and social solidarity decreased (17). This sentiment was especially pronounced among women (10), individuals in the 26-35 age group (8), and university graduates (15). Conversely, the number of participants who believed social bonds strengthened was relatively low (5), indicating a general view that social solidarity weakened during the access restriction period.

7.2.3. Individual and cultural perceptions

This main theme was created to identify changes in individual and cultural perceptions following the Instagram access restriction. In this context, participants were asked the following questions:

- How did the Instagram access restriction affect your views on personal freedoms and freedom of expression?

- How do you think the restriction on Instagram impacted changes in your community's cultural and social structure?

- How did the Instagram access restriction change your perceptions regarding information sharing and misinformation within society?

Under the main theme of Individual and Cultural Perceptions, participants' views on personal freedoms and freedom of expression following the Instagram restriction were coded as the "Personal Freedoms and Freedom of Expression" sub-theme, the effects on changes in the community's cultural and social structure as the "Cultural and Social Structure" sub-theme, and perceptions regarding information sharing and misinformation within society as the "Information Sharing and Misinformation" sub-theme. As shown in **Figure 5**, among the 260 codes applied to the responses from the 80 participants within this main theme, 94 belong to the "Information Sharing and Misinformation" sub-theme, 87 to the "Cultural and Social Structure" sub-theme, and 79 to the "Personal Freedoms and Freedom of Expression" sub-theme.
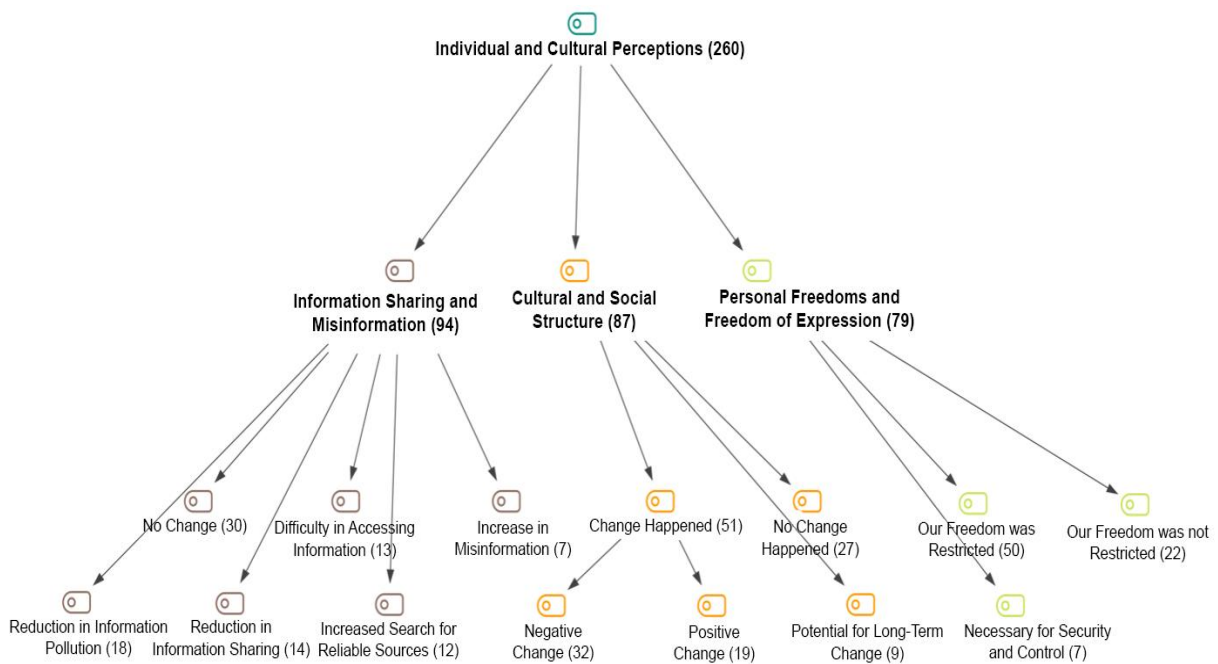

Figure 5. Individual and cultural perceptions main theme hierarchical code-subcode model.

Under the "Information Sharing and Misinformation" (94) sub-theme, some participants (30) stated that their perceptions in this regard had not changed, while others (18) felt that misinformation decreased with the restriction. Some participants noted that information sharing decreased (14), they had difficulty accessing information (13), and they began seeking new, reliable sources (12). Additionally, a group of participants (7) expressed that the reduced access to information sources due to the restriction played a negative role in distinguishing between accurate and inaccurate information and led to an increase in misinformation. Below are some responses from participants:

P-53: "Since I'm not interested in anything other than information, it was good not to see unnecessary stuff."

P-15: "People could turn to Instagram for clear information. In this sense, I think the exchange of information sometimes drifted in the wrong direction."

P-20: "This has always existed and will continue to. However, the spread rate of misinformation may have been interrupted. I don't know how things are developing on TikTok, but Instagram was seriously the most powerful platform in creating a crowd mentality and stirring things up."

P-10: "It was a platform with a lot of information sharing on current events, and when misinformation was shared, it was refuted quickly due to its reach. Now, that situation is also limited."

Under the "Cultural and Social Structure" (87) sub-theme, a significant portion of participants (51) believed that the access restriction would lead to changes in the cultural and social structure of society. Some participants (32) indicated that the restriction would trigger negative states in society, such as hopelessness, hatred, and depression, while others (19) believed that the restriction would free society from these negative states and end the "opiate effect" of social media on society. Conversely, some participants (27) did not think the restriction would lead to any changes in the cultural and social structure, while a small number of participants (9) thought it might lead to long-term changes. Below are some responses from participants:

P-28: "I think it had both positive and negative effects because I feel more present in real life now, but on the other hand, there are people who make a living from it, so I consider it a negative in that respect."

P-9: "I think many people's hatred toward those who imposed the ban has increased, and this situation disturbed them a lot."

P-20: "It's still too early to make such a conclusion, in my opinion. We might observe the results in the long term, but for now, I see that we look at each other more and talk more in family and friend gatherings."

In the "Personal Freedoms and Freedom of Expression" (79) sub-theme, a significant portion of participants (50) viewed the restriction as limiting freedom, while some participants (22) felt it was unrelated to their perception of freedom. Additionally, a small number of participants (7) believed that the restriction was a necessary step for ensuring social security and control. Below are some responses from participants:

P-68: "I think it would be better to have stricter monitoring options instead of outright bans for personal freedom. However, I believe it's appropriate to take necessary precautions to prevent moral decay."

P-79: "It's not right to restrict it. The negative effects on the country and moral values should be resolved by consulting the company. People who use it in moderation shouldn't be restricted."

P-45: "It seems there's significant corruption in society, but these have always existed. Social media just brought them to light. Some say this restriction limits freedom, but in my opinion, prevention is better than cure. I'm glad it was shut down."

Figure 6 illustrates participants' thoughts on the Instagram access restriction regarding personal freedoms and freedom of expression, changes in the cultural and social structure, and information sharing and misinformation, classified according to demographic information. This theme was divided into variables based on participants' age, gender, education level, and political identity, aiming to provide a detailed analysis of how these variables impacted the theme.

	Male	Female	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 & Above	Pri. Sch.	Sec. School	High Sc.	University	Graduate	Conservative	Nationalist	Ataturkist	Islamist	Social Democrat	Socialist
Individual and Cultural Perceptions																		
Personal Freedoms and Fredom of Exp.																		
Our Freedom was not Restricted	9	13	3	9	4	4	2	1	1	4	12	4	4		12	5		1
Our Freedom was Restricted	15	35	16	14	6	8	6		1	9	25	15	12	3	17	8	3	7
Necessary for Security and Control	4	3	3		2	2			1		3	2	1		2	4		
Cultural and Social Structure																		
Change Happened																		
Negative Change	7	25	10	10	1	6	5	1	2	6	19	4	7	1	12	6	2	4
Positive Change	6	13	5	6	4	3	1	1		2	7	9	2	1	6	7		3
No Change Happened	11	16	10	6	4	5	2			11	10	6	5	3	11	6		2
Potential for Long-Term Change	4	5	5	2	1	1				2	4	3	1	3	2	2		1
Information Sharing and Misinformation																		
No Change	11	19	8	5	6	8	3	1		7	11	11	6	1	15	6	1	1
Reduction in Information Pollution	9	9	6	7	2	1	2			5	8	4	2	2	7	5		2
Reduction in Information Sharing	4	10	6	5	1	1			1	3	8	3	2	2	4	3	1	2
Increased Search for Reliable Sources	3	9	6	2	1	2	1			1	10	1	4		2	3		3
Difficulty in Accessing Information	5	8	4	6	3				1		10			1	2	5		5
Increase in Misinformation	2	5	2	3	2						5	2	2			2	1	2

Figure 6. Distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics within the scope of individual and cultural perceptions main theme.

Figure 6 provides a comprehensive overview of the effects of the Instagram access restriction on individual and cultural perceptions across demographic variables. Under the "Personal Freedoms and Freedom of Expression" sub-theme, the majority of participants reported feeling that their freedoms were restricted (50), a sentiment particularly prevalent among participants in the 18-25 age group (16), university graduates (25), and nationalists (17). Conversely, among those who felt that their freedoms were not restricted (22), participants in the 26-35 age group (9) and university graduates (12) were notable. Additionally, some participants (7) expressed that such restrictions were necessary for security and control.

In the "Cultural and Social Structure" sub-theme, among those who felt that there were negative changes in the social structure (32), participants in the 18-25 age group (10) and university graduates (19) stood out. Conversely, participants who observed positive changes (19) were more concentrated in the 26-35 age group (6) and among those with postgraduate education (9).

In the "Information Sharing and Misinformation" sub-theme, a high number of participants (30) reported no change in information sharing, a view commonly held by participants in the 46-55 age group (8) and nationalists (15). Meanwhile, among those who felt that misinformation decreased (18), information sharing decreased (14), or misinformation increased (7), university graduates (5) were notable.

7.2.4. Adaptation strategies

This main theme was created to identify the adaptation strategies developed by individuals following the Instagram access restriction. In this context, participants were asked the following questions:

- What strategies did you develop to adapt to the situation after the Instagram access restriction?
- How did you manage your time after the Instagram access restriction? How did this affect your daily routines and time management skills?
- Did you develop new methods of communication or ways of doing business to fill the gap created by the restriction on Instagram?

Under the main theme of Adaptation Strategies, the adaptation strategies developed by participants following the Instagram restriction were coded as "Personal Adaptation Strategies," the impact on time

management as "Time Management," and the new communication and work methods developed to fill the gap created by the restriction as "Communication and Work Methods." As seen in **Figure 7**, among the 267 codes applied to the responses from the 80 participants within this main theme, 90 belong to the "Time Management" sub-theme, 89 to the "Communication and Work Methods" sub-theme, and 88 to the "Personal Adaptation Strategies" sub-theme.
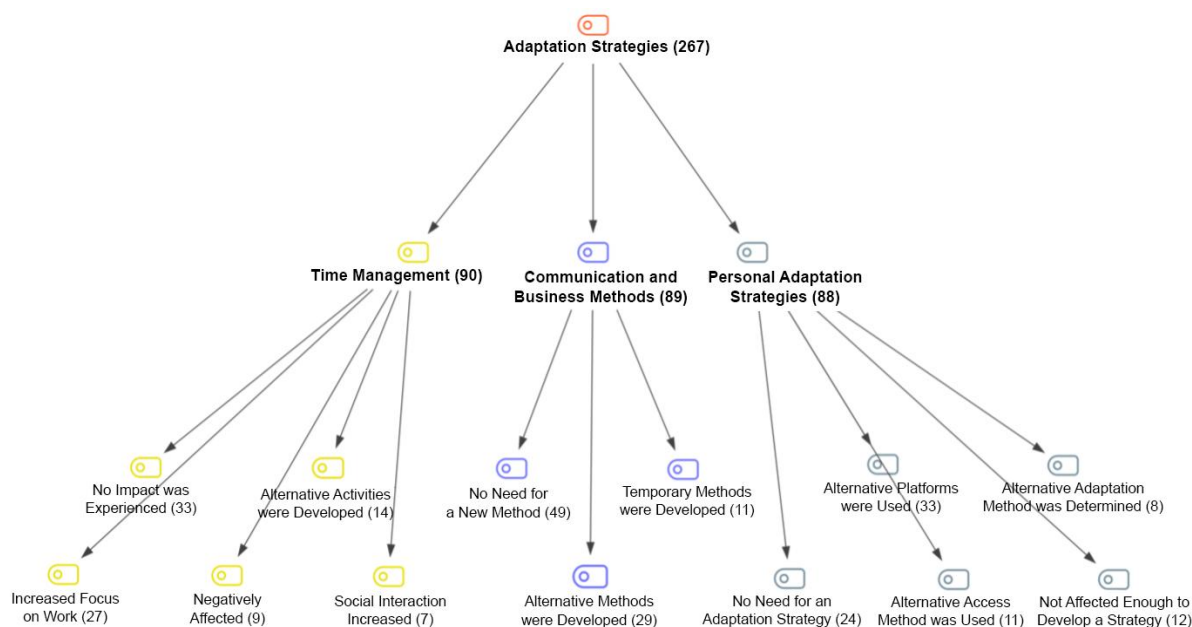

Figure 7. Adaptation strategies main theme hierarchical code-subcode model.

Under the "Time Management" (90) sub-theme, a significant portion of participants (33) stated that the access restriction did not lead to any changes in their time management. Another group (27) reported an increase in their focus on personal tasks after the restriction, which brought them a sense of happiness and peace. Some participants mentioned that the restriction allowed them to engage in different activities (14) and that their social interactions increased (7), while a few indicated that the restriction negatively affected their time management (9). Below are some responses from participants:

P-10: "Instagram was never a place where I spent long hours. There was no change in my time management skills."

P-3: "During the day, I found more opportunities to focus on other tasks. It reduced my screen time on the phone, which made me feel more relaxed."

P-8: "I started using the time I used to spend on Instagram on other platforms and in my daily life."

P-6: "I didn't redirect my time management differently; I kept checking to see if Instagram had reopened."

In the "Communication and Work Methods" (89) sub-theme, the majority of participants (49) did not feel the need to develop a new method and continued using some of their existing methods. Some participants (29) stated that they turned to other social media platforms and instant messaging apps to develop alternative communication methods due to the access restriction. Additionally, some participants (11) mentioned that they temporarily adopted different communication and work methods, thinking that the app would eventually become accessible again. Below are some responses from participants:

P-56: "I don't use other social media instead of Instagram. If the access restriction is lifted, I'll continue from there; otherwise, I haven't followed any way to fill the gap."

P-10: "I looked at Twitter for trending topics, but I didn't use it actively for work."

P-25: "I tried to keep in touch via WhatsApp, but it only allowed me to reach a small circle of friends because I don't have most of their phone numbers."

Under the "Personal Adaptation Strategies" (88) sub-theme, some participants (33) continued their social media use and transitioned to alternative applications instead of Instagram. Another group reported that they did not have excessive interest or usage in social media, so they did not need to develop an extra adaptation strategy (24), and the restriction did not affect them enough to require a strategy (12). Some users mentioned that they opted for alternative access methods, using VPNs to access Instagram (11), while others adopted a different approach by distancing themselves from social media due to the restriction and engaging in various activities (8). Below are some responses from participants:

P-61: "I spend more time on X, YouTube, and my daily hobbies."

P-45: "I wasn't highly dependent on it. It didn't affect me. I'm using Twitter, and if the restriction lasts, I might download a VPN just to check occasionally."

P-68: "There was no need to develop a strategy to adapt."

Figure 8 presents a classification of participants' thoughts on personal adaptation strategies, time management, and communication and work methods in response to the Instagram access restriction according to demographic information. This theme was divided into variables based on participants' age, gender, education level, and political identity, aiming to provide a detailed analysis of how these variables impacted the theme.

	Male	Female	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56 & Above	Pri. Sch.	Sec. School	High Sc.	University	Graduate	Conservative	Nationalist	Ataturkist	Islamist	Social Democrat	Socialist
Adaptation Strategies																		
Personal Adaptation Strategies																		
Alternative Platforms were Used	9	24	15	7	5	3	3	1	1	9	13	9	9	2	8	9		5
Alternative Access Method was Used	7	4	5	2	3	1			1	3	7		3		3	3	1	1
Alt. Adaptation Method was Determined	3	5	1	4		3			1	2	2	3			4	3		1
No Need for an Adaptation Strategy	7	17	5	7	5	7				3	15	6	3	2	11	6	2	
Not Affected Enough to Dev. a Strategy	4	8	4	3	1	1	3			2	7	3	4	2	3	1		2
Time Management																		
Negatively Affected	1	8	2	3	2		2		1	1	6	1	4		2	2		1
No Impact was Experienced	12	21	12	5	7	5	4	1		4	18	10	4	2	14	8	2	3
Increased Focus on Work	8	19	7	11	3	4	2	1	1	5	11	9	5	2	9	5	1	5
Alternative Activities were Developed	6	8	5	4		4	1			5	6	3	4	1	4	5		
Social Interaction Increased	2	5	5	1		1				3	4		1		4	1	1	
Communication and Business Methods																		
No Need for a New Method	13	36	15	13	5	12	4	1		10	27	11	8	5	16	13	3	4
Temporary Methods were Developed	4	7	2	6	1	1	1			2	5	4	2		2	5		2
Alternative Methods were Developed	11	18	11	6	7	2	3	1	2	7	12	7	8		11	6		4

Figure 8. Distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics within the scope of individual and cultural perceptions main theme.

Figure 8 provides a detailed overview of the effects of the Instagram access restriction on participants' adaptation strategies across demographic variables. Under the "Personal Adaptation Strategies" sub-theme, a significant portion of participants opted to use alternative platforms (33), particularly among women (24), participants in the 18-25 age group (15), and university graduates (13). Among those who used alternative access methods (11), male participants (7) and university graduates (7) were prominent. On the other hand, some participants (24) reported that they did not feel the need for an adaptation strategy, especially those in the 26-35 age group (7), university graduates (15), and those with a nationalist political identity (11).

In the "Time Management" sub-theme, the majority of participants (33) indicated that the restriction did not negatively impact their time management. This sentiment was especially prevalent among women (21), participants in the 18-25 age group (12), and university graduates (18). Additionally, among participants who

reported an increase in focus on tasks (27), the 26-35 age group (11) and university graduates (11) were notable.

Under the "Communication and Work Methods" sub-theme, the majority of participants stated that they did not feel the need to adopt new methods (49). This view was especially common among women (36), participants in the 18-25 age group (15), university graduates (27), and those in the 46-55 age group (12). Among participants who developed alternative methods (29), women (18), participants in the 18-25 age group (11), university graduates (12), and those with a nationalist identity (11) were more prominent.

Figure 9. Code cloud.

8. Discussion

This study comprehensively examines the effects of Instagram access restrictions on individuals and how these effects vary based on demographic factors. The findings reveal the detailed impact of social media access restrictions on perceptions of personal freedom, information sharing, social structures, and adaptation strategies. While these findings align significantly with existing literature, they also offer new insights into the individual and societal dimensions of social media access restrictions.

The results of this study parallel the findings of Arvas[5] and Karakaya[16], which emphasize the negative impact of social media access restrictions on freedom of expression and information sharing. Young adults, university graduates, and individuals with nationalist political identities reported being the most affected by these restrictions. This underscores the central role of social media in modern societies as a platform for self-expression and information access.

Regarding the impact of social media platforms on social structures, various perspectives exist in the literature. Studies by Di Florio[12] and Tanash[29] have shown that social media censorship leads individuals to seek alternative means to bypass access restrictions. Similarly, this study found that women, young people, and university graduates adapted to the Instagram restriction by using alternative platforms. This finding highlights the strength of social media habits and the strategies individuals develop in response to restrictions.

However, the finding that information-sharing habits did not change significantly indicates how central social media platforms have become for individuals. Research by Allcott[3] examined how social media platforms influence information sharing and misinformation, reaching similar conclusions. The fact that most participants did not perceive a major difference in information sharing suggests that social media has become an integral part of societal structures and that access restrictions do not completely eliminate information exchange.

Regarding time management, this study presents a complex picture, showing that social media access restrictions do not always lead to negative consequences. A significant portion of participants stated that the Instagram access restriction did not adversely affect their time management. This finding partially contradicts studies by Twenge[31] and Primack[24], which explore the impact of social media usage on time management and personal productivity. It highlights the need for further investigation into the personalized effects of social media access restrictions.

Finally, this study demonstrates that the effects of social media access restrictions on individuals are multi-dimensional and vary across demographic groups. While existing literature predominantly focuses on the negative consequences of social media bans, this study shows that these effects differ from person to person, and in some cases, individuals develop positive adaptation strategies.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has comprehensively examined the effects of the Instagram access restriction on individuals and how these effects vary across different demographic groups. The findings indicate that the restriction led to various outcomes on critical issues, including perceptions of personal freedom, impacts on cultural and social structures, information sharing, and misinformation. Additionally, participants' adaptation strategies and time management skills in response to this situation were noteworthy. The results provide essential insights on both individual and societal levels, shedding light on future studies in this area.

The study's findings reveal that the Instagram access restriction profoundly impacted individuals and that these effects significantly varied based on demographic characteristics. Under the theme of personal freedoms and freedom of expression, a majority of participants expressed feeling restricted. Young adults in the 18-25 age group, university graduates, and individuals with nationalist political identities reported that access restrictions on social media platforms severely impacted their freedom of expression and information sharing. These findings underscore the importance of social media as a tool for self-expression and free information sharing in modern societies.

Under the cultural and social structure sub-theme, a high proportion of participants indicated that social structure experienced negative changes. Young people and university graduates particularly felt that restricting social media platforms negatively affected their social interactions. This finding highlights the role of social media platforms in shaping social structures and the potential impact of restricting such platforms on societal interactions. Furthermore, the high number of participants who felt there was no significant change in information sharing suggests that access restrictions on social media platforms did not

entirely alter information-sharing habits but reflect that these platforms have become an integral part of social structures.

In terms of adaptation strategies, many participants continued to use social media despite the Instagram access restriction and turned to alternative platforms. Women, young people, and university graduates were more likely to adapt by using other platforms instead of Instagram. This finding indicates the strength of social media usage habits and the tendency for individuals to seek alternative routes when faced with restrictions. However, some participants did not develop any adaptation strategies, suggesting that dependency on social media platforms varies significantly from person to person.

In the time management sub-theme, most participants stated that the Instagram access restriction did not negatively impact their time management. This finding demonstrates that access restrictions on social media platforms do not always negatively affect daily routines and time management skills; in some cases, individuals benefited by focusing on personal tasks. This complexity reveals that access restrictions have varied and multi-dimensional effects on individuals' lives.

Regarding communication and work methods, the majority of participants indicated they did not feel the need to develop new methods. However, some participants turned to alternative communication and work methods after the Instagram restriction. This indicates that individuals' dependence on social media platforms varies, with some showing flexibility and developing alternative methods in response to restrictions.

Overall, this study reveals that the Instagram access restriction created deep and complex effects on individuals. The findings provide valuable insights into how access restrictions on social media platforms impact daily life, social interactions, and information-sharing habits. These insights help illustrate the central role of social media platforms in modern societies and improve our understanding of the potential effects of restrictions on individuals and communities.

While this study offers important findings on the impacts of the Instagram access restriction on individuals, it has also highlighted the need for broader and more in-depth research in this field. In this context, the following recommendations for future research, beneficial for both researchers and policymakers, should be considered:

Future studies should explore the economic impacts of social media restrictions across diverse cultural contexts, focusing on platforms like Instagram, which serve as significant income sources for individuals and organizations. Such research could examine how these restrictions affect advertisers and content creators by influencing ad revenue, market access, and brand visibility, providing valuable insights for policymakers and businesses to optimize social media policies for economic sustainability. Additionally, analyzing demographic differences, including factors such as age, gender, education level, and political identity, could deepen understanding of the varied effects these restrictions have on individuals. Investigating shifts to alternative social media platforms and examining how user behaviors evolve within the digital environment following restrictions is another important area of inquiry. This could reveal trends in platform migration and changes in engagement patterns. Expanding the scope to include other platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube would provide a more comprehensive perspective on the broader social and behavioral impacts of restrictions. This research could explore the behavioral, cultural, and economic changes caused by these limitations, contributing to the development of more balanced and effective social media policies while offering insights into long-term effects on individual habits and societal structures.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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