

REORIENTED HATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF  
INSTAGRAM BEAUTY INFLUENCERS



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## PLAGIRISM

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.

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## ABSTRACT

Today, new media technologies have become quite widespread and have become an area where individuals do their daily work in their lives. Individuals continue their daily practices with the help of new media technologies in a large area of their lives. With the spread of new media platforms, 'influencers' have emerged on these platforms and today individuals have begun to see new digital advertisements with influencers. In this thesis, influencers who produce content in the beauty category reshape their lives through the hate speech they receive, and their lives with hate speech are examined. The questions of this thesis are “What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media based on beauty standards?”, “What is the nature of hate speech against influencers and how are they affected by hate comments?”. As a result of the thesis, it has been observed that influencers are regularly exposed to hate speech, and these discourses are mostly related to their physical characteristics. In addition, it has been observed that influencers cope with hate speech with their unique methods.

*Keywords: Beauty Influencers, Hate speech, Lynch Culture, Social Media,*

## ÖZET

Günümüzde yeni medya teknolojileri oldukça yaygınlaşmış ve bireylerin hayatında günlük işlerini gerçekleştirdiği bir alan haline gelmiştir. Bireyler hayatlarının büyük bir alanında yeni medya teknolojilerinin yardımı ile günlük pratiklerini devam ettirmektedir. Yeni medya platformlarının yaygınlaşması ile bu platformlar üzerinde ‘influencer’lar ortaya çıkmış ve günümüzde yeni dijital reklamları bireyler influencerlar ile görmeye başlamıştır. Bu tez içerisinde güzellik kategorisi içerisinde içerik üreten influencerların aldıkları nefret söylemleri üzerinden hayatlarını yeniden şekillendirmesi ve nefret söylemi ile olan yaşamları incelenmiştir. Bu tezin soruları “Sosyal medyada güzellik standartları üzerinden nasıl bir nefret söylemiyle karşılaşılıyor?”, “Influencer'lara yönelik nefret söyleminin doğası nedir ve nefret yorumlarından nasıl etkilenmektedirler?”. Tezin sonucunda influencerların düzenli olarak nefret söylemine maruz kalmaları ile birlikte, bu söylemlerin çoğunlukla fiziksel özellikleri ile ilgili olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca influencerların nefret söylemleri ile kendilerine özgün yöntemleri ile başa çıktıkları gözlemlenmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Güzellik Influencerları, Linç Kültürü, Nefret Söylemi, Sosyal Medya*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, new media technologies have taken their place in all areas of our lives and are becoming more and more widespread. The spread of new media technologies has changed a large part of daily practices. Now, individuals can satisfy their education, consumption, production, and socialization needs with new media platforms. Thanks to the platforms that emerged with new media technologies, new concepts have begun to enter the literature. One of these concepts is an influencer. An influencer is a person who has become the face of advertisements and appeals to a certain audience. We can come across many different influencers with different content on social media platforms. With the new media, one-way communication, which is seen in traditional media, has gradually lost its effect. There is interaction in new media. Unlike traditional media, individuals can respond to the message to be given on new media. For this reason, influencers, product recommendations, or shares have great importance in consumption today.

Concepts such as hate speech and lynching culture were the concepts used and examined in research on traditional media before social media research started. Especially in our country, the Hrant Dink Foundation works on hate speech. At the same time, the concepts of hate speech and lynching culture began to be examined in social media studies. However, although it is not a very wide area yet, the concepts of hate speech and lynching culture have been examined with questions such as how it is in general. The concepts of hate speech or lynching culture were discussed without addressing the individuals exposed.

If I need to talk about the main influence behind the emergence of the thesis topic, I can mention that it originated from my own experiences with my influencer identity. Since 2017, while creating content on Instagram related to fashion, skincare, and makeup, I began to focus particularly on fashion content. During this period, I had the opportunity to observe the impact of hate comments and messages I received primarily due to my physical appearance and clothing style, both on my professional content creator account and on a personal level. Within this research, considering my own experiences, I decided that the research focus should be in this area, exploring

how beauty content creators, including myself, are affected when encountering hate speech and the reasons behind facing such discourse.

In this thesis, unlike the literature, beauty influencers who receive hate comments, their perspectives on beauty standards, and reshaping their lives with hate speech will be discussed.

The interaction of individuals in this way may not always yield positive results. Influencers' posts can receive supportive or good comments, as well as negative comments containing hate and anger emotions. In this thesis, the theories written in the history of new media and communication studies will also be examined. Although this thesis aims to examine how hate speech has power on social media. In addition to these concepts, the beauty standards imposed on influencers will be examined. Consequently, the questions of the research are “What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media over beauty standards?”, “What is the nature of hate speech against influencers?” and “How are influencers affected by hate comments?”.

The contribution of this study to the literature will be that this study, which was conducted on influencers in the areas where hate speech and lynching culture are examined, will provide a different perspective to future researchers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, detailed studies have been carried out, especially on social media. These studies continued social media and new media platforms of almost all of the lives of individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic. Especially when it is seen that the activities of the individual such as working, education, meeting his needs, and socializing are met through social media, research on social media platforms and technologies has increased, and the order of the world has begun to change.

In this thesis, the theories written in the history of new media and communication studies will also be examined. Although this thesis aims to examine how hate speech has power on social media.

### 2.1. Network as a Concept

The network concept has an important place at the point where new communication technologies have reached. From a certain point of view 'network' can even mean interacting with a person socially. Castells (2004) defined a network as,

A network is defined by the program that assigns the network its goals and its rules of performance. This program is made up of codes that include the valuation of performance and criteria for success or failure. To alter the outcomes of the network, a new program will have to be installed in the network – from outside the network. Networks cooperate or compete with each other. Cooperation is based on the ability to communicate between networks. This ability depends on the existence of codes of translation and interoperability between the networks, and access to connection points. (Castells, 2004, p.3)

The concept of the network appears in both social and natural sciences. When explaining the concept of a network Van Dijk (2006) states that “A network can be defined as a collection of links between elements of a unit. The elements are called nodes. Units are often called systems. The smallest number of elements is three and the smallest number of links is two. A single link between two elements is called a relation(ship). Networks are a mode of organization of complex systems in nature and society.”(Dijk,2006, p.24)

In addition to that, Van Dijk examined networks within social levels and evaluated them as four levels. At the first level, it showed individual relations. The concept puts the communication and interaction of the individual first. The second level showed the group and organizational structure. While Van Dijk was looking at social levels, he progressed with a pattern, and when we examine all the levels, the pattern will emerge better. In the third level, he showed social relations. And finally, at the fourth level, he showed global relations. If we come to what I mean by Van Dijk's pattern, I can explain this pattern as follows. The individual first starts to establish bilateral interactions and then expands these relationships and interactions. With its first expansion, it begins to penetrate groups and organizational structures. Within these groups and organizational structures, their relations expand and begin to exist within a certain society. Finally, it begins to globalize within the society it is in. It can be said that the levels Dijk stated are a relationship pattern from small to large. (Dijk, 2006, p.26-27)

The biggest reason why we can understand or interpret Van Dijk's social levels better now may be new media technologies. Especially with the increase in the use of the internet, groups and organizational structures can become more global, and even individuals can increase their communication to more global levels. At this point, when we make a comparison with the statements of Castell (2004), Dijk (2006) examines networks in terms of social level and reveals that there is an interaction system that is gradually opening up, while Castells (2004) stated that networks cooperate or compete with each other.

After the concept of network, we need to examine the development of internet and web technologies. The development of Internet and web technologies explains social media systems and will lead me to give information about influencers, which is the main subject of this thesis.

### **2.1.1. Development of Internet and Web Technologies**

First, we should briefly talk about the history of the Internet. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union launched the first space satellite, Sputnik, on October 4, 1957. Later, the US defense department launched the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) against Sputnik. (Almagor-Cohen, 2011, p.46). Leonard Kleinrock, the father of Modern Networking, was at the founding of ARPANET and stated that ARPANET would be for researchers only. (Almagor-Cohen, 2011, p.47) ARPANET began to evolve into the Internet as time went on, and the term 'Internet' was first used in a 1974 article by Vint Cerf and Robert Kahn about the TCP protocol. TCP/IP Protocol is important to the internet and many people have seen Cerf as the father of the internet. (Almagor -Cohen, 2011, p. 50,) Then, in the 1980s, the internet was commercialized. In 1984, the Defense Department split ARPANET into two. ARPANET will be going to be used for advanced research and MILNET will be going to serve for military purposes. (Almagor- Cohen, 2011, p. 52,)

By the late 1980s, many people were using email, but the internet was not in the public eye. But all that would change. In the 1980s, the internet became more and more widespread and started to grow rapidly. (Almagor- Cohen , 2011, p. 53) Of course, the internet had to evolve as it became used in daily life. As mentioned before Of course, this development started slowly before, as in the history of the internet.

With Web 2.0, many applications that you currently use on mobiles such as Facebook, Youtube, Google, and Skype. Web 2.0 includes social networking and collective intelligence. As mentioned before, it ensures basic needs in the life of individuals such as education, work, and social life.

With these developments and new Technologies, there is a new concept of media, which is new media. Although new media are seen as the equivalent of the Internet, this view causes many problems. The Internet is a non-physical human interaction with certain possibilities between computers connected over a simple network. Each of these possibilities is a unique condition for interaction. (Yzer,S Southwell ,2008, p-8-9)

With the globalization of new communication technologies, communication has become a constantly developing and renewing process. Internet and communication technologies have entered the process of continuous development and renewal at this point and continue to develop day by day.

### **2.1.2. Network Society**

Castells (2004) stated that “A network society is a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies.” (Castells, 2004, p.3)

Castells (2004), Network explained society as societies whose social structure is based on networks and powered by information and communication technologies. Networks work with binary logic: inclusion /exclusion. In the network, the distance between nodes is close to zero. Networks essentially follow the logic of small countries' priorities; It connects the whole network and communication network and follows a certain protocol. The network extension is unlimited and there is no access unless the network changes. Here, Castells explained that networks establish a connection with a certain protocol, while at the same time, he mentioned that networks are at the basis of life and stated this as follows. Castells (2004) states that “Networks, however, are not specific to twenty-first-century societies or, for that matter, to human organization. Networks constitute the fundamental pattern of life, of all kinds of life.” (Castells, 2004, p.4)

Just as Castells said, the new social structure is expanding with the network society. Because people now communicate without the limitations of time and space and introduce their own culture to other cultures with their content or the people they meet. Culture no longer needs to be there to be known. In this case, it shows quite clearly the impact of new communication tools on societies.

At this point, Van Dijk's views on the Information society are important. Van Dijk made his statement about the Information society as follows: “In an information society the information intensity of all activities becomes so high that this leads to:

- an organization of society based on science, rationality, and reflexivity.

- an economy with all values and sectors, even the agrarian and industrial sectors, increasingly characterized by information production.
- a labor market with a majority of functions largely or completely based on tasks of information processing requiring knowledge and higher education (hence, the alternative term knowledge society);
- a culture dominated by media and information products with their signs, symbols, and meanings.” (Dijk, 2006, p.19)

Van Dijk (2006) states that “The network society concept emphasizes the form and organization of information processing and exchange. An infrastructure of social and media networks takes care of this. So the network society can be defined as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization at all levels. Increasingly, these networks link all units or parts of this formation. In Western societies, the individual linked by networks is becoming the basic unit of the network society. In eastern societies, this might still be the group linked by networks.” (Dijk, 2006, p.19)

According to Van Dijk, the concept of network society is a certain organizational form and may vary according to society. Van Dijk made this distinction between Western and Eastern societies. While explaining this situation through information processing and exchange, we can see the use of social media today. The exchange that Van Dijk mentioned can be interpreted not only as the shopping habit we see today but also as an exchange of information.

As Van Dijk (2006) states, one of the best features of social media is that individuals can communicate and find themselves in the places where they belong, without being stuck with the limits of time, space, or social limits.

We can see several different approaches to the concept of the network society. These approaches will be explained in detail in the next section.

### 2.1.3. Approaches to Network Society

While referring to the concept of the network society, it is necessary to consider the approaches of McLuhan, Castells, and Dijk. As mentioned in the concept of network, Van Dijk divided networks into four different levels and these are individual relations, group and organizational relations, social relations, and global relations.

McLuhan (1962) in his article “The Medium is the Message” stated, “In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.” (McLuhan, M., 1962, p.203) McLuhan thinks that with new technology and automation new patterns of human relationships can be formed. But McLuhan (1962) also states that “The restructuring of human work and an association was shaped by the technique of fragmentation that is the essence of machine technology. The essence of automation technology is the opposite. It is integral and decentralist in depth, just as the machine was fragmentary, centralist and superficial in its patterning of human relationships.” (McLuhan, 1962, p.203)

As can be seen, McLuhan stated that human relations are restructured with machine technology. However, he argued that automation technologies are the opposite of machine technologies.

McLuhan (1968) stated that “Now that we live in an electric environment of information coded not just in visual but in other sensory modes, it’s natural that we now have new perceptions that destroy the monopoly and priority of visual space, making this older space look as bizarre as a medieval coat of arms over the door of the chemistry lab.” (McLuhan, et.al., 1968, p.7) At this point, McLuhan showed that automation technologies are different from machine technology, as stated above, and that information technologies are coded because we live in an electrical environment are not only sensory mode and make changes with a new perspective.

Although McLuhan is a pioneer on the subject, we should also examine the perspectives of Van Dijk and Castells on the issue of network society. Van Dijk (2006) states that “Examples of this cutting through all levels of networks are

individuals who pass the borders of the units they belong to establish links with other individuals in groups, organizations, and societies they do not belong to, in this way creating their structures. The same goes for organizations passing the borders of their societies or nation states.” (Dijk, 2006, p.28)

Van Dijk(2006) stated that the network society has crossed all levels and structured itself in the regions where individuals belong. At this point, he stated that not only individuals but also organizations exceed not only social but also state borders. To explain, with the network society, individuals can exist in the communities that they feel they belong to, regardless of where they are, and these communities can be in every region, not just a region.

Van Dijk (2006) rejects a formalistic and superficial approach to the network society, instead, he defends a moderate notion of a network approach. He explains the moderate notion of a network “This means that, first, not only are relations stressed, but also the characteristics of the units they link. The most interesting things occur when relations and the characteristics of units come into conflict. This happens, for example, when the new digital communication networks, with relations transcending space and time in the global 24-hour economy, collide with the limitations of the biological human organism (unit), with its daily rhythms and routines or needs for rest that cannot fulfill the expectations of the technology and economy concerned.” (Dijk, 2006, p.28)

At the same time, Van Dijk also touched on the radical network approach “A second qualification of the radical network approach is that, in this book, networks are not supposed to be the basic units of contemporary society as they are in the view of Manuel Castells (1996, 2000, 2001). Instead, these basic units are held to be individuals, households, groups, and organizations increasingly linked by social and media networks. In modern Western societies, the individual is becoming the most important basic unit of society. In others, this frequently is the family, kinship group, or local community. The combination of social and media networks produced by both organizational and technological innovation forms the all-embracing network structure of modern societies. This combination justifies the use of the strong metaphor of networks shaping the nervous system of advanced high-tech societies.” (Dijk, 2006, p.28) With his radical network approach, Van Dijk opposed Manuel Castells and

stated that networks are not basic units, while he stated that basic units consist of individuals, households, groups, and organizations connected by social media.

Van Dijk also referred to the characteristics of the network society as follows. He said that the social units of the Network Society were fragmented and dispersed. By this, he means that the density of contacts and ties within these units is relatively lower compared to mass society. Face-to-face contact is still, in many respects, the most significant type of communication in the network society. But, over time, mediated communication also partially replaces and augments it. (Dijk, 2006, p.36)

Castells (2004) stated that,

The ability of networks to introduce new actors and new contents in the process of social organization, with relative independence of the power centers, increased over time with technological change, and, more precisely, with the evolution of communication technologies. This was particularly the case with the possibility of relying on a distributed energy network that characterized the advent of the industrial revolution: railways, ocean liners, and the telegraph constituted the first infrastructure for a quasi-global network with self-reconfiguring capacity. However, industrial society (both in its capitalist and its statist versions) was predominantly structured around large-scale, vertical production organizations and extremely hierarchical state apparatuses, in some instances evolving into totalitarian systems. (Castells, 2004, p.5)

Castells states that technology creates new processes, actors, and contents with rapid development. He associated this situation with industrial society and its development into a totalitarian system. "Networks became the most efficient organizational form as a result of three major features of networks that benefited from the new technological environment: flexibility, scalability, and survivability." (Castells, 2004, p.5) Flexibility shows that networks are constantly changing their environment and have constantly changing factors. Scalability indicates continuous expansion and contraction. Survivability, on the other hand, explains that it has no center and a large area, and networks can withstand any attack.

With the rapid development of communication technologies, we can see the change in societies. Even today, with the constant change in social media technologies, we can observe serious variability in societies even within a year. However, when we look at the history of internet technologies, Castells explained the transformation of society into an information society as follows.

At the core of the technological change that unleashed the power of networks was the transformation of information and communication technologies, based on the microelectronics revolution that took place in the 1940s and 1950s. It constituted the foundation of a new technological paradigm, consolidated in the 1970s, mainly in the United States, and rapidly diffused throughout the world, ushering in what I have characterized, descriptively, as the information age. Because of available electronic information and communication technologies, the network society can deploy itself fully, transcending the historical limits of networks as forms of social organization and interaction. This approach is different from the conceptual framework that defines our societies as information or knowledge societies. (Castells, 2004, p.6)

Castells (2004) also states that,

So, what is new, both technologically and socially, is a society built around microelectronics-based information technologies. The early emphasis on information technology, semantically separated from communication, reflected, in fact, the logic of stand-alone electronic devices and computers. This is outdated, at least since the deployment of the Arpanet, more than three decades ago. It is also a reflection of the division of the world of communication technology between computers, telecommunications, and broadcast media. Again, this is a distinction that has a relative justification in the business and institutions that organize each domain but is senseless in technological terms. ( Castells, 2004, p.7)

As mentioned above, Castells also mentioned that the changes in society are faster and more continuous with social media. At the same time, when we look at technological and social developments, Castells, who sees that societies are now based on microelectronics, stated that information technology is separated from

communication. While describing new media features, we must keep in mind the concept of the network society. We can see the variability in social communication since the controls on the Internet.

Contrary to these views, there are critical approaches to issues such as freedom of expression and media manipulation in the network society. While emphasizing that media organizations are important organizations struggling for independence from the government, Schiller emphasized that the protection of this independence is very important for the functioning of democratic societies. Schiller (1973) stated that,

When they deliberately produce messages that do not correspond to the realities of social existence, the media managers become mind managers. Messages that intentionally create a false sense of reality and produce a consciousness that cannot comprehend or wilfully reject the actual conditions of life, personal or social manipulative messages.(Schiller,1973, p.1)

Overall, Schiller's work emphasized the importance of control over communication and culture, and the need to resist the concentration of media ownership and the promotion of consumerism in contemporary society.

Although not with a critical perspective like Schiller, Turkle focused on how technology affects the connection between people, how social interactions are shaped in digital environments, and the relationships of individuals with digital tools. In her studies, she emphasized that digital technology has both positive and negative effects on communication and relationships. Turkle's (2011) studies have concentrated on the ways that digital technology might thwart the capacity to establish close and meaningful relationships with people. She makes the case that being constantly connected via social media and other digital platforms might result in a feeling of being "alone together," where we are physically present with people but emotionally cut off.

According to Turkle (2011), people love new technologies and these technologies make parents and children more comfortable in both work and education. (Turkle, S., 2011, p.152) Also Turkle (2011) stated that "Connectivity offers new possibilities for experimenting with identity and, particularly in adolescence, the sense of a free space, what Erik Erikson called the moratorium. This is a time, relatively

consequence-free, for doing what adolescents need to do: fall in and out of love with people and ideas. Real life does not always provide this space, but the Internet does.” (Turkle, 2011, p.152)

We use social networking to be “ourselves,” but our online performances take on lives of their own. Our online selves develop distinct personalities. Sometimes we see them as our “better selves.” As we invest in them, we want to take credit for them. (Turkle, 2011, p.160)

While Turkle stated that it is possible to have different personalities on social media and stay away from real life, she also mentioned the game called "Second Life" in her book and touched on the different selves of people. as opposed to McLuhan, Turkle (2011) states that

The network’s effects on today’s young people are paradoxical. Networking makes it easier to play with identity (for example, by experimenting with an avatar that is interestingly different from you) but harder to leave the past behind, because the Internet is forever. The network facilitates separation (a cell phone allows children greater freedoms) but also inhibits it (a parent is always on tap). Teenagers turn away from the “real-time” demands of the telephone and disappear into role-playing games they describe as “communities” and worlds.” And yet, even as they are committed to a new life in the ether, many exhibit an unexpected nostalgia. They start to resent the devices that force them into performing their profiles; they long for a world in which personal information is not taken from them automatically, just as the cost of doing business. (Turkle, 2011, p.169)

Turkle's work emphasizes the possible downsides and detrimental effects of digital communication in a networked society, in contrast to McLuhan's emphasis on the positive possibilities of new technology to improve human communication.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere has been influential in political and social theory, and has become an important point in describing the democratic participation of the public and freedom of expression in communication studies. The

public sphere, according to Habermas (1991), is a crucial forum for democratic discourse and communication, but it is also becoming more colonized by influential groups like the media and big business marketers. Habermas (1991) in his work states that,

Only this dialectic of progressive “socialization” of the state simultaneously with an increasing “state-ification” of society gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere- the separation of state and society. Between the two and out of the two, as it were, a re-politicized social sphere emerged to which the distinction between “public” and “private” could not be usefully applied.(Habermas, 1991, p. 142)

Habermas made an economic criticism and argued that the more economically powerful actors have a higher tendency to use political tools, and the blurring of the border between the market and the state will cause social inequality.

#### **2.1.4 Digital Culture**

Communication, which started from the beginning of human existence, strengthens the stable structure of societies. With communication, societies, and cultures exist and the culture continues to spread thanks to communication. Society exists for a long time by transferring its culture. The media allows people to constantly receive news from their environment and the world in general.

(Büyükbaykal, C. 2015, p. 636) With the new media, new values have emerged. At this point, developments in communication studies have come to the point of shaping societies and guiding the world. (Büyükbaykal, 2015, p. 637)

As stated above, culture spreads and survives through communication. However, anthropologists have had different views on the definition of the concept of culture. According to Edward Tylor (1981, s. 18; Billington, Strawbridge, Greensides ve Fitzsimons, 2010, s. 34), culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral values, laws, customs, and other skills and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Bronislaw Malinowski ” (Burke, 2008, p. 41), on the other hand, defined culture as “artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values inherited from the previous generation”. (Yalçınkaya, 2016, p. 598). With these explanations, it is understandable that culture is the inherited artifacts

transferred from generation to generation within the society in which the individual lives. There are certain cultural elements in every society.

While digital culture can be seen as a part of the general societal system based on transformations in the economic base of society; it also signifies a process of transformation of new cultural forms. Digital culture not only continues the old trends but also carries the innovative interactions of the technological infrastructures that make up the superstructure. Digital culture is a recent term describing the rapid impact of digital devices such as the digital revolution, computers, and communications/telecommunications. With the formation of the digital environment, man and his universe have changed forever. Digital culture is associated with the acceleration of social change and technological transformations that take place in a surprisingly short time. Digital culture; access to the universal, affirmation of identity, catching of belonging, gaining meaning of the individual and/or information in a larger time and space. (Yalçinkaya, 2016, p. 603).

As mentioned above, digital culture not only continues the old trends but also carries out innovative interactions, individuals can be global. With this, individuals do not need a time scale or a certain location to communicate and take information or give information.

As opposed to these views Mattelart (2000), strong interests exploit media images and communication technology to promote a homogenized and Westernized culture, undermining the variety and autonomy of other cultures.

Mattelart (2000) states that,

The integration of economies and communication systems spawns new disparities between countries and regions and between social groups; it is to these logics of exclusion that the concept of world communication refers to. Contrary to what the egalitarian and globalist representation of the planet suggests, it serves as a tool for analyzing the globalization of the system in progress, without fetishizing it, by restoring its historical concreteness. It reconnects with the history of world trade and the social and economic disparities accompanying it. (Mattelart, 2000, p.98)

While Mattelart stated that the above-mentioned situation will lead to low-paid jobs, he also stated that there will be metropolitan nations in high-tech regions. He thought that networks would be active for these remote points to unite the world economy, and the lower points would be open to marginalization or abandonment.

According to Mattelart (2000), the advertising industry seeks to create a broad international community of consumers, considering that differences in lifestyles and living standards are more important than geographical proximity and connection with a national tradition. "Considering that variations in lifestyles and standards of living are more important than geographical proximity and belonging to a national tradition, the advertising industry strives to construct vast transnational communities of consumers who all share the same "socio-styles," forms of consumption and cultural practices."(Mattelart, 2000,p.99)As quoted by Mattelart (2000), the advertising industry strives to create a large community of transnational consumers who share similar lifestyles, consumption habits, and cultural practices regardless of people's geographic location. This shows the power of advertising and marketing in the globalization process. With the effect of advertising, consumers tend to be attached to similar socio-styles and consumption patterns by transcending cultural boundaries.

At this point, Mattelart states that there will be a structural inequality within the marketing targets of topologies. According to him, "The reproduction of strong tendencies toward segregation between data-rich and data-poor groups, a risk highlighted even in the most official documents, refers both to these groups' connection to the world information infrastructure and the compilation of their stocks of data."(Mattelart,2000, p.100)

Mattelart argues that the rise of digital communication has been driven by economic interests and has led to new forms of inequality and domination, rather than promoting democracy and participation as many proponents of digital culture suggest.

#### **2.1.5. Social Media Environment**

Social media platforms are constantly used today and have minimized the impact of major changes in human life, especially since the Covid -19 pandemic. According to the TUIK, The most used social media and messaging applications by

individuals were WhatsApp with 82.0%, YouTube with 67.2%, and Instagram with 57.6%. When the most used social media and messaging applications are examined by gender; It was observed that men use WhatsApp at 85.9%, YouTube at 70.8%, and Facebook applications at 61.5%, while women use WhatsApp at 78.1%, YouTube with 63.7% and Instagram applications with 55.9%.

([https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Hanehalki-Bilisim-Teknolojileri-\(BT\)-Kullanim-Arastirmasi-2022-45587](https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Hanehalki-Bilisim-Teknolojileri-(BT)-Kullanim-Arastirmasi-2022-45587))

As mentioned before, the internet, the web, and new media technologies are constantly developing. Social media is constantly evolving. A new type of application or a new platform is emerging every day. Social media is a platform used by almost every individual in the world right now. Social media focuses on the social needs of the individual. The internet, which has emerged with the increase in technological developments, has also brought the formation of social media. All the revolutions on the internet have also affected and changed the structure of the media. (Nisbet, 2021, p. 12)

We do the act of socializing physically before social media, by looking at a screen. With these applications, we can talk, message, and even communicate with our family and friends, regardless of time and place. Limitations have been removed with social media and more and more people have started to use it every day. Social media; participation, openness, speaking, communities, and connectivity. Social media removes barriers as much as possible in accessing and using content. The connectivity feature of social media, which is extremely plain and simple to use, is like the hypertext feature of the new media. (Şevik , 2015, p.22)

Social media also has numerous platforms. For the continuity of social media, there must be interaction. Social media encourages individuals to create a community and network for continuity. Perhaps the only common point of all these tools, in which different technologies and different methods are used, is that they all provide a high level of sharing service to their users. These are simply listed as wikis, blogs, content-sharing sites, micro-blogging, and social networks. (Şevik, 2015, p. 26)

As mentioned before, social media is constantly evolving. While social media was about communication in the beginning, it later evolved into communicating and

connecting through photo, video, tweet, or blog sharing. Today, social media is mostly filled with video sharing, and even communication has started with the sharing of videos. While social media has developed continuously, there are changes and developments on social media platforms every day. These developments are not only for the needs of people but also because of the competition between social media platforms.

Simultaneously, social media has transcended its initial purpose of personal socialization and expanded into professional realms. Nowadays, social media serves as a platform for both personal and business purposes. On a personal level, this shift is exemplified by the rise of influencers, while in the professional realm, social media is utilized as a valuable tool for businesses. Every user on social media can use a professional account and share as they wish. Today, many people can gain interaction by using the features of social media platforms to appeal to their audience. Many people who have their audience have started to earn their own money with affiliate marketing and even become well-known people by collaborating with brands, even playing in advertisements in traditional media. Professional accounts can be opened in any field. Influencers can vary in different types as their main content area such as fitness, fashion, beauty, food, etc.

Social media concepts are divided into three. While a group of researchers looked at the Internet from a mainstream, some thought the critical. Apart from these, the third part is critical and evaluates its mainstream and critical aspects without falling into technological determinism. McLuhan comes to mind first when looking at thinkers approaching with a cyber-utopian point of view. McLuhan (Varol&Varol, 2019, p. 138-142) argues that there is a link between imagination and technology, and that imagination is the only way to understand the world. Based on this, he emphasized that people who will live in the age of technology will be more conscious than people who live in the written culture. Because, according to McLuhan, written culture distanced people from each other and ensured their individualization, thus destroying their consciousness. For this reason, he emphasized that "media is the message" in his works. McLuhan's "Media Ecology" theory exalts media technologies too much and puts invention above human labor and even humans. (Nisbet, 2021, p.40-41)

Castells (2008) emphasizes that the digital environment is an ambiguous space for the power as well as for the users, as he said in the conclusion part of his book “Information Age”, he highly exalts the cyber environment and the globalization it creates and states that cyber networks unite the whole world and distinguish differences implying that it is eliminated. It describes the environment created by new media technologies as a democratic platform where everyone can participate. Based on this, he thinks that the "power of flows" in the cyber environment will defeat the power that creates political and economic pressure. (Castells, 2008, p.78)

Cyberspace did not create a completely different social structure as claimed, although technological innovations have changed human life, they have not made the structure of society completely different, and social structures have transferred themselves to the cyber environment. On the other hand, as Castells (2008) claimed, social media especially contributed a lot to organizing horizontally against social problems.

New media is abundant with ideas and information, leading to the formation of interest-based communities for users who struggle to keep up. Consequently, this accentuates individuals' group identities and contributes to polarization.

At this point, individuals have the opportunity to join and interact with groups on social media platforms where they feel a sense of belonging. Working mostly on social networking sites, Danah Boyd focuses on the intersections of society and where young people position social media in their lives. According to Boyd,

Teens are passionate about finding their place in society. What is different as a result of social media is that teens' perennial desire for social connection and autonomy is now being expressed in the networked public. Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. (Boyd, 2014, p.8)

As Boyd (2014) suggests, individuals find their place within social media through their impulse for socialization. Within networked communities, they discover

where they belong to express themselves. However, at this point, in areas characterized by the digital gap where internet usage is limited, individuals face access limitations within networked societies, which prevent them from finding their rightful place on these platforms.

MutluBinark (2015) talked about the concept of the “digital gap”, which shows that inequalities exist, in his research on internet usage and said, “Internet usage rate in the Southeast Anatolia region, which is at the end of the same data as the Internet usage rate in Istanbul and Marmara regions says that there is a difference of almost 20% between at the same time, the statements that the user has all the control in the social media do not reflect the truth as it can be seen.”. (Binark, 2015, p.11)

When explaining the Digital Gap, Binark (2015) not only addressed this inequality but also highlighted the power of information for users who have access to social media. Therefore, it emphasized that everything appearing on social media may not be true or could be distorted. At this point, individuals should question the information rather than immediately spreading it when they come across any piece of information on social media, as the speed of accessing information has increased, allowing users to access multiple layers within a single piece of information.

The most important factor in drowning the individual in information has been the 'hyper textuality' feature of the new media. The feature of this text in new media is that it is a clickable text. Thus, this endless text, which has no end, allowed the user to direct the information. Now, the user can switch to a page containing more comprehensive information about the content, from the links and tags in the text of the news, whichever part of the news he is interested in, for example. Thus, while increasing the interaction, the user does not have to spend time on parts that are not interesting. (Nisbet, 2021, p.46)

As mentioned earlier, social media can be used both personally and for business purposes. Nowadays, social media platforms serve not only as a means of socializing but also as a platform for various daily practices. Fuchs (2014) supported Marx's view on ideology. Fuchs examines social media platforms and thinks that these platforms are not only for ‘socializing’ they have also the same kind of business

model. They use this model for targeted advertising and turn their user's data into a commodity. (Fuchs,2014, p.245)

As seen above, Fuchs (2014) has argued that social media is not only for socializing but also functions as a business model. Fuchs suggests that this model is utilized for targeting advertising to the audience and reaching potential customers.

Fuchs (2014) states that "In concrete work, human subjects equipped with labor-power apply instruments to objects to create products that satisfy human needs. On Facebook, labor power is predominantly informational work. Information is a threefold process of cognition, communication, and cooperation. On Facebook, users publish information about their life, which means they objectify their subjective knowledge that is grounded in their experiences in society in such a way that they create and update their user profiles."(Fuchs, 2014,p. 250)What Fuchs explains here is that social media platforms such as Facebook have certain valuations over their users.

Fuchs elaborated on this issue as follows:

Value on Facebook means the average time that users spend on the platform. The law of value on Facebook means that the more time a certain group spends on the platform, the more valuable the corresponding data commodity gets. A group that on average spends a lot of minutes per day on Facebook (e.g. the group of those aged 15–25) compared to another group (e.g. the group of those aged 75–85) constitutes a more valuable data commodity because (a) it has a higher average labor/online time per day that generates more data that can be sold and (b) it spends more time online, during which targeted ads are presented to this group.(Fuchs,2014, p.258)

We can summarize the topic discussed by Fuchs (2014) as follows. While individuals spend certain intervals of their days on Facebook, they are the ones generating all the interactions, yet it is the time spent on Facebook that increases its value. In this sense, individuals are essentially providing a certain labor force, and in return, their interactions are collected as data and presented to them as advertisements. The interactions provided by the user, which represent their labor force, lead to the appearance of targeted ads. As a result, the user becomes a consumer again. This

means that the user themselves are the ones generating the advertisements that will appear in front of them and performing the actions that will drive them to become consumers once more.

Today, individuals' consumption habits within social media applications, driven by a desire to showcase themselves, contribute to their continuous engagement in a consumer-driven society. The individual aims to deliver the products (clothes, cars, houses, decorations, jewelry, etc.) that s/he has consumed, to the audience, by presenting them on display. For this reason, consumption turns into a wheel and continues in pursuit of the individual's pleasure and feelings. (Ünlü, Filan, 2021, p.40)

The simultaneous presence of the user in both the producer and consumer roles occurs through engagement on social media. The user positions themselves within a specific space on social media by interacting with their posts or engaging with others' posts according to their preferences. At this point, individuals who are users of social media can access information, news, or consumption-related content more rapidly compared to traditional media.

The multiple and independent information networks that the virtual world offers to its users and the possibility of sharing the desired posts by creating an agenda have also ended the monopoly position of traditional mass media in terms of news, information, and entertainment functions. The content created by traditional media devices in the form of public and monopoly broadcasting was presented in a form by different authorities, and then the standardized content productions offered by commercial publishers under the name of diversity or the position of being the only source for the information desired to be reached ended with the widespread use of social media platforms. (Ercan, 2020, p.7)

As mentioned earlier, with the increase in social media usage, the speed of information dissemination has also accelerated. However, at this point, it is unknown how accurate the disseminated information is or to what extent it may have undergone manipulation.

It is quite possible to encounter misleading information frequently, since it is quite amenable to manipulation due to its structure and does not go through any

control mechanism. This situation is directly related to the competence and hardware that the users use this network in question. Therefore, this transformation towards the mass media is open to be considered as the evil history of media tools and technologies. Because, in every period of its existence, the media has been one of the first areas that both political and economic authorities want to seize with its propaganda, manipulation, ideological apparatus, marketing, simulation tool, drugs, and the tsarism of capitalism. With the instant feedback transformation offered by new media technologies as of the current period, social media tools provide a test environment for whether some news is real or not and can offer a discussion environment or opportunities to comment. (Ercan, 2020, p.8)

The interpretability and multiple sourcing of information and news disseminated through social media platforms lead to its uncontrolled spread. Unlike traditional media, news circulated on social media platforms has lost its local nature.

Because social media provides the transmission of messages by reaching the target audience that cannot be reached within personal possibilities. Therefore, new media technologies have also touched the locality and individuality that traditional media tools have forgotten, causing one of the main functions of mass media to be revived. All these innovations that come with the integration of technology with media tools have not been shaped in text or podcast form, but at the same time, live broadcast services made by traditional mass media with giant tools, new media tools, and micro-level reduce the user's environment, the images he wants to convey live with all other users or followers. (Ercan, 2020, p.8)

When we evaluate it in this way, social media platforms give the user the right to interact. Live broadcast features or communication features are very similar to traditional media but are faster and timeless.

Social media is constantly evolving. A new type of application or a new platform is emerging every day. Social media is a platform used by almost every individual in the world right now. Social media focuses on the social needs of the individual. The internet, which has emerged with the increase in technological developments, has also brought the formation of social media. All the revolutions on

the internet have also affected and changed the structure of the media. (Nisbet, 2021, p. 12)

With social media platforms, we can talk, message, and even communicate with our family and friends, regardless of time and place. Limitations have been removed with social media and more and more people have started to use it every day. Social media; participation, openness, speaking, communities, and connectivity. Social media removes barriers as much as possible in accessing and using content. The connectivity feature of social media, which is extremely plain and simple to use, is like the hypertext feature of the new media. (Şevik, 2015, p.22)

When people enter the screening on social media, they can share every moment: the food they eat, the places they visit, the living room of their house, etc. Paul Virilio(1984) calls this processes the "industrialization of vision". In this context, today, the show has a significant impact on consumption. Individuals have begun to make their consumption for demonstration purposes. Consumption has left its place to show in social media environments and the concept of conspicuous consumption has taken its place in the literature in this sense. (Ünlü, Filan, 2021, p.43)

#### **2.1.5.1. Influencer in Social Media**

Influencers are people who have the power to influence the purchasing decision of others because of their actual or perceived authority, knowledge, location, and relationship, as well as brand advocates and niche supporters. (Influencer Marketing, 2020). Social media influencers can reach an audience through the use of blogs, tweets, and other social media channels. represents a new independent and third-party supporter shaping their positions. Through sites such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, social media influencers create content that promotes certain brands to gain followers and brand awareness. (Gedik, 2020, p.366)

Influencers are categorized in certain ways according to the number of followers. If we examine Micro and Macro influencers, those with 1,000-10,000 followers are called Micro-influencers, and those with 10,000-1,000,000 followers are called Macro influencers. (Demirbilek&Sezer,2021, p.69-71)

Social media celebrities refer to individuals who become famous for their social media presence, as opposed to traditional celebrities who are famous for their movies, music, and TV shows. (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu, 2019: 3) When examining the effects of this new type of celebrity, it was found that consumers had a stronger attachment to them and perceived them as more authentic. The perceived authenticity and deep commitment of these unconventional stars result in higher purchase intent of the products they support because consumers identify with them and try to imitate them. (Gedik, 2020, p. 366)

While explaining the concept of influencers, as seen in this section, influencers are now categorized with certain data as their follower counts or engagement counts. In the following sections, the collaborations and marketing processes of influencers will be explained.

#### **2.1.5.2. Influencer Marketing**

Influencer marketing is a new strategy that is increasingly being adopted by businesses. According to Wong (2014), influencer marketing can be defined as a form of marketing that identifies and targets people who have an impact on potential buyers in general. But having an influence is more than having a large number of followers; The relationship between the influencer and his followers is about the influencer's expertise and credibility. (Gedik, 2020, p. 369)

Influencer marketing is carried out with various tools in social media. These tools are increasing day by day and they are preferred more and more. According to CreatorDen's 2020 research results, Instagram is the most used medium in Influencer Marketing. (<https://creatorden.com/2020-creatorden-influencer-marketing-inceleme-siyilini-en-iyilerini-acikliyoruz/>) At the same time, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Blogs follow. YouTube, on the other hand, stands out in marketing with video. In addition, YouTube averages 2 billion. Explaining it to the user provides a better explanation of complex issues to the followers. YouTube increases interaction by providing access to more cosmopolitan groups of people. (Demirbilek, & Sezer, 2021, p. 64-65)

As mentioned above, every social media platform has more than millions of users. One of the biggest factors especially for brands to turn to influencer marketing is that the brand only pays a fee and sends products. After this point, brands do not need to spend on shooting, studio, clothing, and make-up, because all of these processes belong to influencers. Brands reach a larger audience by working with influencers. At the same time, influencers who produce quality content begin to appear in front of brands and attract their attention over time. Influencers who establish reliable relationships with brands can establish longer-term collaborations by strengthening their ties. (İyitanır, 2020, p. 13)

The position of influencers and the regulations they need to adhere to can vary in Turkey. Given that the research is focused within Turkey, it would be appropriate to include this information.

According to the report by CreatorDen, among the most preferred social media platforms by brands, Instagram takes the lead with 65%, followed by YouTube with 30%. In 2018, within Turkey, companies mostly preferred a budget range of 50,000 to 100,000 Turkish Liras, accounting for 31% of the total budget allocation for influencer marketing. The second most preferred budget range was 100,000 to 250,000 Turkish Liras, constituting 30% of the allocation. Additionally, 6% of companies opted for campaigns with budgets of 500,000 Turkish Liras or more. Presently, the influencer marketing market has surpassed 1.5 billion dollars globally and has grown to around 30 million Turkish Liras in Turkey as well (webrazzi.com). (Canöz ,Gülmez, Eroğlu, 2020, p.79)

Furthermore, according to the reports from INFLOW Network and HypeAuditor, a significant majority (7.2%) of influencers in Turkey create lifestyle content. Other popular content categories include entertainment and humor (6.1%), photography (5.2%), and family-related content (4.9%). (pazarlamaturkiye.com, 2022)

Upon reviewing reports concerning influencer marketing on social media, as shown above, studies have been conducted on preferred content types and allocated marketing budgets. However, no report has been found within these studies that examines the gender distribution of influencers.

As mentioned before, influencers in Turkey need to be aware of specific legal responsibilities while sharing content and ensure compliance with these obligations.

In May 2021, the Directorate General for Consumer Protection and Market Surveillance, affiliated with the Ministry of Commerce, introduced the "Guide on Commercial Advertising and Unfair Commercial Practices by Social Media Influencers." This guide established legal responsibilities for influencers. It mandates that influencer advertisements be transparent and comprehensible. In cases where influencers receive financial gain or benefits such as free or discounted products or services in exchange for their posts, they are required to clearly indicate this using hashtags like #Ad, #Sponsor, #Collaboration, #Partnership, #Gift, or with sentences that explicitly express the commercial partnership. (newslabturkey.org, 2021)

Influencer marketing can be examined with the Fisherman's Model in media research. Because, as mentioned above, there is a high rate of users and an active influencer marketing system in influencer marketing.

The first step in Fisherman's Model(Ojuri, 2018: 17). is to identify the demographics of the targeted customers, the communities, and the potential threats and opportunities these communities contain. The next step is the selection of the influencer with the widest reach and the transfer of the message that the brand determined in the first stage wants to convey to its customers. (Demirbilek&Sezer, 2021, p.74)

Although science invalidates Fisherman's model because it is based on influencers, it can be an important component of influencer marketing strategy when used only as a domain. On the other hand, the Customer-Centric Impact Model is that it's not a direct reversal of Fisherman's model. When the customer is placed at the center of the Customer-Centered Impact Model, a completely new universe emerges. When looking at the flow direction of communication, differences are observed in both models. In Fisherman's model, communication goes toward the social graph of the influencer; In the Customer Centric Impact model, communication is going towards the social graph of the customer; In the Customer Centric Impact Model,

communication is the direction of influence from the players in the Customer's social graph. (Demirbilek&Sezer, 2021, p.76)

In parallel with this model emphasizing customers, Influencer marketing is a form of relationship building that can be very beneficial for brands that want to expand their target audience and convert them into loyal customers through trust and authenticity.

“Accordingly, there are two types of influencer marketing that should be mentioned. (Sudha &Sheena, 2017: 16; Narassiguin & Sargent, 2019: 1) These are: Earned influencer marketing and Paid influencer marketing.

1. Earned influencer marketing: results from free or pre-existing relationships with influencers or third-party content promoted by the influencer to further their personal social development.

2. Paid influencer marketing: Paid influencer marketing campaigns can take the form of sponsorship, pre-roll advertising, or testimonial and can appear anywhere in the content.” (Gedik, 2020, p. 370)

As explained in this section, influencer marketing has become a preferred process with the increasing popularity of social media today. The influencer marketing methods described in this section will be examined in more detail in the next sections.

### **2.1.5.3.Features of Influencer Marketing**

Under this heading, the structure and details of influencer marketing will be examined. Marketing consists of 4P: product, price, promotion, and distribution. However, in today's Business to business market, 4Ps were insufficient and 4Ms were added instead. (Demirbilek & Sezer, 2021, p.75)

4Ms are, Making the Influencers, Managing the impact, Monitoring relationships, and Measuring the influencers. (Panno, online article)

The creation phase of influencer marketing initiatives is divided into two stages: identification and activation. The campaign progresses through the Trickle and

Ripple stages during the identification phase, during which the persona's journey is described. The trickling stage influences the campaign's outcome and the message's course. However, in the crowded world of social media, successfully communicating a message can be difficult. As a result, organizations must carefully define their target market before enlisting influencers who can effectively convey their message. The campaign enters the management stage when the most suitable influencer has been chosen, where the business concentrates on creating and maintaining a strong relationship with the influencer. The brand can boost its potential for promoting its goods or services and developing brand supporters among customers by upholding dependable and proactive communication. This stage includes a variety of paths, including those for the product, knowledge, calendar, message, alternate platforms, and feedback. Companies must monitor the campaign's development in light of the awareness, response, and action objectives. The brand assesses the effectiveness of the campaign in the measuring stage by tracking brand metrics (investments, resources, products) as well as influencer metrics (ratio, sentiment, effect). Brands may make wise judgments for upcoming successful campaigns by studying these metrics. (Demirbilek & Sezer, 2021, p.75- 83)

At this point, there may be insecurity among the masses. At the same time, the inability of brands to do their advertising strategy well can negatively affect influencers. Among the disadvantages, is the fact that it is a difficult situation that meets this situation. Of course, this is not the case for everyone. Some influencers can earn large amounts of money. That's why it's considered a full-time job. In this case, many brands cooperate with influencers for advertisements and promotions. (İyitanır, 2020, p. 15)

Another way of doing Influencer Marketing, there is also affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing is very common on today's social media sites. The foundation of affiliate marketing is independent affiliates using marketing strategies to generate sales in exchange for a fee from the business based on successful conversions made via the affiliate's networks. A company's product or service is promoted by an affiliate. If the affiliate can provide enough traffic to their website, blog, or social media page and the consumers click their affiliate link and make purchases, this relationship is a win-win scenario. The sponsoring business often compensates an

affiliate in the form of a commission for the goods that the affiliate sells on its website. (Delkamp, 2018, p.11)

Delkamp (2018) explains that Affiliate marketing is preferred and states that, “Affiliate marketing is favored because it usually uses a performance-based model, meaning the company doesn’t endure marketing expenses after initial setup unless there are results from the affiliate.”(Delkamp, 2018, p.12)

As Delkamp mentioned above, affiliate marketing is a method that is highly preferred by big brands and companies do not need to allocate a budget for the campaign. It is a process that influencers with certain characteristics can start by registering for the programs.

At the same time, he explained the reasons why affiliate marketing is so preferred. Delkamp at this point (2018) states that affiliate marketing has several advantages for the affiliate, including low risk, cheap startup expenses, and operations costs, no logistical expenditures, the potential for passive income, and a worldwide market. The affiliate merely requires a platform where they may promote the items and put links to the merchant they are linked with, thus the risk is negligible. (Delkamp, 2018, p.12)

Based on Delkamp's (2018) statements, we can see that affiliate marketing is preferred and the reasons. Affiliate marketing, which is an area of influencer marketing, is advantageous in terms of influencer and brand with less cost, but the risks it can create are less and insignificant.

Of course, influencer marketing has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the biggest advantages, which is the main reason why brands work, influencers establish a relationship with their audience and because of this relationship, their audience listens to them. At the same time, influencers are the people who can influence people's behavior and give them advice on many issues. If a brand establishes a reliable relationship with the influencer in this way, the influencer also shows the brand as a recommendation to its audience. (İyitanır, 2020, p. 13)

Since influencers provide this sense of trust, they can manage the consumption of their followers. Influencers give suggestions and information and share their

sponsored content. This is organic because after the influencer makes these shares, the follower decides to buy or not. When the followers who buy or the followers who review the brand share their experiences, they create a new communication network. Disadvantages can also become important. Because it can affect the implication of the brand irreversibly. So, in most collaborations, brands want to control influencers. Brand value and content should be compatible. People first look at the reliability of the source and then evaluate the product to buy. If he buys the product and does not get results as the influencer says, this affects both the brand and the influencer. But if it turns out as expected, this will affect both the influencer and the brand positively. Of course, it is also a disadvantage that the influencer has fake accounts, likes, and followers and is not transparent about it. For this reason, there is a segment that does not trust influencers. (İyitanır, 2020, p. 14)

At this point, both influencers and brands need to be very careful in their choices and campaigns. In this way, both brands and influencers do not encounter the problem of insecurity as mentioned above.

Although it has risks and disadvantages, influencer marketing is widely used today. As explained in the paragraph above, this form of marketing, which can produce a mutually continuous result, is widely used due to the increase in influencers and the constant use of social media.

## **2.2. Participatory Culture**

Participatory Culture can be explained as follows. It has a low barrier to artistic behavior and general interaction. It gives strong support against producing and sharing what it produces. We can say that there is an informal mentoring program, that is, a person who is knowledgeable about a subject can give information to another by sharing. At the same time, people in a participatory culture think about the benefit of the contribution and feel that they have a connection with each other. (Jenkins, 2009, p.6) In participatory culture, not everyone needs to be a participant. It's just that everyone needs to know that they are free to participate and that their contribution is valuable. In such a world, many watch, many go deeper, and some become professionals within this community.

As stated above, individuals are aware of their freedom of participation, even if they do not have to be permanent participants. This community strongly encourages creative behavior and provides active participation. (Jenkins, 2009, p.6) In this case, as stated in the participatory culture, creative behaviors are supported and even non-participants become participants in this context.

Participatory culture, as mentioned earlier, is something that everyone does not need to be involved in but knows they can. Especially today, everyone can be involved in social media in some way, either as an influencer or as a personal participant.

If we touch upon the aspect of participation, Boyd (2014) describes teenagers' engagement with public spaces in her research on young people, stating, "When teens turn to networked publics, they do so to hang out with friends and be recognized by peers. They share to see and be seen" (Boyd, 2014, p.203). With the rise of new media tools, we can observe the significance of participatory culture. In Boyd's research on teenagers, we witness the emergence of public space resulting from the development of technology, which challenges the traditional notion of public space.

Technologies can be explained from a more ecological point of view rather than from the point of view of isolation. The reason for this may be different relations among many communication technologies and cultural communications around them. Each media system contains a specific communication technology and creates social, cultural, legal, political, and economic institutions, practices, and protocols. (Jenkins, 2009, p.7)

Participatory culture emerges as the average consumer absorbs and responds to new media technologies that enable them to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways. Focusing on expanding access to new technologies can only get us so far if we don't develop the knowledge necessary to use these tools for our purposes. (Jenkins, 2009, p.8)

As stated in the paragraph above, participatory culture has developed rapidly, especially because new technologies have turned into a tool that we need in many areas. The fact that individuals constantly meet their needs such as education,

work, and socialization with new technologies has ensured their rapid transition to participatory culture.

When examining YouTube, Burgees, and Green (2009) emphasized that YouTube is part of participatory culture. When describing YouTube, they highlighted that users within the platform actively contribute and distribute content to reach other users. Burgees and Green (2009) stated, "Similarly, YouTube is not actually in the video business – its business, rather, is the provision of a convenient and usable platform for online video sharing: users supply the content, which in turn brings new participants and new audiences" (Burgees & Green, 2009, p.4).

As we have seen before, participatory culture is essentially about individuals being part of a productive society where participation is not mandatory but still present in some form. As seen in the example of YouTube, the person producing content expands participation by reaching new participants and a new audience.

When using the term participation, mostly cuts out educational practices, the creative process, community life, and democratic citizenship. Our aim should be to encourage young people's talents, knowledge, ethical framework, and Self-Confidence to become participants in such a society. Many young people are already in this process.

There are certain features of Participatory Culture in this educational process. Jenkins explained these features as follows; "Affiliations are, memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centered around various forms of media, such as friends, Facebook, Myspace, message boards, metagaming or game clans. Expressions are producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and nodding, fan videos, fan fiction, or mash-ups. Collaborative problem solving is working together in teams to complete tasks and develop new knowledge, such as through Wikipedia, alternative reality gaming, or spoiling. Circulations are shaping the flow of media, such as podcasting or blogging." (Jenkins, et.al. , 2009, p.9)

When we look here, most young people and even the users of social media are in these processes. Looking at several forms of participatory culture, people's acquisition of new abilities is a good investment for the future. Participatory culture

has led to the reworking of the rules of schools, cultural behavior, community life, and the functioning of a business. (Jenkins, et. al., 2009, p.10)

At this point, while explaining participatory culture, we can gain a clearer understanding of the processes within social media, as discussed by Jenkins (2009), through Baym's (2010) explanations.

Baym (2010) states that "The common use of the term "virtual" to describe online relationships and groups, and of the acronym "IRL" (in real life) to describe offline connections, are evidence of this deep-seated presumption." (Baym, 2010, p.30)

Baym points out that, with the increasing presence of social media technologies in our lives, individuals describe their relationships established in these environments as virtual while referring to their real-life relationships as IRL. At this point, we can observe that as individuals spend more time engaging on social media, they tend to separate their real-life and online lives. Following this, we can recognize the significance of Jenkins referencing James Paul Gee's definition of affinity spaces.

"James Paul Gee, calls such informal learning cultures "affinity spaces" asking why people learn more, participate more actively, and engage more deeply with popular culture than they do with the contents of their textbooks. Affinity spaces offer powerful learning opportunities, Gee argues because they are sustained by common endeavors which bridge differences in age, class, race, gender, and educational level because people can participate in various ways according to their skills and interests because they depend on peer to peer teaching with each participant constantly motivated to acquire new knowledge or refine their existing skills, and because they allow each participant to feel like an expert while tapping the expertise of others." (Jenkins, 2007, p.25-26)

While formal education is still closed, informal learning is surrounded by pop culture, which is experimental. While formal education is static, informal education surrounded by pop culture is more open to development. Informal learning communities evolve faster in response to short-term needs, but the institutions that support public education have become much less developed over the years. (Jenkins, 2007, p.26)

With Jenkins' explanation, along with Baym's (2010) statement, we can observe that during the time individuals spend on social media, they engage not only in learning but also in developing relationships, leading to faster-growing informal learning. Despite the existence of formal education, informal learning, surrounded by popular culture on social media, as Jenkins (2007) points out, is more openly aligned with development, much like the concept of affinity spaces.

These affinity spaces also have highly generative circles. For this reason, it has a constantly innovative structure."The Pew study suggests something more- young people, who create and circulate their media are more apt to respect the intellectual property rights of others because they feel a greater stake in the cultural economy. Both reports suggest we are moving away from a world where some produce and many consume media towards one where everyone has more active shakes in the culture that gets produced." (Jenkins, 2007, p.26)

Although there is fast and innovative informal learning in the media, misinformation can spread very quickly. Even not publishing a full picture can change the information. Participatory culture describes today's social media very well. As mentioned before from the very beginning in social media, interaction is very important. Although not everyone has to produce content on social media, even if they do not produce content, they can interact with the produced content and make informal learning.

It is necessary to examine the culture industry together with the theory of participatory culture. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industry promotes conformity and passivity among consumers, who are encouraged to consume cultural products without questioning their underlying assumptions or values.

Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. The technical contrast between the few production centers and a large number of widely dispersed consumption points is said to demand organization and planning by management. Furthermore, it

is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself." (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944, p.114)

As seen above, Adorno and Horkheimer explained the culture industry from a technological point of view and stated that there should be reproduction with the participation of millions of people in this process. While they stated that the management should do more planning due to low production and widespread consumption, they also stated that the power of technology on society is related to economic power.

Marcuse (1964) emphasized that at this point, the culture industry renders individuals passive and consumerist. Marcuse stated that "Contemporary industrial civilization demonstrates that it has reached the stage at which 'the free society' can no longer be adequately defined in the traditional terms of economic, political, and intellectual liberties, not because these liberties have become insignificant, but because they are too significant to be confined within the traditional forms. New modes of realization are needed, corresponding to the new capabilities of society." (Marcuse, 1964, p.12)

Marcuse (1964) argued that the traditional concept of a free society has been undermined by industrialization. Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) stated that,

The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer's guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward

continuation of that presented on the screen.(Adorno, Horkheimer,1944, p. 118)

Adorno and Horkheimer stated that the culture industry was homogenized by passing through the filters of the world.

The stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity does not have to be traced back to any psychological mechanisms; he must ascribe the loss of those attributes to the objective nature of the products themselves, especially to the most characteristic of them, the sound film. They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts.(Adorno, Horkheimer,1944, p.119)

Marcuse (1964) argued that mass production and mass distribution have fully appropriated the individual. In this regard, Marcuse stated that,

Mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory. The manifold processes of introjection seem to be ossified in almost mechanical reactions. The result is, not adjustment but mimesis: an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a whole. (Marcuse, 1964, p.16)

Adorno and Horkheimer also stated that mass media are voiced according to the imagination and originality of the products, not the consumers, and they stated that long-term thinking is no longer in question in the hustle and bustle of life.

Marcuse, similar to Adorno and Horkheimer, argued that society is constantly under the pressure of consumption within industrial mass media and mass production and that the concept of a "free society" no longer exists.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry produces standardized and mass-produced cultural products that are designed to appeal to the widest possible audience, while suppressing individual creativity and critical thought.

### **2.2.1. Social network**

Today, individuals use social media platforms as social networking areas. Weather and Morrison (2008) stated that “Social networking is a concept that has been around much longer than the internet or even mass communication. People have always been social creatures; our ability to work together in groups, creating value that is greater than the sum of its parts, is one of our greater assets.” (Weaver, Morrison, (2008), p.97)

As seen above, the concept we call social networking is what individuals are always doing, such as socializing in a society or a group, or working with a group. However, with the development of the internet and the use of the internet by most individuals, it has been a concept that has been examined in new media research.

The social media platforms that most individuals currently use are social networking areas. On these platforms, they can reach not only the people they know or have met but also almost anyone who has an account and establish new connections. It is social networking for individuals to be social and to meet new individuals by being in groups that are suitable for them.

As mentioned above, social networking creates a certain environment with categories such as similar views and hobbies. The biggest change that the internet has made in social networking allows the individual to communicate not only with the individuals close to him, but also with people in different time zones, different places, and even different cultures. In this way, the individual constantly changes and meets new information. Thus, the individual can renew and change herself/himself, and there is no limit to the information she/he can learn. You can meet new cultures and places. They can meet not only with another individual but also with another culture directly.

### 2.2.2. Social Capital

It would be useful to consider the perspectives of Putnam and Bourdieu while explaining Social Capital. Bourdieu (1986) states that,

“The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects.” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.15)

Accordingly, it can be understood that Bourdieu thought that the social world should be reduced to be explained because it has an accumulated history, and he explained the concepts of cultural capital and social capital. In this section, only the explanations about social capital will be mentioned.

Bourdieu (1986), when explaining Social Capital, stated:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose acknowledgment of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical space or even in economic and social space.(Bourdieu, 1986, p.21)

While explaining social capital, Bourdieu stated that it is a less and more institutionalized network of relations and that it provides a collective capital to its

members with this network, and that close relations can be strengthened with corporate steps as well as tangible and symbolic exchanges.

In addition, he also states that “The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21)

Bourdieu means that the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the acknowledgment of a minimum of objective homogeneity, so even though it is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural capital possessed by a given agent, or even by the entire set of agents to which he is connected, social capital is never completely independent of it because it multiplies the capital he possesses on his own. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21)

Bourdieu (1986) also states that the existence of network connections is not given naturally, they are constituted once and for all by an initial act of institution. He also states that,

In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt or institutionally guaranteed. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.22)

While giving an example to this subject, Bourdieu states that a business is carried out through marriages because families are in exchange while marriages take place.

“The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed.” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.22) Bourdieu states that social capital

requires a continuous social effort and recognition is provided through certain exchanges.

In addition to Bourdieu, Ellison (2011) examined social capital on Facebook and concluded that the interactions on Facebook predominantly involve individuals from the user's close network (family, friends, etc.) as well as their extended network (friends of friends). (Ellison et al., 2011, p. 13)

Putnam (1999) states that “the touchstone of social capital is the principle of generalized reciprocity”. (Putnam, 1999, p.142) With reciprocity, he implements that an individual is doing something for his/her neighbor and not expecting anything immediately in return without probably knowing them, but confident enough to get something in return at some other time. (Putnam, 1999, p.142)

“Members of a community that follows the principle of generalized reciprocity.” (Putnam, 1999, p.143) Putnam thinks that every community follows a principle of generalized reciprocity, like giving a dime to a stranger for a parking meter or helping an elderly person carry their bags.

On the other hand, Ellison (2011), examines social capital theory with social network sites and states that “social network sites’ unique features and uses may encourage both bridging and bonding outcomes. In contrast to the anonymous interactions between strangers on public forums, the majority of connections on SNSs comprise pre-existing relationships (Ellison et al., 2007).” (Ellison et al., 2011, p.7)

At this point, Ellison (2011) emphasizes that there is a sense of connection even in pre-existing relationships and individuals interact with each other, even if they did not have a previous relationship. This brings us back to the issue of trust, as stated by Putnam (1999).

“‘Honesty is the best policy’ turns out to be a wise maxim rather than a mawkish platitude, but only if others follow the same principle. Social trust is a valuable community asset if—but only if it is warranted.” (Putnam, R., 1999, p.143) In other words, Putnam states that “Trustworthiness is the key ingredient.” (Putnam, 1999, p.143)

Putnam also categorized 'trust' too, he states that "There is an important difference between honesty based on personal experience and honesty based on a general community norm." (Putnam, 1999, p.144) This means that the trust you feel has a time interval. An individual's trust in their long-term friend and someone they have known for 2 weeks is different. Putnam explains this as follows; "Trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks are sometimes called "thick trust." On the other hand, a thinner trust in the generalized other." (Putnam, 1999, p.144)

Thin trust is even more useful than thick trust because it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally. As the social fabric of a community becomes more threadbare, however, its effectiveness in transmitting and sustaining reputations declines, and its power to undergird norms of honesty, generalized reciprocity, and thin trust is enfeebled." (Putnam, 1999, p.144)

In explaining thin trust, Putnam noted that with the thinning of the social fabric of society, its effectiveness in communicating and maintaining reputations diminishes, and its power to support norms of honesty and generalized reciprocity and thin trust diminishes.

After looking at the issue of trust, we can also examine the topic of friendship and social capital addressed by Ellison (2011). Ellison stated that "When considering Friendship and social capital on SNSs, it is important to note that the concept of social capital is not contingent upon close friendships and requires only that a connection exist between two individuals in a network. Some types of social capital, like bridging, are difficult to generate from close friends and depend on a heterogeneous set of ties in a social network." (Ellison, et.al., 2011, p.9) At this point, Ellison highlighted that not all friends on SNSs are actually "friends," and many of them may not be part of the close circle.

Putnam (1999) also states that "Social trust in this sense is strongly associated with many other forms of civic engagement and social capital." (Putnam, 1999, p.144)

After looking briefly at the theories about social capital, we can see it as the state of the individual when they are in a group. While Bourdieu looks at this issue as recognition, Putnam has proceeded through trust. Today, even on social media, individuals try to put themselves in a category. In this categorization, it finds itself in certain groups. These groups may be places where individuals develop themselves or have similar characteristics and hobbies. At this point, the individual exists in a social capital to exist or be 'validated' to itself.

### **2.2.3. Privacy Issues**

There is a constant encounter with security problems on social media. On social media, an individual shares a lot of information, especially when registering on social media, then increases their data with their shares. This information may include age, place of residence, and bank information. Hacking can be done directly to the individual's account, rather than just a platform, and their friends can be defrauded using your photos and name.

Although there is a hacking problem, the information given while registering on social media may be stored in some way. Gamble for this situation (2016) stated that "In the larger context of data mining, a considerable measure of productive analyzing to learn can be found advanced records of human conduct in interpersonal organizations without breaching the user's privacy. " (Kumar, et.al ,2016,p.115). At this point, the information of the individual is shared with many different organizations without the need for hacking, and in this case, all kinds of privacy problems occur.

An individual's general living space has become a public space shared with all. While describing living spaces, private living space is shared with certain people to a limited extent. In social media, users want an environment similar to real life where they can feel safe. They can choose to show only as much of their private life as they want on their websites. However, Internet-based communication is often the scene of events such as the violation of the privacy of private life that is incompatible with the rules. These unethical behaviors carried out by ignoring the personal rights of the

users trigger psychological problems such as insecurity, anxiety, and fright in individuals.( Kutlu, 2022, p.107)

Regarding privacy Cohen (2013) states,

“Search engines filter and rank search results, tailoring both the results and the accompanying advertising to what is known about the searcher and prioritizing results in ways that reflect popularity and advertising payments. Social networking platforms filter and systematize social and professional relationships according to their logic. Content formats determine the material conditions of access to information — for example, whether a video file can be copied or manipulated, or whether a news forum permits reader comments. Each set of processes structures the practice of citizenship and also subtly molds network users’ understanding of the surrounding world.” (Cohen, 2013, p.1913)

As mentioned above, stealing personal information over social media, using it unethically, and using it for marketing has now become a daily practice. Many people today receive spam emails or calls for marketing. As mentioned before on social media, individuals share most of their information to register, so there is a big problem when information is stolen.

#### **2.2.4. Hate Speech**

There is enormous variation in the definition of hate speech. It does not merely refer to speech that expresses hatred; after all, it is fully appropriate, we might think, to express hatred at heinous injustice. Instead hate speech is a term of art, referring to the particular expressions of hatred against particular (groups of) people in particular contexts. (Howard, 2019, p.95)

In hate crimes, even if prejudice is not a reason, its realization constitutes a crime, and in cases where it is regulated as a crime; it is not possible to be punished for the deed independent of prejudice. It is a crime to make hate speech, not just any kind of speech. (Ercan, 2020, p. 16)

The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation 97(20) defines ‘hate speech’ as follows: “The term ‘hate speech’ shall be understood as

covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

As stated above, since hate speech can be related to a person's subjective and social characteristics, it is not possible to give an acceptable definition. Both the conceptual confusion and the lack of clear expressions regarding the content, combined with the lack of control over the new media tools, make it clear that hate speech is prevalent in today's communication and information age. It makes it necessary for us to say that it should be seen as an issue that needs to be emphasized. (Ercan, 2020,p.16)

Hate speech can occur in every situation. Individuals can be attacked with hate speech not only as a comment but also on another platform. Regardless of the content of hate speech, it is done all the time. Although it is sometimes tried to be presented as criticism. For this reason, there is a big difference between criticism and hate speech. These differences will be visible, especially in the data analysis section.

Information and ideas of all kinds are becoming more and more accessible globally and are growing at an unprecedented rate. Traditional without scarcity of resources, wider and more diverse capabilities, easier access, participation, and production than the media creates. It's used as a shield behind which individuals hide their hail views. People once you get used to domination it seems like oppression to finally have equality, and people do whatever any limitation of an individual's behavior when they are accustomed to forcing people, it looks like an attack on an individual's rights. Criticism of their views and ideas, expression appears to be an attack on the right to freedom of speech and is a part of mainstream power structures. (Mohamoud, 2022, p.82)

However, it is also necessary to examine hate speech in conjunction with the concept of freedom of expression. On social media, the presence of hate speech is an issue that influencers face, as will be explored in the findings. However, since their accounts are public and positioned for everyone to see, individuals engaging in hate speech might interpret their actions as exercising freedom of expression.

"Freedom of expression supports the democratic structure of society by allowing everyone, including all groups within the community, to freely express their thoughts and create an environment for these ideas to be openly debated. The freedom to articulate (express) thoughts constitutes the foundation of a liberal democratic state and forms one of the fundamental conditions for the progress of democratic societies and the development of individual personalities (Tezcan, Erdem, Sancakdar, and Önok, 2006: 189)." (Şevik, 2015, p.77-78)

Indeed, as explained above, while freedom of expression is defined in this manner, the perception of hate speech as an exercise of freedom of expression within the realm of social media can be seen as quite understandable. In this context, researchers have attempted to elucidate the dilemma between hate speech and freedom of expression with certain limitations.

However, we can preserve the dilemma between hate speech and freedom of expression by imposing certain limitations. This is because hate speech can lead to psychological harm that could be tantamount to physical harm. Therefore, States consider it their right and duty to intervene in such situations. There are four aspects to consider: the content of the expression, the manner of its use, the speaker's intentions and motivations, and the conditions under which the expression is used (Almador, 2002: 16). (Şevik, 2015, p.81)

At this point, the laws of the Republic of Turkey have introduced various penalties for incitement crimes that provoke hatred and enmity among the public (Şevik, 2015, p.81). However, even though some individuals resort to legal measures on social media for these reasons, there are others who do not. As can be observed in the findings, individuals might block users who engage in hate speech towards them or report such accounts to the social media platform to have them suspended or closed.

### **2.2.5. Lynching Culture**

Due to the possibilities of social media, the 'discriminatory' language as mentioned while explaining hate speech can reach people more quickly. The hyper textuality of social media allows users to access multiple pieces of information at

once, but it is a scary situation for users who do not do fact-checking. Accurate information can be accessed quickly as well as false information, and with the increase of users who do not do fact-checking, chaos can occur.

The user, caught in the information bombardment, turns to accounts that are close to their interests and way of thinking. This happens with interaction, that is, the user is directed to the like of a post they like. In this way, the person is close to a certain lantern according to the content he interacts with. S/He may encounter the comments of the "other" who are outside of this lantern as mentioned. Although this is rare, it is not an uncommon situation. Even if the user is in a lantern, there are 'trend' sections where they all meet in a common area. In the trend section, he suddenly turns into anger with the effect of his encounter with the other and his false polarization. After a few comments, thanks to the personalized feature of social media, it also comes to the forefront on the pages of users who have similar views and causes an avalanche of reactions/hate speech to the other area. The mass in the comments evolves into a lynching person or group. (Nisbet, 2021, p. 73)

At the same time, conflict can occur between the two groups when influencers face lynching or hate speech. To explain, the group that loves the influencer, that is, the followers, and the groups that lynch the influencer may face each other.

The unique structure of social media is to ask for comments after content is shared. The presence of the 'Like' button is one of the biggest factors that trigger the sharing and commenting of the viewer. The fact that the limit of freedom of expression is not known and there is no penalty for this issue, especially in new media channels, leads to the fact that the limits of comments are not drawn. (Nisbet, 2021, p. 75)

One of the most obvious results of social media is that it creates masses, social media groups, followed users, and hashtags, the ability of social media to be easily anonymous; forms the masses in a natural way that can be considered almost spontaneously. Social media is easily accessible, its content is easy to read, colorful and attractive, supported by visuals and short, which facilitates the formation of masses. (Nisbet, 2021, p. 76)

Attempts of lynching or incidents of violence are served with attention-grabbing headlines. It is aimed to reach more viewers by doing this, and major crimes such as lynching are almost. It is normalized by turning it into a show. As shown material of lynching events marketing, deprives the public of the seriousness and gravity of such events. Moreover, it serves to normalize it for society. (Korkmaz, 2021, p.69) As mentioned, the spread of lynching culture in this way, even with marketing, has caused this situation to become normal.

As the culture of lynching increased in this way, then the cancel culture emerged. In the next section, the cancel culture, which has become quite widespread recently, will be explained.

### **2.2.6. Cancel Culture**

Today, along with hate speech and lynching, we encounter the culture of cancel on social media. At this point, we need to look at and examine the meanings of cancel culture on both academic and social media. Silva (2021) stated that,

“The term “cancel culture” generally refers to the use of social media (or public platforms) to “cancel” the reputation of a public figure, usually in response to a negative social event or scandal.(<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/cancel-culture-words-were-watching>) However, there are many definitions and fluidly evolving interpretations of “cancel culture”. Another way of viewing this form of social interaction is by attempting to focus exclusively or excessively on the negative aspects of the individual while ignoring any positive aspects, or allowing them to be outweighed by the negative ones, thereby canceling their net positive effect or influence. The objective of those who engage in “cancel culture” is to belittle their “target” to the point of erasing the recognition of that person or entity, or damaging any positive effects such that they are ultimately erased, or canceled. Ultimately, “cancel culture” is a form of raw justice and imbalanced social protest that could broadly be equated with the concept of naming and shaming, or social profiling, with the intent of causing irreversible reputational damage.” (Silva, 2021, p.3)

As stated in Silva, it is seen that the public figure of the cancel culture can be canceled after a negative event or a scandal, but it has very different interpretations of the term cancel culture. As a result of the scandal or negative event mentioned in Cancel culture, all positive aspects of a figure are canceled and generally subject to the cancel culture. The purpose of cancel culture is actually to cancel one's knowability.

Silva (2021) explained the introduction of the cancel culture problem into academia as follows: “The issue of “cancel culture” in academia, including academic publishing, is not a clear-cut phenomenon. Most likely born from social struggles in the US, this concept has come to be associated with high-profile political figures, actors, and other members of society and, more recently, with academia.”(Silva, 2021, p.5)

The concept of 'cancel culture' refers to a brand or a figure in front of the public due to their offensive actions, namely racist, transphobic, sexist, etc. It is to condemn in front of the public for such statements or actions. (Pelmer, 2020, p.15) Cancel culture is partly generated from the emotional branding tactic that brands use to satisfy consumers' poignant emotions. This is an attempt to 'create a warm sense of community among brand users'. Because these emotions can create connections, they can fade and cool when brands offend their consumers. Consumers who become activists appear to be 'co-creators of the relationship between organizations and their publics', so when they feel misrepresented, brand sentiment turns into a culture of cancellation as a political and personal response. (Palmer, 2020, p.16)

“Cancel culture” started to grow in time as the sensitivity of the public’s opinion started to grow respectively as well. The more sensitive the people became, the easier it became for the identity’s mistake to become nitpicked as a target of “canceling”. This, in turn, helps conclude how “cancel culture” has become a part of the present social media culture and why it has now been impactfully used as a political term.” (Farajallah, Ramta, 2022, p.79)

As stated above, cancel culture is now a part of social media culture and is widely used in many subjects, especially for political purposes. Farajallah and Ramta also state that when people become more sensitive they can be a target of canceling.

They explained the continuous use of cancel culture in wider areas with social media as follows:

“Becoming a popularized consciousness within the social media culture in 2017, cancel culture has become a well-used term on the internet. Formed from the concept that “cancel” would encourage a halt towards the support of a scandalous celebrity in a sort of cultural boycott, the slang has now been politically terminalized around the 2020s to define the current social media culture that has overtaken most of the lives of the world, especially the population of the future generations.”(Farajallah,Ramta, 2022, p.79)

With the increasing popularity of social media, the term cancel culture has started to be used quite a lot, as mentioned above. Especially the news of celebrities, which were described as 'magazines' in the traditional media a while ago, now cause them to be canceled on social media. This situation can be briefly called a cultural boycott as stated above.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In this part, the methodology of this research will be explained.

#### **3.1. Scope and Aim of the Research**

In this research, how influencers, who produce content on beauty and fashion, are affected by hate comments, is discussed. The research has three questions, and they are stated in the introduction part. These questions are “What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media over beauty standards?”, “What is the nature of hate speech against influencers?” and “How are influencers affected by hate comments?”. The purpose of this thesis is to examine influencers' hate speech, how they deal with it, and their perspectives on beauty standards and social media.

#### **3.2. Research Design and Data Collection**

The data collection method used in this study was qualitative. In the process of collecting data, in-depth interviews were conducted with five influencers who had agreed to participate in the research. During the analysis stage, the information obtained from the in-depth interviews with the influencers was included in the study, with the condition of preserving personal information confidentiality. The information provided by the influencers in this research, which was designed as a qualitative ethnography, was analyzed in the findings section. The common characteristics of the influencers who participated in the in-depth interviews were that they regularly shared content in the beauty/fashion field and had more than 10,000 followers.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in a structured format. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes and were conducted online via a platform. The reason for conducting the interviews online was due to the participating influencers' full-time employment or student status.

In the research, consent forms were sent to the participants before the interviews, and stated that they can withdraw from the process if they feel uncomfortable. The collected data was not shared with anyone, and names, and identities were kept confidential. For this reason, no ethical problems will be encountered in the research.

### **3.3. Limitations of the research**

As in any research, this study has certain limitations. In this research, interviews were limited to only five female influencers, and these influencers were restricted to producing content on Instagram in the beauty field.

Although there are male influencers in fields such as beauty and fashion, the research was limited to female influencers, and interviews were conducted solely with them. As indicated in the literature review, despite reports being available on content preferences, categorization based on follower counts, or influencer marketing budgets in Turkey, there has been a lack of studies specifically focusing on the gender distribution of influencers.

Another limitation is that most of the interviews take place online because of the locations. In online interviews, the participants not turning on the camera either on the internet or at their request or experiencing difficulties in the images may cause problems in understanding their gestures and facial expressions. At this point, there may be a problem with the clarity of the participant's thoughts or in the process of going into details.

The last limitation is that participants have the right to withdraw from the process during the in-depth interview. In case of withdrawal from the process, there may be a decrease in data and a narrowing of the findings of the research.

### **3.4. Importance of the research**

The importance of this study is that it will fill the gap in the literature where hate comments are not examined from an influencer point of view. Hate comments were examined in the literature, but they were examined within the framework of the questions of how they were written or what they were written for. In this case, this research will be shaped to fill the gap in the literature.

In addition, thanks to this research, the thoughts of influencers who receive hate comments within the framework of beauty standards and how much these comments change their beauty standards or not will be examined.

This study, which has never been in the literature, will be a new field in studies on hate comments and influencer studies and will guide research.

### **3.5. Findings**

In this section, the data obtained as a result of in-depth interviews with influencers will be given.

#### **3.5.1. Information on Influencers**

All the influencers contributing to this research are women and have more than ten thousand followers. Although influencers share in the field of beauty, they have certain differences. While analyzing the data, influencers will be mentioned as 'participants' and will be numbered.

Participant 1, 24 years old, has 16,400 followers and produces content on beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. At the same time, she also produces content on TikTok and youtube, even though she is more active on Instagram. She opened her account on Instagram in 2018. She is currently engaged in affiliate marketing and works with the agency for affiliate marketing earnings. Participant 1 maintains her influencer identity on a part-time basis and works at the same time. While participant 1 stated that “I would continue to be an influencer part-time, because social media could vary, I might not have a regular income, and it would put me in trouble.” She also stated that the reason she started to produce content was her curiosity about subjects such as make-up and skin care and her family and friends pushed her to produce content. When she wanted to create content in the fashion area, she stated that “I wasn’t looking like the other girls that produced content on fashion, so I wanted to reach girls like me and make suggestions.”

Participant 2 , 25 years old, has 15,500 followers and produces content on make-up in the beauty field, as well as on-site suggestions. Although she only produces content on Instagram, she first opened her account in 2017 but then turned it into a private account for a while. The reason for this situation is hate speech which will be explained in detail in the next sections. Although Participant 2 does not currently do affiliate marketing, she does influencer marketing and some brands have

an agreement. The agreement with these brands started with the brands contacting her because she had used the brands before. Even though she is not doing affiliate marketing, she still works with the agency because it is in the system, but this agency is an institution that it only communicates with when it makes a profit. Participant 2 stated that “Some agencies contacted me to work with me, but I did not accept it because I do not feel ready.” Participant 2 maintains the influencer identity part-time and does her master's at the same time. Participant 2 stated that she would be an influencer part-time after her student life was over and stated that the reason for this was that she never saw social media as a 'business' and that it could disappear at any moment. She also stated that she became a content creator because she liked the trends on social media and wanted to do it.

Participant 3, 23 years old, has 14,900 followers and is heavily involved in makeup and skincare in the beauty field, but also produces content in the home/life and fashion field. At the same time, although she has not been active on Instagram lately, she shares her content more on Tiktok. She used to actively share videos on youtube, but she closed her account. Participant 3 opened her Instagram account in 2020 and maintains her influencer identity part-time. Participant 3 does not do affiliate marketing very actively, therefore, as seen in Participants 1 and 2, she has an agreement with the agency to receive her earnings. However, she stated that she was doing influencer marketing in the past, but she refused to promote the products she did not like among the products sent by the brand, so her contract was terminated. The reason why Participant 3 maintains her influencer identity on a part-time basis is that she is a student and is a part-time assistant teacher. In addition, participant 3 stated that the reason for starting to produce content was to evaluate what she bought because she shopped too much and to inform their audience about the products she bought.

Participant 4, 30 years old, has 73,500 followers and produces content in the field of beauty, makeup, care, fashion, and lifestyle. Participant 4 has been producing her content on Instagram as a part-time influencer since 2013. At the same time, participant 4 is working and does not have a personal contract but has an agreement with more than one agency and carries out affiliate marketing with two different brands. Participant 4, who is engaged in influencer marketing, states that she is very

selective when she makes an agreement with brands and that brands should be convincing. She also states that through brands she must experience the products and then will promote them. Participant 4 stated that “I share something every day and I have a page layout but I don’t make plans about it. If there is a collaboration post I need to share, I have to plan it because those posts have certain dates.” Participant 4, who maintains her relationship with his followers by constantly sharing stories, stated that she changes the way of sharing according to the wishes of her followers, shapes her content according to their messages, and even her lifestyle content has emerged in this way. In addition, she stated that she started her content sharing first on Blogspot and then on Instagram since she was a journalist, and stated that her main purpose was to remove censorship. Participant 4 stated that “There was no one who spoke properly about self-care, so I started this business to reveal the truth on this platform.”.

Participant 5, 40 years old, has 12,600 followers and produces content on beauty, body and mental beauty, yoga, and fashion. The participant has been producing her content in this field for 6 years due to yoga teaching, which is her profession. The reason for opening her account is to reach more students and to show her target audience that yoga is an accessible sport. Participant 5 stated that “Since yoga is seen as a high society sport, I wanted to show that everyone can do this sport no matter what their economic situation is. In addition, people want to get to know their teacher through social media before they take lessons.” Participant 5 stated that she determined the contents according to what she wanted, that is, she shared her own life as she wanted. Participant 5 expressed this situation as “I share my content as how I am I continue to share my books, yoga content, or fashion content by not moving away from the philosophy of yoga.” Participant 5, who is a part-time influencer, is not currently doing influencer marketing. A post she shared before was seen by the brand and shared on the brand's page. Due to her low earnings, she does not engage in affiliate marketing and does not have an agreement with any agency in this context. In addition, she stated that when making brand agreements, she generally pays attention to the fact that brands have clean and natural ingredients and are suitable for a sustainable lifestyle.

Participant 5 stated that she currently shares her posts as she wishes without a plan, but if her followers want certain videos, she tends to share them directly. On this

subject, participant 5 stated, “Sometimes they ask me for videos about losing weight or meditation. When I receive such messages, I either direct them to my YouTube channel or I shoot such videos and share them in the evening.” While producing content in the field of beauty, she stated that she both learned new yoga positions by following the trends and had a lot of fun.

In this context, in the following sections, a detailed analysis will be made of the influencers' perspective on beauty and social media, especially the hate speech and the effect of these discourses on the influencer.

### **3.5.2. Findings on Hate Speech Towards the Influencer**

All the influencers participating in the research received hate comments. The content of hate speech varies from person to person, and the participants were exposed to more than one type of hate speech rather than a single type of hate speech.

Participant 1 stated that "Hate speech is usually directed towards my physical appearance. I predominantly received hate speech in the form of comments, although I occasionally received messages in response to my stories. Instagram and YouTube were the platforms where I encountered hate speech the most." Participant 1 stated that she generally received hate speech in the summer months because of her physical features and clothes, as she mostly produces fashion content. Participant 1 said, “I mostly get hate comments about my appearance and physical features. When I receive hate comments for my style, I am criticized with very immoral, unspeakable words. This is because I like to wear shorts, skirts. So, that is traumatic for me.”

Participant 2 stated that when she made her account public in 2017, she was overweight. As stated in the previous section, participant 2 used her account privately for a certain period after 2017. The reason for this situation is the hate speeches that she takes on her physical characteristics and the way she lives her life. Participant 2 stated that “I tried to protect myself by using my account private due to the majority of comments and messages, but after losing 30 kilos, I reopened my account and continued to produce content. While continuing my content after losing weight, I started to get hate comments on my physical features again.” At this point, she said

that she received hate comments because of the color of her hair or the shape or length of the nails she had made.

Participant 2 added, "I constantly received comments like 'Dye your hair, it looks bad with three different colors' from a fake account. It made me doubt my hair and I started obsessively asking my friends if it looked that way. Eventually, I couldn't take it anymore and blocked that account. However, the harassment continued as they created a new account and continued sending comments and messages. As my graduation was approaching, I decided to dye my hair. Surprisingly, after the change, the comments and messages stopped completely. I don't understand the reasoning behind this type of speech and obsession."

Participant 3 stated that she was exposed to hate comments during the research. She stated that she generally received hate comments on her physical features, but when she produced content, such as cooking, she received hate comments on her content. At the same time, she stated that she received hate speech as comments, and stated that she had received hate comments mostly from TikTok in the last few months. Participant 3 stated that while receiving hate comments about her physical features, she generally talked about her weight and when she started to lose weight, she was constantly posting change videos. She stated that she was trying to prove herself. She stated that "I received hate comments in the video I shared because some people 'do not like my nose' since I recently underwent a nose job." The hate comments she received for her content about cooking were directed towards the content over her physical features. Participant 3 explains this situation as follows, "I shared a recipe that I thought was healthy. Under this recipe, I received comments such as 'Who are you to share this?' 'How do you know it is healthy?'"

Participant 4 stated that she has been exposed to hate speech many times and that these discourses are generally related to her appearance. Participant 4, who stated that she was exposed to hate speech both through comments and messages, stated that she was only criticized when it was seen on the screen. She stated that "I received hate comments about my hair color because I mostly shared hair care and bleached my hair in natural ways." While stating that many people sent her long messages and comments, she stated that by blocking her she protected herself and made social media

more reliable for her. When she received comments or messages containing hate speech, participant 4 expressed her thoughts as follows,

“I wonder what has happened to this person that they have reached a point where they can make such comments about me. However, it doesn't affect me because I have gone through a period of anxiety and panic attacks, which brought me enlightenment. Additionally, when I was younger, people used to make fun of me a lot, but I learned to laugh along with them.”

While describing hate speech, she gave suggestions from certain content. While talking about the hate speech about hair color, in the video where she also shows her getting a gold bracelet for a collaboration with her boyfriend, people always say "Gold is haram for a man. gold causes reproductive problems in the male." She stated that she saw the comments and did not respond to the comments. However, when she noticed that there were constant comments after those comments, she stated that her video was watched more than her normal videos and that she was both surprised and very happy to see that her followers responded to the comments containing hate speech and defended her. Participant 4, who stated that she frequently encountered comments saying that she needed to have Botox done constantly due to the new wrinkles that formed on her face, stated that she would have such a procedure done whenever she wanted.

While Participant 5 stated that she received hate comments like other participants, these comments were sexually explicit or related to her clothes. Participant 5, who was exposed to a lot of hate speech about the flexibility and openness of her clothes since she filmed her content with sports clothes, stated that "If I were to follow their advice and film content wearing an oversized T-shirt, it would not showcase the correct movements, and I would be unable to perform them accurately. For the viewer to truly understand the exercises, I need to wear a sports bra and leggings, allowing them to observe my technique." She stated that the hate speeches only got on her nerves and irritated her, but also stated that she did not make any changes to these discourses. While she stated that she generally received hate speech from comments, she stated that she did not consider these comments and did not take any action against these comments. While she stated that she deleted some of the comments about hate speech, she stated that she paid attention to the content of

these comments. She stated that while she was deleting the sexually explicit comments, she directly deleted the comments that tried to exploit religion and blocked those people. However, she stated that she left it alone when there was hate speech in other comments or she liked the comments. Participant 5, who expressed that the analysis of the content she was exposed to revealed higher instances of hate speech, believed that the content reached a larger audience when there was high controversy.

To summarize, all the influencers participating in the research were exposed to hate speech. Only Participant 4 and Participant 5 stated that they were not affected by the comments, while Participants 1, 2, and 3 stated that they were slightly affected by hate speech. It has been observed that although the methods of coping with hate speech of the participants are different, they receive hate comments both in terms of content and appearance. It was observed in all participants that the analyzes of the contents with intense hate speech were higher. At this point, content with intense hate speech on social media is shown to more people due to the increase in interaction, but as seen in participants 1,2,3, and 4, the support of the followers supports the stance of influencers against hate speech and is good for them. In the next section, the effect of hate speech on influencers will be examined in more detail.

### **3.5.3. Findings on the Effects of Hate Speech on Influencer**

Although the views of the participants towards hate speech are similar in general, it has been observed that the analyzes of the content that they are exposed to hate speech are higher and that these contents reach more people. However, the effect of hate speech on the individual will be examined in this section.

When Participant 1 receives comments or messages containing hate speech, she responds to these comments and shares her response in her story. She explains this situation as follows, “While sharing this comment, I believe the other person didn't consider my happiness and posted it in a public space. As a result, I started sharing these types of comments on my Instagram stories as well. However, they often delete their comments when I respond to them.” Participant 1 also stated that she did not delete the comments or block the people who wrote the comments containing hate speech. She also stated that if she saw these people more than once, she blocked them. Regarding how hate speech makes one feel, participant 1 stated that she was affected

by hate comments, adding that "those who say they are not affected are lying to themselves". While the participant stated that there was a period when she lost weight and changed herself, "Even though I said it to myself, deep down, I knew that I did it because I wanted these comments to stop." she stated. She stated that she made fun of the comments about her dressing style and that the hate comments about her physical features or behavior upset her even though they did not affect her as much as they used to.

However, Participant 1 stated that the interaction of the content containing hate speech is very high and that it is watched by many more people than the videos or photos they normally share. "I am now happy when I receive hate comments because I know that the content, I worked so hard for will reach more people."

Participant 2 stated that, as mentioned in the previous section, she first received hate comments in 2017 and that these comments were related to her physical characteristics. She kept her account secret for a certain period and continued to share with her close circle because when she shared herself or shared the places she went, she was criticized for her weight and told that she needed to lose weight constantly. Participant 2 stated that "I received hate comments from almost every direction, both as comments and messages." Participant 2 stated that, when she opened her account when she lost weight, she wanted to prove herself by sharing how much she had changed, but the hate speech did not stop when she lost weight. She has stated that she has now received hate speech from fake accounts about the color of her hair or the color or length of her nails. During the interview, participant 2 stated that even though she talked about these situations with a laugh, these comments caused her to question herself and she was highly affected by these hate speeches. Even though she stated that the reason for her weight loss was herself, participant 2 also said that social media had an effect, and when she received comments about her hair, she said, "My graduation was approaching, and I decided to dye my hair slightly as an excuse because I was exhausted from the constant harassment about my hair. Once I dyed my hair, those messages and comments stopped completely."

Participant 2 stated that the analysis of the content containing hate speech was better and that she took the criticisms into account and improved herself. Participant 2 stated that "If there is something that everyone has in common, it would be technical

matters. For instance, when it comes to technical aspects, I make an effort to correct them and consider constructive comments.”. Particularly, participant 2 stated that she realized that she had landed on the Discover page when a video started to be watched a lot, and at this point, she started to expect hate speech. Participant 2 stated that she tried to respond to comments containing hate speech more funnily and did not specifically delete these statements.

Participant 3 stated that she was affected by the hate comments and said, “In the past, it had a greater impact on me, but I believe it has lessened now. However, I still anticipate criticism regarding my weight, for instance. This caught me off guard, especially after sharing the nose video, which was when Participant 3 displayed her before and after photos following her surgery. When I receive such hateful comments, it can deeply affect me. There have been instances where I couldn't even get out of bed for a day because I was taken by surprise. Although I had no intention of engaging with these comments, I found myself constantly reading through them, which made it a challenging day. It seems that being offensive has become a trend.”. Especially as stated in the previous section, she got a lot of comments on "offensive humor" as she stated with her post after she got her nose done on TikTok. In addition, when she actively produced content on Instagram, she was annoyed especially by the comments she received on her physical features, and during the weight loss process, "I began a dieting journey, although it wasn't solely motivated by the comments. However, I felt compelled to share my weight loss progress consistently because I had the urge to prove to others, "Look, I'm losing weight.".

While she stated that she received hate speech mostly through comments, she stated that she did not delete the comments and kept these comments open so that she might support them when they see them, she stated that "I never delete comments, but on platforms like TikTok, there are filtered comments where not all comments are visible. However, I intentionally opened them because I felt that if people saw the negative comments, they would offer even more support. For instance, when I shared my experiences in my story, the overwhelming number of supportive messages I received motivated me greatly.”

Participant 3 stated that the analysis of the content that received hate speech was better, “It's true that when there is more negative discourse surrounding a video, it

tends to attract more attention and viewership. In a way, this can even present an opportunity for us. For instance, my nose video on TikTok has reached nearly 1 million views, which is a significant number. It shows that the video gains more traction despite the negative comments. Those who can become accustomed to this dynamic tend to handle it well and navigate through it successfully.”

While Participant 4 stated that the hate comments did not affect her, she stated that she thought that people wrote her problems as comments and that she did not care because she thought that she only knew herself from what she saw on the screen. She stated that while she was creating a safer space for herself, she both blocked content that included such discourses or that did not fit her. As mentioned in the previous section, participant 4 stated that she was exposed to hate speech because she had a gold bracelet made with her boyfriend in the cooperation she prepared, “At some point, people begin to create chaotic scenarios, like when they started telling me, “You must have had an accident outside, and if you were taken to the hospital, they wouldn't even be able to fit you in the MRI machine because of your wristband.” In response, I questioned why they were thinking so negatively.”. While she stated that she did not share her boyfriend much due to the constant variability of the discourses on social media, these comments made her feel that she was right, but when she re-entered the comments, she expressed that “I was very surprised to see that my followers were protecting me under these hate speeches.” While she stated that she did not share the hate speeches she received as comments or messages, directly blocked or ignored, she stated that she did not like to share such negative content on her profile. While she stated that hate speeches did not affect her, especially with this action, she also stated that she already knew how to laugh because she was mocked when she was a child.

At the same time, participant 4 stated that “I received hate speech based on someone's opinion that my hair “didn't look like a yellow color” after I bleached it myself. Additionally, I received comments suggesting that I should cover my wrinkles with Botox.” But she was at peace with herself on this matter and that she could decide whether to have Botox or not when the time comes.

Participant 5 stated that she wears sports clothes in the content she produces and because these clothes are naturally open, she receives hate speech as comments. She also stated that she blocked these comments based on their content or liked them

to make fun of them. However, although Participant 4 does not normally share hate speech, she shared a comment she received on youtube and stated this situation as follows, “Actually, it wasn't a hate comment that I received; it was a message from a follower. They wrote, "My husband doesn't like me because I'm overweight. How can I lose weight quickly? Please help me." This situation saddened me greatly. I shared this message in my story and expressed my discomfort about how someone could say such hurtful things to their life partner. Many people showed their support and offered encouraging words in response.” She stated that when she receives hate comments if the content of these discourses includes sexual or religious exploitation, she directly blocks these people and deletes their comments. Participant 5 stated that the content that was exposed to hate speech was watched more, while the content with high polemics was discovered more. In addition, participant 5, who stated that she did not share comments containing hate speech and did not want to respond to hate with hate, stated that these comments did not affect her. On this subject, participant 5 stated, “Whenever I receive such comments, I often notice that these accounts are fake. As a result, I haven't felt the need to change my content or myself based on these comments.”

As stated in the previous section, all the participants received hate speech, but they all had different reactions and feelings. While Participant 1 responds to and shares comments, participant 2 responds to certain comments, participant 3 can produce humor content directly through these comments, while Participants 4 and 5 do not react to these comments. While participants 4 and 5 did not care about hate speech, participants 1,2, and 3 stated that they were affected by these discourses and made changes, although not entirely because of these discourses. We can see that participants 1 and 3 were affected by the discourses. In general, hate speech had a certain effect on all participants, but these effects may vary. In this section, we can see that the hate speech is in terms of physical or appearance, in this regard, the influencer has certain thoughts, whether she changes herself. In this respect, detailed information about the influencers' perspectives on the perception of beauty will be examined in the next section.

### 3.5.4. Findings on Influencers' Perception of Beauty

Particularly, participants who produce content in the field of beauty were asked about their perspectives on beauty standards, and in this context, they were asked if there was anything they wanted to change in their field. In this section, the answers of the participants to these questions and their perspectives on the concept of beauty will be examined.

Participant 1 stated that beauty standards are both within certain limits and not. Participant 1 stated that “I believe that every body and appearance is beautiful, but beauty is subjective and varies from person to person. I appreciate a sportier look and strive to be physically strong while maintaining aesthetic appeal. To me, embracing both masculine and feminine qualities is equally important. However, others may find being a size zero attractive, and that's perfectly fine. I don't believe beauty fits into a single mold and should be celebrated in its diverse forms.” At this point, she stated that the standards of beauty differ from person to person, and everyone likes certain features. However, she has certain criteria according to herself.

While describing her transition to fashion while producing content in the field of beauty, participant 1 said, “My primary goal was to assist others while also working on self-improvement. That's how I ventured into the world of fashion. It wasn't about starting because I dressed well initially. I was a bit chubby, and my focus was on dressing in a way that complemented my body. I wanted to showcase this approach to others and inspire them to embrace their unique style.” At this point, participant 1 has started to produce such content so that those with a body type like hers can be inspired by her and not feel lonely, instead of closing herself because it is different from the body that is constantly shown on social media or is more popular in general. Particularly, participant 1, while mentioning that hate speech affects her, stated that “50% of the effect in the weight loss process is due to social media”, although it is not exactly because of the discourses she receives.

Participant 1, when asked what she would change if there was something she could change in her content production area, stated that “If I had the opportunity, I would challenge the constant pressure to buy and consume in our current capitalist system. While it may be challenging, I believe in redefining our values beyond

material possessions. Additionally, I would like to change the perception that beauty can only be associated with a size zero. I firmly believe that every outfit can be beautiful, regardless of body size or shape. Embracing diversity and promoting body positivity would be a significant change I would strive for.” Participant 1 stated that if she could change something, especially in the field of fashion, she would like to change the system that constantly pushes her to shop.

Participant 2 stated, “Beauty is not merely a matter of perception. Social media should be accessible to everyone, focusing not on the perception of beauty, but on fostering a culture of reason.”. While we state that it is hate speech that affects some if not all, of the reason for changing one’s self, just like Participant 1, in the perceptions on social media, we can say that it is not the perception of beauty but the beauty she sees herself. Participant 2, who advocated the importance of thought and mind not beauty, stated that the perception of beauty is completely related to one's self. Also, participant 2 stated that if she could change anything in her field of content she would change the recommendation of unhealthy, cheap, and unbranded products.

Regarding beauty standards, participant 3 said, “I believe that social media has influenced my perception of beauty and certain physical characteristics. The constant exposure to images of women with a particular body type has created an impression that this is how beauty should be. I used to find women with a thinner waist and slightly wider hips attractive, and in the past, I was drawn to shorter women. However, now I find women with slightly longer legs more appealing. The homogeneity of appearances on social media might also play a role, as now only women fitting that image seem beautiful to me. It feels strange to have this shift in my perception.” she stated. Participant 3 started to think that it should have certain physical characteristics due to social media.

As stated in the previous sections, participant 3, just like Participants 1 and 2, made changes to their physical characteristics due to hate speech and because of their desire. Unlike Participants 1 and 2, participant 3 stated that since she started producing content on social media, she started to judge her physical characteristics more and criticize herself more. She stated that she noticed things she wouldn't normally notice because she showed herself on social media. Participant 3 stated that she wanted to remove “filling processes” from the beauty content she produced on

social media. She explained the reason for this by saying that almost all of the people she sees on social media look alike.

Participant 4 stated that they think naturalness is beauty in terms of beauty. As mentioned in the previous sections, in the hate speeches, participant 4 was told that she should have Botox in general and stated that the same things were constantly imposed. Participant 4 stated that, as stated in the previous sections, she did not consider the hate speeches and did not make changes in herself or her content according to these discourses.

When Participant 4 was asked what she would change if she wanted to make a change in the field of beauty, where she produces her content, she stated that she would change the impositions of beauty. At this point, she stated the popular haircut models now and said, "People often suggest that I should change my hairstyle, but I have been wearing my hair the same way for as long as I can remember. I keep it that way because it's my personal preference. I usually trim my bangs myself or occasionally visit a hairdresser, but even then, I don't feel entirely comfortable with the change."

Participant 5 stated that beauty is imposed differently every year, like fashion. Participant 5 states that "In my opinion, beauty comes from being well-groomed, having clean skin, and maintaining clean hair. If you choose to get Botox or other treatments to enhance your appearance, it should be based on your personal preference and when it makes you feel good, rather than following what's fashionable. Trends change over time, and you may not enjoy the results when they go out of style. For me, beauty lies in embracing naturalness." Participant 5's point of view on beauty was stated as naturalness, but when she detailed that she saw certain beauty trends every year, she stated that a different filling or aesthetic procedure was in fashion every year, while everyone thought that her naturalness deteriorated after having a different procedure every year.

When Participant 5 was asked if there was anything she wanted to change in her field, she stated that she would like to change the system in fashion, which is geared towards continuous buying. At this point, she argued that sustainable trends should be more prominent.

When examining the answers of the participants, they have a perception of beauty that the person chooses according to herself, not a general point of view of beauty. Even though participants 4 and 5 did not intend to make any changes in themselves because they produce content in the field of beauty, participants 1,2, and 3 made changes in themselves but stated that the reason for this change was only because of the hate speech they received on social media. Participants 1 and 5 additionally wanted to change the system that is constantly pushed to shop because they produce content in the field of fashion, while participants 3 and 4 stated that they wanted to change certain beauty impositions, and participant 2 stated that she wanted to prevent the recommendation of cheap and unhealthy products because they produced more content in the field of makeup.

In the next section, the perspectives of the participants on social media will be examined, as they receive hate speech on social media and use social media very actively.

### **3.5.5. Findings on Influencers' Perception of Social Media**

In this part of the research, the perspectives of the participants on social media will be constantly examined. As the participants have a certain audience and regularly produce content for this audience, they spend most of their days producing content on social media or discovering new content.

Participant 1 stated that when she started to produce content, especially while doing influencer marketing, “As a micro-influencer, brands often approach me to send their products. However, I only accept products that are suitable for my page and content. For example, I don't frequently share makeup-related content, but I may occasionally feature skincare products. I make sure to test samples on my skin to ensure compatibility before recommending them to others. Additionally, I prefer to personally try out makeup, skincare, and fashion products to assess their suitability and quality before promoting them to my audience.” For this reason, participant 1 stated that she disagreed with the brands because the brands did not give time to try the products. Participant 1, who also stated that she was doing affiliate marketing, stated that she shared certain links in line with the wishes and needs of her followers, but also shared the products she had used or owned before in these posts. Especially

on social media, influencers may encounter such problems while doing both affiliate and influencer marketing.

Participant 1 stated that if she wanted to make a change in the field of fashion, which is the area where she produces her content on social media, she wanted to change the order that is constantly pushed to shop and the perception that every outfit looks beautiful only on slim bodies, she stated that, “In the past, I used to create outfits by mixing and matching the pieces I already had, and if needed, I would adjust them to align with the current fashion trends. I even incorporated my mother's clothes into my outfits for a decade or more. However, when I started receiving negative feedback from my followers or those who wanted to follow my style, I felt compelled to constantly shop and share links, as I didn't want to appear solely focused on shopping.” At the same time, she stated that she used to explain her skin care processes, but that she no longer produces that ingredient. New brands are coming out all the time because I couldn't follow them so I quit. At the same time, even if our skin types are the same, the product that was good for me was not good for someone else, frankly, I did not want to be the culprit. he stated. Especially when producing content in the field of beauty, influencers may experience such problems when followers buy a recommended product directly, and as a result, they may be exposed to hate speech.

As seen above, participant 1 shaped her content shares according to the wishes and needs of her followers, while also shaping its affiliate marketing shares accordingly. Participant 1, who stated that she received messages especially from her followers or from the target audience who saw her on the homepage, stated, “This is essential because if followers don't receive answers to their questions, they may leave since feeling valued is important to them. It's not solely about the content itself. I often receive comments like "I never thought you would reply" when they message me and receive a response. Therefore, I make it a priority to reply to or address their questions in my content or stories, especially when the requests are particularly intense.” Participant 1 stated that she compared herself with other influencers and explained this situation as follows, “I do find myself comparing at times. Previously, when my videos were directly featured, the situation changed significantly with the emergence of such accounts. It affects my mood as I come across content that may be technically flawed, such as poor lighting, sound, or transitions, gaining visibility on

the Explore page. In these instances, comparing allows me to analyze and reflect on my work. For instance, when I see friends who have high levels of engagement and successfully balance their work and influencer roles, I may realize my own mistakes, such as not sharing enough stories. Ultimately, this comparison serves as a valuable learning opportunity for self-improvement."

Brands with an influencer marketing agreement of Participant 2 continue to send products to her, unlike Participant 1, participant 2's agreement with these brands was a result of the observation that she was constantly using these brands, so the agreement process for Participant 2 was healthy. Participant 2, who shares the products she uses and is asked about, even if she does not continue affiliate marketing regularly, especially just like Participant 1, promotes the products she uses or knows herself. Participant 2, who wanted to prevent cheap health or unbranded products from being recommended, especially in the beauty field where their content is located, stated that they were not happy at all that such videos were trending.

Participant 2 stated that since she produces more makeup content in the field of beauty, she receives requests from her followers to make certain posts many times and that she shares these posts in a way that suits her. Participant 2 states, "I used to receive requests, such as showing how to draw an eyeliner. Although these requests weren't reflective of my style, I would fulfill them in my story content. The story format allowed for a more natural approach, as I would zoom in and out when going about my day. Currently, there is a particular topic, such as sharing my hair routine, that many people are interested in seeing. As a result, I plan to showcase it in real-time, possibly even this week. Even my close friend has encouraged me to share it now." Although the participant did not give a clear answer to the question of whether she compared with 2 influencers, she stated that when the followers of other influencers she knew and were close and they got a little more popular, they stopped communicating with her and saw how quickly people could change.

Participant 3, especially when doing influencer marketing, was the reason for the deterioration of their relationship with brands, because they wanted products that they did not like or did not fit on their page to be sent to them and shared. Participant 3, who shares the products after experiencing the products or shares the products she uses directly, has therefore come to the end of her cooperation with the brand.

Because products that are not compatible with their page are products that will not attract the attention of their followers. Participant 3, who is not currently doing affiliate marketing, has been publishing her content more on TikTok recently. Participant 3 also stated that "I often adapt my content based on the preferences of my followers, and I even share lifestyle and home-related content in response to their requests. I used to frequently ask on Instagram, "What do you want to see on my page?" in my stories because I value their input and opinions. By actively seeking their feedback, I aim to ensure that the content I provide aligns with their interests and keeps them engaged."

When asked what she wanted to change in the beauty field where Participant 3 produced her content, she said, "If there was one thing I could eliminate, it would probably be the need for filling jobs. While I can do them myself, I would prefer if they didn't exist at all." she stated. Based on this discourse, we can understand that procedures such as filling, or aesthetics should be personalized because many people look similar in terms of beauty today. Participant 3 stated that she compared herself to other influencers, but that she wanted to improve herself, and stated, "Yes, it does happen. It used to happen more frequently, but now I feel a sense of relief when I don't have to deal with it as much. I would often criticize videos, questioning their quality and assessing if they met certain standards. Even if I didn't engage in a dialogue, I would send a message expressing my appreciation if I liked the content. I would also compare how the video was created and what applications were used. I have observed that some individuals who experience rapid growth may have strong connections despite not producing high-quality content. They manage to attract a large number of dedicated followers, for example."

Participant 4, just like Participant 1, stated that while doing influencer marketing, brands pay attention to their content being natural and clean, and in addition, they share because of experiencing the products. While explaining this situation, participant 4 stated that she is very selective because a new brand is constantly being introduced to the market. She stated that she not only shares with the affiliate marketing system in her stories with the suggestions and requests of her followers but also publishes informative content with the question-answer feature, while at the same time, she changes the content at the request of her followers.

Participant 4 chooses the brands it will deal with great care, especially since it produces more intense content on hair and skin care while sharing the products that it uses and previously displayed on its page while doing affiliate marketing. Participant 4 stated that “I feel extremely tired and bored with the constant promotion of similar products on social media and the continuous emergence of viral beauty trends. It often seems like they are presenting lipstick or other products as if they have just been released, even though they have been around for years. I find the pressure to go viral on TikTok particularly exhausting. It's repetitive, and we already know about these products and trends. Enough is enough.”

When asked what she wanted to change in the field of beauty, participant 4 stated that “I don’t want to see the constant impositions anymore.”, and as stated in the previous sections, she did not want to see statements such as ‘popularly cut her hair ‘or’ get botox now ’. Participant 4 stated that she did not compare themselves with other influencers.

The participant 5 stated that she did not engage in affiliate or influencer marketing and that it was shared only once in a brand's account. Participant 5 also stated that she changed the content according to the wishes of her followers. While Participant 5 also stated that she compared herself to other influencers, she explained this situation as follows, “Yes, I compare myself to others. I observe and draw inspiration from some of them. Sometimes, I feel a tinge of jealousy, and I criticize myself, thinking about how well they are doing compared to me. However, I don't like to dwell on the fact that something has already been done. Instead, I strive to do things in my unique way, ensuring that it stands out and offers something different. Comparing myself to others serves as a source of inspiration for me.”

In this section, while examining the perspectives of the participants on social media, we see that they produce both new and different content according to the wishes and needs of their followers on these platforms, where they work part-time. However, for participants 1, 3, and 4, especially in influencer marketing, the agreement process with brands can be long and difficult. The biggest reason for this is to avoid any problems due to the habit of buying the recommended products directly, as seen in the explanations of Participant 1, but at the same time, as stated by Participant 4, too many brands have emerged.

As seen in Participant 2, especially micro-influencers cooperate a lot in return for the brands to send products, but they make healthier collaborations as a result of the products they use being noticed by the brands.

However, as can be seen again in this section, correct criticism on social media contributes to the development of influencers, while hate comments affect the participants in terms of changing themselves and getting on their nerves. In addition, when the participants were asked to compare themselves with other influencers, all participants except participants 2 and 4 stated that they compared themselves, but we can see that this helped them a lot and added a difference to their content.

The next section will examine in detail how influencers deal with hate speech and lynching culture.

### **3.5.6. Findings on The Ways of Dealing with Hate Speech / Lynch Culture**

As seen in the previous sections, the participants were exposed to hate speech. How they deal with these discourses and whether they are exposed to lynching culture will be examined in detail in this section.

Participant 1 stated that while dealing with hate speech, she replied to the comments containing these speeches and shared them, adding, "Since this person showed no signs of shame when they wrote that to me, I don't believe they will feel ashamed if I share it or reply to their comment." Participant 1, who stated that she shared these comments with her followers and received support because the clothes she wore were short or revealing, received hate comments on both her physical appearance and clothing style, stated that she was very happy with the support she received and that sometimes her followers directly responded to such discourses and protected her.

Participant 1 stated that hate speeches reach a wider audience and are exposed to the culture of lynching. Participant 1, who said that she started to block the people who wrote these comments after a certain point, explained this situation as follows, "I reached a point where I started giving sarcastic responses to all comments, but as the negativity became overwhelming, I began blocking people based on the level of maliciousness in their comments. When I refer to the level of maliciousness, I mean

that I faced intense criticism from men when I posted a video featuring skirts and dresses for Valentine's Day combinations. I understand that their reaction was absurd. However, when it came to sexually explicit or vulgar comments, I started blocking those individuals immediately. That's the extent of the negativity I was referring to.”

Participant 1, when asked about her thoughts about someone other than herself being lynched and changed herself, said, “I can't say much. There were times when I wished she hadn't made such changes and could have dealt with it on her own. However, when I reflect on the experiences I had as a micro-influencer, facing extensive hate speech, I understand why she made similar changes when she faced similar situations. Additionally, larger accounts often face similar backlash, especially those who are full-time influencers. When your entire life is built around social media, it becomes necessary to make such adjustments. Losing their presence on social media would mean losing their entire source of income.” As it is understood at this point, although the participant is a micro-influencer, she knows what she has experienced and felt when exposed to lynching or hate speech such as large pages, so she is entitled to other influencers who are exposed to these discourses and change herself. Particularly, as mentioned in the previous sections, participant 1 can estimate the effect of these discourses on the individual, as she has changed herself due to hate speech.

Participant 2 stated that she did not respond to comments or messages containing hate speech, but did not delete them, while she replied to some comments. Especially in the comments about her appearance, she stated that “I made changes even if it wasn't entirely because of that comment, and when I made these changes, the hate speech was stopped.” However, she stated that she made technical changes in the content when she saw that it was related to the content of hate speech, and stated that she knew that hate speech would come, especially when her videos were watched too much. As stated in the previous sections, Participant 2 was offended when she received hate comments about her weight in the first period of content production, and she kept her account private and started producing content again after losing weight. In this regard, when Participant 2 opened her account after losing weight, she stated that she always received comments about her hair color from fake accounts and that these comments were cut off when she dyed her hair. She stated that the reason for

this was that she was not believed no matter how much she responded to the comments and that she made an explanation to be believed.

While Participant 2 stated that she had never been exposed to lynching culture, she stated that she did not share hate speech in her story and did not share any data about whether her followers supported or did not support her. However, participant 2 stated the following about the content producers who were exposed to lynching culture other than herself, "They have a significantly larger number of followers compared to us, and as a result, they also receive a different magnitude of hate speech. Unlike us, being an influencer is their full-time job, so it seems understandable that they would make changes to adapt to the circumstances."

While Participant 3 stated that she received hate speech mostly through comments, she stated that if she shared herself, her appearance was only criticized if she shared content such as food. Participant 3 stated that while dealing with hate comments, she never deleted these comments, sometimes shared them in her story, and wanted all comments to be seen and stated that other people who saw the comments on this subject defended her and that this support made her feel happy and did not make her feel lonely. While she thought that the hate speeches had affected her more in the past, the hate speech she had just gotten herself done after the nose job process affected her seriously and she stated that she could not get out of bed for 1 day. She stated that "In the past, I received hate speech regarding my weight, and as a way to prove myself, I regularly shared my weight loss journey, although it wasn't solely because of those comments."

Participant 3, who stated that she was exposed to the lynching culture, explained her attitude towards the lynching culture as follows, "I usually respond to hate comments by making a sarcastic statement in the beginning. If someone writes a proper comment, I will respond. Sometimes I share these comments in my story and express my thoughts about them, simply because I feel the need to do so. I always make sure to explain my perspective." Participant 3, who responds by throwing a story to give a collective answer because of the increase in these discourses when it turns into a lynching culture, responds to the comments that she thinks are worth responding to, as can be seen from her answer. However, she stated the following about the people changing herself in the lynching culture she saw other than herself, "I

agree that dealing with hate speech can be psychologically challenging, and even those who claim not to be affected may still experience subconscious effects. The constant exposure to negative comments can leave a lasting impact. It is normal for individuals to make changes and start paying more attention to their appearance as a result. When you are constantly engaged with social media, it becomes difficult to ignore or avoid such comments since they are always visible on your phone or device." While she stated that she noticed features that she had not noticed before when she shared on social media regularly, she also stated that she knew how others felt because she received a lot of comments about her appearance and made changes.

Participant 4 stated that they did not share hate comments, and generally blocked the people who wrote these comments, thus turning social media into a safe place for them. She stated that she sometimes did not see comments and messages containing hate speech and that she was both surprised and happy to see her followers defending her, especially in the comments. She stated that while she does not feel anything against hate speech, she is sorry for the people who write these speeches to her. However, as mentioned in the previous sections, she stated that she was exposed to lynching culture in the content of her hair color and that she had a gold bracelet made with her boyfriend. While stating that she was exposed to the lynching culture, she stated that "They formed a community around the hair care and bracelet video, supporting and empowering each other. They engaged in discussions, exchanged ideas, and actively participated in the conversation." In particular, she stated that the reason why she did not respond to such discourses was that she thought that the other person would not understand her directly and did not want to waste her own time.

However, as someone who has been exposed to lynching culture and hate speech, participant 4 expressed his thoughts on people who were exposed to lynching culture other than herself, as follows: "There needs to be someone capable of managing the culture of online harassment. For instance, the influencers themselves are unable to do so, and I believe they end up completely changing themselves. It seems like everyone is striving for a uniform look. I often get asked why I appear different at events, but it's not that I'm the different one; people fail to grasp that everyone is undergoing the same plastic surgery procedures. Lately, there's been a trend where everyone is getting the same modifications. I tried it out, but it didn't

work for me. However, my followers persistently expect me to showcase it. Everyone looks the same; their faces, affiliated agency, hairstyle, makeup—everything.”

Participant 5 stated that they generally received hate speech from comments by fake accounts and stated that they evaluated these comments according to their content. She stated that she directly deletes and blocks comments that contain religious exploitation or try to impose something. While she stated that she received sexual comments about the clothes and yoga positions she wore because she shared yoga content, she stated that she was uncomfortable with these comments, but she did not change the content, no matter how angry she was. In addition, she stated that the reason why she did not respond to such statements was that she did not respond to hate with hatred and that if she did, she did not want these people to think that they felt important.

While the participant 5 stated that she was exposed to lynching cultures, she explained this situation as follows. “A chain of comments supporting each other has emerged from bot accounts one after another. I try not to dwell on it and don't even remember the specifics. Moreover, I don't have an audience that encourages hate or negativity, so it came as a surprise to me.”. Her attitude towards the lynch culture, on the other hand, was to make fun of all the comments by liking and not responding at all. When Participant 5 was asked what she thought about the changes made to herself by those who were exposed to lynching culture other than herself, she stated that “I feel a bit saddened by it, particularly when it comes to weight-related issues, as it can have an impact on one's health beyond a certain point. My aunt, who is an actress, often talks about how advancements in technology greatly improved cameras, which can now pick up even the smallest makeup flaws during shoots. This leads people to become more self-conscious and make comments about wanting to change themselves to appeal to everyone. While I empathize with someone who feels self-conscious about their prominent ears, for example, it's unfortunate that the nature of this profession places such emphasis on appearance because it can be emotionally distressing to constantly scrutinize oneself.”

As everyone has a coping method against hate speech and lynching culture, participants 1 and 3 tend to respond more or share their stories, while participants 2, 3, and 4 tend not to respond according to the content of these discourses. However,

participants 1,3, and 4 stated that they are happy when they receive support from their followers. In the next section, the findings described so far will be analyzed in more detail, and in the conclusion, the main questions of the thesis will be discussed.

### **3.6. Analyzing Findings**

In this section, the findings of the research will be examined.

All of the participants are influencers but four out of five participants are doing influencer marketing on social media, and only two are actively engaged in affiliate marketing. Two out of five participants have agreements with an agency. It has been observed that all five participants are very selective in terms of suitability for their pages and features of products or brands when making brand agreements. The sharing frequencies of all the participants vary according to the activity periods, and only one participant makes a certain visual order in terms of sharing patterns.

All five participants produce content and change their content style according to the wishes and needs of their followers. Participants who are part-time influencers on social media show value to their target audience by producing more content that their followers want.

When the reasons for the start of the influencer processes of the participants were examined, it was seen that they started with very different reasons. Participant 1 stated that at first, she made her content on make-up and skin care, then she entered fashion content in terms of continuity and started to inform by showing that she could dress well even though she was not thin. While Participant 2 stated that she liked makeup trends very much and started to enter these trends, Participant 3 stated that she constantly shopped and now she shared informative posts to make these shopping meaningful. Participant 4, on the other hand, stated that due to journalism, which is her main profession, there is a lot of censorship on social media and no one talks about skincare or self-care, and she entered to remove this censorship. Participant 5, on the other hand, stated that while she was a yoga instructor due to her profession, she started to produce content so that her students could get to know her beforehand and that she showed her lessons more in this way.

In addition, when the participants were asked what they wanted to change in the beauty category they produced their content, participants 1 and 5 stated that they wanted to increase the continuity, in addition, participant 1 stated that they wanted the physical beauty standards to be no longer taken into account. Participant 2 virally stated that he wanted to change the removal of beauty trends and the recommendation of cheap, health products, Participant 5 stated that he wanted the permanent beauty impositions to disappear, and Participant 3 stated that he wanted to remove the aesthetic procedures that were made to constantly change.

Influencers' hate speech and what they do in the face of these speeches are frequently mentioned in the sections above. To summarize again, all influencers have encountered hate speech. All of the participants stated that they responded to hate speech to a certain extent, and in what situations they responded. While Participant 5 directly deleted and blocked comments such as religious exploitation, participant 2 replied if she got very angry, participant 3 generally did not delete the comments specifically and was happy when she received support, participant 4 directly blocked and created a safer environment for herself, and participant 1 generally shared these hate speeches and stated that she had replied. However, in this case, we can see that there is a certain limit to hate speech. While the participants either respond or block when they are very angry, four of the five participants stated that they are affected by these statements. At the same time, when asked what hate speech is about, four of the participants stated that it changed according to the content style, while one participant stated that it was only about her appearance. While stating that they receive hate comments according to their content style, the participants stated that when they appear, their content is criticized on their physical features, but when they produce content on different content, for example, participant 3 shared content about meals and she got hate comments. Particularly, participants 1,2 and 3, who made changes in themselves with hate speech, stated that some of the reasons for these changes were the criticism they received on social media, and a certain part was their own decision, while Participant 3 said that "these comments remain in the subconscious." she stated. Participants 4 and 5 stated that they did not make any changes to these discourses and did not listen to such discourses.

Especially when asked about the analysis of the content containing hate speech, all of the participants stated that their content was watched more and received more interaction. They stated that their content reaches more people, especially because of the constant comments and the existence of a certain discussion environment. At the same time, we can state that these discussions are not only between hate speech but also between the supporters and the people who make hate speech as follows. Participants 1,2,3 and 4 stated that they were supported by their followers and this support was good for them. Participant 3 stated that she did not particularly delete the hate comments and did not feel lonely when she received supportive comments, while Participant 4 stated that she was very surprised when she saw that she was supported and when she saw the answers of her followers to the hate comments that came to her.

When asked whether the participants compared themselves with other influencers, it was observed that three of the participants compared themselves, but improved themselves in this way. Participant 4 stated that “I do not compare myself and proceed on my path.”. Participant 2, on the other hand, stated how much their friends who rise very fast have changed. At the same time, when the participants were asked whether they followed the trends, 3 participants stated that they did, while 2 participants stated that they did not.

Although the participants have different views on beauty standards, the common view of all is that there is no certain standard. However, while stating that they see that certain standards are established on social media every year, participant 3 stated that they were affected by these trends, while Participant 2 stated that beauty is internal and mental. Participants 4 and 5 stated that beauty should be natural and that every beauty standard imposed on social media should not be followed, while Participant 1 stated that “beauty is personal” and emphasized that it is not a general thing.

Regarding the lynching culture, four of the participants stated that they were exposed to the lynching culture, while Participant 2 stated that she had never been exposed to the lynching culture. When the attitudes of the participants about the lynching culture were examined, it was observed that they had the same attitudes towards hate speech, and there was no change in the attitudes of the participants to

these statements. Participant 3 stated that, especially when faced with lynching, she made a statement if she needed to answer, and if the comments were too intense, she made a general statement via her story.

The lynching culture is especially prevalent in high-follower accounts that can be categorized as mega-influencers, and these people are regularly exposed to lynching on social media platforms. This situation is constantly shared and revived on social media. Due to the continuity of the lynching culture on social media today, changes in these discourses have been observed in influencers who are exposed to these discourses a lot. When this situation was asked of the participants, they were faced with similar answers. In the face of this situation, participant 1 stated that "I think he could cope if he had not changed, but then I remember the situations I was exposed to and I agree", while participant 2 stated that "after all, they have to change this place and therefore it seems normal to me". Participant 3 stated that they were entitled to make changes, especially since the lynching process is a difficult process to deal with. While Participant 4 stated that she had to make changes because she could not manage the lynching process according to herself, she stated that she was not happy because everyone looked alike on social media and indicated that the change was normal.

To summarize, we can see that the participants have similar views with each other in certain parts. Although the attitudes of part-time influencers and content producers are like each other, especially towards hate speech, there may be certain differences. Influencers who have been exposed to lynching culture try to manage this process similarly with their stance against hate speech in general. However, as it can be seen, while hate speech causes a change in some of the participants, it is not even all of the reasons for change. In addition, as the participants stated, even though beauty standards are imposed on social media with both hate speech and content, influencers have their views and standards regarding these standards.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The features of social media and influencers that have come to the fore in the last period have been examined in detail in this thesis. This research aims to identify the underlying themes of hate speech directed toward influencers and to challenge and redefine the beauty standards reflected in these hateful comments. Based on this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants and the findings of these interviews were explained in detail in the previous sections. This research has two questions, and these questions are explained in the subtitles of the methodology section. These questions are “What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media over beauty standards?”, “What is the nature of hate speech against influencers?” and “How are influencers affected by hate comments?”.

Before providing detailed explanations, I need to answer the research questions based on the findings of the study. Regarding the first research question, "What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media over beauty standards?", I can say the following based on the research findings: Users on social media criticize individuals who do not conform to subjective beauty standards, and these criticisms often escalate to the level of hate speech. As seen in the Findings section, influencers are regularly subjected to hate speech, which should not be confused with constructive criticism. While there are constructive criticisms on social media, users also pressure influencers to constantly change aspects of their content, including their appearance, which they dislike.

Regarding the second research question, "What is the nature of hate speech against influencers and how are they affected by hate comments?" based on the research findings, I can say the following: As mentioned in the previous paragraph, influencers are subjected to hate comments from various aspects, primarily about their appearance and also about their content styles. In some periods, as indicated by influencers as well, they can also be subjected to hate or lynching comments based on religion. However, even though these comments may be religion-oriented, the focus of the comments is on the content or styles of the influencers.

The last question, “How are they affected by hate comments?” I can say the following: out of the 5 influencers who participated in the study, 2 of them

acknowledged that despite their attempts not to be affected, the intensity of hate speech eventually had a psychological impact on them, leading them to make changes about themselves based on these hateful comments. On the other hand, the remaining 3 participants stated that they were not affected by the hate speech and dealt with such comments by either deleting or blocking them.

As mentioned above, it has become easier for individuals to reach each other with the removal of limits by social media. Although this convenience is an advantage, it also has disadvantages as seen when examining the problems of this research. Since there is no limitation, hate comments are increasing on social media. At this point, as stated in participatory culture, people know that they can be participants even if they don't have to be. Even if the individual does not constantly produce content on social media like an influencer, he/she can interact with the produced content. In this case, the individual sees that he/she can be a participant and interacts with the influencer content thanks to new tools such as comments, messages, or sharing. At this point, issues that have been mentioned in the literature, such as hate comments or lynching culture, appear and enter the academic literature.

In the literature Hate speech defined as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin. (The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Recommendation 97(20)). Based on the research findings, hate speech is no longer directed solely towards political or immigrant minorities but also towards individuals who do not conform to beauty standards displayed on social media or who resist conforming to trends on social media. Within the scope of the study, it has been observed that influencers who are subjected to hate speech generally do so because they do not follow trends or refuse to adhere to certain beauty standards. At this point, the explanation of hate speech should also include individuals being targeted with hate speech for not conforming to certain trends or standards, and thus, being considered as minorities in relation to these trends or standards.

As highlighted in the literature review, hate speech can indeed be caught in the dilemma of freedom of expression. Due to the freedom of expression, users may argue

that they can engage in hate speech based on the notion of expressing their own opinions, especially since influencer accounts are public. However, this situation can lead users to face legal obligations. This is because the laws of the Republic of Turkey include penalties for statements that can incite the public. As a result, users might find themselves under legal obligations.

Users, whether through legal means or as described in the findings, often choose to block individuals who engage in hate speech to create a safe environment for themselves. Additionally, users can report individuals who engage in hate speech on social media platforms, leading to the suspension or closure of these accounts on the platforms.

While explaining the lynching culture in the literature section, the formation of mobbing culture begins with hate-filled comments being directed at a specific content, and due to social media algorithms, individuals with similar thoughts to the person making the hate speech gather around the content and make multiple hateful comments, initiating a group formation. Based on the research findings, I can say that this explanation is consistent with the results. The participants in the study mentioned that they have encountered lynching culture through hate speech, where the majority of individuals join forces and support each other in spreading hateful comments.

If we look at the problems and their findings, the first question is “What kind of hate speech is encountered on social media over beauty standards?” As we can see from the findings, influencers receive comments according to their content patterns, but the comments they receive in terms of beauty standards come to them physically. These physical comments are generally related to the height and weight of the influencers. Influencers realize that there is a certain imposition on social media, especially about beauty standards, both in the content they see, with the similarity of other content producers, and through the hate speech that comes to them. Particularly, as stated by the participants, influencers who do not change themselves with the popularity of certain appearances or physical features every year or at certain intervals are exposed to certain hate speech.

Actually, at this point, the two questions of this research should be explained together. The second question is “What is the nature of hate speech against influencers

and how are they affected by hate comments?” As mentioned above, especially if it is about appearance and physical features, as we can see from the findings, it emerges through beauty standards or 'beauty trends' that are imposed on social media or constantly revealed. However, when there is hate speech about their content, the participants face very different results. Hate speech, which can change according to the content types, is in the form of questioning the information of the influencer if it is informative content, but criticism of the content type or the activity within the content only happens when this situation reaches the level of hate.

Eventually, influencers are regularly exposed to hate speech and lynching culture in their daily lives with the increasing dimensions of hate speech. Although hate speech is mostly based on physical features, content producers who do not comply with the beauty standards imposed on social media are constantly writing with hate speech. Therefore, when we look at the problems found in this research, it is seen that the nature of hate speech on social media is both beauty standards and questioning the real identity and knowledge of influencers, while influencers who do not have certain physical characteristics are constantly pressured to have these physical characteristics, and they are confronted with hate speech. It can be said that they are against it.

As mentioned earlier in the research, hate speech increased with the spread of social media. The increase in hate speech is also seen as a result of in-depth interviews conducted in the research. Hate speech is becoming widespread as a result of the sharing of participatory culture, influencers or content producers on social media, and comments written by individuals with the right to 'freedom of speech'. Because the individual does not realize or does not want to realize what he/she does while expressing his/her free thought goes beyond criticism and turns into hate speech and what effect it has on the other person. Hate speech is very common at this point.

As a result of in-depth interviews, it was observed that lynch culture is also quite common and a situation that influencers are exposed to. Although we have mentioned in the relevant section of the research that lynching culture emerges as a result of the increase in hate speech on social media and individuals producing hate speech as a group due to the constant accessibility of these discourses, we can see that it is widespread on social media.

To sum up, exposure to hate speech or lynching culture by influencers, content producers, or anyone whose social media account is open to the public is becoming more common with the increase in social media usage. As mentioned before, hate speech is mostly made through physical features, as seen in this research on influencers, and it enables influencers to develop a mechanism that is suitable for them. What is meant by this mechanism, as stated in the findings section of the research, is that influencers are affected by these hate speeches, all of the influencers have developed methods such as deleting, replying, or blocking comments containing these discourses to protect themselves. In this case, as can be seen, the main point of the culture of hate speech and lynching is that it affects the people who are exposed to this situation in a very large way.

Although the research on hate speech, which is the main focus of this research, has been done as stated before, there has been no research on its effect on influencers and there has been a certain gap in this area. As a suggestion for future research after research, I should state that even if it is difficult to communicate with influencers, there is a subject that needs more work. Attitudes towards hate speech and its effects can be studied within a larger group and further shaped by media analysis. For further research, this research will be a starting point.

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## APPENDIX

### **Personal Information:**

1. Age:
2. Place of residence:
3. Education/occupation:

### **Influencer Information:**

1. When did you create your account?
2. Number of followers:
3. What is the category of your content?
4. On which platforms do you have an account?
5. Are you currently working or are you a full-time influencer?
6. Do you have any agreements with an agency?
7. Do you do affiliate marketing?
8. Do you do influencer marketing? Are there any brands you have agreements with?
9. If you have agreements with brands, what factors do you look for in those brands?
10. How often do you share content? Do you have a specific sharing pattern?

11. Do you change your content format based on your followers' suggestions or needs?

12. If you produce beauty content, what is your main goal? (self-improvement, helping others, etc.)

**Hate Speech:**

1. Have you been subjected to hate speech on social media?

2. If you have been subjected to hate speech, how did you receive it? (message, comment, etc.)

3. What was the hate speech about? (your appearance, your content, etc.)

4. If you received a comment about your appearance in hate speech, would you consider making a change?

5. What is your attitude towards hate speech? (responding, ignoring, blocking, etc.)

6. How do you feel about hate speech? Does it affect you?

7. How do the analyses of your content that contain hate speech compare to others? (higher or lower engagement)

8. Do you share content that contains hate speech? How do your followers react when you share it? How do you feel if you are supported or not supported?

9. What is your perspective on beauty? Is beauty for you limited to a certain standard? (certain physical features, posture, etc.)

10. Do you compare yourself to other influencers?

11. Do you apply trends in your field?

12. If you could change anything in your field, what would you change?

**Cancel Culture:**

1. Have you ever experienced hate speech that turned into cancel culture?

2. What was your attitude if there was a situation that turned into cancel culture?

3. Even if we don't face ourselves on social media, we often see someone facing hate speech or cancel culture. What do you think about the changes these people need to make after hate speech?