



Social Media Usage During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

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<p>This thesis explores how social media usage changed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, examining how these changes reflect broader trends in digital communication and social behaviour. It focuses on the reasons people use social media and the kinds of content people are consuming at different stages of the pandemic. The study offers a theoretical framework to comprehend the psychological and social requirements that social media users satisfy during times of crisis by utilising the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It also looks at how these changes affect social interactions and digital connection, providing insights into how social media has developed into an essential tool for overcoming and adjusting to the difficulties caused by the pandemic.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic caused a great deal of change in how people used social media, making these platforms essential for entertainment, communication, and information sharing in the face of widespread lockdowns and social isolation. This study looks at how social media evolved into a lifesaver for people who want to stay in touch with each other, receive real-time information, and work and learn remotely. It draws attention to how social media has become more important as traditional physical venues have been more constrained, leading to a rise in online commerce, content creation, and virtual engagement.</p> <p>The research focused mostly on young people, particularly students, and was conducted utilising Webropol survey. It was then shared via social media sites. It investigated their preferences for information and online behaviours during a time of widespread lockdowns and social distancing measures. A total of 52 responses were successfully gathered during the survey's March 15–24, 2024, period.</p> <p>The results indicate a significant increase in social media use during the peak of the pandemic as people sought information, entertainment, and connections with others. Platforms including Instagram, and TikTok have seen an increase in engagement. There was a clear preference for videos, live streaming, and interactive posts in the content consumption behaviours. Despite a slight decline in use intensity following the pandemic, persistent patterns of interaction were seen, indicating enduring impacts on digital activity.</p> <p>In addition to increasing the adoption of digital media into daily life, the thesis notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role that social media plays in maintaining society norms and personal well-being during times of crisis. The future development of social media and tourism initiatives that consider users' evolving needs and behaviours in the post-pandemic environment will be greatly aided by these observations.</p>
Key words Social media, COVID-19, Tourism, Uses and Gratification Theory

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1 Introduction

In today's digital age, social media has become a pervasive force globally, significantly influencing personal relationships, politics, culture, and commerce. With billions of users worldwide engaging in real-time sharing of experiences, views, and creative expressions, social media has transformed from a platform for viral trends into a catalyst for social movements, enhancing the dynamic interconnectivity of our world and fostering diversity and unity online.

Social media has become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused widespread lockdowns and social separation. Widespread house quarantines were required as the extremely contagious coronavirus, which was initially discovered in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, moved quickly across continents. Social media platforms developed into vital instruments for community cohesion, communication, and information sharing during this period, and they were crucial in helping communities deal with the pandemic's effects. The virus, which is thought to have started in bats and spread to humans through an intermediary host, not only caused a health emergency but also highlighted how important digital connectedness is to modern civilization.

During the pandemic, social media's broad reach and rapid expansion were highlighted dramatically, as it functioned not only as a medium for sustaining personal ties, but also as a critical route for information transmission and collective action. Lockdowns implemented worldwide to stop the virus's transmission created an unprecedented reliance on digital platforms, highlighting social media's significance in modern life.

1.1 Research objectives

This thesis aims to reveal the specific methods in which people used social media to cope with the pandemic's issues through an in-depth analysis based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It looks into what is viewed, why people use social media, and how these things affect how people behave when they travel. This study, which focuses on the young adult demographic, notably students who navigated their educational paths throughout the pandemic, provides unique insights into the evolving interaction between social media and tourism.

1.2 Thesis structure

The structure is designed to logically progress from introducing the topics to a detailed analysis and then to conclusions that are supported by the data collected.

The chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis, the assumptions of uses and gratification theory, detailing how this theory applies to social media use during the pandemic.

The chapter 3 offers a detailed examination of various social media platforms and their distinct characteristics. It delves into the specifics of each platform, from the way they function to how they cater to different user needs, such as personal networking, professional engagements, and entertainment.

The chapter 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the research methods used for data collection and analysis. It offers a detailed explanation of the selected research design, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and analytical methods.

The chapter 6 summarizes the results of the data collection, providing a detailed examination of how social media usage changed during the pandemic.

The thesis is concluded in the chapter 7, which provides a summary of the major discoveries made during the study. It analyses how these findings will affect future tourism and social media tactics. This chapter explains how research has illuminated shifting attitudes and practices regarding social media use during and after the pandemic.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study is significant in a variety of ways, particularly in the fields of tourism, digital communication, and social behaviours influenced by global disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has radically changed how people interact with one another and with technology. This thesis explores how these shifts have influenced the usage of social media, providing insights into the changing connection between digital platforms and users. The study contributes to a better understanding of how societal behaviours evolve in response to global concerns by looking at changes in social media usage during and after the pandemic.

2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework functions as a conceptual model that shows the relationships between the different concepts and variables in a research investigation. It gives researchers a well-organized set of guiding principles to help them comprehend the connections between the various study components. This framework provides a logical structure that supports the entire investigation, serving as a lens through which researchers can see, interpret, and analyse data. A theoretical framework guarantees an orderly manner of gathering, analysing, and applying data by arranging and placing research topics and techniques. It basically serves as the foundation for the scholar's investigation, allowing for a well-focused and cogent examination of the results.

In this thesis, I will be using Uses and Gratifications Theory to support my thesis. The theory of uses and gratifications is a communication theory that emphasizes the active activity of media consumers or audiences. It implies that people deliberately select media content according to their requirements and try to use media to satisfy those wants. The uses and gratifications theory emphasizes the idea that people are proactive in their media consumption, choosing media based on what they believe will fulfill certain psychological or social needs, in contrast to previous theories that saw media audiences as passive receivers of information (Whiting & Williams, 2013)

2.1 Assumptions of Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is based on several fundamental assumptions that affect its approach to media consumption. These assumptions highlight the active role that media consumers play as well as the variety of reasons that influence the particular media material that they choose. The notion that consumers are actively involved in choosing media that suits their unique needs and interests rather than being passive recipients of it is at the heart of the theory. The idea highlights the purposeful and goal-directed aspect of media consumption, emphasizing the different reasons people select different kinds of media content. The Uses and Gratifications Theory, which depicts the intentional and dynamic relationship between media consumers and the material they consume, is based on these assumptions taken together. (Vinney, 2019).

2.1.1 Active audience

According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, the "Active Audience" idea highlights how media consumers choose and interpret content according to their own needs and preferences. Using this strategy, audiences are now seen as active participants in the media experience rather than just as passive consumers of information. People utilise their own freedom to select media that fits their own interests and goals, exhibiting goal-directed behaviour when using media (Vinney, 2019).

Thanks to the abundance of digital options accessible today, audiences are able to participate in a selective manner, selecting not just what material to consume but also the platform, timing, and mode of contact. Their active participation is further defined by their selectivity, which also extends to interactive behaviours like enjoying, sharing, and commenting. Furthermore, in an era of pervasive misinformation, contemporary media consumers evaluate the content they consume critically, assessing its relevance and veracity (Vinney, 2019).

Overall, the active audience theory underscores a more empowered viewer who not only consumes but also critically engages with, interprets, and influences media, reflecting a significant evolution in the relationship between media and society.

2.1.2 Intentional media use

The "Intentional Media Use" assumption within the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that users are deliberate and purposeful in their media consumption, strategically selecting platforms and content that align with specific personal goals and needs. This strategic selection process is guided by individual objectives, such as staying informed about market trends through a financial news website, maintaining health via a fitness app, or connecting with friends and family through social media. Users engage with media to fulfill intents like information seeking, entertainment, social connection, self-expression, or relaxation, demonstrating purpose-driven consumption (Vinney, 2019).

Users engage deeply with material to learn new skills, stay up to date on current events, or find support for personal issues. Every engagement with media is goal oriented. This concentrated interaction is motivated by expected rewards that consumers want to obtain, such learning more from a documentary as opposed to a feature film. Intentional media use requires a certain degree of media literacy and self-control, as users must choose the sources that best suit their requirements from a wide range of media options (Vinney, 2019).

Additionally, people frequently modify how much media they consume in response to how well it serves their goals, enhancing their media habits over time to maximise the advantages they obtain. This adaptive behaviour demonstrates how deliberate media use affects engagement style and intensity in addition to media choice. Media creators and marketers that want to customise material that fulfils consumer expectations and has a bigger impact must comprehend these behaviours.

2.1.3 Diverse Needs and Gratifications

According to the "Diverse Needs and Gratifications" premise in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, people utilise media to satisfy a range of particular wants and desires. According to this viewpoint,

media is a multipurpose tool that people use to fulfil a variety of psychological and social needs, each in line with their own goals and the demands of their circumstances (Vinney, 2019).

First and foremost, media offers a form of escape, giving people a way to get away from daily stress or monotony. People can lose themselves in other worlds through movies, TV series, books, or video games, providing a little mental break and diversion from social or personal problems (Vinney, 2019).

Second, people frequently turn to the media for entertainment when they're feeling down. This involves engaging with humorous and entertaining content, including comedic podcasts, lighthearted social media feeds, or comedy shows. The need for pleasure and enjoyment is driven by the need for amusement, which lifts the spirits and offers a welcome diversion from daily tasks (Vinney, 2019).

Thirdly, media has a big impact on social integration. It is important for those who want to preserve cultural ties or who might feel alone in their immediate physical surroundings since it makes them feel more a part of their communities or cultures. Social media, news sites, and niche forums are examples of platforms that let people remain in touch and take part in local or international conversations (Vinney, 2019).

Additionally, by expressing people's ideals, views, or lifestyles, the media can support personal identity. People can discover and reaffirm their identities within a community of people who share similar experiences or viewpoints by engaging with specialist information that is in line with their interests, political beliefs, or cultural traditions (Vinney, 2019).

Finally, one of the main forces behind media consumption is the search for information. People use media, such as blogs, educational websites, and online newspapers, to keep themselves informed about the world around them. Beyond simple curiosity, this need for information allows for educated decision-making, expands knowledge for professional or personal development, and aids in the comprehension of challenging local or global situations (Vinney, 2019).

2.1.4 Selective Exposure

People prefer media content that conforms to their preexisting attitudes, values, and beliefs, according to the Uses and Gratifications Theory's "Selective Exposure" idea. The need to preserve cognitive consistency, which gives people a sense of security and confidence in their opinions, motivates this behaviour. People who interact with media that supports their preexisting beliefs do so in a way that lessens the discomfort that comes with cognitive dissonance (Vinney, 2019).

Because people are occasionally exposed to opposing views, selective exposure can also reinforce convictions and result in more firmly held opinions. This propensity helps to sustain a stable and peaceful mental state in addition to supporting individual views. Furthermore, selective exposure helps people feel more a part of the community by exposing them to media that reflects their social affiliations or cultural heritage. This helps people reaffirm their social and cultural identities (Vinney, 2019).

In the age of digitalization, social media platforms and news outlets use advanced algorithms to enable selective exposure. By personalising user feeds based on past interactions, these technologies have the potential to exacerbate the echo chamber effect, which occurs when users encounter fewer opposing viewpoints and solidify their preexisting convictions (Vinney, 2019).

In general, selective exposure highlights a proactive aspect of media consumption in which people actively choose what to read and how to interpret it based on their preexisting preferences. This has significant consequences for political discourse, social cohesiveness, and individual belief systems.

2.1.5 Individual differences

The concept of "Individual Differences" within the Uses and Gratifications Theory acknowledges that every person is unique, with distinct wants, desires, and motives that influence how they interact with media. This diversity in media consumption is shaped by various factors, including personality traits, values, life experiences, and demographic backgrounds (Vinney, 2019).

For example, media preferences are highly influenced by personality attributes. While introverts can favour quiet content consumption, such as reading or watching films, extroverts might be drawn to interactive social media sites that promote networking. People who have a strong need for cognition are frequently drawn to academic publications or movies that are thought-provoking (Vinney, 2019).

Beliefs and values are also very important while choosing media. Individuals who place a high value on environmental sustainability may favour media that addresses sustainability-related concerns, whereas people with strong political or religious convictions may favour media sources that align with their ideologies (Vinney, 2019).

A person's education, upbringing, and cultural background are all factors in their life experiences that influence their media consumption habits. For instance, immigrants may interact with local media to feel more at home in their new environment or consume media from their home country to preserve cultural ties (Vinney, 2019).

Media consumption is also influenced by demographic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic level, and education. While older groups may choose traditional media like television or newspapers, younger generations may prefer modern media technology and platforms. Furthermore, socioeconomic position may have an impact on access to particular media genres, and education levels may have an impact on the complexity of the content ingested (Vinney, 2019).

Media choices are influenced by psychographic factors, which go beyond demographics and include lifestyle, interests, and hobbies. While tech fans are likely to consume a lot of content about developing technologies, travel enthusiasts may subscribe to travel blogs and channels (Vinney, 2019).

Lastly, people choose media based on their diverse cognitive and emotional demands. While some people use media to unwind and find emotional comfort, others use it to find intellectual challenges, stimulation, or information (Vinney, 2019).

In order to more successfully tailor content and advertising to the different needs of their audience, media producers and marketers must have a thorough understanding of these individual variances. Additionally, it offers more profound understandings of the complex reasons behind media consumption and shows how various audience segments might be engaged according to their particular qualities.

3 What is Social Media?

Social media is a term that refers to a set of online platforms and websites that allow users to establish profiles, share material, and communicate with others, promoting digital connections and interactions. These platforms make it possible for people and organisations to interact, share knowledge, and express themselves using a variety of media, including text, photographs, videos, and more. Users have the ability to interact with content by like, sharing, commenting on, or reacting to postings, as well as connect with friends, family, or people who share their interests. Furthermore, social media is frequently used as a source of news and entertainment, as well as a platform for businesses and advertisers to reach their target audience, making it a diverse and significant instrument in modern communication (Dollarhide, 2023).

3.1 Social networking platforms

Classic social networking services that let users make personal accounts include Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Users can share life events, personal updates, and different types of material, such images and videos, through these accounts, which serve as digital identities. Features that enable users to like, comment on, and share one other's posts contribute to the interactive aspect of these platforms, promoting a sense of community and continuous conversation. Facebook, for instance, offers a plethora of platforms for social engagement and the sharing of interests, from local community announcements to international fan communities, through its broad usage of groups and pages (Nations, 2021).

Instagram is a great platform for influencers and marketers who want to visually engage their audience because it concentrates on photos and short videos and is more geared towards visual content. By expanding the possibilities for content sharing and consumption, Instagram Stories and Reels have increased user diversity and pushed the limits of innovative storytelling on the network (Moreau, 2022).

Snapchat has a different strategy by emphasising posts and messages that vanish quickly. This feature, which has impacted the platform's culture by encouraging unplanned and less edited sharing of ordinary occurrences, has notably appealed to younger demographics (Moreau, 2019).

As a microblogging platform, X (formerly known as Twitter) is unique in that it lets users post brief messages, or tweets, to a large audience. X's strength comes in its immediacy and brevity, which sets it apart from other social networking sites and makes it a vital tool for real-time news and rapid updates. Tweets are limited in length, necessitating short and focused communication, which users can supplement with hashtags to participate in larger conversations or tap into popular subjects. X

is now widely recognized as a potent forum for activism, live commentary on events, and public debate (Gil, 2021).

3.2 Professional networking platforms

Professional networking platforms like LinkedIn is a prominent example of a professional networking platform where users can connect with colleagues, showcase their professional skills and accomplishments, and network for career opportunities.

LinkedIn is the most widely used platform and has several uses. Users can use it to develop comprehensive professional profiles that function as online resumes. These profiles contain information about previous and current employment, educational background, professional abilities, and recommendations from employers and coworkers. With this thorough profile setup, individuals may provide prospective employers, partners, and clients a detailed picture of their professional identity (Hanna, 2022).

LinkedIn also makes networking easier by connecting users with possible employers, peers, and industry leaders. By making recommendations for connections based on common professional experiences, hobbies, and contacts, the platform's technology helps users build their professional networks naturally. Users can get news and insights into corporate cultures by following organizations that interest them. They can also receive updates on job openings (Hanna, 2022).

3.3 Video sharing and streaming platforms

Video sharing and streaming platforms like YouTube and Vimeo are dedicated to uploading, sharing, and streaming video content, from educational videos to entertainment and vlogs.

YouTube is the world's most popular video sharing network, with a massive library of videos catering to nearly every interest. Users can establish channels, add their own videos, and grow their subscriber numbers. Because of this, more people can create material and become "YouTubers," making videos their full-time job for many. The YouTube algorithm makes personalized video recommendations to individuals based on their viewing preferences, which keeps viewers interested in extended periods of time. The platform is a comprehensive source of knowledge and entertainment because it supports a wide range of content categories, including music videos, documentaries, reviews, and tutorials (Romero, 2019).

While Vimeo's functionality is comparable to YouTube's, it appeals to a distinct demographic. Vimeo is frequently the preferred option for filmmakers and artists who want to distribute their work in the greatest digital format because of its excellent video support. Vimeo provides a more refined

viewing experience with less of a focus on advertising than YouTube, which heavily relies on advertisements for revenue. With the variety of subscription options offered by this platform, content creators have greater flexibility over how their work is monetized (Bastié, 2023).

Professional filmmakers and companies also prefer Vimeo for hosting because it gives them more control over how their videos is presented. This includes the ability to customize the video player and improve privacy settings, which are essential for sensitive content and corporate contexts (Moreau, 2021).

3.4 Social news platforms

Discussion forums and social news websites like Reddit and Quora serve as discussion forums where users can engage in conversations, ask questions, and share information on a wide range of topics.

The social news network Reddit is a prime example of its kind, built around user-generated content arranged into forums called "subreddits." Every subreddit has a focus on a certain interest or topic, such as science and technology, cooking, or personal finance. Community members can vote or downvote user-submitted content, which might include conversations, news links, and private queries. Posts are ranked according to a voting method that makes sure the community's favourite material gets seen by as many people as possible. Users can communicate freely and share without the burden of a public social media profile because to the anonymous nature of the platform. Its arrangement encourages open communication, with the interest in the subject matter taking precedence over the identity of the speaker. Reddit's extensive archives are a great source of knowledge and guidance on a wide range of topics (Widman, 2021).

With Quora, users pose specific questions to the community and receive replies from other users, the platform adopts a more question-and-answer format. You can vote for the best and most relevant responses by sorting these questions and answers by topic. Especially when responding to questions in their area of expertise, Quora urges members to utilise their true names and qualifications. This gives the material shared more legitimacy and authenticity and gives professionals credit for their work (Novak, 2023).

Quora's strategy emphasizes completeness over coverage, promoting comprehensive responses that are typically backed up by personal experiences or professional knowledge. Quora has emerged as a preferred forum for longer, more thoughtful conversations, setting itself apart from the quick exchanges typical of many other social networking platforms (Novak, 2023).

Reddit and Quora have both had a big impact on how people share and use knowledge online. They make it possible for knowledge to spread quickly and offer venues for the establishment of niche groups centred around certain requirements or interests. Because of this, people looking for guidance, support from peers, or insights into subjects not frequently covered by the media will find them to be especially helpful.

Furthermore, because users can easily access and participate in the most recent conversations, news, and analysis on these platforms, they are indispensable during significant events like international crises, technological breakthroughs, or cultural trends. Also, because they allow community people to organise around causes, pool resources, and plan activities, they play a significant role in fostering civic involvement and activism.

3.5 Messaging platforms

Messaging apps for private communication, like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat also offer social features like group chats, voice and video calls, and status updates. WhatsApp is known for its simplicity and dependability. Assuring that communications between the sender and the recipient stay confidential and secure, it offers end-to-end encryption. WhatsApp users may communicate multimedia files, disclose their whereabouts, and make voice and video conversations in addition to texting. Its group chat feature, which lets friends, family, and coworkers form private groups for exchanging updates and planning events, is especially well-liked. In addition, WhatsApp has a feature called "Status" that allows users to share text, photographs, and videos that vanish after a day, much like other social media platforms' "Stories" feature (Allen, 2022).

Facebook Messenger, which was once part of Facebook, has now grown into a standalone software with numerous of new features. It enables users to play games, send money, and communicate with businesses via automated bots in addition to text, phone, and video messaging. Messenger is a flexible tool for social and business connections because of its integration with Facebook's wider ecosystem, which enables smooth interactions within the social network (Wigmore, 2016).

WeChat is particularly well-known in China, where it functions as an all-in-one platform that extends beyond chatting. Through the app, users may order takeout, schedule appointments, pay bills, and access public services. Its social capabilities are extensive and include "Moments," a feature that lets users post updates and photographs with their friends and is akin to Facebook's timeline. WeChat is an essential tool in its users' daily lives because of its capacity to combine many facets of social and practical life into a single platform (Talin, 2024).

These messaging apps have revolutionized communication by enabling instantaneous, global accessibility. The difference between traditional SMS and more dynamic forms of communication has

been decreased with the introduction of social features like group chats and video calls. The platforms' extensive integration into both the personal and professional spheres of contemporary life is reflected in their dual roles as essential resources for business communications and customer support as well as instruments for interpersonal contact.

Essentially, messaging apps have reshaped how people interact with one another by providing a variety of features that meet a variety of demands, from informal conversations to official business interactions. They are prime examples of how communication technologies have come together in the digital age, enhancing messages with a variety of media and interactive features in addition to simple exchange.

3.6 Dating platforms

Dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge are designed to help people connect romantically or socially based on their preferences and interests. Tinder is likely the best-known modern dating app, because to its user-friendly "swipe" feature. Swiping left indicates passing someone and right indicates showing interest. When two users swipe right on one other's profiles, a match is created. By making dating simple and almost game-like, this straightforward method has revolutionised dating and encouraged users to interact with the app on a regular basis. Tinder streamlines the setup process by integrating with other social media networks to retrieve photos and basic profile information (Moreau, 2021).

Bumble distinguishes itself with a unique method in which women must initiate heterosexual matches. By lowering unsolicited messages, this feature aims to change the conventional power dynamics and create a safer environment. Beyond just dating, Bumble also provides tools for business networking and friendship-building (Moreau, 2020).

Under the slogan "Designed to be deleted," Hinge emphasises that it wants to promote long-term partnerships as opposed to hookups. This is accomplished by giving users the option to present a more thorough profile that incorporates their vices, vitals, and virtues. By encouraging users to like and remark on particular sections of other people's profiles, Hinge enables users to interact with content more deeply and initiates deeper conversations from the outset (Weingus, 2024).

Dating apps significantly alter social relationships by expanding the range of ways people can meet and engage. These apps use sophisticated algorithms to recommend possible matches based on shared interests, friends, location, and even behavioural patterns identified by the user's app usage (Weingus, 2024).

In addition, the popularity of dating apps has influenced societal changes in dating customs and conduct. They have made internet dating mainstream and widely accepted, neutralising and expanding the process of finding possible mates. These platforms have also had a big social impact, changing everything from communication patterns in general to the mechanics of interpersonal relationships (Weingus, 2024).

As dating apps have become more popular, worries about safety and privacy have also increased. Sensitive personal data is handled by these sites in large quantities. Important facets of their business operations include how they safeguard this data and provide users with privacy control. In order to improve user safety, these applications also continuously create and add security features like location tracking, photo verification, and in-app messaging without disclosing private contact information (Weingus, 2024).

As a result, dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge have revolutionised the way individuals start and maintain relationships, providing insight into the changing nature of human connection in the digital age. They play a crucial role in contemporary social dynamics and reflect major changes in society standards about private and personal contacts.

3.7 Blogging platforms

Blogging platforms like Tumblr, and Medium allow users to publish long-form written content and engage with readers through comments and social sharing. Blogging platforms have given people the ability to express themselves, share expertise, and convey their experiences to a global audience. Anyone with internet connection can create an online presence and reach a wider audience by using them as effective tools for public conversation and personal expression. An increasingly diverse range of viewpoints can now be heard in public discourse thanks to the democracy of content creation, which has enhanced the availability of information (Indeed, 2023).

Tumblr offers a blogging experience that is more dynamic and focused on multimedia. Because it blends social networking components with regular blog publishing, it is especially well-liked by younger viewers. A wide range of content kinds, such as text, images, quotes, links, chat transcripts, audio files, and videos, can be posted by users. Its social features, such as like and reblogging, facilitate the spread of viral material and create a community-focused environment where users can effortlessly share and advertise one other's content (Costello, 2023).

Medium prioritises readability and high-quality content, with an easy-to-use interface that puts the reading experience first. Its method of bringing authors and readers together via interest-based channels as opposed to private networks or customised feeds makes it distinctive. Medium provides content authors with built-in analytics tools and the opportunity to earn money through its

Partner Programme, which pays writers based on how deeply Medium members connect with their work (Rumberger, 2023).

Blogging platforms have grown in value as educational tools because they provide a forum for student and teacher participation, writing assignments, and the presentation of academic work. In a professional sense, they enable companies, thought leaders, and creatives to communicate directly with followers and customers, provide in-depth insights, and develop thought leadership and brand awareness (Rumberger, 2023).

In conclusion, blogging services like Medium and Tumblr are essential to the modern digital environment. They are changing the way that information is produced, shared, and consumed around the world. They do this by not just offering the resources required for complex content creation and management, but also by encouraging community involvement and interpersonal relationships.

4 Social media and the COVID-19 pandemic

Social media usage shifted rapidly during the COVID-19 epidemic and was vital to people's ability to communicate, get information, and pass the time during lockdowns and social isolation. Social media behaviour changed as a result of the pandemic, reflecting broader changes in society.

Lockdowns and isolations forced people to spend more time at home as a result of the extensive lockdowns and social distancing measures that were implemented. Social media emerged as a vital resource for preserving relationships with others, staying informed, and reducing feelings of loneliness.

Due to a lack of outside activities and entertainment alternatives, people started using social media to stay entertained. They connected with friends, watched movies, and took part in online challenges and communities. Screen time rose as a result of the widespread adoption of online learning and remote employment. In professional and educational contexts, social media platforms were utilized as a tool for communication, teamwork, and information exchange.

The pandemic caused a boom in information-seeking behavior. Social media platforms have become main providers of real-time updates, news, and information about COVID-19, public health guidelines, and other pertinent topics. Social media acted as a platform for government agencies and health groups to disseminate official guidelines, health updates, and recommendations, thereby increasing public knowledge and safety.

There was a significant rise in online shopping as a result of the pandemic-related mall and physical store closures and limitations. Social media platforms replaced physical retail locations as the primary means of bringing customers and companies together. These platforms became essential to the retail ecosystem during the pandemic because they made it easier for firms to interact directly with customers, showcase products, and simplify transactions.

In addition, a surge in the production of original material on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok was caused by the trend towards spending more time at home. People became more involved with these social medias as they started DIY projects, took up new hobbies, and contributed original content. In addition to being a method to kill time, this surge in content creation gave many people a creative outlet through which they could express themselves, pick up new skills, and keep up virtual social ties. The increasing amount of user-generated content has also given rise to new content creators and influencers, further impacting trends in a variety of industries and further diversifying the digital landscape.

4.1 Social media statistics

Social media usage skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic as people resorted to these platforms for online learning and remote work, as well as for entertainment, information and news updates, and staying in touch with others. This increase in usage was a reflection of people's adaptation to new restrictions and lifestyle changes. With a 7% growth from the previous year, there are currently over 4.5 billion users online, almost reaching a 60% worldwide population. Approximately 3.2 billion individuals are still offline despite this growth. Users spend 6 hours and 43 minutes a day on average on the internet, which adds up to more than 100 days a year. Google and YouTube are popular websites that receive more traffic than Amazon, one of the biggest E-Commerce websites in the world (Kemp, 2021).

The world's population, which increased by more than 80 million since the beginning of 2020, stood at 7.83 billion as of January 2021, growing at a consistent 1% yearly rate. The number of people using mobile phones has also increased; 5.22 billion people, or 66.6 percent of the world's population, currently own mobile phones. This indicates that since January 2020, the number of unique mobile users has increased by 1.8% (Figure 1.). In addition, there are now 8.02 billion mobile connections globally, a 0.9 percent increase. Internet usage continues to grow, with 4.66 billion people globally, up 7.3 percent from last year and achieving a global internet penetration of 59.5 percent. The number of people using social media has increased significantly, reaching 4.20 billion users after expanding by 490 million over the previous year. With this year-over-year surge of 13 percent, the global population of social media users currently numbers over 53 percent. These figures highlight how quickly technology is being incorporated into people's daily lives everywhere (Kemp, 2021).

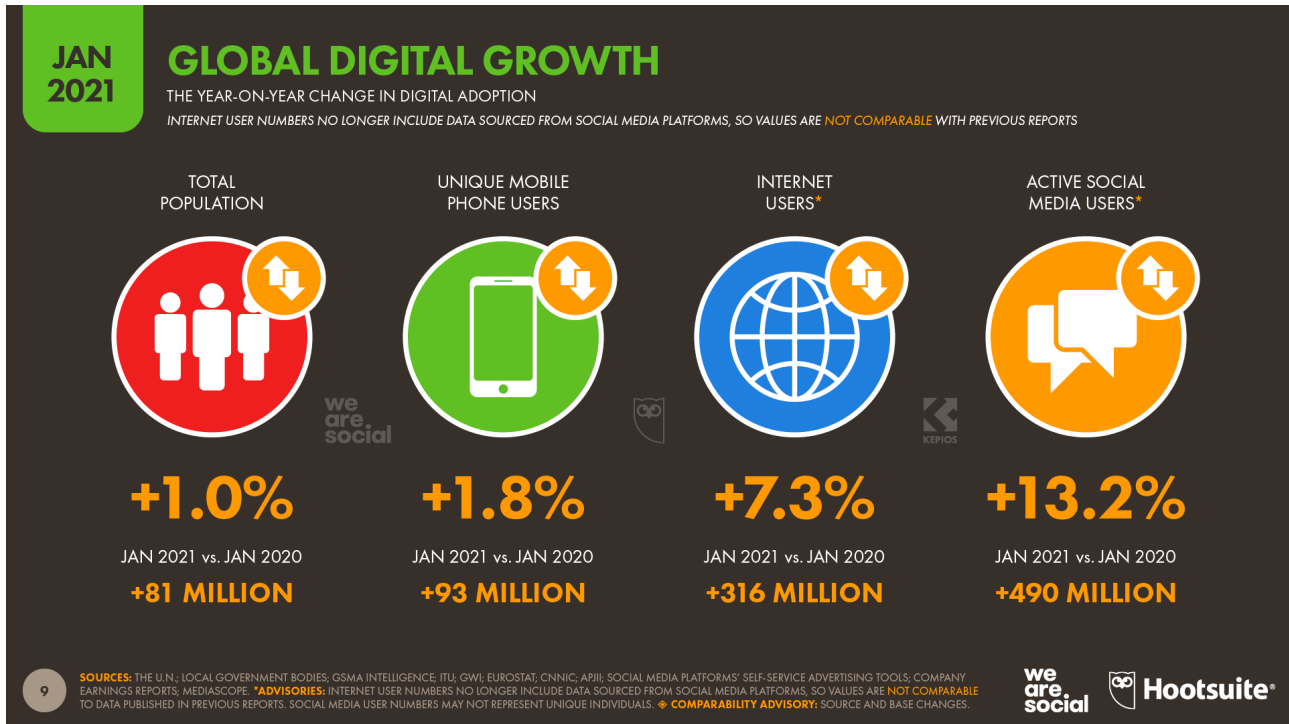


Figure 1. Global Digital Growth 2021 (Kemp, 2021).

The public introduction of 5G networks in late 2019 represented the turning point in worldwide connectivity. After this development, there were more than 5.22 billion unique mobile users globally, and for the first time, mobile devices accounted for more than half of all internet usage. The adoption of 5G has resulted in a significant increase of mobile data speeds. In just a year, South Korea saw a rise from 51Mbps to over 100Mbps. In addition, the dominance of mobile apps increased even further, with only 9% of mobile device usage going towards online surfing and accounting for 10 out of every 11 minutes spent on mobile devices. This demonstrates how interactions through apps are becoming increasingly important in place of traditional web browsing (Kemp, 2021).

5 Research method

This chapter discusses the research techniques used to gather, examine, and evaluate data—an essential step in answering particular research questions or verifying hypotheses. These techniques can be divided into two primary groups: qualitative and quantitative. In order to make conclusions, quantitative approaches like surveys and experiments rely on numerical data and statistical analysis. Conversely, non-numerical data is used in qualitative approaches, such as observational studies and interviews, to get an understanding of intricate social and behavioural processes. The study's aims and the resources at hand inform the research technique selection, guaranteeing that the strategy is in line with the context and goals of the investigation (Streefkerk, 2019).

5.1 Quantitative data collection method

Quantitative data collection is a systematic method for acquiring information that can be quantified and statistically analysed. This method is widely used in domains including as sociology, psychology, economics, and business to understand and analyse the behaviour, preferences, and opinions of people or groups. Comparatively speaking, quantitative data works with numbers and values that enable a more exact and objective assessment than qualitative data, which is descriptive and involves qualities that cannot be quantified (Bhat, 2019).

In order to collect quantitative data, surveys and questionnaires with closed-ended questions that respondents must answer are common structured instruments used in the process. Depending on the goals and research design, these tools may be given in person, by mail, online, or over the phone. The purpose of the questions is to gather measurable information on the topic at hand, such as averages, frequencies, and other statistical components (Bhat, 2019).

Utilising existing data sets, which may include financial records, historical data, and other archival information that sheds light on long-term trends, is another popular strategy for gathering quantitative data. Quantitative data can also be obtained from experiments and observations by designing them such that time spent on a task is recorded or the frequency of a specific behaviour is noted (Bhat, 2019).

Quantitative data collecting enables researchers to test hypotheses, find correlations between variables, and forecast future behaviours or trends. The acquired data is frequently represented as graphs, charts, and tables for analysis, which may include statistical approaches ranging from simple descriptive statistics to advanced inferential analyses (Bhat, 2019).

The primary benefit of quantitative data gathering is its ability to provide specific, quantifiable facts that can support larger generalisations about a population based on a sample size. To guarantee the accuracy and authenticity of the data acquired, it is imperative that the process of gathering data be meticulously planned and carried out. This includes selecting acceptable samples, creating clear and unbiased questions, and using rigorous statistical analysis techniques (Bhat, 2019).

5.2 Research target group

The strategic choice to focus on young individuals, especially students, for the survey about social media use during the pandemic was made in consideration of various variables that make this group particularly relevant to the study's goals. Among the most frequent users of social media are young adults, particularly those in school. They use these platforms not just for entertainment and education but also for social relationships. Because of this high level of interaction, there is a wealth of data available to analyse changes in social media usage during the pandemic.

6 Results

This section analyzes the results of the survey. To fully understand and interpret the findings presented here, it is essential to refer to Appendix 1, which contains the survey questions. Familiarity with these questions is crucial as they provide the context needed to comprehend the implications of the survey responses and their relevance to the research objectives.

The main objective of the study was to obtain detailed information about the ways in which people's social media usage habits changed both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special emphasis on individual experiences and viewpoints. The survey was shared on several social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram. The survey was accessible from March 15, 2024, to March 24, 2024. 52 people responded to the survey in total, which is a tiny number yet offers insightful information on current social media trends. The volume of responses points to a focused strategy where obtaining insightful information was prioritized over quantity. Each response was examined in order to identify more profound patterns and preferences, such as the emotional impact of social media interactions and changes in usage habits over time, that would not be obvious from observational data alone.

6.1 Respondents' demographics

The gender distribution of the responders to the survey was diverse. Based on the gathered information, 24 participants, or 47% of the total, self-identified as male (Figure 2.). The majority, or 25 participants, or 49%, identified as female. A further 2 participants, or roughly 4% of the sample, indicated that they preferred gender designations other than those that are clearly defined as male or female or that they decided to identify as non-binary. Interestingly, no participant chose to withhold their gender, indicating that all responders were eager to provide this information. The gender variety among the study participants is emphasized by this distribution.

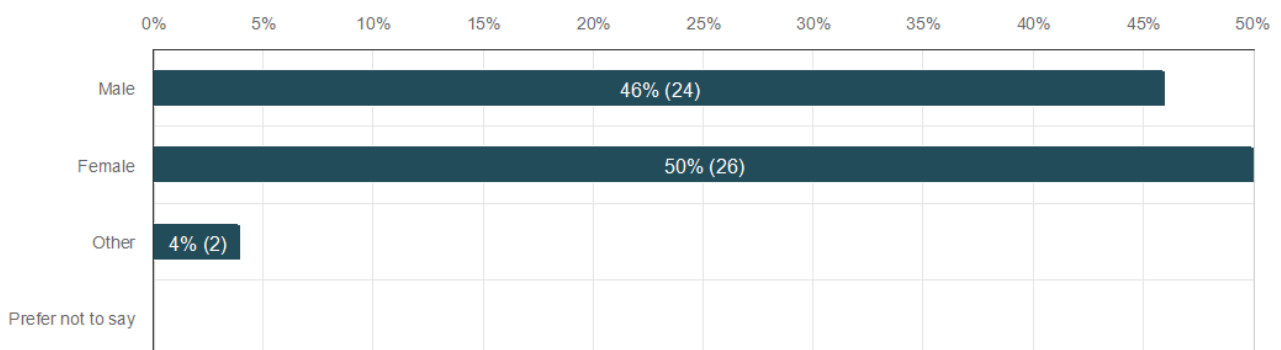


Figure 2. Gender of the respondents. n = 52

The age distribution of the respondents indicates that the survey's primary target audience was young adults, especially students (Figure 3.). 33 people, or 63% of the participants, were in the 19–24 age range. This significant representation is probably due to the survey's original focus on college campuses and its subsequent distribution via WhatsApp group chats, which successfully reached this younger audience.

The second largest age group consisted of 13 respondents, or 25% of the sample, who were between the ages of 25 and 29. This participant group offers insightful viewpoints that are probably a reflection of their early job phases and post-graduate experiences, which may have a different impact on their social media usage than it does on college students.

Last but not least, 6 participants, or 12% of the sample, were above 30. Despite its lesser size, this group is important because it offers perspectives from an older population and may present different perspectives on the use and effects of social media. In order to better understand how various age groups use and adapt to social media in their daily lives, their responses add to the study by offering a wider range of life experiences and social media interactions.

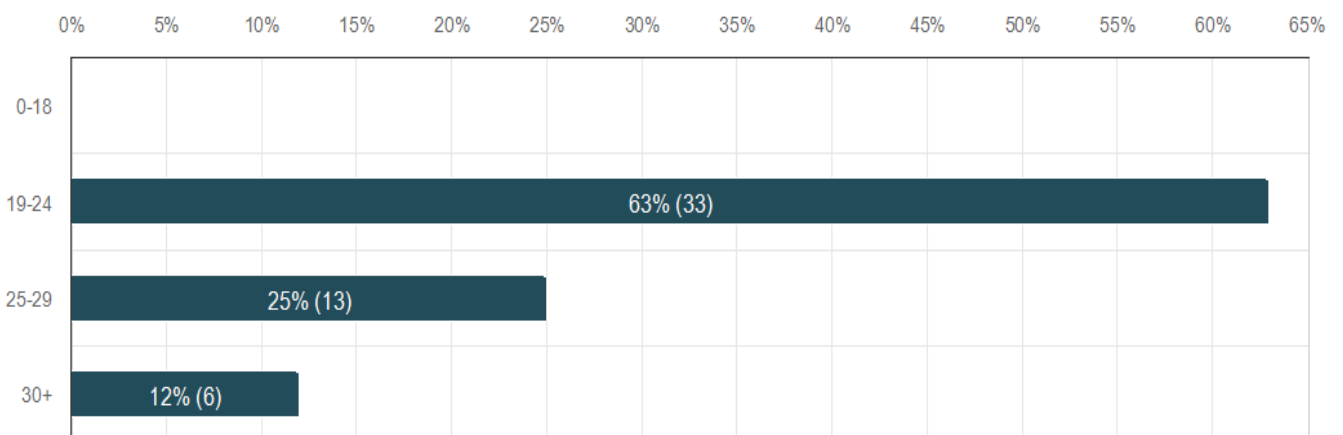


Figure 3. Age of the respondents. n = 52

The survey featured a diverse international representation, with a total of 52 participants spanning 7 different nationalities (Figure 4.). The majority of respondents were Finnish, accounting for 46 out of the 52 participants, indicating that the survey primarily reached a local demographic within Finland. This significant representation of Finnish respondents could be reflective of the survey's distribution channels or the geographic focus of the study.

In addition to the Finnish majority, the survey also included individuals from six other countries, each represented by 1 respondent: American, British, Chinese, Mexican, Norwegian, and Thai. This variety in nationalities, though small in number, brings a valuable global perspective to the study. Each of these respondents potentially provides unique insights into social media usage patterns influenced by their cultural backgrounds and local social norms.

The presence of such diverse national backgrounds in the survey underscores the global relevance of the research topic—social media usage—while also highlighting the predominance of Finnish participants. This distribution allows for an exploration of both culturally specific and universally relevant trends in social media behavior, offering a nuanced view of how different regions interact with digital platforms. The findings can help illustrate both global patterns in social media engagement and more localized experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the digital landscape across different cultural settings.

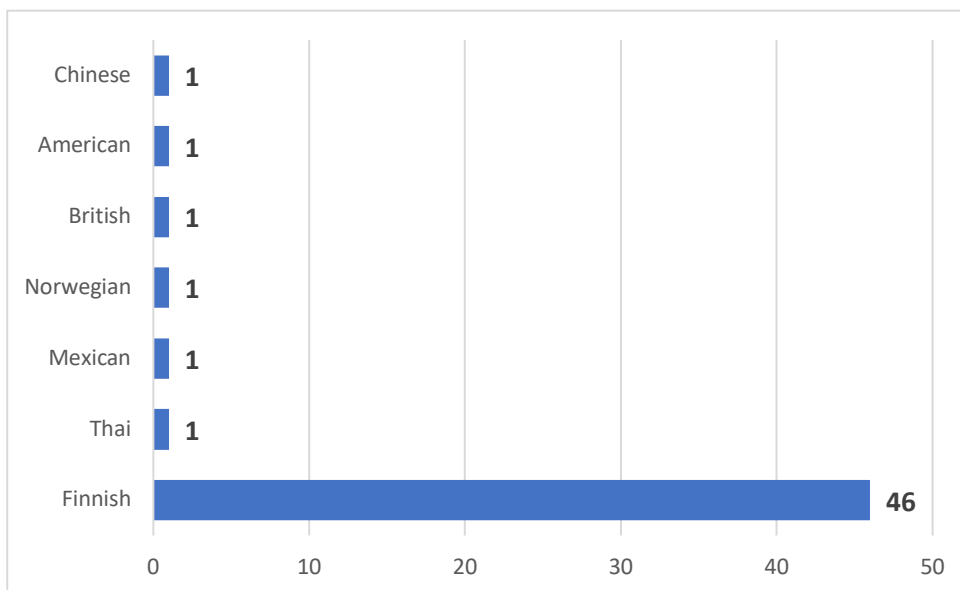


Figure 4. Nationality of the respondents. n = 52

The occupational breakdown of the survey respondents offers an insightful perspective on how different groups engaged with social media during and after the pandemic. More than half of the participants, representing 54% or 28 individuals, were students (Figure 5.). This high representation aligns with the survey's targeting strategy, which focused primarily on academic institutions and students navigating their educational experiences during the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This focus is particularly relevant given the significant impact of the pandemic on educational formats, likely influencing students' reliance on social media for both academic and social support.

Employed individuals made up 36% of the respondents, with 19 participants falling into this category. These individuals most likely used social media in a different way, balancing both their professional and personal lives. This may involve using social media to unwind from work-related tasks, network professionally, and remain up to date on industry trends.

The smallest group, consisting of 10% or 5 respondents, were those who were unemployed. This group's social media usage could be particularly nuanced, potentially focusing on job searching, connecting with support networks, and seeking entertainment or distraction during a challenging period of unemployment. Their engagement on social media might also reflect broader economic conditions and the job market's status during and following the pandemic.

Overall, the occupational diversity among the respondents provides a rich dataset from which to analyze varied social media usage patterns. Understanding these patterns can offer valuable insights into how different employment statuses influence the purposes for and frequency of social media use, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the platform's role in users' daily lives across different socio-economic backgrounds.

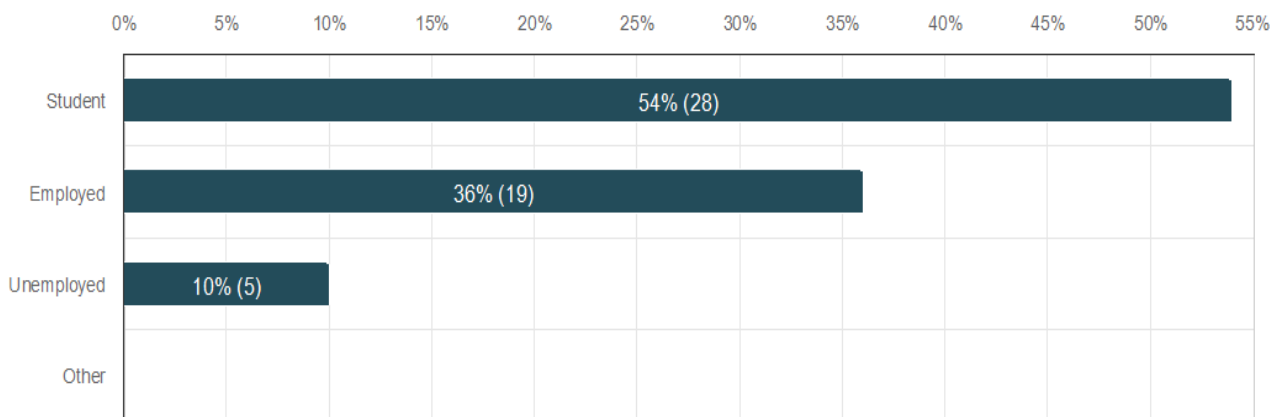


Figure 5. Occupation of the respondents. n = 52

6.2 Social media usage

The survey asked respondents about their primary social media platform usage (Figure 6.), which provided insights into the popularity and demographic preferences of various sites. WhatsApp is the most popular messaging service in Europe, according to the results, which show that 49 of respondents use it regularly. This extensive use highlights how WhatsApp has become ingrained in this region's everyday communication habits.

Following closely after, Instagram is preferred by 47 of respondents, indicating its wide appeal across a variety of groups, especially for its social networking features and visual content. With 44 responses, Snapchat comes in third place, demonstrating its appeal to younger users who are lured to its transient messaging and media-sharing features.

TikTok, in fourth place with 41 responses, demonstrates its quick rise as a major participant in the social media scene, particularly among the younger generation seeking amusement and creative expression. Facebook, which was previously the industry leader in social networking, is now ranked fifth with 32 responses, suggesting that older demographics are using the site more frequently to stay in touch with friends and family.

Despite its continued prominence as a major provider of video content, YouTube appears to be losing ground as a primary social site, as shown by the 25 replies it received. With 15 responses, Pinterest appears to have a more specialized audience. It is used for visual bookmarking, inspiration, and lifestyle curation.

The survey also featured "other" category, which received 5 replies, with participants listing services including Discord, iMessage, WeChat, LinkedIn, Jodel, Weibo, and Baidu. Notably, WeChat was brought up twice, highlighting the platform's cultural and geographical relevance and demonstrating its appeal among Chinese users.

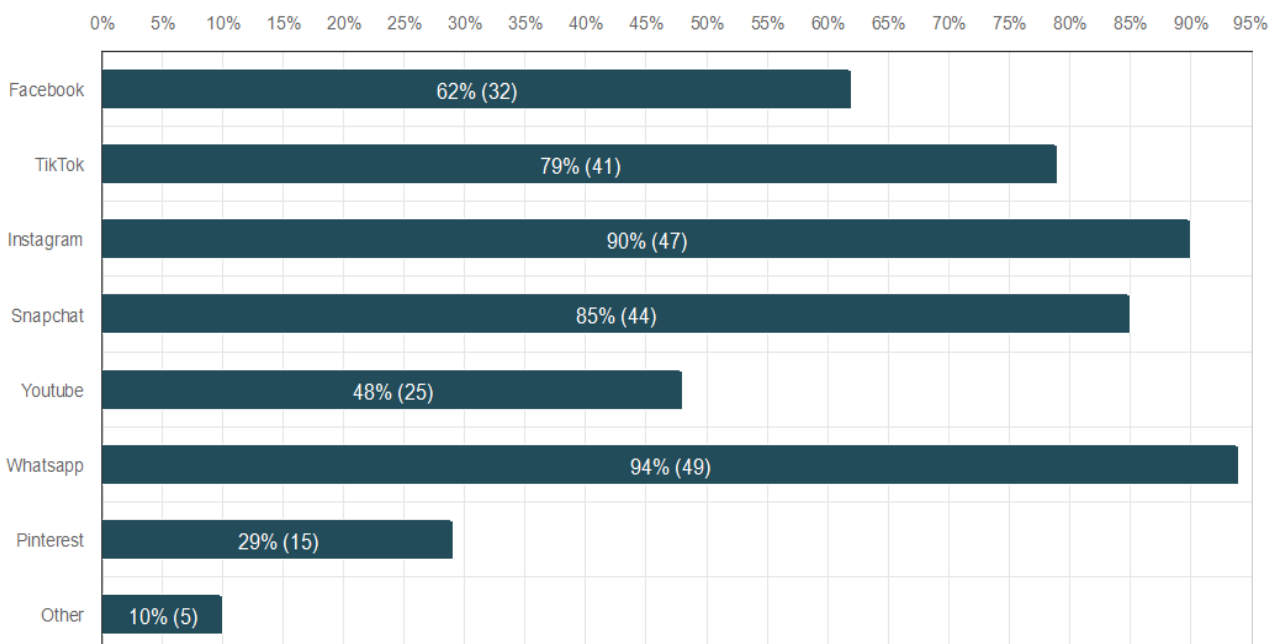


Figure 6. What social media platforms do you use? n = 258

The survey inquired whether participants had searched for information online about COVID-19. The results indicated that only 7 out of 51 participants did not seek any information about the virus, while the remaining 44 participants actively looked up details regarding COVID-19 (Figure 7.). This high level of information-seeking can be attributed to a general urgency among the public to understand the virus better. During the initial stages of the pandemic, there was a limited number of reliable sources available, prompting most people to turn to official COVID-19 websites for accurate and trustworthy information.

Participants in the survey were also questioned about the specific sources they used to seek information on COVID-19. The most frequently cited source was Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos (THL), which was mentioned by 12 participants. THL is the Finnish government agency responsible for public health and welfare, overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The agency plays a crucial role in conducting research, advancing health and welfare, and providing specialized knowledge to support public policy development in Finland. During the pandemic, THL was instrumental in reporting daily COVID-19 infection rates and offering guidance on how residents could protect themselves from the virus (THL, 2024).

The World Health Organization (WHO) was the second most referenced source. Similar to THL, WHO has been pivotal in leading and coordinating the global response to the pandemic. It issued early warnings, declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, and subsequently declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. WHO continuously provided guidance on public health best practices, including social distancing, mask usage, and hygiene, and issued detailed protocols for healthcare workers on managing cases and preventing infections (WHO).

Other sources mentioned by respondents included various news websites and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Google, BBC, Ilta-Sanomat, and Helsingin Sanomat. These platforms served as additional resources for obtaining news and updates about the pandemic, highlighting the diverse avenues through which people sought information during this global health crisis.

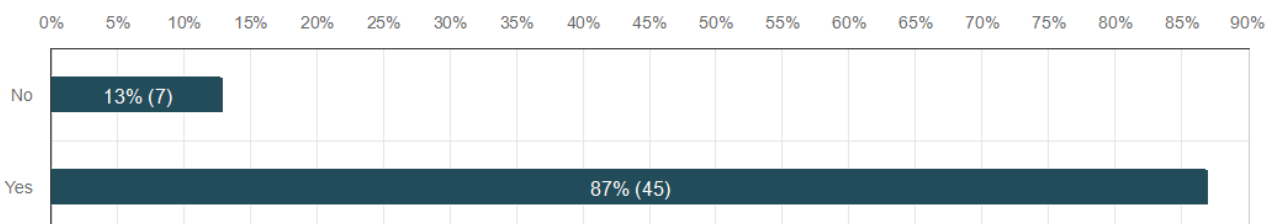


Figure 7. Did you search any information regarding COVID-19? n = 52

The survey queried participants on their reasons for using social media, revealing varied motivations influenced heavily by the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicate a tie for the most cited reasons: entertainment and maintaining connections with friends and family, each garnering 48 responses (Figure 8.). People turned to social media for entertainment, seeking relief and a psychological escape from the stress of the pandemic. With increased time spent at home, platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and various streaming services saw heightened usage. These platforms provided not only entertainment but also served as creative outlets where users could express themselves and share content, fulfilling their need for creative engagement and leisure activities. Equally prevalent was the use of social media to stay in touch with friends and family. As physical gatherings became restricted and perceived as unsafe due to the risk of virus transmission, social media became essential for maintaining social bonds. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp played crucial roles, enabling individuals to keep up with loved ones, share significant life updates, and support each other through the uncertainties brought on by the pandemic.

Staying up to date was the third most common reason for using social media, as indicated by 47 respondents. During the pandemic, the COVID-19 situation evolved rapidly, underscoring the necessity for accurate and up-to-date information about the virus's spread, preventive measures, and changing health guidelines. Social media proved to be an essential tool for accessing these timely updates. Its widespread accessibility allowed users to swiftly adapt to new health advisories and safety protocols, such as mask-wearing, social distancing, and rigorous hygiene practices, thereby facilitating an appropriate response to the unfolding public health crisis.

Online shopping was another significant reason for using social media, with 34 responses. As traditional shopping venues became less accessible due to lockdowns and safety concerns, social media platforms that facilitated e-commerce saw increased activity. Users not only shopped for necessities but also engaged in browsing for leisure, taking advantage of the convenience and safety of online shopping.

Spare time received 18 responses, indicating that many individuals used social media as a way to pass time and unwind at the end of the day. Meanwhile, general networking garnered 17 responses, reflecting people's desire to interact with new individuals and forge new connections, leveraging social media as a tool for expanding their social and professional networks.

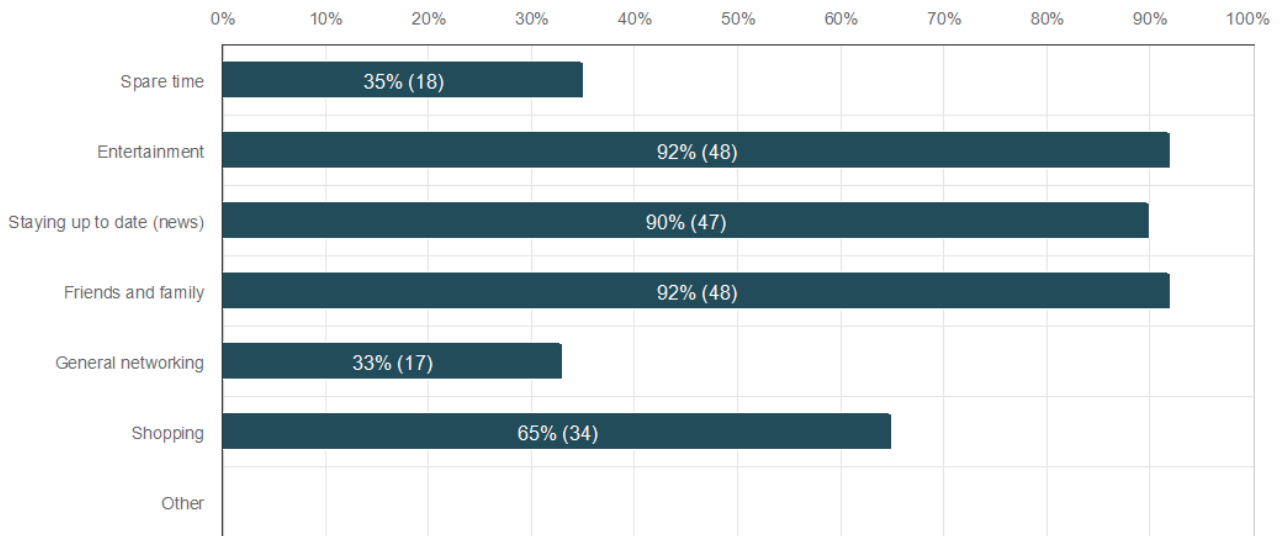


Figure 8. What is your reason of using social media? n = 212

6.3 Comparison with during and after COVID-19 pandemic

The survey's structured design, with two of its three pages containing nearly identical questions about social media usage during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, provides a clear comparative analysis of changing behavior patterns. This methodology allows for a straightforward evaluation of how social media habits evolved as pandemic restrictions were lifted.

During the pandemic, the data reveals that social media usage was significantly higher, with the majority of respondents spending between 2-4 hours and 4-6 hours daily on various platforms (Figure 9.). These high usage brackets, each reported by 18 respondents, underscore the role of social media as a crucial tool for communication and entertainment during lockdowns. The equal number of respondents in the 0-2 hours and 6+ hours brackets, both with 8 participants, illustrates a broader spread of user engagement, from minimal to extensive.

Post-pandemic, the distribution of social media usage shifted noticeably. The most common usage bracket was still 2-4 hours, reported by 26 respondents, but there was a significant increase in the number of users spending only 0-2 hours on social media, with 14 respondents. Conversely, the numbers for higher usage brackets, 4-6 hours, and 6+ hours, decreased to 7 and 5 respondents, respectively. This shift suggests a normalization of daily routines as people resumed more offline activities and perhaps experienced less need to seek social connections or entertainment exclusively online.

People started using social media as a key source of current news, health information, and leisure activities during the pandemic, when face-to-face interactions were limited due to physical restrictions. In a time of widespread anxiety and isolation, the urge to preserve social links and stay informed about the epidemic drove this increase in reliance on internet channels.

The decrease in hours spent on social media following the pandemic suggests a gradual return to pre-pandemic habits, with more time for outdoor activities, in-person socialising, and less dependency on digital platforms to meet daily social and informational demands.

It's possible that the pandemic time sped up the previously unheard-of degree of personal digital media integration. This has long-term effects on how people consume media since more people have probably formed new routines around consuming digital information, which may continue, if to a lower degree, even when the pandemic conditions improve.

A further reason to be concerned about the effects of prolonged screen time on mental health is the high usage during the pandemic. Understanding these effects may help guide future

suggestions for digital well-being in a world where hybrid forms of social connection and labour may become more prevalent as the globe enters a post-pandemic period.

The survey results show how people adjusted to a unique worldwide occurrence while also providing insights into how the connection between digital media consumption and social norms is changing.

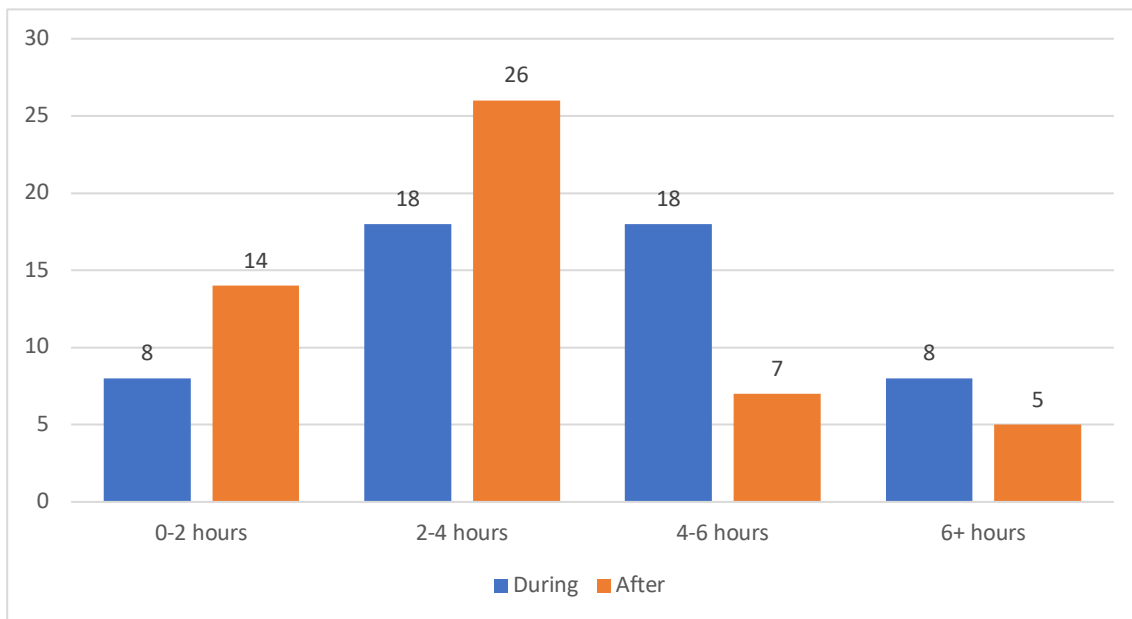


Figure 9. How many hours do you spend on social media during and after COVID-19? n = 104

The survey explored the types of social media content participants engaged with both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants had the option to select more than one type of content, revealing varied preferences (Figure 10.). During the pandemic, the most consumed types of content were videos (52 responses), images (50 responses), short videos (39 responses), article posts (29 responses), and live videos (20 responses). In contrast, the least engaged with content types were blog posts (17 responses), research posts, and infographics (each receiving 10 responses).

As the pandemic subsided, the consumption patterns for several types of social media content remained relatively stable: videos (51 responses), images (49 responses), short videos (38 responses), and article posts (24 responses). However, there was a notable decline in engagement with research posts, which fell to just 4 responses, suggesting a diminished public interest in research-related content. Other content types, such as live videos (7 responses), blog posts (13 responses), and infographics (7 responses), also saw varying levels of engagement.

This data suggests that while certain types of content maintained steady levels of engagement, others saw fluctuations likely influenced by the evolving public interest and information needs related to the pandemic.

Additionally, participants were prompted to explain why they consumed these specific types of content. The analysis of their responses revealed that many participants cited social media addiction, boredom at home, and a desire for entertainment as primary drivers. These reasons were anticipated, given the restrictions on outdoor activities during the pandemic.

In the post-pandemic period, while many of the reasons remained consistent with earlier responses, new motivations emerged in the feedback. Participants mentioned seeking inspiration and keeping up with viral content and trends as additional factors influencing their social media consumption. This shift indicates a gradual return to more proactive and diverse content engagement as the immediate effects of the pandemic lessened, allowing people to explore broader interests and interactions on social media platforms.

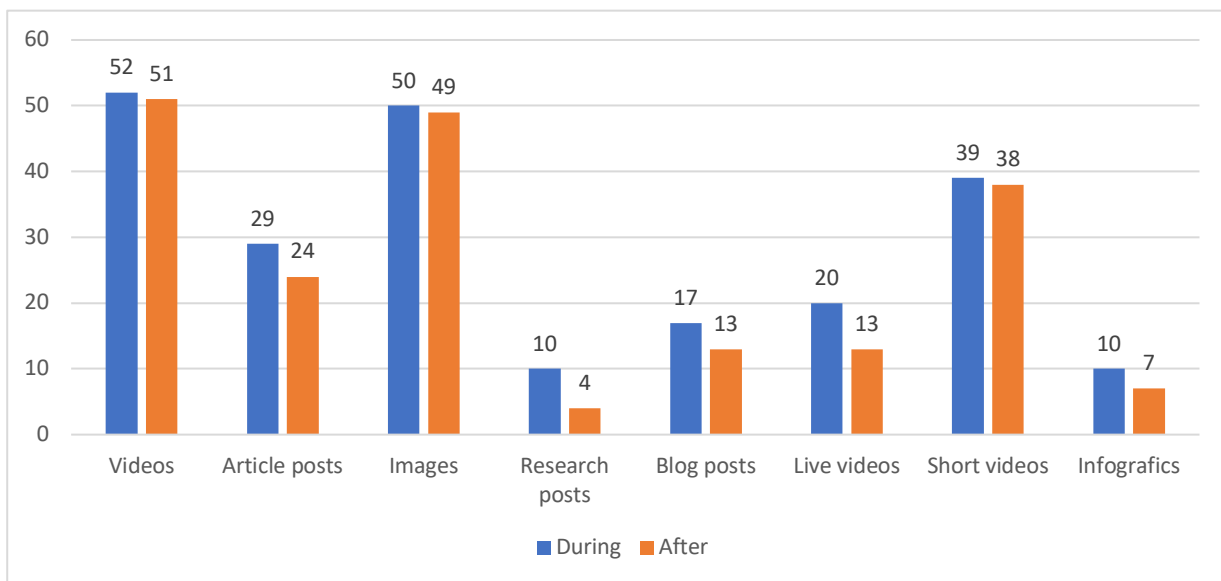


Figure 10. Types of social media contents consumed during and after COVID-19. n = 459

The survey looked into how often participants consumed tourism related contents on social media both during and after the pandemic. The results show that, of the 52 respondents, 25 saw between 11 and 29 posts on tourism each day during the pandemic, whereas 16 saw fewer, ranging from 0 to 10 posts (Figure 11.). 9 participants interacted with between 30 and 49 posts per day, and just two participants saw more than 50 posts.

There was a noticeable decline in the consumption of content related to tourism following the pandemic, according to the data. More over half of the participants (29 in total) reported viewing 0 to 10 posts per day. 6 participants saw between 30 and 49 posts, while 17 others saw posts between 11 and 29.

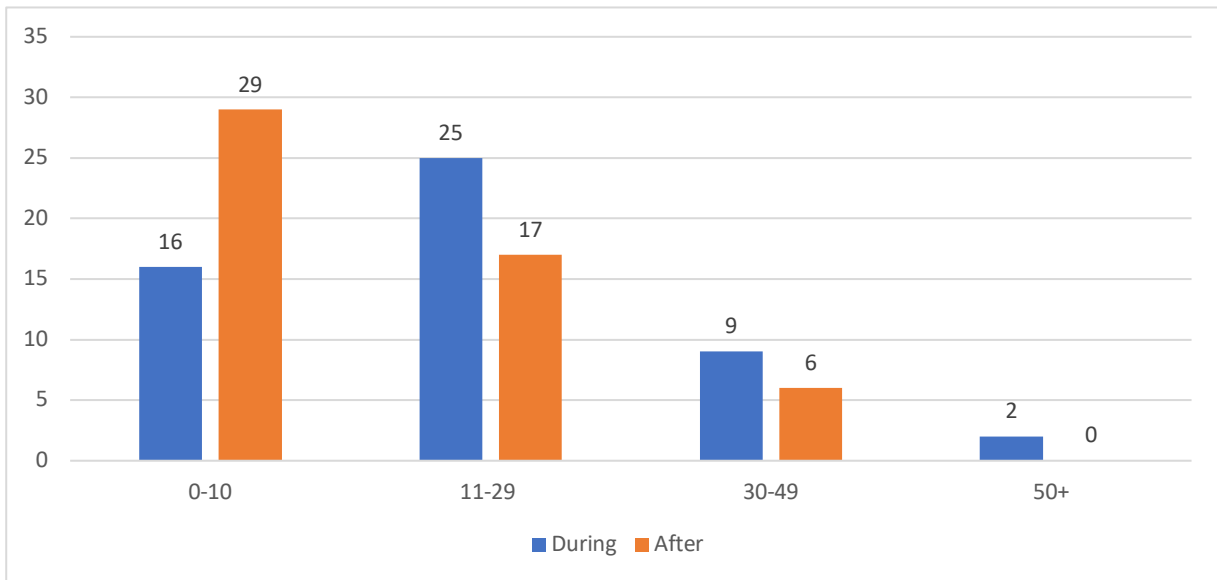


Figure 11. Average tourism related contents consumed during and after COVID-19. n = 104

7 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic's effects on social media usage have been studied in this thesis, which has thrown light on important changes in digital communication, particularly in the travel and tourist industry. The results show a greater reliance on social media for amusement, connectivity, and information, which is likely due to the pandemic's need to combat social isolation.

People's dependency on social media increased dramatically throughout the pandemic as they used these platforms to keep entertained, informed, and engaged. Physical barriers that prevented people from interacting personally and professionally increased the demand for social media, which is vital for preserving relationships and getting access to current health and safety information.

During the pandemic, social media users accessed a wide range of content, with a noteworthy increase in real-time news and health-related information consumption. But after the pandemic, people's interest in news only marginally decreased, but their need for amusement and social connection remained, highlighting people's ongoing reliance on social media for communication.

The post-pandemic period started to show a little decline in total screen time, despite social media usage staying high. People began to rely less on digital platforms for everyday interactions when regular activities resumed, indicating a slow return to more conventional modes of involvement.

In conclusion, the thesis emphasises how the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on social media usage patterns, with long-term consequences for digital interactions in the tourism industry and beyond. Adapting to these shifts will be essential as we navigate a digitally advanced future to ensure resilience and involvement across all industries.

7.1 Discussion

Understanding social media usage during and after the pandemic was one of the study's main goals. These objectives were mainly accomplished by my detailed planning and careful implementation. A complete knowledge of the shifts and continuities in social media behaviour during these various times has been made possible by the combination of meticulous literature research and methodical data collecting.

WhatsApp emerged as the most popular social media network among European users, with 49 percent of survey respondents using it on a regular basis. This broad use highlights how essential WhatsApp is to daily communication in this region. Instagram was a close second, favoured by 47 individuals, demonstrating how popular it is due to its visual content and networking capabilities. 44

individuals preferred Snapchat, which is especially popular among younger audiences because of its transient messaging. With 41 responses, TikTok demonstrated how quickly it is becoming more and more popular on social media, especially with younger users. Facebook, which was formerly the industry leader in social networking, is now ranked fifth with 32 respondents, suggesting that older users are increasingly utilising the site to maintain relationships with friends and family.

Entertainment and keeping in touch with friends and family were the two most often mentioned answers, each receiving 48 replies, when asked why people use social media. This illustrates the platforms' functions throughout the pandemic as sources of vital communication as well as distraction. The second most frequent response, provided by 47 participants, was to stay informed, highlighting the importance of social media in spreading accurate information in a timely manner throughout the pandemic.

The survey also showed shifts in the ways that people consume content. Videos, photos, and short videos were the most popular content during the pandemic, and there was a lot of interaction with live videos and article articles. Following the pandemic, the public's interest in content related to the pandemic may have decreased as the crisis subsided, as evidenced by the discernible reduction in engagement with research posts. However, the consumption of photos, short videos, and videos stayed steady.

Going forward, this project's insights emphasise how crucial it is to balance professional commitments with intense academic pursuits and practise diligent time management. This knowledge is essential for improving professional practices and studies in the future and facilitating a more seamless transition between work and research responsibility.

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Figures

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey and the questions

Social media usage during and after COVID-19 pandemic

 Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, social media significantly influenced how people, groups, and institutions interacted, obtained information, and dealt with the extraordinary difficulties brought about by the worldwide health emergency. Social media platforms turned into vital resources for sharing public health directives, safety instructions, and real-time information on the virus.

This survey is intended to gather information on people's activities on social media during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey has 16 questions and should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be kept entirely anonymous and will only utilise your input for academic and research reasons.

1. Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

2. Age *

- 0-18
- 19-24
- 25-29
- 30+

3. Nationality * Finland Other **4. Occupation *** Student Employed Unemployed Other **5. Choose the following social media platform you use *** Facebook TikTok Instagram Snapchat Youtube Whatsapp Pinterest Other

6. What is your reason of using social media? (choose the following that suits you the best) *

- Spare time
- Entertainment
- Staying up to date (news)
- Friends and family
- General networking
- Shopping
- Other

The following questions are related to DURING the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. On average how many hours a day did you spend on social media? *

- 0-2 hours
- 2-4 hours
- 4-6 hours
- more than 6 hours

8. What types of social media contents did you consume? *

- Videos
- Article posts
- Images
- Infographics
- Research posts
- Blog posts
- Live videos
- Short videos
- Other

9. What made you consume these types of content? ***10. On average, how many tourism related contents did you see on daily basis? ***

- 0-10
- 11-29
- 30-49
- 50+

11. Did you search any information regarding COVID-19? If yes, where? *

- No
- Yes

The following questions are related to AFTER the COVID-19 Pandemic.

12. How many hours a day did you spend on social media? *

- 0-2 hours
- 2-4 hours
- 4-6 hours
- more than 6 hours

13. What types of social media contents did you consume? *

- Videos
- Article posts
- Images
- Infographics
- Research posts
- Blog posts
- Live videos
- Short videos
- Other

14. What made you consume these types of content? *

15. On average, how many tourism related contents did you see on daily basis? *

- 0-10
- 11-29
- 30-49
- 50+

16. Any comments you would like to add?