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# The Turkish Ordeal – A Historical-Processual Analysis of the Perception and Engagement of Elderly People in the Digital Transformation

*İrem Özgören Kinli & Onur Kinli \**

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**Abstract:** »Die türkische Tortur – Eine historisch-prozessuale Analyse von Wahrnehmung und Engagement älterer Menschen in digitaler Transformation«. This paper employs a process-oriented methodology for evaluating how digital access to private and public services alters social and everyday practices among older people in Turkey. We also focus on the reaction of elders to the technological infrastructure developed by the Turkish state. We analyse the dynamic interplay between turning points in macro-level historical events and adaptive responses in micro-level contexts. Through historical analysis of the visual turn of culture, the aim is to reveal different ways of digital inclusion of the elderly in processes of digital transformations in Turkey, as citizens of the digital state. We provide an analysis of the process pattern of Turkish digitalisation with qualitative data gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with middle-class elders in Turkey. To identify temporal patterns in the Turkish digital transformation process, interviews are analysed in terms of their transformative aspects in society. The research data are classified into three groups with respect to their level of analysis from the micro, through the meso, to the macro level: Creation of novelty; variation, continuation, and /or transformation; adaptation. The focus of the article is on the exploration of the impact of the usage of digital communication tools by elders in terms of novelties, continuations, transformations, breaks, and adaptations observed at the micro (individual), meso (social interactions), and macro (governance) levels of social analysis.

**Keywords:** Digital society, Turkish elders, process-oriented methodology, digital transformation, digitalisation process.

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## 1. Introduction

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The micro and macro level continuously interact with each other according to Norbert Elias's process-oriented methodology (Baur and Ernst 2011). The macro level depicts figurations or social structures, while the micro level points out individuals in those social structures. In this perspective, Baur (2017) highlights the main questions to ask for identification of causal relations in micro-macro relationships, such as: "*How did the macro level influence the micro level in a specific period?*" and vice-versa. For the reconstruction of the micro level, interviews are one of the suggested tools that is suitable to identify individual's capacity to modify figurations (Baur et al. 2019).

In this paper, we adopt the socio-historical framework of digital phenomena proposed by Hergesell (2021) to identify the process patterns of digitalisation routes ranging from the creation of radical novelty by digital technologies to the mere continuation of ongoing processes using digital means. These patterns are as follows: Appearance of new actors, structures, and processes; variation, continuation, and/or transformation of existing processes; and adaptation to ongoing processes or shaped by these processes through the strategic use of digital technologies.

We explore how digital access to private and public services alters social and everyday practices among older people in Turkey. Unlike previous studies, we did not take the generation gap as a determining factor, as it is commonly observed in elders' studies. Through historical analysis of the visual turn of culture, the aim is to reveal different ways of digital inclusion of the elderly in processes of digital transformations in Turkey, as citizens of the digital state. The focus of this article is on the exploration of the impact of the usage of digital communication tools by elders in terms of novelties, continuations, transformations, breaks, and adaptations observed at the micro (individual), meso (social interactions), and macro (governance) levels of social analysis.

We refer to Negroponete's analysis of digital life in the post-information age to define digitisation. According to Negroponete (1996, 14-9), digitisation is the technical process of data conversion. As the smallest element of information, bits could be described as a state of being: on/off, true/false. Representing this state of being with digits of 1 (one) and 0 (zero) in the early days of computing language allowed us to digitise every type of information. The practical usage and management of this technical process in all sorts of production could be described as digital transformation. Even though the spread of practical usage of digitisation in all means of production has quite a long history, digital transformation could be observed for the last three decades. As Şahin and Aksoy (1993) have already stated, digital

transformations experienced in Turkey have manifested their impact more directly and effectively in the field of communication. That is why we focus on the integration of digital technologies in communication processes. By digital communication technologies, we refer to a range of communication devices based on electronic storage, transmission, and computerisation-including computers interconnected by the internet. The digital communication tools under study are PCs, tablets, and mobile phones, which can run applications such as e-mails, instant text messages, audio and video calls, and social media.

The issue of how digital technologies and their applications entail radical changes associated with changes in culture, business ecosystems, media, and culture have been broadly discussed in literature. Researchers address radical changes through digital technologies in the cultural heritage domain (Bertacchini 2017), in labour markets and skills (United Nations ECLAC 2021), and in the field of information and communication technologies (Nestorenko and Wiezbik-Stronska 2019). Some authors explore how digital innovations radically transform the way people interact with each other and participate in social and political life (Gil de Zúñiga 2015). Yet, others focus on how digital innovations give rise to the appearance of new manners (Marx 1994), to the fundamental transformation of public services (Lember 2018), and to the creation of new actors, practices, structures, beliefs, and values that lead to emergence of new institutional infrastructure and new organisational forms (Hinings, Gegenhuber, and Greenwood 2018).

Digital transformation does not necessarily bring novelty, but instead it may produce less drastic change by shaping social relations and modifying social processes. Digital effects attached to established processes have been widely discussed in the public sector (Misuraca 2019, 15-9). To explore transformative effects of digitalisation in economic sectors, some studies suggest digitalisation alters how people work in their jobs (Fossen and Sorgner 2019), while others highlight the importance of effective implementation of digital technologies to support individual and professional development (Pankratova, Abdullaev, and Konopko 2020).

Digital technologies may not always create innovations or changes on their own. They can be used strategically to implement long-term visions, goals, and principles. The proliferation of digital education stands as an exemplar to demonstrate the strategic use of digital technologies in education. Delivering education through digital platforms paves the way for the achievement of educational goals such as the improvement of the quality and inclusiveness of education and training systems and the creation of a collaborative and creative learning environment detached from the constraints of physical location and timetable. In the development of new digital services and applications in digital government settings appears another example to implement long-term government policies and

programs. According to Vlahovic and Vracic (2015), digital transformation is the transformation from traditional administration towards the digital government.

Although the integration of digital technologies into different aspects of life has been widely discussed in terms of its influence on people and society, the impact of the digitalisation process on elders is a relatively new topic of study in the field of digital studies. While some researchers argue that elders are more digitally excluded than younger people (Tatnall and Lepa 2003; Vicente and Lopez 2008; Rose, Holgersson, and Söderström 2020), others explore the ways to promote digital inclusion of elders (Olphert, Damodaran, and May 2005; Holgersson, Söderström, and Rose 2019; Holgersson, Kävrestad, and Nohlberg 2021). There are various studies dealing with the internet engagement of elders (Hill, Beynon-Davies, and Williams 2008; Niehaves and Plattfaut 2014) and its impact on their lifestyles and individual habits (Hynes and Rommes 2005).

Some scholars have argued that communication technologies may reduce or prevent social isolation of mostly older adults (Fokkema and Knipscheer 2007; Chen and Schulz 2016; Beneito-Montagut, Cassián, and Begueria 2018). In line with this, some researchers demonstrate that elders exhibit positive attitudes toward using digital technologies for communicating with their friends and family members (Selwyn, Gorard, and Furlong 2003). Yet, there are also other studies that show elders' hesitation to use digital tools and services due to their risk perception (Hill, Beynon-Davies, and Williams 2008).

Based on the assumption that older people are more likely to lack adequate digital skills, competencies, and experience compared to their younger counterparts, studies in the Turkish context focus on the following themes: older population's adaptation to internet-based services (Kuzuluk, Balkaya, and Güner 2018); usage of digital technologies in daily life experiences (Yıldırım Becerikli 2013); adaptation to social media tools, applications, and practices (Şentürk 2017; Kalınkara and Sarı 2019; Görgün Baran, and Öztekin Alpaydın 2020); and socialisation processes (Özkan and Purutçuoğlu 2010; Tuna Uysal 2020).

In the next section, we explore the dynamic interplay between the turning points in the macro-level historical events and the adaptative responses in the micro-level contexts. We demonstrate the impact of digital transformation on people and, in turn, the reaction of people to technological infrastructure developed by the Turkish state. We present our methodological framework of analysis in the third section. Finally, in the last section, we examine our interviews with respect to their level of analysis from micro through meso to macro level.

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## 2. Processes of Digital Transformations in Turkey

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The processes of digital transformations in Turkey have to be evaluated with the unique character of the modernisation process of Turkish state formation through communication technologies. According to Şerif Mardin, the emergence of increased demand for agricultural products during the early 1940's – with the slow growth of infrastructural bases – led to a new form of integration between richer villages. Mardin also explains this integration through three components: “*communications, administration, and the market.*” Economic crisis of the Second World War and the severe measures to regulate the market ended up with the government's extensive control of the society and economic life. Thus, government access to these components became more significant in Turkey than in other developing countries (Mardin 1975, 27-8).

Daniel Lerner ([1958] 1964) in his well-known study, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, which could be considered as an inspirational text for modernisation theory and mass media, tracked the transformation process of traditional societies in the Middle East. Lerner focused mainly on the role of mass communication in social transformation. Even though it is a difficult task to summarise his findings on Turkish society – conducted through field study by Lerner himself in the late 1940s and early 1950s – it will be helpful to mention his few key statements to formulate a solid ground for this paper. Lerner made a classification of his respondents according to exposure to mass media and formulated three typologies: Moderns, Traditionals, and Transitionals. The Moderns (approximately 10% of the society, 98% literacy), who regularly read a daily newspaper and listen to the radio, acquire what they called “news” mainly through media. The Traditionals (approximately 60% of society, 19% literacy) show very little interest in the media and receive their news through oral systems. The Transitionals (approximately 30% of society, 71% literacy) participate in both systems.

After a long survey through interviews, Lerner concluded that, despite their illiteracy, the Transitionals are much closer to a modern style of life than the equally illiterate Traditionals. He argued that, while the Transitionals lack on education, they compensate for this by scoring heavily on other indices. Their use of empathic skills makes them men-in-motion and equips them to live in a modernising world. That is why Lerner saw the Transitionals as the new source of social energy for the future of Turkey by bringing the newer currents of thought and action that may emerge in the near future.

There is no doubt that Lerner's scientific vision mostly came true. The Transitionals shaped the Modern Turkey. Since most of our elder respondents were children of Lerner's Turkey, most of them were also members of the Transitional families. Many of them had their first phone

conversation in the early 1960s and half of them obtained a landline telephone in their houses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most of them received their high-school degrees in the early 1960s while at least one of their parents was illiterate or less educated.

This pattern strongly correlates with the development of infrastructure and transformation of Turkey. In 1970, the number of telephone exchange centrals in Turkey was 1,406. The capacity for telephone subscribers was 409,731. Within a ten-year period, right after the installation of digitally equipped automatic exchange, the number of centrals had risen to 3,301 and the capacity had been extended to reach 1,023,600 subscribers. According to the official data for 1971–1981 period, the numbers of telephone subscribers increased by an average rate of 12% per every year. However, it seems that the development of infrastructure could not cope with the demands. Official records also show that the number of telephone subscription applicants – those on the waiting list – increased from an average rate of 80% (in 1969) to 150% (in 1976). While there were approximately 1.5 million active telephone subscribers in 1982, nearly 1.7 million people were on the waiting list. The demand for telex had also risen in the late 1970s. In 1978, telex applicants on the waiting list were two and the half times the number of the active subscribers. A similar pattern was observed during the installation of cable TV infrastructure in the early 1990s. Applicants had to wait three years for receiving the service. In the late 1990s, internet applicants shared the same fate. Due to the drastic rise in subscribers and applicants in the early 1980s, Turkey could be considered as the most underdeveloped country in telecommunication services among European and Balkan states (Yurt Ansiklopedisi 1984, 8572).

Being on a waiting list was not an absolute obstruction to obtaining such services. Until the early 1980s, especially in cities, it was a very common practice to use familiar local stores' (grocery, pharmacy, etc.) phones. Public pay stations were for choice of calling of course; however, local stores were essential in receiving calls. For example, a person would give the local grocery's phone number as their contact number and the grocery's apprentice would usually come to their door and notify them about the call. One of our interviewees, a retired engineer, (IN 29) remembered those days with embarrassment. As he puts it:

In the late 70s, I really needed a phone for my work and to communicate with my parents in my hometown, so I applied for subscription. Even after three years, I had been on the waiting list and had been frequently using the grocer's phone. I was occasionally receiving many calls during weekends therefore I started to spend my whole time sitting in front of the grocery, because I was really ashamed for being notified by the grocer's apprentice every hour. I remember that I could not stay in my pyjamas or have a comfortable bath time even on Sundays. Moreover, to overcome my embarrassment, I felt obliged to shop for unnecessary things and to chat with the

grocer and his apprentice on topics that I hated most. Only for sake of that mandatory interaction, I've become a Fenerbahçe fan and tried to enjoy football. That's why I bought my cellular phone and then my smart phone as soon as they got on sale.

The eminent media historian Uygur Kocabaşođlu states explicitly the similar situation for the underdeveloped status of radio and broadcasting infrastructure in Turkey in 1960s. According to Kocabaşođlu, although radio was considered a very useful tool as an ideological state apparatus to manipulate the society with very low literacy, state authorities did not pay the required attention and did not invest in innovative technologies in broadcasting as expected. While the average number was 239 receivers (per 1,000 people) in Europe, there were only 71 receivers (per 1,000 people) in Turkey in the year 1964. Kocabaşođlu also calculated that the average selling price for a moderate radio receiver was approximately equal to the salary of a middle ranked civil servant (Kocabaşođlu 1980, 386, 425).

Within the context of engaging mass media and technology, we have to note that, in today's digital era, affordability does not seem to be a crucial issue for the same strata in acquiring smart phones. While an average price for a smart phone is above the minimum wage and close to a salary of a middle ranked civil servant, the number of smart phone users and the renovation rate of these gadgets per person are drastically higher than in any other developing country.

Briefly, we can argue that, in the Turkish case, it was not the society that stayed aloof to communication technologies but the state; even in the case of not having a radio (before TV broadcasting) or a TV could not be assessed easily as a matter of individual's choice. We can observe the practice of collective/communitarian usage of radio and TV even in the late 1970s. That kind of usage was not only limited to coffee houses and cafeterias as expected. Houses were the places for gatherings – not only for special occasions – to listen to the radio or watch TV. The urge to ease curiosity to novelty and the sympathy of house owners towards these naive demands constituted very exceptional ways of socialisation in Turkish society because those regular gatherings occasionally included strangers. Regarding the high sensitivity of the household privacy in Turkish cultural habitus, that degree of toleration could not be explained through so-called Turkish hospitality. One of our respondents, a university professor, (IN 17) got very emotional when she remembered those days:

When I was a university student, my father brought a TV in our house. Only within a week, I found myself preparing snacks and serving tea to our guests whom I had never met before. I was working as a waitress like a bee in my own house. I could not study, I could not do anything during the broadcasting. I really do not remember what TV programs were about, because I was very very busy in hospitality. I was really exhausted. My father was a very



gentle man. When I saw him proud to be the owner of the show, I did not complain about it not to upset him.

After the Coup d'état in September 1980, the practices of neoliberal policies inevitably accelerated the integration of Turkey into global capitalism. Being under martial law for three years, Turkey had difficulties in finding credits and foreign investments. Right after the Özal Government came into power in 1983, investment in innovative technologies in telecommunication led to important transformations in communication. According to the "Haberleşme Ana Planı" [The Master Plan for Communication] in 1983, it is understood that the government envisioned the telecommunication sector as the pioneer for its development plan to integrate into international capitalism. The investment budget tripled to five billion dollars, which the European average had only been reached. In 1985, the US Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) supported the Turkish telecommunication digitalisation process with financial and technical assistance in return for some privileges for the US bases in the region. The technical assistance of the US consisted of the usage of three transponders of Intelsat V satellite. Usage of satellite technology rapidly accelerated Turkish telecommunication development. One of our male interviewees (IN 1) closely witnessed the practice of US-Turkey bargaining:

When I was working as a civil engineer in the Incirlik Airbase, suddenly our workload increased enormously due to the installation and learning process of new technological devices in communication. I first met with the computer at that time. I had never touched a button before that. Our American colleagues or supervisors encouraged us to learn as much as we could in a very short time. They even let us to take those expensive gadgets to our homes on holidays.

"On-line" banking systems and its show case, automated teller machines (ATM), were on duty in 1989. All these innovations were presented by right-wing and liberal parties with the motto of "We have stepped into new age!" The prime minister, Turgut Özal, frequently used this metaphoric slogan in almost all of his speeches. One of our respondents, a retired air pilot (IN 22), who was a strong political opponent of the government at that time, expressed his feelings with honesty:

I could not bear watching him (the prime minister) on TV. When I heard "We have stepped into new age!", a shiver went down my spine! Even today! Because all sorts of these reforms were deliberately delayed by ruling elites through years. And they have not been taken into practice by a visionary plan. Let's take the ATM which I had been familiar with during my visits abroad, were presented as glitter space shuttles. Even today you can see many elders in line in front of banks to get their pension salaries manually. Because it is complicated, and they are insecure about how to use an ATM. For example, there is no shedder on the ATM in my neighbourhood and the sun always shines on the screen, I cannot see a word. I think all sorts of investments in technology in Turkey were not sincere attempts towards

welfare of the society. Nothing's became easy with the use of digital technology as it was promised and expected. This is an illusion.

In the early 1990s, digital telecommunication technology became much clearer in daily life. Audiotex lines that have numbers starting with "900" had become a type of entertainment with its erotic, astrological, storytelling, etc. services. In a very short period, those paid services raised drastically with the start of the first private TV channel: Star TV's commercials. Phone bills became a serious issue for the budget of middle-class families. A very concerned mother (IN 4) of the 1990s was "living in hell" in her saying referring to those commercial lines:

I had two adolescent sons at that time. I was shocked when I saw my phone bill. The amount was nearly half of my salary. I learned that my sons had become addicted to 900 services. Later, I learned that there were many others. I really don't remember how many petitions I had signed with many others to be sent to authorities for them to monitor and control these nonsenses. After that, Atari saloons became a really big social issue for kids and teenagers. Raising kids in that era was a nightmare. Today, at least kids can play with their gadgets at home. You do not have to worry anymore about where they are. My son can track my grandson through his phone when he is out.

The mid-90s were a turbulent era for Turkish political, economic, and social life. High inflation rates and the rise in demands in the material culture of digital technology placed very high pressure on the banking credit system. Turkey was considered a vast commercial market for testing new products with its large young population. Capitalism needed more TV channels and more commercials. Therefore, national satellites Turksat 1B and 1C were launched into orbit after a few failed attempts, which costed millions and delayed several investments in the field. With the composite character of the cable TV infrastructure, it was intended to reach 500,000 subscribers by the end of 1995. However, the actual subscribers were only 151,000 and the foreseen profit remained 50% under the expectations. Ercan Mutlu and Hakan Tuncel explain the reason behind the failure of the government for not having a decent communication policy: for citizens, there was not so much to gain by subscribing to cable-TV services. Censorship was standing as an important issue behind that. On the other hand, telecommunication market value was estimated at 40 billion dollars in the mid 1990s. A state-owned enterprise PTT (Post-Telegraph-Telephone) agency was divided, and its telephone unit was privatised. Thus, it transformed into Turk Telekom Agency. In the course of critical public debates, the Turk Telekom Agency was established as a monopolist actor in telecommunication at the dawn of the internet revolution (Mutlu and Tuncel 1996, 716-8).

The fast commercialisation of the broadcasting industry in Turkey demolished the old monolithic structure of the Turkish broadcasting media and challenged the state monopoly with the emergence of new private

television and radio stations during the early 1990s. During the past three decades, several studies have explored the impact of the abrupt transformations in the broadcasting system. While some authors deal with a sequence of socio-cultural and legal changes with its individual, social, cultural, political, and ideological dimensions (Eren 1996; Uluç 2003; Akkor Gül, Ertürk, and Elmer 2020), others explore changing communication practices in various communication contexts and related industries (Akdenizli 2015). In this article, we focus on the impact of social transformation brought by Turkish elders' usage of digital communication tools in their private life, social relations, and interactions with the digital state through the interaction of micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis.

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### 3. The Methodological Framework of Analysis

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Qualitative research methodology was used for this study. For data collection, we adopted purpose-oriented sampling. As a qualitative data-collection method, we used semi-structured in-depth interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before enrolment in the study. We conducted in-person interviews from August 2021 through October 2021 in five big cities of Turkey, namely İstanbul (5 people), Ankara (5 people), İzmir (7 people), Adana (8 people), and Mersin (5 people). Thirty (16 women and 14 men) educated (having at least a high school diploma) middle-class elders (over 60 years of age) were included in the sample population for this study. These socio-demographic variables have been opted for this study, as they would be beneficial in providing favourable conditions for facilitation of adoption of digital technology and possession of digital experiences.

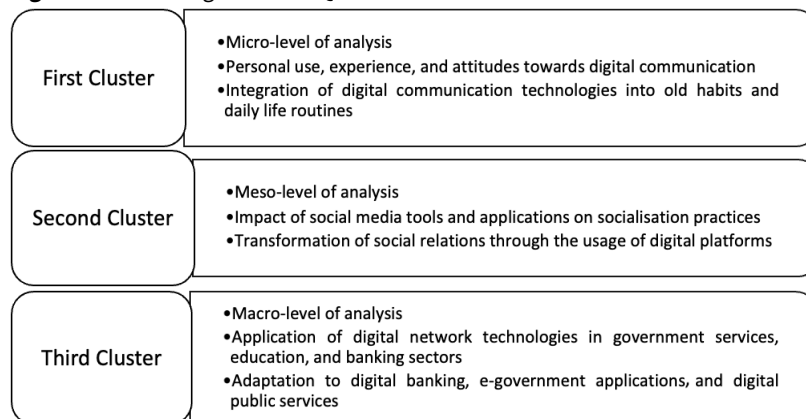
Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. With the participants' consent, we audio-recorded the interviews and translated them from Turkish to English. The interviews were coded by assigning numbers to interviewees. We used the abbreviation "IN" for Interviewee Number. Through the description and analysis of qualitative textual data from interview transcripts, qualitative narratives were analysed using inductive thematic content analysis. Inspired by Hergesell's (2021) socio-historical framework of digital phenomena, the following process patterns of digitalisation routes have been explored: Creation of novelty; variation, continuation, and/or transformation; and adaptation (see the introduction to this Special Issue for the development of this heuristic (Büchner, Hergesell, and Kallinikos 2022).

Questions of the interviews were developed and categorised in three clusters (see Figure 1). The first cluster addressed micro-level questions focusing on personal use and experience with electronic tools, systems, devices, and resources to assess elders' attitudes towards digital technologies.

We addressed questions about interviewees' first encounter with television, mobile phones, and computers; daily usage of internet technologies and digital platforms; and self-assessment of their perceived level of digital literacy skills and technological competencies in terms of digital inclusion/exclusion.

Secondly, the meso-level questions aimed to explore to what extent digital technologies have transformed the way elders interact, socialise, work, or retire. We addressed questions about interviewees' adaptation to the changing digital environments and their social interaction with their peers through their usage of digital platforms. Lastly, the macro-level questions focus on how the application of technology in government services, education, and the banking sectors altered elders' social and everyday life practices. We asked interviewees about their usage of digital banking and e-government applications and digital public services as well as the integration of digital technologies in their teaching practices. The discourses identified during the analysis are developed inductively by grouping similar arguments from interviews into categories. The micro-, meso-, and macro-level questions allowed for the inductive construction of the identification of the process patterns of the Turkish digitalisation route, which will be explored in the fourth section in detail.

**Figure 1** Clustering Interview Questions



A methodological limitation of this study is that socio-culturally privileged elders were selected to be included in the interviews through the method of purpose-oriented sampling. As a form of non-probability sampling, our empirical findings are not generalisable to the population at large. Although our research findings are not statistically representative of the greater population of interest, we argue that they are qualitatively generalisable for

socio-culturally privileged middle-class elders who are living in the most-populated cities of Turkey.

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## 4. Analyses of Research Data

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In this part, we analyse the process pattern of the Turkish digitalisation route by using our qualitative data gathered through interviews. Regarded as the members of Lerner's transitional families, we interviewed elders to explore how their usage of oral, written, and visual communication tools has changed in the processes of digital transformations in Turkey. At the micro-level, we focus on elders' daily use of newspapers, radio, television, mobile phones, computers, related internet technologies, and digital platforms (Pinterest, YouTube, Netflix, etc.). At the meso level, we explore in which direction and to what extent elders' use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.) has affected their social interactions with their peers. Moreover, we question how efficiently elders engage with their affiliated civil society groups through digital platforms. At the macro level, we are concerned with how the digitalisation of public services and banking applications has altered elders' social and everyday practices. Our interviews demonstrate that elders use conventional communication tools such as radio and television and digital communication tools such as audio-visual calls and social media. During the transition from oral to visual culture in Turkey, our empirical data show that while elders show interest in audio-visual media, they do not prefer using written communication tools such as text messages and emails.

### 4.1 Creation of Novelty

We analyse interviews in terms of digital communication technologies' transformative potentials in society to identify temporal patterns in processes of digital transformations in Turkey. At the micro, meso, and macro levels of social analysis, we classify the research data into three groups: Creation of novelty; variation, continuation, and / or transformation; and adaptation. We generated these categories inductively from the empirical data. We explore, at all levels of social analysis, to what extent digital communication technologies shape new habits and routines and create new modes of communication.

At the *micro level* of analysis, acquisition of new hobbies and interests is observed as a novelty introduced by digital communication technologies. Four of the interviewees presented digital technologies as the reason why they have adopted new hobbies and interests. They expressed their willingness to use technological devices to entertain themselves. They had a

high level of eagerness to learn, use, and adopt digital technologies for activities of leisure and relaxation. This might be considered as a sign of successful coping and adaptation to the challenges of the new digital era.

A housewife shared her enthusiasm for playing online computer games with her first personal laptop (IN 2). Another interviewee emphasised the impact of digital platforms to improve her own needlecraft skills and techniques, and to give her inspiration to create new ideas (IN 20). A retired lawyer told us how online streaming services enabled her to start binge-watching TV shows (IN 12).

Another respondent (IN 16) stressed how digital devices served him to discover a new leisure activity:

I worked at television studios throughout my professional life. I have never been interested in photography, since dealing with photography was a complicated process. After buying a digital camera, I started to be interested in photography. I enjoy taking bird pictures with my digital camera. I have been following the online activities of a Bird Observatory Centre. I signed up for the reception of notification messages when members upload new bird pictures.

At the *meso level* of analysis, we aimed to explore to what extent digital technologies have transformed all aspects of elders' life through their social interactions on the group level. We considered the meso level a key to bridging macro-level changes to micro-level experiences. Some of our interviewees argued that new digital communication and network technologies have radically transformed the way they socialise with others. They claimed the idea that adoption of digital tools fostered their social communication skills and helped them to improve their social interactions with their family, neighbours, and peer groups.

Long before publications related to social media research, Erving Goffman (1959) described how individuals present themselves differently in face-to-face interactions with different groups of people. Following Goffman's theory as a framework for analysis of self-presentation, social media interactions provide, at the *meso level* of analysis, a "vantage point" for reflection on the diversity of perspectives. We present many aspects of ourselves online to others, which are mostly absent in our social interactions. Thus, social media turns out to be a platform for rediscovery by our acquaintances and friends. In line with this approach, one of our respondents, a housewife (IN 8), noted that increasing frequency of sharing on social media platforms is a way to get to know one another by the following words:

I discern better my friend's opinions on various issues via social media. For instance, I did not know if she was sensitive to animal rights, until the time that she liked some posts about animals on her Facebook account. On the other hand, my cousin disappointed me with her WhatsApp media messages. She revealed her real face with these image and video sharing, which left a bad taste in my mouth.

The setting up internet service for home as a representative sign of hospitality, for instance, emerged at the meso level as another novelty from the interview data. Two of our interviewees mentioned how unavailability of internet connection at home acted as a barrier to hosting their visitors. One of the respondents, a retired architect (IN 21), indicated his lack of interest in using internet services and applications. He expressed his earlier disinclination to allocate budget for digital technologies. Yet, he expressed he felt the need to get internet connection at home to make his guests comfortable.

Another respondent, a teacher (IN 6), stated that she not only bought an internet package for home, but also that she had to contact public authorities to request them to invest in fiber-optic internet service infrastructure in the area. She said that she made a great effort to access a qualified internet service to make her son stay longer in her summer house during his annual visits.

We have also observed that digital media might create new contents to share with peer groups. For instance, a university professor (IN19) stressed how sharing obscene jokes among his male peers has started through his secondary school's WhatsApp group.

The final novelty detected, at the *meso level* of analysis, is the usage of social media for new motives. While all our interviewees stressed that they have WhatsApp installed on their mobile phones, only a few of them see a reason to use actively Twitter, such as following political turmoil. All female participants have Facebook and Instagram accounts, whereas almost all male respondents declared no usage of these social media platforms despite their follow-up from others' (mostly their wives') accounts. Our participants explained the following reasons why they use and like social media: information seeking and/or sharing, expression of opinions, social interaction, entertainment, relaxation, a way to pass time, and the surveillance and watching of others. In addition to all these reasons, one of our interviewees, a housewife (IN 24), reported a new motive for using social media. As she shared with us:

Every morning, after I wake up, I post a good morning message to the family WhatsApp group. This is a way to tell them not to worry about me. One day, I was late to send that message. Each family member phoned me to learn whether I am well or not.

As can be clearly seen, WhatsApp has become a new type of self-report medium to give status updates.

At the *macro level* of analysis, appearance of new manners had emerged from the interviews as a novelty. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias (2000) explores how political and economic long-term changes that created modern society lead to alterations in manners and social codes. For avoiding shame with the fear of losing social prestige, individuals control and regulate their

manners accordingly in line with the societal changes. In this sense, proliferation of new telecommunication technologies raises novel patterns of personal interaction and, correspondingly, new manners. To put it another way, technology-related new manners emerge during the digitalisation process.

Almost all of our respondents argue that it is inappropriate to share personal life updates regularly on social media platforms. One of the interviewees (IN 5) qualified these social media updates as outrageous, another one (IN 30) regarded sharing with other people what they eat or where they go through their social media posts as disrespectful. Similarly, a housewife (IN 23) complained about the inconveniences she had to face due to changes in communication technology. She expressed her disappointment that people nowadays call others or text some messages whenever it comes to their minds.

Another complaint about the impact of digital technologies on manners came from a technician (IN 3):

For the celebration of religious days, people do not call their beloved ones and visit them anymore. They just send SMS messages. They do not even write their own celebration message. I do not even respond to these template messages. I cannot tolerate this kind of impolite behaviour.

Thus, the following new themes emerged from the interviews to illustrate how digital communication technologies shape new practices and create new types of communication patterns: The acquisition of new hobbies and interests (on the *micro level*); newly emerged social awareness; setting up internet service for home as a representative sign of hospitality; new contents to share with peers; the development of a new type of self-report, i.e., giving a status update (on the *meso level*); and the appearance of new manners (on the *macro level*).

#### 4.2 Variation, Continuation, and/or Transformation

To what extent people integrate new technologies into their daily lives has been called into question with the process of digitalisation. While adoption of technological innovations may lead to new habits as we have already suggested previously, it is also common, at the *micro level* of analysis, to observe that people have a tendency to integrate new technologies into their old habits and daily life routines.

While one of our interviewees, a computer seller (IN 15), stated that he started to read the daily newspaper online since it is easier to read news with larger text size, another respondent, an engineer (IN 29), stated that nowadays he prefers checking the weather forecast application on his mobile phone. In line with this, a civil engineer (IN 4) noted that Pinterest has now become her new cookbook to record her favourite recipes, and a housewife



(IN 11) mentioned that she started to use the Google search engine instead of printed encyclopaedia to learn various information that she is curious to know. A teacher (IN 18) emphasised the similar transition as well by stating that it feels like old times for her to listen to radio theatre podcasts since she has always been a radio listener.

We also observed from the interviews that digital technologies usually have a powerful influence on the acquisition of skills, competencies, and knowledge related to important personal and professional qualities. Among our interviewees, even the ones having negative attitudes toward digitalisation mentioned at least once during the interview how a technological tool helped them to improve their professional skills and self-development.

While two of our interviewees (IN 1; IN 25) highlighted the contribution that YouTube Engineering Channels have played in improving their professional skills, a housewife (IN 10) highlighted the effective use of YouTube videos as a tool for religious learning. Moreover, another housewife (IN 2) mentioned her choice of avoiding the usage of the WhatsApp dictation tool with the objective of improving her writing skills in Turkish.

We observed, at the *meso level*, that the advances in technology have brought rapid and drastic change and transformation in the socialisation process of our interviewees. All our respondents pointed out that they use, more or less, social media applications to connect with their close friends, children, and grandchildren as well as other family members. Most of them claim that social media plays an active role in keeping people socially connected independently from their positive or negative attitudes towards social media-based communications.

While a retired air pilot (IN 22) told us that he started to make group calls on WhatsApp with his high school friends after the outbreak of COVID-19, a teacher (IN 6) expressed how social media played a major role in reducing her social isolation after her husband passed away.

A few of our respondents had negative views about using social media. To illustrate it, a pharmacist (IN 9) expressed her concerns and highlighted the dangers of social media and its negative impact on face-to-face or real-life communications among people.

Participation in civil society activities through communication provided by the internet channels emerged from the interviews as another theme, which demonstrates, at the meso level of analysis, how digital technologies may change roles, functions, actions, and structures of social and political groups. In line with this transformation, we asked in what ways our respondents use digital social media to organise and / or participate meetings in voluntary organisations. None of them reported an active role in the organisation of political and social gatherings. Only two of them mentioned their supportive

role to disseminate ideas and activities of their affiliated groups by deploying social media services.

One of them, a teacher (IN 18), explained the effective use of social media as a space for promoting animal adoption. The second one, a banker (IN 27), mentioned how social media provides an effective platform for online interaction with a large number of similar-minded people to discuss political issues.

Thus, the following themes emerged from the interviews to illustrate to what extent digital technologies shape old habits, improve personal and professional qualities, and modify socialisation practices: New tools for old habits; improvement of professional skills and self-development (on the micro level); socialisation through digital platforms; and participation in civil society activities through digital technologies (on the meso level). From our interviews, we have not detected, at the *macro level*, any theme related to variation, continuation, and / or transformation.

### 4.3 Adaptation

In this section, we explore to what extent elders (at the *micro level*) adapt to digital technologies shaping existing practices and structures in education, financial transactions, and government services (at the *macro level*). Three themes emerged from the analysis of interviews: Digital technologies in education; digital banking applications; and development of new digital services and digital government applications.

Digitalisation in education refers to the use of a broad range of technology-enhanced educational strategies to support both teaching and learning. Among our interviewees, we had three university professors and two teachers. We asked them how and to what extent digital technologies should be integrated and used in teaching practices. None of them expressed enthusiasm for using digitalised teaching practices. They identified themselves as either digitally apathetic or incompetent.

While an English teacher (IN 6) mentioned the difficulty of using online teaching tools in her classroom, a retired teacher (IN 18) argued that digital learning should not replace traditional classroom practices. A university professor (IN 19) expressed his disinclination to adapt his teaching methodology to fit students' needs in an online learning environment. Moreover, a university professor (IN 17) argued that digitalisation accelerated her retirement decision because she felt herself under the pressure due to the expectations from university professors to develop their digital skills and abilities. Another one (IN 28) expressed his consideration for early retirement because efficient use of digital technologies became an indicator to be considered as successful.

Since the impact of digitalisation has entered the banking industry, banks have started to offer online banking along with traditional banking services. We asked our respondents how often they use digital banking applications to explore their attitudes towards the use of digital services and applications in the banking sector. Five respondents reported that they never use digital banking services; instead, they have their family members use banking applications on their behalf. As a housewife (IN 8) stated, she feels more secure when she uses mobile banking applications with the guidance of her daughter. While four of the respondents reported regular use of digital banking applications, they do not know even how to access their accounts.

None of our respondents declared any security concerns. On the contrary, all our respondents are aware of digital banking services, and all of them considered digital banking applications as trustable and safe. Ten of our interviewees reported a rare use of these applications. In that context, one of them, a retired architect (IN 21), mentioned:

I prefer traditional banking services because I consider the interpersonal relationship with bank employees something generally useful, efficient, and necessary.

Results from interviews demonstrate that the usage of digital banking services depends on individual needs and purposes. While a retired civil engineer (IN 1) who uses digital technology devices efficiently expressed less interest in online banking applications, a retired mechanical engineer (IN 7) who never uses any digital applications expressed a high interest in digital banking services because he does not want to share details of his personal bank account even with his family members.

The development of new digital services and applications in digital government settings change traditional public management. We asked interviewees to specify their use of the e-government services to assess their perceptions about e-government applications. Only five of them reported a regular use of e-government websites and their diverse applications. Most of them declared that they created their e-government account during COVID-19 pandemic to get vaccinated. Eight of them highly praised the use of digital government applications.

As one respondent, an electrical engineer (IN 25), stated:

I am actively using the essential e-government services such as social security, tax, and health services. I can access whichever information I want, whenever I want it.

Two respondents were highly critical of digitalisation of public services. They (IN 3; IN 26) expressed their dissatisfaction with the obligation to schedule medical appointments online.

A pharmacist (IN 13) told us that she decided to retire early because:

We used to make medicine. With the digitalisation of healthcare services, we have now become vendors. I prefer face to face communication. Yet, we do not have any more conversations with patients.

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## 5. Conclusion

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The social anthropologist Kudret Emiroğlu (2016) argues that through the entire Turkish history – from its Asiatic roots to the Modern era – Turkish cultural communication had been strongly dependent on oral culture. He claims that, even after the nation building process of the new republic, literacy has not been considered as a critical issue. Moreover, all sorts of intellectualism had always been anticipated for its connotative aspects of elitism. That is why, he adds, Turkish society paid a very short visit to written culture and rapidly articulated itself in experiencing visual culture that has been digitally constructed.

Especially for highly educated elders, who were greatly engaged in written culture, it became much harder to cope with the digital world and society as expected, not only due to the generation gap. Old habits of their literate knowledge strongly need reliable mediators even to transfer it into digital world for new audiences. Therefore, they either choose to stay connected or withdraw into solitude. Most of them tended to perceive their adaptation process to the digital world as an adjustment process that feels uncomfortable. That is why they all try to set up a sort of buffer zone between their curiosity to engage and practice to intervene. They all wanted to keep distant from social media while also retaining the right to criticise it by means of not fully engaging in it. This could be weary but promising. That reaction is very reminiscent of David Riesman's (1964, 373) famous finishing words of his master work:

[...] one thing I am quite sure: the enormous potentialities for diversity in nature's bounty and men's capacity to differentiate their experience can become valued by the individual himself, so that will not be tempted and coerced into adjustment or, failing adjustment, into anomie.

Remaining totally indifferent to social media became almost an impossible option. Even the ones who do not have any social media accounts admitted that on several occasions, they asked their family members or close friends "What was going on?" Right here, we can contemplate of Bruce Brown's (1974, 168) remarks on the desire of involvement. He argued that, against the capitalist siege of social freedoms, emancipatory desires urge people to participate in the social processes on all levels from local to international, and the need for release from ignorance and tutelage. Many of our respondents – especially the social media protestors – remembered exactly that, they obtained their first twitter accounts during the Gezi Events in 2013. We must

note that those respondents considered themselves the generation of the 1968 protests.

All our interviewees remembered clearly their first meeting with the radio and their first encounter with the TV nearly after half a century. However, none of them remembered exactly their first meeting with smart phones and their first video conference, which possibly has been realised only in the last few years. Only with one exception – who has been in software and computer technology business since the 1980s – all our respondents were hesitant in using digital technologies, whether they were fully motivated or not. While admitting their digital illiteracy or incompetency, all of them put forward several excuses. While reluctant ones expressed their excuses within the sense of protesting impositions, motivated ones put forward their health issues such as defects of eyesight. Most of our respondents defined themselves as “very busy” dealing with “nonsense” facilities in social media, as a common excuse for being digitally incompetent. Controversially, they all stated the fact that they were enjoying their retirement with plenty of leisure time.

We observed that being fully ignorant to the digital world reveals some sort of embarrassment, especially for highly educated elders. Therefore, their awareness forced them to stay in touch at some level with digital technologies. For example, while protesting buying smart phones or using other types of digital gadgets, they reluctantly welcome that sort of present from family members. Many of them stated that their first smart phone or tablet was one of family member’s old-fashioned item.

A similar pattern could be monitored in their interaction with digital public services. Most of them delegated younger family members or close friends to deal with internet-based practices (such as all sorts of bookings – flights, vaccination appointments, etc. – buying tickets, paying taxes). Their excuses were very clear and common: “*Not to do something wrong!*” However, their tendency was to pay in cash to the mediator while executing the transactions with the mediator’s credit card. That attitude highly contradicted their previous responses about trust issues for digital banking procedures. Because nearly all of them surprisingly expressed their trust in the digital banking system against fraud.

Consequently, at the micro level of analysis, our research data demonstrated that socio-culturally privileged middle-class elders, despite their digital illiteracy, are aware of the impact of digital communication technologies in their daily lives. Regardless of their positive or negative attitude towards this transformation, they adopt more easily audio-visual tools, while they are more reluctant to use digital writing apparatuses. Elders’ engagement in this process of digital transformation creates novelties by shaping their new types of communication patterns. The integration of new communication technologies in elders’ lives transforms old habits by

improving their professional skills and self-development. Elders protest digital communication tools at the point where digitalisation replaces face-to-face interactions and is used as a substitute for personal communication.

At the meso level of analysis, we observed that digital network technologies and social media have radically altered elders' socialisation practices with family members and peer groups. Moreover, elders' adoption of digital communication tools transforms their ways of participation to civil society activities.

At the macro level of analysis, elders adapt to digital technologies shaping existing practices in education, financial transactions, and government services as long as they facilitate and improve their quality of life. Our interviews showed that the more elders engaged in the digital world with full effort, the more they felt alienated from new social dynamics. Because of missing the crucial chapters of digital learning or engagement processes, they try to compensate for their inadequacy with their use of empathic skills, which had to be generated through their literate knowledge or through their established social manners. There are not any kind of standard manuals or guides for the digital world and society which they can follow. That is why they felt free to generate self-appointed manners and rules for social media usage or in any form of digital communication.

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Digital Transformation(s)

Introduction

Stefanie Büchner, Jannis Hergesell & Jannis Kallinikos

Digital Transformation(s): On the Entanglement of Long-Term Processes and Digital Social Change. An Introduction.

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Contributions

Ole Hanseth

When Stars Align. The Interactions and Transformations of e-Health Infrastructure Regimes.

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Kathrin Braun, Cordula Kropp & Yana Boeva

From Digital Design to Data-Assets: Competing Visions, Policy Projects, and Emerging Arrangements of Value Creation in the Digital Transformation of Construction.

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