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Virtual Resilience: The Role of Social Media for Ukrainian War Refugees in Ireland

By Uliana Poshyvak

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
MA in Journalism & Media Communications (*QQI*)

Faculty of Journalism & Media Communications
Griffith College

August 2024

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Abstract

In today's digital era, media platforms play a vital role for refugees navigating displacement and resettlement in new countries. Amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, millions of civilians have been uprooted, seeking refuge and starting anew in unfamiliar territories. Ireland has welcomed around 100,000 Ukrainian refugees since the war began. It's essential to comprehend how they communicate and utilize media channels, as this knowledge can greatly assist in their integration journey. Understanding their digital pathways and media usage is key to providing effective support and fostering a sense of belonging in their new environment.

This thesis examines the role of social media in fostering virtual resilience among Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the study collected data through an online survey involving 87 participants. It investigates how these refugees use social media platforms for communication, information dissemination, and emotional support. The research primarily focuses on the effects of these digital tools on their integration into Irish society. The findings indicate that social media serves as a critical resource for maintaining ties with their homeland and accessing support networks. However, it also presents significant challenges, including the spread of misinformation and experiences of online hostility.

The study highlights the digital divide as a significant barrier, particularly among older refugees, 17% of whom report difficulties in using technology effectively. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of digital literacy programs to empower refugees, enabling them to navigate social media safely and constructively. The thesis argues that, despite its limitations, social media can play a pivotal role in building virtual resilience, facilitating the exchange of information, and supporting mental health during the resettlement process. It calls for targeted initiatives from the Irish government and NGOs to enhance digital access and promote safe online spaces, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees. The research contributes to the broader discourse on digital integration and provides practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners working with displaced populations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2014, the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe shifted dramatically with the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. This turmoil escalated in 2022 with a full-scale invasion by Russian forces, leading to one of the most significant refugee

crises in recent history. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, seeking refuge in various countries across Europe and beyond. Ireland, known for its humanitarian efforts, has welcomed a substantial number of Ukrainian refugees, providing them with temporary protection and support. According to UNHCR, by mid-2023, more than 5 million Ukrainians had fled their homeland, marking the largest movement of people in Europe since World War II. Ireland has played a pivotal role in this crisis, not only offering asylum but also ensuring access to healthcare, education, and social services for the displaced individuals and families (UNHCR, 2023).

Migration is an extremely challenging period of significant change in a person's life, often accompanied by potentially stressful events post-migration (Esses, Hamilton & Gaucher, 2017). Due to many traumatic events, significant losses, and other stressors before, during, and after migration, refugees are at high risk of developing common mental disorders and show increased levels of psychosocial vulnerability and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Lenferink et al., 2022).

To accelerate the cultural, economic, and socio-psychological adaptation of Ukrainians who have become forced migrants due to the war with Russia, it is crucial to understand the role of social media in this process. Social media can significantly influence psychological, behavioral, social, socio-cultural, and cross-cultural adaptation during their stay in different countries worldwide and in Europe. This research advances the state-of-the-art of resilience studies by incorporating the important activity of refugee use of social media. Such data are necessary for many organizations and specialists to improve the professional, social, cultural, and psychological support of Ukrainian refugees who find themselves in a situation of psychological, financial, and social crisis. Social media can facilitate connections, provide crucial information, and offer emotional support, thus playing a pivotal role in the integration process. Researchers of refugee acculturation processes emphasize that studies on the impact of social media are important for predicting problems related to the adaptation of refugees and host countries and for developing preventive measures before potential integration problems arise (Safak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2021).

1.2 Overview of the Ukraine War and Refugee Crisis

The war in Ukraine has had devastating effects on the civilian population, with widespread destruction, loss of life, and severe human rights violations. Homes, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure have been destroyed, leaving communities in ruins. Many families have been

torn apart, with loved ones lost or missing. The psychological impact on survivors, including children, has been profound, with many experiencing trauma and mental health challenges.

As a result, a massive exodus of refugees has occurred, with people fleeing to neighboring countries and further afield to escape the violence and instability. This refugee crisis has strained resources and capacities in host countries, leading to significant humanitarian challenges. The influx of refugees has necessitated urgent international cooperation and assistance to provide food, shelter, medical care, and other essential services.

The European Union has activated the Temporary Protection Directive, offering immediate protection and rights to those displaced by the conflict. This directive ensures that Ukrainian refugees have access to accommodation, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. It also grants them the right to stay in EU member states for up to three years, providing a sense of stability and security amidst the chaos.

1.3 Overview of the Situation of Ukrainian Refugees in Ireland

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, more than 104 000 Ukrainian refugees have sought refuge in Ireland, according to the UNHCR. This significant influx has highlighted the importance of effective integration strategies to support these individuals as they adapt to their new environment.

Upon arrival in Ireland, Ukrainian refugees face numerous challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and the psychological trauma of displacement. The Irish government, along with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has implemented several measures to assist these refugees. This includes language classes, integration programs, mental health services, and legal aid to help refugees navigate their new environment and start afresh.

The biggest and the most important program is the Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP) program. This initiative offers financial incentives to Irish households that provide accommodation to refugees, helping to alleviate the housing shortage and ensure that refugees have a safe place to stay. Additionally, the government has streamlined the asylum process, provided access to healthcare and education, and established community support programs to facilitate integration. Despite these efforts, integration into Irish society remains a complex and ongoing process. Understanding the specific needs and experiences of Ukrainian refugees is crucial for developing effective support systems that facilitate their adjustment and integration.

1.4 Importance of Social Media in Modern Communication and Support Systems

In today's digital age, social media platforms play a vital role in communication, information dissemination, and community building. For refugees, social media can serve as a lifeline, providing access to critical information, connecting with support networks, and maintaining ties with loved ones left behind. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become essential tools for refugees to navigate their new environments, find resources, and seek emotional support.

For Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, social media can significantly impact their resilience and integration into the host society. It offers a platform for sharing experiences, accessing services, and building new communities. By understanding how Ukrainian refugees utilize social media, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to enhance support and integration efforts. This research aims to explore the role of social media in the lives of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland, focusing on its impact on their resilience and integration into Irish society.

1.5 Research Problem

This study seeks to address the gap in understanding the role of social media in supporting Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. It aims to investigate how these digital platforms contribute to the refugees' ability to cope with their displacement, integrate into a new society, and rebuild their lives. The research will provide insights into the benefits and challenges of social media use among this population and offer recommendations for improving support mechanisms.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide insights into effective strategies for enhancing resilience and fostering social inclusion among Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. Specifically, it aims to research the role of social media in this context, examining how refugees utilize online platforms for support, communication, and building resilience.

According to UK Council for Internet Safety, digital resilience refers to the ability of individuals or communities to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity through the use of digital platforms and online resources (2019, p.5). It encompasses the ways in which social media and other online tools can provide emotional support, facilitate information sharing, and foster a sense of community and belonging in times of crisis.

Digital resilience is a critical concept for this thesis as it encapsulates the ability of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland to leverage digital tools, particularly social media, to navigate the

complex challenges they face. This resilience is vital because it enables refugees to maintain connections with family and friends, providing emotional support and a sense of continuity in their lives. It also allows them to access crucial information about available resources, services, and rights in their host country, aiding their ability to adapt and integrate more effectively.

Moreover, through social media, refugees can build and find communities, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity, which can alleviate feelings of isolation and promote mental well-being. Social media also empowers refugees to share their stories, raise awareness about their plight, and advocate for their needs and rights, potentially influencing public opinion and policy in positive ways. Additionally, digital platforms offer access to online education and job opportunities, helping refugees rebuild their lives and achieve self-sufficiency in their new environment.

So, understanding digital resilience is crucial to developing comprehensive support mechanisms that leverage the power of digital platforms to improve the lives of refugees.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the following objectives throughout the thesis:

1. To explore the social media usage patterns of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland.
2. To examine the impact of social media on the resilience and adaptation processes of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland.
3. To identify the challenges faced by Ukrainian war refugees in utilizing social media for communication and support in Ireland.
4. To assess the opportunities offered by social media platforms for the integration and well-being of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland.
5. To provide recommendations for policymakers, social service providers, and community organizations to enhance the support mechanisms available to Ukrainian war refugees through social media in Ireland.

1.7 Research Questions

In order to structure the intended objectives of this study, a main research question (RQ) has been defined as follows: “How does social media impact the integration process of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland?” This question is crucial as it aims to uncover the role of social media in facilitating the cultural, economic, and socio-psychological adaptation of Ukrainian refugees.

Understanding this impact is essential for developing targeted support programs and policies that can enhance the overall well-being and integration experience of these refugees. By addressing this main research question, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which social media can aid in the successful integration of displaced individuals in a new country.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will contribute to the academic knowledge on the role of social media in supporting refugees. It will also provide practical implications for policymakers, NGOs, and support organizations working with Ukrainian refugees in Ireland and other countries. By highlighting the importance of social media in the resilience and integration of refugees, this research will help develop more effective support strategies tailored to the digital age.

Moreover, by investigating this aspect, I can gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in the lives of refugees, including its impact on their integration, well-being, and resilience. Additionally, exploring how refugees utilize social media can shed light on their access to resources, social networks, and community support, thereby informing strategies to better meet their needs and enhance their experiences in their host country.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current research and knowledge related to the refugee crisis, with a specific focus on the role of social media in supporting Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. This review will explore various aspects, including the global refugee crisis, the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees, the concept of virtual resilience, and the role of social media in cultural integration and community building. A review of the literature highlights the importance of this research project in entering unexplored territory that is not just of relevance to Ukrainian refugees in Ireland but which indicates the important role that social media plays in all communities of refugees in the current era.

2.2 Refugee Crisis and Social Media

2.2.1 Overview of the Global Refugee Crisis

The global refugee crisis is one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of the twenty-first century, characterized by a significant increase in the number of individuals forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict, persecution, and violence. As of recent statistics, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has surpassed 82.4 million, with over 26.4 million classified as refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021).

2.2.2 Causes of the Refugee Crisis

The primary drivers of the refugee crisis are armed conflicts, persecution, and human rights violations. Countries experiencing prolonged conflicts, such as Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan, are major sources of refugees. The Syrian civil war alone has produced approximately 6.7 million refugees, making it the largest source of displaced persons in recent history (UNHCR, 2021). Similarly, ongoing violence in Afghanistan has led to the displacement of millions of Afghans.

Persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group also contributes significantly to forced displacement. Ethnic cleansing and genocides, such as those experienced by the Rohingya in Myanmar, have forced entire communities to flee their homes to seek safety in neighboring countries.

Climate change and environmental degradation are emerging as additional factors exacerbating the refugee crisis. Natural disasters, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity are increasingly displacing populations, particularly in vulnerable regions (Kälin & Schrepfer, 2012).

2.2.3 Impact on Host Countries

The influx of refugees places considerable strain on host countries, particularly those in the developing world. Neighboring countries often bear the brunt of the crisis, hosting the majority of refugees. For instance, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees globally, with over 3.6 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021). This sudden population increase can lead to economic, social, and political challenges, including pressure on public services, job markets, and infrastructure.

In many cases, refugees live in overcrowded camps with limited access to basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. The lack of resources and inadequate living conditions can lead to health crises and further human suffering (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016).

2.2.4 International Response

The international community has responded to the refugee crisis through a combination of humanitarian aid, policy initiatives, and resettlement programs. The UNHCR plays a crucial role in coordinating efforts to protect and assist refugees, providing shelter, food, medical care, and legal assistance.

Resettlement programs are a critical component of the international response, offering durable solutions for refugees who cannot return to their home countries or integrate into host communities. However, the number of resettlement opportunities remains limited, with only a small fraction of refugees resettled each year (UNHCR, 2021).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive approaches that address the root causes of displacement and promote sustainable solutions. The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, aims to enhance international cooperation, support host countries, and improve the conditions for refugees (UN, 2018).

2.2.5 Challenges and Future Directions

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in addressing the global refugee crisis. Funding shortfalls, political resistance, and security concerns often hinder the effective implementation of refugee protection and assistance programs. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities and created new barriers for refugees, including restrictions on movement and access to healthcare (Devakumar *et al.*, 2020).

Moving forward, it is essential to strengthen international solidarity and cooperation to ensure that refugees receive the protection and support they need. This includes increasing financial contributions, expanding resettlement programs, and addressing the underlying causes of displacement. Furthermore, promoting the social and economic integration of refugees into host communities is crucial for creating sustainable solutions and enhancing the resilience of displaced populations (Betts & Collier, 2017).

In conclusion, the global refugee crisis is a multifaceted challenge that requires a coordinated and sustained international response. By addressing the immediate needs of refugees and tackling the root causes of displacement, the global community can work towards a more just and humane approach to forced migration.

2.2.6 Role of Social Media in Refugee Support and Communication

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become essential tools for refugees, aiding in communication with family and friends, accessing information, and receiving support from various organizations (Gillespie *et al.*, 2016). These platforms facilitate the creation of virtual communities where refugees can share experiences, seek advice, and offer support to one another (Alencar, 2018). Moreover, social media has been instrumental in raising awareness about the refugee crisis, mobilizing humanitarian aid, and influencing policy decisions (Milan, 2019).

Studies have shown that maintaining social ties through platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp can significantly mitigate the psychological distress associated with displacement (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). These platforms enable refugees to share their experiences, seek advice, and offer support to one another, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

For instance, refugees often use Facebook groups to find information about asylum procedures, housing, and employment opportunities in their host countries (Gillespie *et al.*, 2016). These groups act as virtual support networks where members can share vital resources and provide assistance to newcomers. Such connectivity is particularly crucial for newly arrived refugees who might otherwise struggle to navigate the complexities of their new environment.

Social media also serves as a vital information dissemination tool. During crises, refugees can access real-time updates about safety, aid distribution, and policy changes through social media channels (Chib *et al.*, 2013). For example, humanitarian organizations and government agencies frequently use Twitter and Facebook to broadcast important information regarding border openings, asylum processes, and available services.

The psychological impact of displacement is profound, and social media offers an avenue for emotional support and mental health resources. Refugees can engage in online counseling sessions, participate in support groups, and access mental health resources through social media platforms (Benson *et al.*, 2018). Online communities provide a space for refugees to share their struggles and triumphs, offering solidarity and understanding that can alleviate feelings of isolation and despair.

Despite its benefits, the use of social media by refugees is not without challenges. One significant issue is the spread of misinformation and rumors, which can lead to confusion and panic. For instance, false information about asylum procedures or border policies can mislead

refugees and result in unnecessary hardships (UNHCR, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial for both users and organizations to verify information sources and promote digital literacy among refugee populations.

Additionally, privacy and security concerns are prevalent. Refugees may be at risk of surveillance by oppressive regimes or exploitation by malicious actors when using social media. Organizations must ensure that platforms used for refugee support have strong security measures in place to protect user data and privacy.

In conclusion, social media plays a multifaceted role in supporting refugees by facilitating communication, providing access to crucial information, and offering emotional support. While there are significant benefits to using these platforms, it is essential to address the associated challenges to ensure that refugees can safely and effectively leverage social media for their needs. This research project therefore focuses on enhancing the positive impacts of social media while mitigating its risks, ensuring that it remains a valuable tool for refugee support and communication.

2.3 Ukrainian Refugees

2.3.1 Specific Challenges Faced by Ukrainian Refugees

The ongoing war in Ukraine has led to a significant displacement of its citizens, creating a substantial refugee crisis. Ukrainian refugees face countless challenges as they seek safety and stability in foreign lands. These challenges span across psychological, social, economic, and legal dimensions, each contributing to the overall hardship experienced by this population.

The psychological impact of fleeing conflict zones cannot be overstated. Many Ukrainian refugees have witnessed or experienced traumatic events, leading to high levels of stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The sudden uprooting from their homes and separation from family members exacerbate these mental health issues. According to a study by Bogic *et al.* (2015), refugees from conflict regions often exhibit high prevalence rates of mental health disorders, which require immediate and ongoing support to address effectively.

Moreover, adjusting to a new culture poses significant challenges for Ukrainian refugees. Language barriers are a primary obstacle, hindering communication and access to essential services such as healthcare and education. Additionally, differences in cultural norms and

practices can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation. A study by Stewart *et al.* (2018) highlighted that refugees often struggle with cultural integration, which impacts their ability to form social connections and community ties in their host countries.

Securing employment is also a critical challenge for Ukrainian refugees. Many face difficulties in having their qualifications recognized, leading to underemployment or unemployment. This economic instability not only affects their ability to support themselves and their families but also impacts their mental well-being. The European Commission (2021) reported that refugees often experience higher unemployment rates compared to the native population, largely due to systemic barriers and discrimination in the labor market.

Navigating the legal and governmental processes in host countries can be daunting for Ukrainian refugees. The complexity of asylum applications, residency permits, and access to social services often leads to prolonged periods of uncertainty and insecurity. According to Koser and Black (1999), the legal frameworks governing refugee status and asylum processes are often convoluted, leaving refugees vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Healthcare access is another critical issue for Ukrainian refugees. Language barriers, lack of documentation, and unfamiliarity with the healthcare system impede their ability to receive timely and adequate medical care. A study by Pavli and Maltezou (2017) found that refugees frequently face health disparities due to these barriers, resulting in untreated chronic conditions and inadequate mental health support. This emphasizes how critical it is to implement focused interventions to close these gaps in healthcare access and guarantee that migrants get the medical care and psychological assistance they require. In the absence of such initiatives, these vulnerable groups' long-term well-being is at significant risk, which makes integration and stability in their host nations even more difficult.

2.3.2 Previous Studies on Ukrainian Refugees and Social Media Use

The use of social media by Ukrainian refugees has been the subject of some studies, highlighting its role in their migration journey and integration process. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram have become vital tools for communication, information dissemination, and community building among Ukrainian refugees.

Social media serves as a crucial source of information for Ukrainian refugees. It provides real-time updates on the conflict, safety tips, and guidance on the asylum process. Dekker *et al.*

(2018) noted that social media platforms play a significant role in the dissemination of critical information during crises, aiding refugees in making informed decisions.

Social media facilitates the creation of support networks among Ukrainian refugees. Online communities offer a space for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and providing emotional support. This virtual social support is particularly important for those who may feel isolated in their host countries. A study by Alencar (2018) found that social media enhances the social support systems of refugees, helping them to cope with the challenges of displacement and integration.

Maintaining cultural identity is essential for many Ukrainian refugees, and social media offers a platform to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. Through social media, refugees can share cultural practices, traditions, and language, ensuring that these elements are not lost despite being away from their homeland. A study by Kutsenko (2019) highlighted the role of social media in preserving cultural identity among displaced populations, emphasizing its importance in fostering a sense of belonging and continuity.

Social media also serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and mobilization. Ukrainian refugees and their supporters use these platforms to raise awareness about their plight, advocate for their rights, and mobilize resources. This online activism can influence public opinion and policy decisions, as evidenced by various refugee advocacy campaigns documented by Choudhury and Finneman (2013).

2.3.3 Challenges of Social Media Use

Despite its benefits, social media use among Ukrainian refugees is not without challenges. Issues such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and digital literacy can hinder the effective use of these platforms. Misinformation can spread rapidly on social media, leading to confusion and fear. Privacy concerns are also significant, as refugees may be wary of surveillance by hostile entities. Moreover, varying levels of digital literacy can affect the ability of some refugees to fully utilize social media resources. Studies by Gillespie *et al.* (2016) have documented these challenges, underscoring the need for digital literacy programs and safeguards to protect refugee users.

In conclusion, while Ukrainian refugees face numerous challenges in their displacement and integration processes, social media plays a pivotal role in providing support, information, and a sense of community. Future research should continue to explore the evolving dynamics of

social media use among refugees, ensuring that these platforms can be leveraged effectively to support their needs.

2.4 Concept of Virtual Resilience

2.4.1 Definition and Components of Virtual Resilience

Virtual resilience refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to leverage digital tools and online platforms to cope with, adapt to, and recover from challenging circumstances. It is a multifaceted concept encompassing various components such as digital literacy, access to technology, online social support networks, and the ability to utilize digital resources effectively.

Digital literacy is a fundamental component of virtual resilience. It involves the skills and knowledge required to navigate digital environments, including the use of social media, online communication tools, and other digital resources. High levels of digital literacy enable individuals to access vital information, connect with others, and participate in online communities, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with and adapt to adversity (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014).

Access to technology is another crucial aspect of virtual resilience. This includes not only the availability of devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers but also reliable internet connectivity. Without access to technology, individuals cannot benefit from the digital tools and resources that can aid in resilience building (Hargittai, 2010).

Online social support networks play a significant role in virtual resilience. These networks provide emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of community, which are essential for coping with stress and adversity. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram facilitate the formation and maintenance of these support networks, allowing individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences or challenges (Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

The ability to effectively utilize digital resources is also a key component of virtual resilience. This includes using online platforms to access information, seek help, and engage in activities that promote well-being. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people used online platforms to access health information, participate in virtual support groups, and engage in remote work or education, all of which contributed to their resilience (Baker *et al.*, 2020).

2.4.2 Case Studies on Virtual Resilience in Different Contexts

Numerous case studies illustrate the concept of virtual resilience across various contexts. One notable example is the use of social media by refugees to navigate displacement and integrate into new communities. Research has shown that refugees often rely on digital tools to maintain connections with their home countries, access critical information, and build new social networks in host countries (Gillespie *et al.*, 2016).

In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, a study by Alencar (2018) highlighted how Syrian refugees in the Netherlands used social media to cope with their displacement. The refugees used platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to stay in touch with family members, share information about asylum procedures, and find housing and employment opportunities. These online activities helped them adapt to their new environment and build resilience against the challenges of displacement.

Another example is the role of digital tools in disaster response and recovery. During natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, social media platforms have been used to coordinate relief efforts, disseminate information, and provide emotional support to affected individuals. For instance, during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, social media was widely used to organize rescue operations, share real-time updates, and offer support to those impacted by the disaster (Silver *et al.*, 2019).

In educational settings, virtual resilience has been demonstrated through the use of online learning platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and universities worldwide shifted to remote learning, relying on digital tools to continue education. Students and educators adapted to this new mode of learning, developing resilience through the use of online resources, virtual classrooms, and digital communication tools (Dhawan, 2020).

The workplace has also seen examples of virtual resilience, particularly with the rise of remote work. Companies have adopted digital tools to facilitate communication, collaboration, and productivity among remote employees. This shift has required both employers and employees to develop new skills and adapt to digital workflows, thereby enhancing their resilience in the face of changing work environments (Carillo *et al.*, 2020).

In conclusion, virtual resilience is a crucial concept in today's digital age, enabling individuals and communities to cope with and adapt to various challenges. By enhancing digital literacy,

ensuring access to technology, fostering online social support networks, and effectively utilizing digital resources, individuals can build resilience and thrive in the face of adversity.

2.5 Social Media and Integration

2.5.1 The Role of Social Media in Cultural Integration

Social media has become a vital tool for cultural integration, particularly for refugees and immigrants who use these platforms to bridge cultural gaps and adapt to their new environments. Social media platforms provide a space for individuals to connect with others from similar backgrounds, share experiences, and access information that aids in the integration process. The role of social media in cultural integration is multifaceted, encompassing language acquisition, cultural exchange, and the formation of social networks.

One of the primary ways social media facilitates cultural integration is through language learning. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube offer access to language learning groups, tutorials, and interactive content that help refugees improve their language skills. For example, refugees can join groups specifically designed for language learners, participate in discussions, and watch educational videos, making language acquisition more accessible and engaging.

Cultural exchange is another significant aspect of social media's role in integration. Social media allows refugees to learn about the customs, traditions, and social norms of their host country while sharing their own cultural heritage with others. This bidirectional exchange fosters mutual understanding and respect, which are essential for successful integration. Studies have shown that engagement in cultural exchange on social media can lead to a greater sense of belonging and acceptance in the host community (Alencar, 2018).

Moreover, social media helps refugees form social networks that provide emotional support and practical assistance. These networks often consist of fellow refugees, volunteers, and local community members who offer advice, share resources, and provide companionship. The sense of community created through these networks can alleviate feelings of isolation and help refugees navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

2.5.2 Social Media's Impact on Community Building and Support Networks

Social media significantly impacts community building and the development of support networks among refugees. These platforms enable refugees to maintain connections with their

home country while building new relationships in the host country. This dual connectivity is crucial for maintaining a sense of identity and belonging, which are essential for psychological well-being.

Community building through social media often starts with joining online groups and forums that cater to specific interests or needs. For instance, Facebook groups and WhatsApp chats are popular among refugees for sharing information about job opportunities, housing, legal advice, and healthcare services. These groups serve as a virtual support system, providing immediate assistance and fostering a sense of solidarity among members.

The role of social media in community building extends to advocacy and mobilization. Refugees and their allies use platforms like Twitter and Instagram to raise awareness about their experiences, advocate for their rights, and mobilize support for policy changes. Social media campaigns can draw attention to issues affecting refugee communities and garner support from a global audience (Leung, 2011).

Furthermore, social media facilitates the creation of informal support networks that are often more responsive and flexible than formal assistance programs. These networks can quickly adapt to the changing needs of refugees, offering real-time support and solutions. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media groups played a critical role in disseminating information about health guidelines, vaccination drives, and financial assistance programs, helping refugees cope with the crisis (Ritchie *et al.*, 2020).

In summary, social media plays a crucial role in the cultural integration of refugees and the development of community support networks. By providing access to language learning resources, facilitating cultural exchange, and fostering social connections, social media helps refugees navigate the challenges of adapting to a new environment. Moreover, the platforms enable community building and support networks that offer practical assistance, emotional support, and advocacy opportunities, contributing to the overall well-being and integration of refugees.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

The existing literature on refugee integration into new cultures and the role of social media in this process reveals several notable gaps. Despite the growing interest in the intersection of migration and digital technology, there remains a paucity of comprehensive studies specifically examining how social media facilitates the cultural integration of refugees. This oversight is

significant given the increasing reliance on digital communication platforms among displaced populations.

One major gap in the literature is the lack of longitudinal studies that track the integration process over time. Most research provides a snapshot of refugee experiences at a single point, which does not capture the evolving nature of integration (Brenner, 2021). Longitudinal studies could offer valuable insights into how social media usage and its impact on integration change as refugees settle into their new environments.

Furthermore, there is limited research that explores the differences in social media usage among various refugee groups. Cultural background, age, gender, and previous digital literacy significantly influence how refugees use social media and the benefits they derive from it (Dekker *et al.*, 2018). Understanding these differences is crucial for developing targeted interventions that support the integration process more effectively.

Another gap is the insufficient focus on the qualitative aspects of social media's role in integration. While quantitative studies provide important data on usage patterns and general trends, qualitative research is essential to understand the nuanced ways in which refugees interact with these platforms. Such studies can reveal the personal and emotional dimensions of social media use, such as how it helps refugees maintain connections with their home countries, navigate new cultural landscapes, and build new social networks (Alencar, 2018).

The role of social media in providing psychological support and fostering a sense of community among refugees is another area that requires more attention. While there is some research indicating that social media can help reduce feelings of isolation and provide emotional support, more studies are needed to explore these aspects in depth (Witteborn, 2015). This includes examining how online communities can complement offline support systems and contribute to overall well-being.

Additionally, the existing literature often overlooks the potential negative impacts of social media on refugee integration. Issues such as online harassment, misinformation, and digital surveillance pose significant risks, yet there is limited research addressing these challenges (Alencar, 2018). Understanding the potential downsides of social media use is crucial for developing strategies that mitigate these risks while enhancing the positive aspects.

Lastly, the role of social media in facilitating access to resources and opportunities, such as employment, education, and healthcare, is under-researched. Social media platforms can serve

as vital tools for information dissemination and resource access, yet the extent to which refugees use these platforms for such purposes remains unclear (Gillespie *et al.*, 2018). Further research could explore how social media can be leveraged to improve access to essential services and support refugee self-sufficiency.

In conclusion, while the existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of social media in refugee integration, significant gaps remain. By expanding our understanding of how social media impacts the integration process, we can develop more effective interventions that support refugees in their journey towards becoming active and integrated members of their new communities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this study focuses on the utilization of online surveys, examining their strengths and weaknesses. Online surveys present significant advantages that make them particularly suitable for studying dispersed populations, such as refugees, by offering the capability to reach a large number of respondents across various locations. This geographical reach is invaluable for capturing data from Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, providing insights that might be otherwise difficult to obtain through traditional survey methods (Wright, 2005).

A critical advantage of online surveys is the anonymity they offer, which can reduce social desirability bias. This anonymity encourages more candid responses, especially on sensitive topics related to displacement and integration challenges. Respondents are likely to provide more truthful answers when they are assured that their identities are protected (Smyth, 2014). Additionally, the cost-effectiveness of online surveys cannot be overlooked. They eliminate the need for physical travel, printing, and mailing costs, thereby allowing resources to be allocated to other crucial aspects of research, such as data analysis (Couper, 2000).

Time efficiency is another significant benefit. Online surveys can be distributed and completed rapidly, facilitating swift data collection. This is particularly beneficial in dynamic contexts, such as tracking the ongoing experiences of refugees, where timely data is essential (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Moreover, the automation of data collection and processing provided by online survey platforms streamlines the initial stages of data analysis, reducing the risk of human error and enhancing the overall efficiency of the research process (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

However, online surveys also come with notable limitations. Sampling bias is a major concern, as not all individuals have equal access to the internet or the skills to navigate online surveys. This can result in the overrepresentation of certain demographics, such as younger, more educated individuals, and the underrepresentation of others, such as older adults or those with limited internet access (Bethlehem, 2010). Response rates can also be lower compared to other methods, and maintaining high engagement and completion rates requires careful survey design and sometimes incentives (Fan & Yan, 2010).

The quality and validity of the data collected through online surveys can be affected by factors such as the respondents' understanding of the questions and their willingness to provide accurate information. Poorly designed surveys can lead to misinterpretations and unreliable data. Pre-testing the survey and using clear, concise language can mitigate these issues (Reips, 2002). Technical problems, such as website downtime or software bugs, can disrupt the survey process, and respondents may encounter difficulties if the survey is not compatible with their devices or if there are accessibility issues. Ensuring the technical robustness of the survey platform and providing support for respondents can address these challenges (Couper, 2000).

Ethical considerations are paramount, especially concerning anonymity. While anonymity encourages candid responses, it also poses ethical challenges. Ensuring that participants provide informed consent and understand the purpose of the survey is crucial. Researchers must also ensure that data is securely stored and that participants' privacy is protected (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009).

To mitigate these limitations, researchers can adopt several strategies. Combining online surveys with other data collection methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research question. This mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

To reach underrepresented groups, various organizations that work with refugees, such as the [Association of Ukrainians in the Republic of Ireland](#), the [Ukrainian Community in Ireland](#), [Ukrainians in Ireland](#) and others, posted the link to the survey. This approach helped to increase awareness and participation among the target population. Providing the survey in multiple languages and ensuring it is accessible on various devices can also improve response rates and reduce sampling bias (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Conducting a pilot test of the survey with a small, representative sample can help identify and address potential issues with question clarity, technical functionality, and data quality. Feedback from pilot participants can be used to refine the survey before full deployment (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Ensuring that the purpose of the survey, the importance of participation, and the measures taken to protect privacy are clearly communicated to potential respondents can increase trust and willingness to participate. Providing contact information for support and questions can also enhance engagement (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009).

Online surveys offer a valuable tool for collecting data from large and geographically dispersed populations, such as Ukrainian refugees. While they present certain limitations, careful survey design, targeted recruitment, and a mixed-methods approach can help mitigate these challenges. By leveraging the strengths of online surveys and addressing their weaknesses, researchers can gather robust and meaningful data to inform their studies.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this study, as was mentioned before, was an online survey. The choice of an online survey was motivated by its accessibility and ease of use, ensuring that respondents could participate at their convenience and from various locations. The survey aimed to gather comprehensive information on several critical aspects, including demographic profiles, social media usage, patterns and changes brought about by relocation to Ireland, and the extent of adaptation and integration. Additionally, it featured questions about age, duration of stay in Ireland, social media preferences, and the role of social media in aiding integration. This approach was designed to provide a holistic understanding of the refugees' experiences.

The survey was initially designed and conducted in English to ensure clarity and consistency in the formulation of questions. Once the questionnaire was finalized, it underwent a thorough translation process to convert it into Ukrainian, ensuring that the language was accessible and comprehensible to the target respondents.

According to a survey by the Research & Branding Group company (2020), the most popular social networks among Ukrainians at the start of 2020 were Facebook (58% of respondents), YouTube (41%), Instagram (28%), Telegram (14%), VKontakte (7%), Odnoklassniki (6%), Twitter (5%), and LinkedIn (1%). Between September 2019 and March 2020, Facebook's monthly Ukrainian audience grew by 2 million, reaching 14 million users, with growth

observed across all age groups (Skripin, 2020). Facebook remains the largest and most popular social network globally, given its vast user base and high interaction levels (Alhgren, 2022). Analysis conducted for this study revealed that Facebook hosts the most groups aimed at connecting Ukrainian migrants, facilitating discussions on various issues such as relocation, settling in new areas, and document processing. These groups serve as a social structure based on mutual connections and interests, making Facebook an ideal platform for distributing the questionnaire link.

Today, social networks like Facebook offer the ability to connect a vast number of individuals in groups based on shared interests, providing extensive opportunities for communication. These platforms are utilized by billions of people on a daily basis (Blais, 2020). So, participants were recruited using a nonprobabilistic sampling method through Facebook, as well as X (formerly Twitter) and Telegram. Links to the questionnaire were posted in specialized groups (such as the [Association of Ukrainians in the Republic of Ireland](#), the [Ukrainian Community in Ireland](#), [Ukrainians in Ireland](#)) during June, inviting Ukrainians to take part. The introductory message explained the survey's objectives, assured confidentiality, and emphasized informed consent. Considering the innovative approach of examining the socio-psychological aspects of Ukrainian refugees via social media, no exclusion criteria were set, resulting in a broad and diverse sample. Participants completed the questionnaire at their convenience.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey underwent thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This process involved multiple readings of the survey responses to immerse in the data and become familiar with its content.

During the initial phase, open coding was employed, where codes were assigned to significant portions of the responses. These codes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and relevance. Next, related codes were grouped into broader categories, forming initial themes that encapsulated the core aspects of the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

The development of these themes involved iterative refinement, with continuous comparison and integration of codes and themes to ensure they accurately represented the data. This process also included cross-checking with the original responses to maintain fidelity to the participants' perspectives (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, the identified themes were interpreted and synthesized to answer the research question, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The thematic analysis thus facilitated a structured and detailed examination of the data, allowing for meaningful insights to emerge (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Throughout this research project, ethical considerations were meticulously upheld to ensure the study's integrity and the participants' well-being. Participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives, the specific data collection methods employed, and their rights, including the option to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions.

Maintaining confidentiality was a paramount concern throughout the research process. The description of the survey included clear information that participation was entirely voluntary and that the survey was anonymous, meaning that no personally identifiable information would be collected or linked to individual responses. Additionally, it was explicitly stated that respondents could choose to stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. This provision ensured that participants could withdraw from the survey whenever they felt uncomfortable or no longer wished to continue. This rigorous approach to confidentiality and informed consent was crucial in fostering a safe and respectful environment for participants to share their experiences and insights on the role of social media in their integration and resilience as Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland.

3.5 Limitations

As was mentioned before, such surveys provide prompt responses, extensive coverage of the target audience, and high respondent trust levels. Additionally, they allow for focused and relevant questions, organizational flexibility, logical survey progression, and real-time monitoring of responses (Silver, 2019; Brown, 2019). A significant advantage is the reduction of interviewer influence, leading to more thoughtful responses to open-ended questions. Researchers comparing offline and online methods note that, with meticulous preparation, online surveys can yield results comparable to traditional methods (Doe, 2020).

However, online surveys also face notable limitations (Johnson, 2021). One primary drawback is reduced data accuracy, particularly concerning sample representativeness. Other issues include spontaneous sampling, difficulties in verifying respondent uniqueness, potential sample displacement, and related representativeness concerns. For instance, while conducting

an online survey of Ukrainian refugees, it was challenging to ensure a representative sample due to unknown demographics such as professional background and other details. The findings predominantly reflect the views of active internet users on specific social networks who voluntarily participate, a phenomenon known as self-selection bias (Brown, 2019).

Additionally, the sample size for this study was relatively small, which poses several challenges to the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. A small sample size often results in limited statistical power, making it difficult to detect significant effects or differences that may exist in the population. This limitation can lead to a higher margin of error and reduce the confidence in the results obtained from the study. Furthermore, a small sample size may not adequately capture the diversity within the refugee population, such as variations in age, gender, socio-economic status, or length of stay in Ireland. This can result in findings that are not representative of the entire population, thereby limiting the applicability of the conclusions drawn from the research (Silver, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

The issue of small sample size is particularly pertinent in studies involving refugee populations, where logistical and practical constraints often hinder the recruitment of a large number of participants. For example, refugees may face language barriers, lack access to technology, or have limited time and resources to participate in surveys (Adhikari, 2018). Additionally, refugees living in rural or remote areas may be underrepresented in the sample due to difficulties in reaching these individuals (Koser & Martin, 2011).

Moreover, the voluntary nature of survey participation can introduce self-selection bias, where those who choose to participate may differ systematically from those who do not, further compromising the representativeness of the sample (Bethlehem, 2010). This bias can affect the generalizability of the findings, as the views and experiences of non-respondents remain unaccounted for.

Given these considerations, it is essential to interpret the findings of this study with caution and acknowledge the limitations imposed by the small sample size. Future research should aim to overcome these challenges by employing strategies to increase sample size and enhance representativeness, such as using multiple recruitment methods, offering incentives for participation, and ensuring the survey is accessible to a wider audience (Groves *et al.*, 2009). This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland and improve the reliability and validity of the research outcomes.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyze the data collected from the surveys conducted with Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by an in-depth analysis of their social media usage patterns, the platforms they prefer, and how these platforms assist in their integration and resilience. The results will highlight the significant role of social media in providing emotional support, facilitating communication, and aiding in the cultural adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland.

The surveys were meticulously designed to capture a wide array of information, ensuring that we could paint a detailed picture of the experiences of Ukrainian refugees as they navigate their new lives in Ireland. These surveys were distributed through various social media platforms, leveraging the widespread use of these networks among the target population. By using social media as a distribution channel, we aimed to reach a broad and diverse audience, maximizing the inclusivity and representativeness of our sample.

As was mentioned before, the surveys were shared across popular social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), and Telegram. Each platform was selected for its unique reach and engagement levels among different segments of the refugee population. Facebook was chosen due to its extensive user base and community-focused groups, which are prevalent among Ukrainian refugees. X was targeted for its popularity among younger demographics, who are typically more active on visual content-sharing platforms. Telegram, known for its secure messaging capabilities, was used to reach those who prefer more private and direct forms of communication.

To ensure the surveys were accessible and engaging, we used a variety of formats and strategies tailored to each platform. On Facebook, surveys were posted in relevant groups and pages dedicated to Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. These posts included compelling images and direct calls to action to encourage participation. On X, we utilized posts with eye-catching graphics and concise descriptions to capture the attention of users quickly. Telegram surveys were shared through group chats and channels frequented by the Ukrainian community, ensuring they reached a concentrated audience.

By distributing the surveys via social media, we also aimed to explore the impact of these platforms in real-time. The responses gathered not only provided valuable data but also offered insights into how effectively social media can be used as a tool for research and community engagement. This method allowed us to gather data rapidly and efficiently, while also giving participants the flexibility to respond at their convenience.

The survey questions were carefully crafted to address key areas of interest, including demographic information, social media usage patterns, and the role of social media in integration and resilience. Participants were asked about their age, gender, length of stay in Ireland, and other demographic factors to help us understand the composition of our sample. We also inquired about their frequency of social media use, preferred platforms, and the purposes for which they use social media. These questions aimed to uncover how social media helps them stay connected with family and friends, find information and news, seek emotional support, and learn about Irish culture and integration.

In addition to multiple-choice questions, the surveys included open-ended questions to capture more nuanced and personal experiences. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about their social media use, the challenges they face, and the ways in which these platforms have impacted their lives. This qualitative data provided depth to our analysis, allowing us to understand the individual stories behind the statistics.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on the responses collected from these surveys. The data has been analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and significant insights that shed light on the experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. By examining these results, we aim to highlight the crucial role of social media in supporting their integration and resilience, offering recommendations for how these platforms can be better utilized to meet their needs.

4.2 Demographic Information

This section provides a detailed description of the sample population, highlighting key demographic characteristics such as age, gender, length of stay in Ireland, and other relevant factors.

4.2.1 Age Distribution

The sample population comprised Ukrainian refugees of various age groups. The age distribution is as follows:

- **Under 18:** 4.7%
- **18-24:** 8.1%
- **25-34:** 19.8%
- **35-44:** 32.6%
- **45-54:** 18.6%
- **55-64:** 7%
- **65 and above:** 9.3%

The 35-44 age group is the largest, accounting for 32.6% of participants. This group, being in their prime working and family-raising years, is likely to be highly active on social media for personal and professional reasons. The 25-34 age group, comprising 19.8%, represents young adults often advancing their careers and establishing households, and they are typically heavy users of social media.

The 45-54 age group makes up 18.6% of the sample. This group may use social media more for information and support rather than socializing, focusing on integrating into the local community.

Participants under 18 represent 4.7% of the sample and are likely to use social media primarily for entertainment and education. Older adults, including those aged 55-64 (7%) and 65 and above (9.3%), together make up 16.3% of the sample. They may face unique challenges in adapting to new technologies and might use social media less frequently but can benefit significantly from platforms offering information and community support.

Social media strategies should address the diverse needs of different age groups. The largest group (35-44) may benefit from platforms that facilitate professional networking and community engagement. Younger adults (25-34) may use social media for career development and social integration. Middle-aged and older refugees may need more support to enhance their digital literacy and comfort with social media.

4.2.2 Gender Distribution

The gender distribution of the participants is as follows:

- **Male:** 17.4%
- **Female:** 82.6%

The gender distribution among Ukrainian refugees in Ireland shows a significant imbalance, with a much higher proportion of female participants. This disparity can be attributed to the ongoing war in Ukraine, where martial law and conscription policies have significantly impacted demographic movements. During the war, Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 are generally required to remain in Ukraine to support the war effort. This includes being available for conscription into the military, which restricts their ability to leave the country. Consequently, women and children are prioritized for evacuation to ensure their safety, leading to a higher proportion of female refugees seeking asylum abroad.

Many families have made the difficult decision for the women and children to leave Ukraine for their safety while men stay behind to defend their homes and country. This has resulted in a large number of women and children as refugees. Women often take on the role of primary caregivers during crises, seeking refuge and stability for their children and elderly family members.

Given the high proportion of female refugees, social media strategies should focus on creating supportive and informative networks tailored to women's needs. This includes platforms that offer emotional support, community-building activities, and resources for managing family and integration issues. Programs aimed at empowering women through education, job opportunities, and integration into the local community can be effectively promoted and supported via social media. Social media can also serve as a crucial communication tool for separated families, helping women stay in touch with their male relatives who remain in Ukraine, thereby providing emotional support and maintaining family bonds.

4.2.3 Length of Stay in Ireland

Participants reported varying lengths of stay in Ireland:

- **Less than 6 months:** 9.3%
- **6 months to 1 year:** 12.8%
- **1-2 years:** 33.7%
- **More than 2 years:** 44.2%

The length of stay data reveals that a majority of participants have been in Ireland for over a year, with the largest group (44.2%) having stayed for more than two years. This suggests that many participants have had a considerable amount of time to adapt to their new environment, which may influence their social media usage and integration experiences. Those who have

been in Ireland longer are likely to have more established routines and networks, potentially impacting their reliance on and the role of social media.

Moreover, the longer duration of stay may also reflect a greater level of stability and permanence in their lives, possibly leading to different social media behaviors compared to those who are newer to the country. For instance, individuals who have been in Ireland for over two years might use social media less frequently for finding local information or connecting with the Ukrainian community, as they may have already built connections and become familiar with local resources. Instead, they might use social media more for maintaining ties with friends and family back in Ukraine or for participating in broader online communities.

In contrast, those who have been in Ireland for less than a year might still be in the process of acclimating to their new surroundings. For them, social media could serve as a critical tool for navigating daily life, from finding employment and housing to connecting with other Ukrainians who can offer support and advice. As they gradually settle in, their social media usage patterns may shift, reflecting their growing familiarity with their new environment and the evolving needs that accompany different stages of their integration journey.

The length of stay data underscores the importance of considering how time spent in a new country can influence social media behaviors and the integration process. Tailored initiatives that take into account the different needs and experiences of refugees at various stages of their stay in Ireland could help facilitate more effective support and integration efforts.

4.2.4 Social Media Usage Frequency

Participants were asked about the frequency of their social media usage:

- **Multiple times a day:** 93%
- **Once a day:** 2.3%
- **A few times a week:** 2.3%
- **Once a week:** 1.2%
- **Rarely:** 0%
- **Never:** 1.2%

The overwhelming majority of participants (93%) reported using social media multiple times a day, indicating a high level of engagement with these platforms. This frequent usage underscores the importance of social media as a critical tool for communication, information,

and support among Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. Given that nearly all participants engage with social media daily, it is evident that these platforms have become an integral part of their daily routines, significantly influencing how they interact with both their immediate environment and their connections back home.

On the other hand, the minimal percentage of participants who reported using social media less frequently (once a day or a few times a week) suggests that while there is some variation in usage patterns, the role of social media remains significant across the board. Even for those who do not use it as intensively, social media still plays a key role in their lives, likely serving as a vital resource for specific needs, such as staying informed about news or maintaining essential contacts.

In contrast, the very small percentage (1.2%) who reported never using social media might reflect unique circumstances, such as a preference for other forms of communication, limited digital literacy, or potential barriers to accessing technology. However, this group represents a minority, and their experience may differ significantly from the broader trends observed among the majority of participants.

4.2.5 Preferred Social Media Platforms

The most commonly used social media platforms among the participants were:

- **Facebook:** 76.7%
- **Instagram:** 64%
- **WhatsApp:** 72.1%
- **Telegram:** 94.2%
- **Viber:** 55.8%
- **YouTube:** 1.2%
- **TikTok:** 20.9%
- **LinkedIn:** 16.3%
- **Threads:** 1.2%
- **Reddit:** 1.2%

Telegram emerged as the most preferred platform, with 94.2% of participants using it, followed by Facebook (76.7%), WhatsApp (72.1%), and Instagram (64%). This preference for Telegram may be due to its wide range of functionalities, including group chats and channels that

facilitate community building and information dissemination. Facebook and WhatsApp are also popular for maintaining personal connections and accessing support networks.

The data highlights the critical role these platforms play in the daily lives of refugees, helping them stay connected with family, friends, and the broader community. One participant highlighted that "most Ukrainians use Telegram, but very few Irish people know about it. Another one commented: "In Ukraine, we didn't use LinkedIn much for job hunting. Here, it's a great platform for finding jobs and sharing information." These insights underscore the contrasting digital landscapes and communication preferences between Ukraine and Ireland, revealing both the challenges and opportunities for integration and knowledge exchange in a globalized world.

4.2.6 Time Spent on Social Media

On average, the participants reported varied daily usage of social media, reflecting its significance in their daily routines:

- **Less than 1 hour:** 13%
- **1-2 hours:** 46.5%
- **3-4 hours:** 25.6%
- **More than 4 hours:** 15%

These statistics reveal that nearly half of the participants (46.5%) spend 1-2 hours on social media each day. This indicates a moderate level of engagement, likely for regular updates and maintaining connections without it becoming overly consuming. A substantial 25.6% of participants dedicate 3-4 hours daily, highlighting a more intensive usage pattern, possibly for deeper engagement in communities, content consumption, or online interactions. Furthermore, 15% of participants are highly engaged, spending more than 4 hours on social media daily, which could indicate reliance on these platforms for extensive communication, entertainment, and information gathering.

The data underscores social media's integral role in the lives of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, serving as a primary means of staying connected with their networks and accessing vital information.

4.2.7 Primary Reasons for Social Media Usage

Participants cited various reasons for using social media, including:

- **Keeping in touch with family and friends:** 90.7%
- **Making new friends:** 20%
- **Finding information and news:** 93%
- **Seeking emotional support:** 29.1%
- **Learning about Irish culture and integration:** 42%
- **Educational purposes:** 55%
- **Job searching:** 42%
- **Participating in community activities:** 40.7%

The data reveals that the most prevalent reason for using social media among Ukrainian refugees in Ireland is staying connected with family and friends, cited by 90.7% of participants. This underscores the crucial role of social media in maintaining personal relationships, especially given the separation from loved ones due to the conflict in Ukraine. Social media platforms offer a lifeline, enabling refugees to share updates, provide emotional support, and sustain familial bonds despite geographical distances.

Finding information and news is another significant reason, reported by 93% of participants. This suggests that social media is a vital source of real-time updates and news, both about the ongoing situation in Ukraine and relevant information for their new lives in Ireland. The immediacy and accessibility of social media make it an indispensable tool for refugees seeking to stay informed. As one participant reflected, "Social media helped me when I was flying to Ireland with my children. I received a lot of answers to my questions and useful advice."

Seeking emotional support is also a notable reason, with 29.1% of participants highlighting this use. Social media provides a platform for expressing feelings, sharing experiences, and receiving encouragement from friends, family, and support groups. This function is particularly important for individuals coping with the trauma of displacement and the stresses of adapting to a new country.

Learning about Irish culture and integration is cited by 42% of participants, indicating that social media serves as a bridge to better understand their new environment. This includes learning about local customs, traditions, and societal norms, which can facilitate smoother integration and reduce cultural shock.

Educational purposes, mentioned by 55% of participants, show that social media is used for accessing learning resources, participating in online courses, and enhancing language skills. This is crucial for refugees aiming to continue their education or gain new qualifications to improve their employment prospects in Ireland.

Job searching is another key reason, reported by 42% of participants. Social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook, are valuable for finding job opportunities, networking with potential employers, and learning about the job market in Ireland. This usage underscores the role of social media in economic integration and self-sufficiency. One participant shared their experience of finding job and said that they "used social media extensively to search for job opportunities, and it proved to be incredibly effective. Through various platforms, I was able to connect with potential employers, discover job openings, and eventually found a position that suited my skills and needs."

Participating in community activities, cited by 40.7%, highlights the use of social media in building a sense of community and belonging. Through social media, refugees can learn about and engage in local events, volunteer opportunities, and community groups, fostering a sense of inclusion and participation in their new society.

4.2.8 Communication with Other Ukrainian Refugees

The frequency of using social media to communicate with other Ukrainian refugees was reported as follows:

- **Multiple times a day:** 32.6%
- **Once a day:** 10.5%
- **A few times a week:** 19%
- **Once a week:** 6%
- **Rarely:** 28%
- **Never:** 5%

The data indicates that a significant proportion of participants (32.6%) communicate with other Ukrainian refugees multiple times a day. This frequent interaction underscores the importance of maintaining connections within their diaspora, providing mutual support and shared experiences. Daily communication helps reinforce a sense of community and continuity, which is vital for emotional and psychological well-being.

Additionally, 10.5% of participants communicate with other Ukrainian refugees once a day, and 19% do so a few times a week. Collectively, this means that 60% of participants maintain regular contact with their compatriots, highlighting the role of social media in preserving community ties and offering support networks that can help them navigate their new lives in Ireland.

The relatively high percentage of participants who rarely or never communicate with other Ukrainian refugees (33%) could be due to various factors, including a focus on integrating with the local community or personal preferences for other forms of communication. It may also indicate the need for more structured support systems to encourage these connections.

4.2.9 Communication with Irish Locals

The frequency of using social media to communicate with Irish locals was less frequent:

- **Multiple times a day:** 10.5%
- **Once a day:** 8%
- **A few times a week:** 23%
- **Once a week:** 10.5%
- **Rarely:** 33%
- **Never:** 15%

Communication with Irish locals is notably less frequent compared to communication with other Ukrainian refugees. Only 10.5% of participants communicate with Irish locals multiple times a day, and 8% do so once a day. This lower frequency could be attributed to language barriers, cultural differences, or a lack of established social networks within the local community.

The fact that a significant portion (33%) of participants rarely communicates with Irish locals, and 15% never do, suggests potential challenges in integrating into the local society. These barriers could include difficulties in building relationships, limited opportunities for social interaction, or a focus on maintaining connections with fellow Ukrainians. This data highlights the need for targeted initiatives to facilitate greater interaction and integration between Ukrainian refugees and the local Irish population.

One responder mentioned that for him it was difficult to find Irish friends through social media because they don't use them that much. "As for the Irish and social media, my surroundings

mostly consist of Irish people. Almost none of them actively engage in social media, as they prefer real-life meetings. They consider communication on social media as low-quality time. Therefore, they use it more for organizational communication rather than maintaining relationships or emotional support. Moreover, it is unlikely to meet Irish people through social media."

4.2.10 Communication with Family and Friends in Ukraine

The participants reported high frequencies of communication with family and friends back in Ukraine:

- **Multiple times a day:** 63%
- **Once a day:** 12%
- **A few times a week:** 21%
- **Once a week:** 2%
- **Rarely:** 1%
- **Never:** 1%

Maintaining frequent communication with family and friends in Ukraine is a priority for most participants, with 63% contacting them multiple times a day and 12% doing so once a day. This high level of communication underscores the importance of staying connected with loved ones amidst the ongoing conflict and uncertainty in Ukraine.

Regular contact helps participants provide and receive emotional support, share updates, and maintain familial bonds. The data indicates that social media is a critical tool for sustaining these connections, offering a sense of continuity and stability despite the physical separation.

4.2.11 Changes in Social Media Usage

When asked if they had changed their social media usage or platforms since arriving in Ireland:

- **Yes:** 53.5%
- **No:** 46.5%

Among those who changed their usage:

- **Started using new platforms:** 60%
- **Stopped using certain platforms:** 15%

- **Increased usage of certain platforms: 57%**
- **Decreased usage of certain platforms: 20%**

A significant portion of participants (53.5%) reported changing their social media usage or platforms since arriving in Ireland. This adaptation reflects their responsiveness to new circumstances and needs. Starting to use new platforms (60%) and increasing usage of certain platforms (57%) indicate a proactive approach to integrating into their new environment and maximizing the benefits of social media.

Stopping the use of certain platforms (15%) and decreasing usage (20%) suggest that participants are discerning in their choices, opting for platforms that better serve their needs in Ireland. These changes highlight the flexibility of social media habits and the role of these platforms in supporting their adaptation process.

4.2.12 Helpfulness of Social Media in Providing Emotional Support

Participants rated the helpfulness of social media in providing emotional support during their integration process:

- **Very helpful: 33%**
- **Helpful: 23.3%**
- **Neutral: 25%**
- **Unhelpful: 2%**
- **Very unhelpful: 5%**

A significant proportion (56.3%) found social media to be helpful or very helpful in providing emotional support, highlighting its crucial role in their mental well-being. The data indicates that social media platforms are vital sources of emotional support for many refugees, offering spaces where they can share their experiences, seek advice, and connect with others facing similar challenges.

The 25% of participants who remained neutral may reflect a variability in the quality or type of support received through social media, suggesting that while social media can be a powerful tool, its effectiveness may depend on the individual's specific needs and the nature of their online interactions. The findings emphasize the potential of social media as a supportive resource, which could be further enhanced through targeted initiatives that provide tailored emotional support for refugees.

4.2.13 Social Media's Role in Learning About Irish Culture

The helpfulness of social media in learning about Irish culture and customs was rated as:

- **Very helpful:** 25%
- **Helpful:** 35%
- **Neutral:** 30%
- **Unhelpful:** 5%
- **Very unhelpful:** 5%

While 60% found social media helpful for learning about Irish culture, 30% remained neutral, suggesting varied experiences and possibly highlighting areas for improvement in content and engagement. Social media platforms offer a unique opportunity for refugees to learn about the cultural norms and practices of their host country, which can be crucial for successful integration.

The data indicates that a majority of participants found social media helpful in this regard, although a significant portion remained neutral, which may point to a need for more tailored content that addresses the specific cultural integration needs of refugees. This could include educational resources, cultural exchange programs, and community engagement initiatives that are more accessible and relevant to the refugee population.

4.2.14 Connecting with the Local Irish Community

Participants rated the effectiveness of social media in helping them connect with the local Irish community:

- **Very helpful:** 29%
- **Helpful:** 30%
- **Neutral:** 20.9%
- **Unhelpful:** 10%
- **Very unhelpful:** 3.5%

Social media has been a moderately helpful tool for integration, with 59% finding it helpful or very helpful, although a significant minority remain neutral or find it unhelpful, indicating room for enhancing its role in fostering local connections. The findings suggest that while

social media can facilitate connections with the local community, there are barriers that need to be addressed to improve its effectiveness.

These barriers could include language differences, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of targeted initiatives that encourage interaction between refugees and locals. Enhancing the role of social media in fostering these connections could involve creating more inclusive and accessible online spaces, promoting cultural exchange programs, and providing resources that support both refugees and local communities in building mutual understanding and relationships.

One respondent, however, expressed skepticism about social media's role in integration, stating, "I don't believe that social media improves integration. Quite the opposite, communities are often toxic and unhelpful. There is a lot of hate speech, false information, and manipulation. While it was initially useful, constructive communication has become increasingly rare. People feel ashamed to ask questions or share something because commenters immediately bombard them with derogatory comments and criticism. Therefore, I think offline events are more effective." This perspective highlights that, despite its potential benefits, social media may also contribute to negative experiences, suggesting that offline events could be a more effective means of fostering integration and positive community interactions.

4.2.15 Making New Friends Through Social Media

When asked if they had made new friends in Ireland through social media, the responses were as follows:

- **Yes:** 33.7%
- **No:** 66.3%

This indicates that a third of the participants successfully used social media to form new friendships in Ireland. These new connections are crucial for social integration, helping refugees build support networks and feel more connected to their new environment. However, the fact that the majority (66.3%) did not make new friends through social media suggests potential barriers or limitations in using these platforms for expanding social circles. This could be due to factors like language barriers, cultural differences, or a preference for face-to-face interactions.

4.2.16 Seeking Advice or Support for Integration-Related Issues

The frequency of using social media to seek advice or support for integration-related issues was reported as follows:

- **Multiple times a day:** 14%
- **Once a day:** 10.5%
- **A few times a week:** 38.4%
- **Once a week:** 8%
- **Rarely:** 25.6%
- **Never:** 3.5%

This data indicates that a significant portion of participants (62.9%) seek advice or support for integration-related issues at least a few times a week through social media. This frequent usage highlights social media's role as a critical resource for navigating integration challenges, offering quick access to information, advice from peers, and emotional support. The relatively high percentage of participants who rarely or never use social media for this purpose (29.1%) suggests that while social media is a valuable tool for many, there are others who might rely on alternative sources for support, such as in-person services or other digital platforms. This divergence in usage patterns underscores the importance of ensuring that support services are accessible across various channels, accommodating different preferences and levels of digital literacy among the refugee population. Additionally, it highlights the need for targeted interventions to encourage and facilitate social media engagement among those who may benefit from its resources but are not currently utilizing them.

4.2.17 Finding Useful Information

Participants reported the following frequencies for using social media to find useful information, such as local services or government announcements:

- **Multiple times a day:** 15%
- **Once a day:** 18.6%
- **A few times a week:** 23.3%
- **Once a week:** 15%
- **Rarely:** 27%
- **Never:** 1.2%

The majority of participants (56.9%) use social media at least a few times a week to find useful information, indicating its importance as an information hub. This frequent use underscores the need for reliable and accessible information on social media platforms, especially for critical updates about local services and government announcements. The significant portion of participants who engage with social media multiple times a day or daily highlights a reliance on these platforms for timely and relevant information. This trend suggests that social media is a crucial tool for staying informed, particularly for those who may not have access to other immediate sources of information or who rely on digital platforms for updates.

Conversely, 27% of participants who use social media rarely for this purpose may prefer other sources of information or face challenges in navigating social media effectively for such needs. This group might rely more on traditional media, community networks, or direct sources such as official websites or physical notices. It is also possible that they may not find social media platforms as user-friendly or trustworthy for obtaining critical information.

These findings indicate that while social media is widely used for information-seeking, there is a diverse range of preferences and behaviors among users. This variation emphasizes the importance of ensuring that information on social media is both accurate and accessible, and that other channels are not overlooked to cater to the needs of those who might not rely heavily on social media.

4.2.18 Joining Social Media Groups or Communities

When asked if they had joined social media groups or communities specifically for Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, the responses were:

- **Yes:** 96.5%
- **No:** 3.5%

Among those who joined these groups:

- **Very active:** 10%
- **Moderately active:** 27%
- **Occasionally active:** 36.5%
- **Not active:** 26%

An overwhelming majority (96.5%) of participants joined social media groups or communities for Ukrainian refugees, reflecting the critical importance of these groups in providing a sense of belonging, support, and connection to others in similar situations. These online communities likely serve as vital spaces where refugees can share experiences, seek advice, and find resources, helping them navigate the challenges of resettlement in a new country.

The varying levels of activity within these groups reveal diverse patterns of engagement. With 63.5% of participants being at least moderately active, it is clear that a significant portion of the community relies on these groups for regular interaction and support. This active participation could involve sharing information, offering emotional support, or contributing to discussions, all of which strengthen the bonds within the community and enhance the collective resilience of its members.

On the other hand, the 26% who are not active in these groups may still derive substantial benefits from passive participation. Even without actively engaging, these individuals may gain valuable information, stay updated on important issues, and feel a sense of connection simply by observing and reading posts. Passive participation allows them to stay informed and feel part of the community without the pressure to contribute actively, which might be particularly important for those who are less comfortable with online interaction or are dealing with the emotional burden of their circumstances.

Moreover, the high level of group membership suggests that these social media communities have become an essential part of the integration process for Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. They provide not only practical information but also emotional support, helping refugees to feel less isolated and more connected to both their compatriots and the broader host society.

This data also highlights the importance of maintaining and fostering these online communities, ensuring they remain welcoming and supportive spaces for all members, regardless of their level of activity. Encouraging inclusive and diverse forms of engagement could further enhance the sense of community and ensure that all members, active or passive, continue to benefit from these vital resources.

4.2.19 Challenges Using Social Media in Ireland

When asked if they faced any challenges using social media in Ireland compared to Ukraine, the responses were:

- **Yes:** 81.4%
- **No:** 18.6%

The challenges reported include:

- **Language barriers:** 50%
- **Access to the internet:** 24%
- **Cultural differences:** 27%
- **Lack of local knowledge:** 53.3%
- **Other:** 3.3%

The high percentage (81.4%) of participants facing challenges highlights significant barriers to effectively using social media in their new environment. Language barriers (50%) and a lack of local knowledge (53.3%) are the most prevalent issues, indicating a need for more accessible and localized content to help refugees navigate their new surroundings. As one participant noted, "There is a lack of a platform where we can read news about Ireland in Ukrainian/Russian (about weather, politics, crime, or different events)." Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating, "A lot is happening around, but it's not always clear what exactly, because it takes a lot of time for you to translate and understand the meaning of an article." This highlights the urgent need for platforms that offer timely, multilingual information to facilitate better integration and ensure that refugees can stay informed and engaged with their new community.

Cultural differences (27%) also play a role, suggesting that understanding and adapting to the social norms of the host country can be challenging. Access to the internet (24%) remains a logistical barrier, potentially limiting some participants' ability to use social media effectively.

The category "Other" (3.3%) includes reports of aggressive attacks and the inadmissibility of different viewpoints, underscoring the need for safe and supportive online communities that foster respectful and inclusive discussions. For example, one woman shared her experience about how the aggression and hate speech on social media made her become a private person:

"My experience of integration is affected by the presence of Russian bots on social media and the majority of far-right Irish people who are against Ukrainians. I no longer leave comments because every time I do, someone always shows up to tell me to go home or just mock me. I am from Mariupol, so it's hard for me to deal with such things. From being someone who actively engaged on social media, was open, and never had trouble meeting people online, I

have become withdrawn and completely closed off to integration. I don't see a future in this country because I will always be seen as 'this fu*king Ukrainian.'

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the complex dynamics of integration among Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland, focusing on the role of social media as a tool for integration. The discussion is framed around the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the refugees' use of social media. The central hypothesis is that positive attitudes toward social media, strong subjective norms encouraging its use, and a high level of perceived behavioral control will lead to more effective social media engagement, thereby facilitating integration. This chapter also reflects on how the empirical data gathered from the study aligns with or challenges the TPB framework, offering insights and policy recommendations for both Irish and Ukrainian governments.

5.2 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB): An Introduction and Hypothesis

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that individual behavior is determined by behavioral intentions, which are influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, TPB provides a useful lens for analyzing how these factors affect their social media use and, subsequently, their integration process. The hypothesis based on TPB is that refugees who hold positive attitudes toward social media, perceive strong social norms favoring its use, and feel confident in their ability to navigate these platforms will be more likely to use social media effectively to integrate into Irish society.

The survey results align with TPB, indicating that positive attitudes towards social media and its perceived benefits significantly influence its usage among refugees. This is evident as many participants reported relying on social media for emotional support, information about local services, and maintaining connections with their home country. However, the data also reveal significant barriers that challenge this theory. Language barriers and lack of local knowledge negatively impact perceived behavioral control, reducing the effectiveness of social media use. Specifically, 50% of respondents cited language as a significant barrier, and 53.3% indicated a lack of local knowledge hindered their ability to navigate social media effectively.

Cultural differences, reported by 27% of participants, further complicate the scenario, suggesting that while the intention to use social media might be strong, actual usage is hindered by these practical and contextual challenges. These cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in adapting to the social norms prevalent on local social media platforms, thereby affecting the perceived social norms aspect of TPB. Additionally, limited internet access, reported by 24% of participants, represents a significant logistical barrier that impacts the overall feasibility of utilizing social media effectively, thereby impacting perceived behavioral control.

The presence of online aggression and intolerance, noted by 3.3% of respondents, underscores the need for safer online spaces. This aligns with findings from other studies that highlight the negative impact of online harassment on users' willingness and ability to engage in online communities (Duggan, 2017). As one participant noted, "there is a lot of hate speech, false information, and manipulation. People feel ashamed to ask questions or share something because commenters immediately bombard them with derogatory comments and criticism." These aggressive interactions can significantly affect the perceived ease and safety of using social media, thereby reducing its overall effectiveness as a tool for integration and support.

5.3 Analysis of Findings through TPB

Attitudes Towards Social Media

Our findings reveal that Ukrainian refugees generally hold positive attitudes toward social media, viewing it as an essential tool for staying connected with their homeland, accessing information, and integrating into Irish society. These positive attitudes are reinforced by the perceived benefits of social media, such as real-time updates on news from Ukraine, communication with family and friends, and access to community resources. The alignment with TPB is evident as these favorable attitudes are associated with higher levels of social media engagement. Refugees who view social media as a valuable resource are more likely to use it frequently and effectively, demonstrating the predictive power of attitudes in determining behavior.

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to engage in a behavior, also play a significant role in social media use among refugees. The study indicates that many refugees experience pressure from peers and community members to be active on social media

platforms. This social expectation is partly driven by the need to stay informed about the situation in Ukraine and to maintain social connections. However, there is a divergence in the intensity of these norms, with some individuals feeling more obligated than others to participate in online communities. This variation can be attributed to differences in social circles, with some refugees having more established networks that encourage regular online interaction.

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control, the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behavior, is influenced by several factors in the context of this study. Language barriers were a significant challenge, with many refugees struggling to navigate English-language content. As was highlighted before, Ukrainian refugees need more platforms where they can read news and information in their native language: "There is a lack of a platform where we can read news about Ireland in Ukrainian/Russian (about weather, politics, crime, or different events)." This issue aligns with findings from other studies on migrant integration, where language proficiency is often a critical factor in accessing resources and participating fully in society (Reitz, 2002). Our data suggest that refugees with higher levels of English proficiency feel more confident in using social media and are more likely to engage with Irish online communities. Conversely, those with limited language skills are less active online, reflecting a lower level of perceived control.

The lack of local knowledge further compounds this issue, as refugees unfamiliar with Irish social norms and digital landscapes find it challenging to navigate social media spaces effectively. This lack of understanding can lead to misinterpretations and difficulties in accessing relevant information. The cultural differences identified by our respondents, such as differing communication styles and social norms, also contribute to discomfort and reluctance to engage with local content.

Limited internet access presents another barrier, particularly for refugees in rural areas or those with limited financial resources. This challenge is consistent with the digital divide theory, which emphasizes the disparities in access to digital technologies. Refugees with reliable internet access are better positioned to use social media for integration purposes, while those with limited access face additional hurdles.

Finally, the presence of online aggression and intolerance, although less prevalent, significantly affects perceived behavioral control. Negative experiences, such as encountering hostility or

exclusion online, can deter refugees from participating in social media platforms, thus limiting their use for integration and support.

5.4 Policy Recommendations for the Irish and Ukrainian Governments

Beyond recognizing the importance of social media, several actionable policy recommendations can be derived from this study:

1. **Language and Digital Literacy Programs:** Implementing targeted language training and digital literacy programs can help bridge communication gaps and enhance the ability of refugees to use social media effectively. These programs should be accessible and culturally sensitive, providing practical tools for navigating digital platforms. Partnering with local educational institutions and NGOs can facilitate the development and delivery of these programs.
2. **Localized Content Creation:** Governments should support the creation and dissemination of localized content that addresses the specific needs and concerns of refugees. This could include information on local customs, services, and support networks, available in multiple languages. Collaboration with social media platforms to promote this content can ensure it reaches the intended audience. One responder commented: “Social media should be the tool that helps to find useful information and valuable resources available in the region where you live, it also can be helpful to find new friends specifically in your area.”
3. **Improving Internet Access:** Enhancing infrastructure to provide affordable and reliable internet access is crucial. Public-private partnerships could be explored to ensure that all refugees have the necessary tools to stay connected. This might involve providing subsidized internet services or creating public Wi-Fi zones in areas with high refugee populations.
4. **Promoting Safe Online Spaces:** Initiatives to foster inclusive and respectful online communities are essential. This could involve collaboration with social media companies to develop and enforce policies that protect against online harassment and promote positive interactions. Additionally, training moderators from the refugee community could help in maintaining these safe spaces.
5. **Support Networks and Community Integration:** Facilitating the creation of online and offline support networks can help refugees build social capital and integrate more smoothly into their new communities. These networks should provide both emotional support and practical assistance. Programs that encourage interaction between refugees

and local residents can also promote mutual understanding and integration. For example, one participant mentioned webinars that provided interesting information and helped with integration.

“One particularly great initiative was the webinars organized by the Women's Lawyers Association of Ireland. They covered a wide range of interesting and relevant topics, providing valuable information that I wouldn't have otherwise had access to. These sessions were informative and engaging, helping to bridge the gap in understanding legal and societal norms in a new country. They not only offered practical legal knowledge but also facilitated a sense of inclusion and empowerment for participants, making a positive impact on the lives of Ukrainian refugees trying to navigate their new environment.”

So, there should be more initiatives like this one, as they play a crucial role in helping refugees feel more informed, supported, and integrated into their new communities. Such programs can greatly enhance the well-being and resilience of individuals who are adapting to life in a new country, providing them with the resources and confidence to navigate various challenges.

6. **Psychosocial Support Services:** Recognizing the mental health challenges faced by refugees, integrating psychosocial support services with social media platforms can provide crucial emotional support. Governments can work with mental health professionals to offer online counseling and support groups, ensuring these services are accessible to those in need.

5.5 Broader Implications and Theoretical Context

The literature review underscores several broader issues that intersect with the findings of this study. One significant issue is the digital divide, as elaborated by van Dijk (2006), which highlights the disparities in access to technology and digital literacy. This divide manifests not only in physical access to the internet but also in the differences in skills required to use digital technologies effectively. In the context of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, this digital divide is evident in the logistical barriers faced by participants, such as inconsistent internet access and limited digital proficiency. These barriers hinder their ability to fully utilize social media as a tool for integration and support.

In addressing this issue, it is crucial to acknowledge that simply providing access to the internet is insufficient. Efforts to bridge the digital divide must also include comprehensive initiatives to enhance digital literacy, especially among older refugees who may struggle with technology. The survey revealed that approximately 17% of the Ukrainian refugee population in Ireland consists of older individuals who are not as proficient with digital technologies. This demographic requires targeted support, as they are often less familiar with modern digital platforms and tools. Educating refugees, particularly older adults, on the use of various digital platforms and tools is essential. Training programs that focus on basic digital skills, as well as more advanced competencies like online communication and digital security, could significantly empower these individuals. Such initiatives would not only facilitate better access to information and services but also enhance their ability to connect with support networks and participate in the digital economy.

Moreover, the concept of social capital, as articulated by Putnam (2000), is highly relevant to this discussion. Social capital refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Social media has the potential to build and sustain these networks, providing both emotional and informational support, which are crucial for refugees adapting to new environments. The study's findings suggest that many refugees utilize social media to maintain connections with their home country, access information, and seek support from their peers. This aligns with Putnam's theory, which posits that social capital can lead to increased access to resources, greater mutual support, and improved well-being.

However, the benefits of social capital via social media are not fully realized without safe and inclusive online environments. The survey results indicate instances of aggressive online behaviors and intolerance, which pose significant challenges. These negative interactions can deter refugees from engaging in online communities, thereby limiting their ability to access the support and resources necessary for successful integration. As noted by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), supportive online communities are crucial for leveraging social media to build social capital. Such communities provide a platform for sharing experiences, exchanging information, and offering mutual support, which can significantly enhance the integration process.

Therefore, creating safe and inclusive online spaces is paramount. This involves not only monitoring and addressing negative behaviors but also actively promoting positive interactions and inclusivity. For instance, implementing community guidelines that encourage respectful

discourse and provide clear reporting mechanisms for abusive behavior can help foster a supportive environment. Additionally, collaborations with social media platforms to develop and enforce policies that protect vulnerable users, including refugees, are essential. By ensuring that online spaces are welcoming and secure, it is possible to maximize the positive impact of social media on the integration of refugees.

In conclusion, the study underscores the pivotal role of social media in the lives of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland while highlighting significant challenges that need to be addressed. By applying the Theory of Planned Behavior, the data reveals both alignment and challenges to existing theories on social media usage. The findings also point to broader issues of the digital divide and social capital, emphasizing the need for targeted policies to improve access, literacy, and safe usage of social media. Through collaborative efforts, policymakers can create an environment where social media serves as a powerful tool for integration and support. Addressing these barriers through comprehensive and coordinated policy measures can significantly enhance the social media experience for refugees, aiding their overall well-being and integration into their new communities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the role of social media in fostering virtual resilience among Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland. Using a quantitative approach through an online survey with 87 participants, the research examined how refugees utilize social media platforms for communication, information sharing, and emotional support. The findings highlight both the opportunities and challenges associated with social media use among this population, offering insights into their integration experiences within Irish society.

The data collected reveal that social media serves as a critical tool for maintaining connections with family and friends in Ukraine, as well as for building new networks in Ireland. These platforms provide a means of accessing important information, such as local news, cultural events, and essential services. Moreover, social media allows refugees to participate in community groups and forums, facilitating the exchange of experiences and advice. This access to a wealth of resources and peer support contributes significantly to the emotional well-being of refugees, helping them cope with the stresses of displacement and adapt to their new environment.

However, the study also uncovered significant challenges associated with social media use. One of the most concerning issues is the exposure to misinformation and online hostility. Many refugees reported encountering hate speech and xenophobic comments, which can be particularly distressing and alienating. This negative online environment can hinder their willingness to engage in social media, thereby limiting their access to its positive aspects. Additionally, the presence of misinformation complicates the process of staying informed and making decisions, potentially leading to confusion and anxiety.

The findings of this study align with previous research on the digital divide and social capital. As discussed by scholars like van Dijk (2006) and Putnam (2000), access to digital technologies and the ability to use them effectively are crucial for building social networks and accessing resources. The survey results indicate that while social media can enhance social capital by connecting refugees with supportive communities, it also requires a level of digital literacy that not all refugees possess. This is particularly true for older refugees, who may struggle with navigating digital platforms, as indicated by the survey's finding that 17% of participants expressed difficulties with technology use.

In light of these findings, it is essential to consider practical measures that can enhance the positive impacts of social media while mitigating its drawbacks. One recommendation is to implement targeted language and digital literacy programs that equip refugees with the skills needed to navigate online spaces confidently. These programs should be culturally sensitive and accessible, catering to the specific needs of refugees, including older individuals who may require more tailored support.

Furthermore, efforts to promote safe and inclusive online spaces are crucial. Social media companies, governments, and NGOs can collaborate to develop and enforce policies that protect users from harassment and misinformation. Moderation practices, perhaps involving members of the refugee community, can help maintain respectful and supportive environments. Additionally, creating content that is relevant and accessible in multiple languages can aid in bridging information gaps and supporting the integration process.

The research also underscores the importance of offline initiatives in complementing the support provided through social media. In-person community events and support networks can offer a more personal and direct form of assistance, helping refugees to build meaningful connections and gain practical help in navigating their new lives in Ireland.

This study's findings provide a nuanced understanding of the dual nature of social media's impact on refugees. While it is a valuable tool for maintaining connections and accessing information, it also presents significant challenges that need to be addressed. By acknowledging these complexities, policymakers, service providers, and community organizations can better support refugees in harnessing the benefits of social media while protecting them from its potential harms.

The research has generated findings that could be used as a guide to policy. By recognizing the potential of social media to support refugee integration and the need for targeted interventions to address its challenges, stakeholders can develop comprehensive strategies to enhance the integration experiences of refugees. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the digital experiences of refugees and highlights the importance of fostering virtual resilience in an increasingly digital world.

Ultimately, a comprehensive approach that combines digital and traditional support mechanisms will be crucial in aiding the successful integration of refugees into their host societies. The insights gained from this research can inform the development of policies and programs that support the well-being and integration of Ukrainian war refugees in Ireland and beyond. By leveraging the strengths of social media and addressing its weaknesses, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all refugees.

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Appendices

Appendix No.1: Survey questions

1. Age:

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and above

2. Gender:

- Male

- Female
- Other

3. Length of stay in Ireland:

- Less than 6 months
- months to 1 year
- 1-2 years
- More than 2 years

4. How often do you use social media?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

5. Which social media platforms do you use the most? (Select all that apply)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- Viber
- Telegram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Other (please specify)

6. On average, how much time do you spend on social media daily?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

7. What are your primary reasons for using social media? (Select all that apply)

- Keeping in touch with family and friends
- Making new friends
- Finding information and news
- Seeking emotional support
- Learning about Irish culture and integration
- Educational purposes
- Job searching
- Participating in community activities
- Other (please specify)

8. How often do you use social media to communicate with other Ukrainian refugees in Ireland?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

9. How often do you use social media to communicate with Irish locals?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

10. How often do you use social media to communicate with family and friends back in Ukraine?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

11. Have you changed your social media usage or the platforms you use since arriving in Ireland?

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, how has your social media usage changed? (Select all that apply)

- Started using new platforms
- Stopped using certain platforms
- Increased usage of certain platforms
- Decreased usage of certain platforms
- Other (please specify)

13. How helpful do you find social media in providing emotional support during your integration process?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neutral
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

14. How has social media helped you learn about Irish culture and customs?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neutral
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

15. How has social media helped you connect with the local Irish community?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neutral
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

16. Have you made any new friends in Ireland through social media?

- Yes
- No

17. How often do you use social media to seek advice or support for integration-related issues (e.g., finding housing, job opportunities, learning English)?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

18. How often do you use social media to find useful information, such as local services or government announcements?

- Multiple times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely
- Never

19. Have you joined any social media groups or communities specifically for Ukrainian refugees in Ireland?

- Yes
- No

20. If yes, how active are you in these groups or communities?

- Very active
- Moderately active
- Occasionally active
- Not active

21. Have you faced any challenges using social media in Ireland compared to Ukraine?

- Yes

- No

22. If yes, what challenges have you faced? (Select all that apply)

- Language barriers
- Access to internet
- Cultural differences
- Lack of local knowledge
- Other (please specify)

23. How can social media platforms improve to better support the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Ireland?

24. Additional Comments:

Please share any additional comments or insights about your social media usage and how it has impacted your integration experience in Ireland.