

Promoting the Resilience of Refugees by Developing their Digital Marketing Skills

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Abstract

This study focuses on refugee adults' ability to hold on to life again by developing their resilience to cope with the difficulties they face during and after the migration process. The main aim of the study is to determine the impact of developing refugee adults' digital marketing skills on their personal resilience levels. For this purpose, six different programs in digital marketing were offered to the participants over a period of six months. In addition, activities to increase resilience were organized for the participants. The research was designed according to a mixed model. One-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was used as a quantitative method, and the case study method was used as a qualitative research type. According to the results, developing refugee adults' digital marketing skills was effective in increasing their personal resilience levels. However, no significant difference was observed depending on variables such as gender and age. Within the scope of resilience-building activities, the participants defined the closing doors as the professions they lost in their country of origin, while they interpreted the opening doors as being engaged in different jobs and language learning in their new country. It was also found that individuals who were able to sense opportunities at an early stage contributed to the realization of these opportunities by other people.

Keywords: Resilience, digital marketing skills, training of refugees, adult education.

In recent years, there has been rapid population mobility in the world due to economic, social, and political reasons and life-threatening events such as war and natural disasters. This movement, which is called migration, can occur within countries as well as between countries. Especially compulsory migrations to other countries can be quite challenging, affect people's resilience, and become life-threatening (Polat & Kröner, 2023).

Refugees who are forced to leave their country for reasons such as fear, violence, threats, or war and forced to live in another country experience many social, cultural, and economic difficulties that can become traumatic (Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012). While countries with welfare state characteristics help refugees, in other countries, they have to struggle to survive and need support. Supporting these refugees, especially in economic terms, leads to major changes in their lives and contributes to their resilience and adaptation to the country they are in (Walther et al., 2021). The first step of this support is to minimize their economic concerns, accelerate their integration process, and provide employment-oriented training.

With the rapid development of technology, great changes have occurred in many areas, and digitalization has gained great momentum. A digital transformation is taking place in every field, from education to health, from banking to trade. Due to the rapid spread of social media and the use of social media by everyone from the young to the old, this area has ceased to be just a sharing environment and has become a place where individuals and organizations market their products. This has led to the introduction of the concept of digital marketing. Digital marketing is the process of promoting and marketing products and services through digital channels (Kurdi et al., 2022). This process can be used to help refugees overcome their economic difficulties as it is location-independent and allows them to use their skills in online environments.

In this context, the current research aims to determine the impact of developing refugee adults' digital marketing skills on their resilience levels as part of the European Union Erasmus+ project.

Introduction

It is possible to say that human life is cyclical instead of continuing in a uniform and standardized way, sometimes easy, sometimes difficult, sometimes happy, and sometimes painful. For this reason, individuals should have resistance against the negativities and painful situations brought by life and show the ability to continue their lives by struggling. This situation is defined as resilience in the literature.

The term resilience is based on the Latin word "resilire" and means 'to leap or jump back, spring back, recoil, rebound or retreat' (Pahwa and Khan, 2022). According to Rutter (1985), resilience is the ability of some individuals who have experienced serious adversities and difficulties in their lives to produce more positive outcomes than others. Masten (2001) defines resilience as achieving good results despite serious threats to adaptation and development. Although definitions of resilience vary, it is generally associated with a person's ability to recover from adversity and challenges and refers to inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility, and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity (Wagnild & Collins, 2009: 1).

Theory and research on the concept of resilience emerged in the 1970s and focused on the effects of stress and trauma on the functioning and development of individuals and families (Masten, 2018). While defining the term resilience, "adversity" and 'positive adaptation' stand out as the basic concepts (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Resilience is conceptualized as the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress and trauma through assets and resources. Assets and resources can be present within the individual and/or in the environment to support resilience (Windle, 2011).

Resilience determines the capacity of individuals to face events that threaten safety and still demonstrate appropriate behavior (Charney, 2004) and explains how an individual exposed to violence copes positively with past traumatic experiences (Lee et al., 2008). For refugees, resilience is an important concept in the literature in terms of the difficulties they experience during and after the migration process.

Migration is an experience that changes and reshapes people's lives (Polat & Kröner, 2023). In this respect, migration, especially refugee experiences, includes complex factors that can affect the resilience levels of individuals. According to the United Nations, a refugee is a person who has been forced to leave and live outside their country of nationality due to fear, threat, violence or persecution, and war (UNHCR, 2021).

Refugees go through challenging experiences such as leaving their homes, losing family members, struggling with language barriers, and adapting to a new culture. Refugees also experience prolonged immobility and boredom, social isolation, and discrimination in their countries of origin. Participation in the labor market is one of these problems (Sheath et al., 2020; Polat, 2022). Refugees' access to employment is crucial for their income and resilience (Kızıllan, 2018).

Adverse experiences challenge refugees' ability to maintain psychological balance and cope with traumatic experiences. At the same time, however, these challenges can also provide opportunities to develop resilience. As a matter of fact, the United Nations aims to create conditions for refugees to become individuals who can stand on their own feet in the long run, thus increasing their resilience

(Altay Kaya, 2021). For this reason, it is essential to integrate refugees into the society to which they have recently migrated to eliminate inequalities, and to gain competencies in the areas of access to basic services, education, and economic life (Simsek, 2019).

Bullough and Renko (2013) emphasize the importance of the ability of individuals, especially those who have lost their jobs, to seek new opportunities and see the opportunities ahead. Participation in the labor force will help increase the resilience capacity of refugees (Kızıllkan, 2018). Individuals who are supported to participate in the labor force will be more willing to see opportunities and start a new chapter in their lives. Kerfoot (2018) describes this situation with the metaphor of "closing doors and opening new doors." Individuals who develop resilience are able to use the lessons they have learned from their struggles and closed doors to pursue new endeavors. For this reason, it is important to provide opportunities for refugees to work and earn income in their host countries through various programs.

Due to the language, cultural, and social problems refugees face, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by technology when starting their working lives can minimize the impact of these problems. Digital marketing is one of the jobs that refugees can do at the beginning, as digitalization has made communication easier and differentiated its quality (Hvass & Munar, 2012).

Digital marketing is the process of promoting, marketing, and delivering products and services to consumers through digital platforms. Social media, websites, email marketing, and other digital tools enable brands to interact with their target audiences. In other words, digital marketing is the process of creating demand for a product or service by using the interactive power of the internet to share information and add value to the business and its customers. On the internet, the value of something can be increased over time, and it can be found attractive as a result of customer interest. Customers can benefit from added value in the form of pleasure, entertainment, and interest (Stokes, 2008).

Since digital marketing removes geographical barriers and limitations during marketing activities, enables communication mostly through technological means, and requires less investment (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020), it is a very suitable business area for refugees who are passing through a new door and are in the process of adapting to their environment. This is because refugees can carry out marketing activities for the regions where their mother tongue is spoken and thus have fewer language problems while having an income with less investment. This can have a positive impact on their resilience levels, making their lives easier and helping them integrate into their countries faster.

Purpose and research questions

The study aims to increase the resilience of refugee adults through the development of their digital marketing skills and resilience-building activities. Within the scope of this purpose, the following research questions were prepared.

1. Does the development of digital marketing skills have an impact on the resilience levels of refugee adults?
2. Does the development of digital marketing skills have a significant effect on the resilience levels of refugee adults according to age and gender variables?
3. What are the opinions of refugee adults about the resilience-building activities program?

Method

Research Design

In this study, in order to determine the change in the resilience levels of refugee adults who participated in the digital marketing program and resilience-building activities, the embedded design, one of the mixed methods types, was used. In mixed methods research, "embedded design" is a type of research design in which quantitative and qualitative data are integrated. This design is usually created by embedding another research approach in addition to a main research approach (Caruth, 2013).

In the study, a one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was used as the quantitative method. Single-group pretest-posttest design is a type of quasi-experimental research in which the relevant outcomes are measured at least twice. The participant group is selected non-randomly, which makes it a quasi-experimental design (Johnson, 1986).

In order to examine the quantitative findings of the research in more detail and to obtain in-depth findings, the case study method, one of the qualitative research types, was used to examine the views of the participants expressed during the resilience-building activities program (Patton, 2014, p.228).

Participants

The participants of this study are refugee adults who have lost their jobs due to political reasons, who are trying to cope with the difficulties of the migration process, and who are looking for re-employment in the host country. Forty-seven people from Germany and Greece participated in the study. All participants were university graduates 38% were female, and 62% were male. According to the age variable, 72% of the participants were 36 years of age or older, while 18% were between 25-36 years of age. The majority of the participants were political asylum seekers who were forced to migrate after the failed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016.

Research Process

This research is a product of a large-scale European Union Erasmus+ project that aims to increase the resilience of refugee adults through the development of their digital marketing skills. This project, which was planned as an 18-month period between 2021-2023, was realized in two phases: the preparation phase and the implementation phase.

The project process is shown in detail in Figure 1

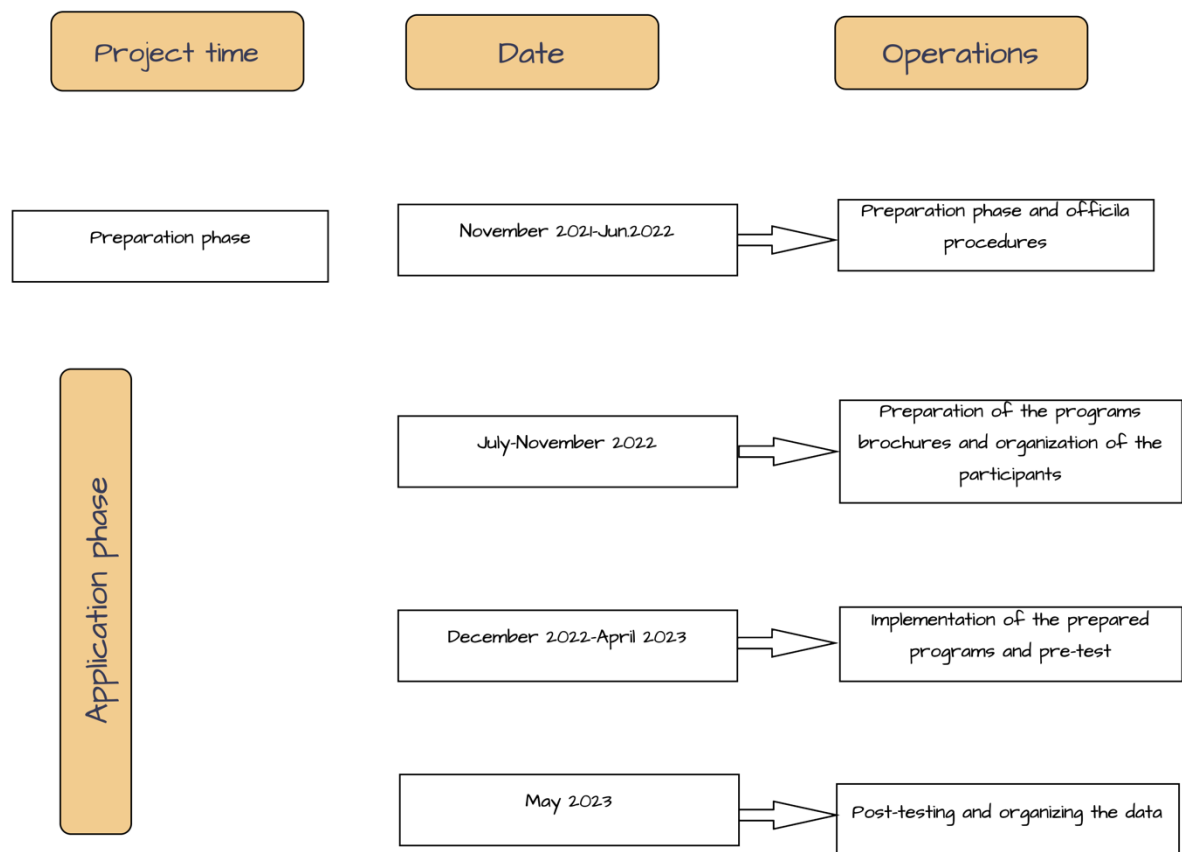


Figure 1: Research Process

The research process was prepared and monitored by the project committee. The project committee consisted of three academicians, a CEO, a civil engineer, and a psychological counselor. In this research, which is part of the aforementioned project "Promoting Resilience of Refugees by Developing their Digital Marketing Skills.", seven different programs were implemented over a period of four months.

Before the start of the programs, the project committee decided to hold seminars on the following topics within the framework of the meetings held to determine the seminars, the content of the seminars, and the trainers:

1. Amazon business
2. Digital entrepreneurship
3. Digital entrepreneurship for refugees
4. Types of companies in Greece
5. Types of companies in Germany
6. Real estate marketing in Greece
7. Resilience-building activities

Before the implementation, the project committee conducted a preliminary interview with the trainers who would deliver the seminars. As a result of the interviews, online brochures in different languages were prepared and shared on social media accounts in order to encourage the participation of individuals of different nationalities in the programs. Based on the feedback and participation requests, it was decided to offer digital entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship for refugees, types of companies in Greece, and types of companies in Germany programs in English and the other programs in Turkish.

Resilience-building activities were prepared by the second author of the study and finalized by taking the opinions of academicians and psychological counselors who are experts in the field. The program consisted of two sessions in total. Each session lasted 90 minutes. The sessions were planned as group sessions. A total of 47 people in 8 groups participated in two sessions regularly. Assignments related to the topic were given in each session, and the assignments were taken back before the next session. Considering both the results of the homework assignments and during the sessions, the individuals who were deemed appropriate to receive individual sessions were identified, and this situation was notified to those individuals privately. Sessions were held at the end of the program with individuals who agreed to receive individual sessions. All sessions were conducted via Zoom, and the sessions were not recorded as the participants did not give permission for video recording.

All the above-mentioned programs were conducted between December 2022 and May 2023. Considering the demographic characteristics of the participants and the interviews with the trainers, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25) was administered in Turkish before and at the end of the programs.

Data Collection Tools

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25)

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was developed by Connor and Davidson to determine the resilience levels of individuals (Connor & Davidson, 2003). In the international literature, this scale was used for adults, and effective results were obtained (Lee et al., 2020; Papini et al., 2021). Due to this feature of the scale, its use was approved by the project committee. The Turkish validity and reliability of the scale was conducted by Karairmak (2010). The measurement tool is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 25 questions. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions: perseverance and personal competence (items 1, 5, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25), tolerance to negative events (items 4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14) and spiritual disposition (items 2, 3, 9, 20). Scale items are evaluated on a scale of 0-4, ranging from never true (0 points) to almost always true (4 points). The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 100, and high scores indicate that individuals with high scores have high psychological resilience. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale .92, and in the present study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as .925.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected using the unstructured interview method. Unstructured interviews are more flexible and can be shaped according to the flow of the interview (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Two different resilience-building activity sessions were organized with the volunteer participants who participated in the study: doors closed, doors open, and using values to build resilience. Since these sessions coincided with the pandemic (Covid-19) period, they were conducted via Zoom.

Doors closed, doors open: The topic of the first session was to realize what the closed and open doors in our lives. The main purpose here was to ensure that the participants do not focus entirely on the closed doors and realize the new doors they encounter in life.

Using values to build resilience: The aim of this session was to remind participants of their values (national and spiritual) and to help them manage their own life events. Participants were not asked to write down their opinions about the session.

Before the beginning of the sessions, the participants were asked to write down their opinions about the doors closed, doors open activity. As the session continued, some participants expressed their opinions about the activity in the chat section, while some participants sent their opinions in written form after the session. These opinions were recorded with the permission of the participants. In order to analyze the quantitative data of the study and to obtain in-depth findings, the participants' opinions are presented in detail in the findings section.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data obtained from CD-RISC-25, it was examined whether the data showed a normal distribution. For this purpose, skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the whole scale and its sub-dimensions and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were taken into consideration. In terms of normal distribution, when skewness and kurtosis values are in the range of (+, -1), they are considered perfect, and when they are (+, -2), they are considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003). As a result of the analysis, it was found that perseverance and personal competence (Skewness = -.987, Kurtosis = .604), tolerance to negative events (Skewness = -.914, Kurtosis = .960), spiritual disposition (Skewness = -.601, Kurtosis = .127) and total score (Skewness = .108, Kurtosis = -.548). In addition, when the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were examined, it was seen that the scores were in accordance with normality in both the sub-dimensions and the total scale ($p > .05$).

Accordingly, the data show normal distribution in terms of the relevant variables. Based on these results, parametric tests (t-tests) were used to analyze the data. Along with parametric tests, effect size analyses were also performed on the sub-dimensions of the scale and the total score.

Descriptive analysis methods, one of the qualitative research data analysis methods, were used to analyze the data obtained from the participants' opinions about the resilience-building activities sessions.

Findings

In this part of the study, the results of the pre-post test using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25) and the data obtained from the views of the masseurs on resilience development activities are presented.

Development of digital marketing skills and resilience

A one-group pretest-posttest experimental study was conducted to determine the effect of developing digital marketing skills on the resilience levels of refugee adults. The mean and standard deviation distributions of the participants' resilience levels are shown in Table 1, and the t-test and effect size values are shown in Table 2.

Table-1. Mean and standard deviation values of pre-post test scores obtained from CD-RISC-25 scale

	CD-RISC-25	Mean	N	Sd
Pre-test	Perseverance and personal competence	39.49	47	5.90
	Tolerance for negative events	13.62	47	2.53
	Spiritual disposition	10.85	47	1.80
	Total	63.96	47	8.74
Post-test	Perseverance and personal competence	43.77	47	7.96
	Tolerance for negative events	15.47	47	3.37
	Spiritual disposition	11.96	47	2.24
	Total	71.19	47	11.99

When Table 1 is examined, a high increase was observed in the mean scores of refugee adults in the perseverance and personal competence ($x_{pt} = 39.49$, $X_{pst} = 43.77$) and tolerance to negative events ($x_{pt} = 13.62$, $X_{pst} = 15.47$) sub-dimensions of the CD-RISC-25 scale, while a very small increase was observed in the mean scores in the spiritual disposition sub-dimension ($x_{pt} = 10.85$, $X_{pst} = 11.96$). However, an increase was observed in the mean scores of the students on the whole scale ($x_{pt} = 67.27$, $X_{pst} = 80.81$).

Table-2. Pre-post test t-test and effect size results from the CD-RISC-25 scale

CD-RISC-25	Mean	N	Sd	t	p	Effect Size Cohen's d	
Pre-Post test	Perseverance and personal competence	4.27	47	9.97	2.94	<.005	.42
	Tolerance for negative events	1.85	47	4.16	3.05	<.005	.44
	Spiritual disposition	1.10	47	3.08	2.45	ns	.35
	Total	7.23	47	14.79	3.35	<.001	.48

When the table is analyzed, the results show that the resilience of refugee adults increased with the development of their digital marketing skills in two sub-dimensions of the CD-RISC-25 scale and in the total score.

According to the data, the results obtained in the sub-dimensions of perseverance and personal competence, tolerance to negative events, and total score have significant and moderate effect size. Perseverance and personal competence sub-dimension ($d = .42$, $p < .005$), tolerance to negative events

sub-dimension ($d = .44$, $p < .001$), and total score ($d = .48$, $p < .001$) have significant, high and strong effect size. On the other hand, the results were not significant in the spiritual disposition sub-dimension.

Resilience level according to age and gender variables

In order to determine whether the development of digital marketing skills has a significant effect on the resilience levels of refugee adults according to age and gender variables, an independent groups t-test analysis was conducted. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table-3. Independent Groups t Test Results of CD-RISC-25 Scale According to Gender and Age Variables

		Gender			Age		
		F	p	t	F	p	t
Pre Test	Perseverance and personal competence	.000	.991	.267	3.244	.078	-.790
	Tolerance for negative events	4.241	.045	-.225	1.382	.246	-1.572
	Spiritual disposition	1.382	.246	-1.309	.399	.531	-.730
	Total	.234	.631	-.150	.420	.520	-1.139
Post Test	Perseverance and personal competence	1.051	.311	1.315	4.387	.042	-.201
	Tolerance for negative events	1.784	.188	1.725	.594	.445	-.391
	Spiritual disposition	.212	.647	.775	.838	.365	-1.084
	Total	1.256	.268	1.508	1.916	.173	-.445

When Table 3 is analyzed within the scope of t-test results in independent groups, no significant result was found in the pre-post test scores obtained from the CD-RISC-25 scale according to the gender variable. This situation is similar for the age variable. Therefore, the applications did not reveal a significant difference in terms of both variables.

Qualitative Findings

In order to analyze the quantitative findings of the research and to obtain in-depth findings, the opinions obtained from the participants are given below:

The theme of the first session was "Doors Closed, Doors Open". The main objective of this session was to learn from the participants about the gains they had lost in the past and the gains they had made in their new lives. The views expressed by the participants during and at the end of the presentation are as follows:

As mentioned above, most of the participants were political refugees who were forced to migrate after the failed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016. Therefore, participants often interpreted their lost jobs as "closed doors". For example, a female participant who shared her thoughts in written form at the end of the session stated the following:

The Closing Door: I was unfairly dismissed from my job in 2016, and after that all doors were closed to me. People who used to offer me partnership and management positions no longer wanted to meet with me. Since that day, I have not been able to get a job that is official, suitable for my qualifications, and sufficient for me to provide for my family at a minimum level. (Participant: 22)

Participants who expressed their views through Zoom used the following expressions:

Can we say something that cannot be fixed about our health as our closed door? (Participant: 24)

First of all, thank you very much for organizing this seminar. I can say that it was good for me. Believe me, when I read what my friends wrote in the chat here, it makes me feel better. In my opinion, life is not all about closing doors. (Participant: 13)

I think it is necessary to approach things with a solution-oriented perspective, not with the problem. Therefore, it is best not to get stuck in closed doors and turn to open ones...(Participant: 8)

Considering that the target group copes with challenges, it was observed that they generally interpreted the opportunities they may encounter or have encountered in the target country as "the doors are open."

A participant who shared his/her thoughts in written form at the end of the session used the following expressions:

I decided to go abroad because all doors were closed in my country. First, I went to America, but when the doors I had hoped for were closed there, too, I returned to Europe. Individuals who were able to perceive the existence of open doors at an earlier stage contributed to the realization of these doors by other people. But it took five years for my children to learn German and become self-sufficient. So we can say that a door opened for my children about a year ago. My husband also completed a vocational training program and was able to start a job about three months ago. I guess this can also be considered as opening a door. (Participant: 22)

The participants who expressed their opinions through Zoom used the following expressions:

First of all, thank you for the program. It was not very difficult for me to find a new door. But it took too long (Participant: 4)

I see the new open door...but I am afraid to enter...I guess I am not very confident... (Participant: 11)

For two years, I was forced to accept that the door was closed because it was easier to go back and continue my old life. Now I realize the door that has opened, and I

am trying to find new fields of endeavor for myself. There are many doors opening right now, but I don't know which one will be my life. (Participant: 7)

As a result of the analysis, it was found that individuals who were able to perceive the presence of doors opening at an earlier stage contributed to other people noticing them. For example, one participant expressed her views as follows.

Actually, until I participated in this program, I always tried to open the door that was closed. I need to discover new doors based on what my friends wrote and what you told me. What can I do now? I think I can create a new route by asking myself powerful questions. (Participant: 19)

That's exactly what I meant, thank you. We need to overcome the anxieties and fears that prevent us from moving. Because the fear of moving can lead us to miss opportunities. (Participant: 14)

In fact, I can say that I should consider that some of the closed doors were the doors that opened for me, or that the closed doors were instrumental in opening new doors... (Participant: 18)

It was also observed that the participants did not only perceive the closing and opening doors in terms of jobs, but also evaluated the event from different perspectives. For instance, while one participant considered learning a new language as an opening door, another participant considered learning and practicing trade as an opening door:

Turkish door closed, and Greek and English doors opened... (Participant: 22)

The door of civil service was closed, and the door of trade was opened...(Participant: 23)

Discussion

The aim of the study is to determine the impact of improving the digital marketing skills of refugee adults on their resilience levels. Three research questions have been developed within the scope of this purpose. The data collected to answer the research questions have been analyzed. The results obtained by analyzing the data and the discussion of these results are as follows in the order of the research questions.

As a result of the research, it was determined that the development of digital marketing skills has a significant effect on the resilience levels of refugee adults. When analyzed on the basis of sub-dimensions, a significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of perseverance, personal competence, and tolerance to negative events, while no significant difference was found in the spiritual disposition sub-dimension. In the literature, studies examining the effect of developing digital marketing skills on resilience are very limited. Therefore, it was not possible to compare this result with other research results. However, Tumlu (2012) states that resilience occurs as a result of situations in which a person is exposed to some risk factors, adapts well to the negative effects of risky situations, and achieves normal developmental outcomes. Since the refugee adults who participated in this study also sought a way out for the future by adapting to their new situations, it can be interpreted as normal that their resilience levels increased significantly. In addition, since digital marketing allows reaching

customers from all over the world (Gedik, 2020), it may have increased the resilience levels of the refugee adults participating in the study by making them believe that they can do business without being affected by the problems they have experienced due to migration. In addition, since digital marketing is less costly than other types of marketing (Fidan & Yıldırım, 2020), it may have been perceived as a viable option for the participants and evaluated as a new hope.

The study conducted to improve the digital marketing skills of refugee adults did not lead to a significant difference in resilience levels in terms of age and gender. There are different studies in the literature that measure the resilience levels of adults according to age and gender variables. For example, Pulido-Martes et al. (2020) found that the resilience levels of men were higher than women, but there was no change according to age. Sambu & Mhongo (2019), on the other hand, state that resilience levels do not vary according to gender; however, resilience levels increase with age. All of the participants of this study had experienced a traumatic experience in their recent past and had similar characteristics in terms of background. Therefore, this may cause all participants to have a similar level of resilience. It can also be interpreted that the activities aimed at improving the participants' digital marketing skills were equally effective for all of them.

Refugee adults' views on the resilience-building activities applied to them are quite positive. As a result of the activities, refugee adults stated that they were able to better see the doors opened for them and the opportunities in front of them. Schweitzer et al. (2007) state that the challenges related to work make it difficult for refugees to adapt. This may lead to a negative shaping of their resilience. Within the scope of this study, showing refugees the existence of a new job opportunity may have positively affected their resilience. The study also found that refugee adults were inspired by looking at other people and this had a positive effect on their resilience. De Kraker (2017) states that social learning has a positive effect on individuals' resilience. Individuals who see that people around them stand firm in the face of adversity and witness their struggles may have increased their resilience by taking this situation as an example.

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