

## THE EFFECTS OF INTERNET CAFES ON SOCIAL CHANGE IN TURKEY: THE CASE OF HENDEK

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of Internet Cafes in embarking or bringing social change in Turkey. In this study, a questionnaire was administrated to 96 internet users in 10 different Internet Cafes in Hendek Province of Sakarya and interviews were made with these people on how the internet has been changing their personal and social lives. The survey included questions such as the amount of time spent in Internet cafes and the types of online activities engaged at the cafes. Social change, on the other hand, was defined as changes in somebody's belief system, way of life and his/her relations with other people. The findings of this study suggest that the internet cafes have been changing all facets of social life in Hendek and in many cases, the internet seems to have created a new way of doing old things and changing the manner in which people live their lives.

### SOCIAL CHANGE AND INTERNET

Social change is a general term which refers to change in the social institutions, the social behavior or the social relations of a society, community of people, or other social structures. Social change is caused by any event or action that affects a group of individuals that have shared values or characteristics; it is an act of advocacy for the cause of changing society (Wikipedia, 2010). One of the most popular definition of social change is supplied by Charles L. Harper in his *Exploring social change*, where social change is characterized as the "significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time" (Harper, 1993).

Social change is defined by sociologists as changing social structure of a community and its social intuitions such as family, religion, traditions and social relations among its people (Tezcan, 1993). Social change is created by revolutions, political or military leaders, inventions and discoveries, new doctrines or ideologies, conflicts and wars. Among other means of creating social change are direct action, protest, advocacy, community organization, community practice and political activism. Education also plays a critical role in disseminating and sustaining social changes in a society. More importantly technology plays an essential role in creating social change. Let us think about how computer and new information technologies have been fundamentally changing our lives for the last 10 or 15 years! In recent years enormous developments in information and internet technologies have began to influence the life of human being with its all spheres.

There is no question that easy access to the internet, like the availability of personal computers with rather cheap prices, introduction of reliable internet services and the establishments of Internet Cafes, has changed the nature of people's connection to others in their social world. Sending and receiving emails have made possible connections among people without physical proximity, and the internet facilitated communication among distant people, making rapid connections possible across long distances. People can now write electronic mails that are transmitted virtually immediately throughout the globe.

But has this communication revolution changed the nature of interpersonal and group processes? Does the Internet make people socially isolated from the community? Does it undermine family relations or friendships? The research from the field makes it clear that many aspects of the lives of people especially young people and the basic nature of their relationships with others have been profoundly changed because of the global diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT). For example, Gergen (2002) claims that ICT has expanded the domain of "absent presence" which in turn, leads to an erosion of face-to-face community centered or privatized sense of self, and a decrease in the "depth" but an increase in the "breadth" of social relationships.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and especially internet and web have created "new type social relations" and "virtual communities" that we have never seen before. Rheingold (2000) uses the term "virtual community" and defines it as "virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." According to Rheingold (2000), a virtual community is a social network of individuals who interact through specific media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests or goals. One of the most pervasive types of virtual community includes social networking services, which consist of various online communities. Virtual communities are used

for a variety of social and professional groups. It does not necessarily mean that there is a strong bond among the members; on the contrary, virtual communities are formed when people want personal relationships online. A person may have hundreds of members in his/her email distribution list, but members may still remain relatively strangers to one another. Sometimes strong ties in the online world are established that lead to close friendship and even to marriage among its members, sometimes people remain anonymous or invisible in the social network of the virtual society (Rheingold, 1993). Today, it is not really known how virtual communities can work across space, time and organizational boundaries. But one thing is certain that a socialization process which is very different from interaction among people in traditional settings takes place. This virtual socialization presents the impersonality of virtual networks and it sometimes has a negative influence on offline interaction between individuals. Calhoun (1991) argues that virtual life often takes over our lives and creates different personalities in people, groups and personal relations. Recently Parsell (2008) has suggested that virtual communities can be pernicious by leading to attitude polarization, increased prejudices and enabling sick individuals to deliberately indulging in their diseases.

On the other hand, Tyler (2002) argues that internet may have had less impact on many aspects of social life than is frequently supposed. According to Tyler, in many cases the internet seems to have created a new way of doing old things, rather than being a technology that changes the manner in which people live their lives (Tyler, 2002). Tyler insists that the basic nature of people's relationships with others may have changed less because of the internet than is often suggested. There are new and useful capabilities associated with electronic communication may have led to changes in pattern of life, the basic social patterns of life have remained very much the same in spite of these internet-induced changes.

### **INTERNET CAFES**

Internet has been a part of our daily lives since the beginning of 1990's and has influenced almost all aspects of our lives from education to trade, from engineering to medicine. However, not many people can afford to have personal computer (PC) due to economic reasons; therefore, they can not get access to the Internet. For example, in Turkey there are about 35 million internet users but only 7.5 million of them have internet access at home or at their offices. This means that only 26.2% of all internet users in Turkey have their own access to internet (TIEV, 2010). Even though some people with low income have PC's, the internet connection rates so high that not everyone can afford to have access to the virtual reality of the Internet.

To provide public access to the virtual world, in 1994, the first Internet Cafe was opened in England and soon spread out all over the world from city centers to small villages. With the notion of seeing the internet as a window unto the world, and in the face of low levels of computer ownership and internet access from home, Internet Cafes have become alternatives to bridge the digital divide by providing Internet access to all citizens. The wide spread of Internet Cafes in all over the world have increased Internet access especially for those who don't have personal computer at home or teenagers who want to play game together.

Internet Cafes can be defined as locations, in which people without computers and/or modem connections can purchase temporary Internet access. Emerging as a practical solution to the problem of lack of income for permanent computer ownership and/or Internet connectivity, Internet Cafes have soon become quite popular worldwide, and have usually owned by private entrepreneurs. In fact, it has become one of the fastest growing service sector businesses in the world. Wakeford (1999) argues that the Internet café is, "a translation landscape of computing where the Internet is produced and interpreted for 'ordinary people' who consume time on the machines, and/or food and drink".

Wakeford sees Internet Cafes as techno-cultural systems, located at the intersection of on-line landscapes (the visual and textual landscapes interacted with when logged on), expert landscapes (the technical expertise that establishes the net and is necessary for the inhabitation of other net landscapes), and translation landscapes (the sites where the Internet is produced and interpreted for ordinary people) (Crang et al., 1999).

People use Internet Cafes for various reasons such as interpersonal communication (e-mail, chat), professional development (job search), entertainment (games, surfing, browsing pornographic sites), academic uses (school search, using various software such as word processors), technical uses (printing, scanning) to name just a few. Internet Cafes not only offer online means of communication, people also use these places for sociability and socializing with other cafe users (Miller and Slater, 2000). Thus, as Musatov (2001) keenly observes, "Internet Cafes satisfy a combination of physiological and information needs of the individual".

Internet Cafes serve both hot and cold drinks as well as snacks and have an hourly charge. Besides coffee, tea and sandwiches, Internet cafes often also offer office-style services - such as printing and copying the documents and information from the world wide web. In addition to the wider range of supplementary services offered some Internet Cafes divided the space into cabins, allowing the kind of privacy and quiet environment.

### **INTERNET CAFES IN TURKEY**

Since its introduction in the mid-1990, the Internet has received a warm welcome from Turks especially by youngs who were quick to adopt new technologies. In Turkey the internet has been seen as "a window unto the world," or "the means to catch up the information age." It has also presented a new business avenue for entrepreneurs. In the face of low level of PC ownership and online access from home Internet Cafes started to crop up all over Turkey synchronically with the world. It is believed that there are around 20.000 registered Internet Cafes in Turkey by the year of 2009 and 1880 of them (approximately 10%) were located in Istanbul (BTK).The number of Internet Cafes in Sakarya Province is 278 and around 30 of them are located in Hendek. Internet Cafes are subjected to the same legal regulations that govern entertainment places such as casinos, bars and tea houses.

Internet Cafes in Turkey have soon become popular social outlets for Turkish youth to hang out and access to the internet. Internet Cafes have been perceived for the young Turks as alternative to traditional Coffee Houses, *Kahvehaneler*. Internet Cafes are seen by the most Turkish youth as places of relaxation and entertainment rather than as places of learning and self-development so they come to the Cafes to play games especially in a group.

Internet Cafes in Turkey are divided into three subgroups: The first subgroup (organizational cafes) is regarded as the same with educational institutions and libraries of public organizations. These cafes are located in a public agency and they can only serve their own personnel. They cannot be regulated by outside agencies. The second subgroup (commercial cafes) can provide Internet access but can not let its customers use gaming software. The third subgroup (game cafes) has both Internet access and gaming facilities. This last group of cafes needs to be at least 200 meters (about 600 feet) away from educational institutions and mosques. On March 26, 2001, the police further regulated the commercial and gaming cafes. According to this latest legislation, there is no longer a minimum age requirement for entering commercial cafes. For game cafes, the minimum age was decreased from 15 to 12, but parental consent was made necessary for everyone below 18 (Goker, 2001).

There is an intense debate in the Turkish media regarding the potential benefits and harms of Internet Cafes. On the one hand, crimes such as stalking, assault, rape and even murder that originate from Internet Cafes chat sessions (Gurol, 2001). On the other hand, there are optimistic news stories such as Cuyar's (2001), which contend that banning the children from visiting Internet Cafes is not a solution. Instead, parents need to regulate the amount of time their children spend and the content that they are exposed to in Internet cafés. It is even argued that chatting and playing computer games may improve children's decision-making abilities. Although some aspects of Internet cafés might be beneficial to its customers, these places need to be controlled vigorously: In the first three months of the year 2001, 600 (nearly 15%) of the then 4,472 registered cafes were penalized by government authorities on the charges of providing access to separatist, indecent, gambling sites, letting underage users in, violating copyright laws, etc. (Goker, 2001).

On the other hand, the rapid increase in the use of these places in Turkish society has particularly raised concern about social and psychological development of Turkish youth. It has recently been complained that youngsters visit Internet Cafes not for educational or informational purposes but rather to access violent-oriented electronic games, pornographic and separatist materials which assumed to undermine their moral values and social inclusion with the community.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative research design was adopted by employing a survey technique. The target population consists of individual who are using Internet Cafes in Hendek, Sakarya. The questionnaire of 48 items was delivered to 100 internet users in 10 Internet Cafes whose ages ranged from 15 to 25.A total of 96 surveys were returned . Of these, 23 were female and 73 were male. Most of the participants in the study were high school and university students. Most of these young internet users were residents of Hendek (%53) . After applying the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with the participants of the study. A total of people interviewed were 60.The rest of the internet users didn't want to participate in the study. Interviews divided into six separate sessions, in each session 10 people were interviewed. Some interviews with cafe owners were also made in order to check the replies of Internet Cafe users. The outcomes of this survey have been statistically analyzed by SPSS for Windows 16.0. The data has been analyzed using techniques such as, frequency and percentage calculations.

## FINDINGS

The first sets of questions in the survey were designed to find out how many days in a week the participants came to the Internet Cafes and the number of hours they spent in Internet Cafes per week.

Table 1 .The number of days that users come to the cafes per week

How often	Frequency	Percentage (%)
One day	15	14.4
Two days	22	21.1
Three days	20	19.2
Four days	13	12.4
Five days	12	11.5
Six days	10	9.6
Seven days	4	3.8

Most of the Internet Cafe users in Hendek come to the cafes 2 or 3 days per week. These days are usually the days at the weekend because Saturdays and Sundays the youths find more spare time than the week days for internet use.

Table 2. The number of hours that users come to the cafes per week

How often	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 -2 hours	15	14.4
2-3 hours	21	20.1
4-5 hours	19	18.2
6-7 hours	13	12.4
8-9 hours	10	9.6
10-15 hours	8	7.6
15-20 hours	8	7.6
21 and more	2	1.9

Internet Cafe users in Hendek usually spend 2-5 hours (38.3 % ) per week, approximately 15% percent of the participants of the study spend 1-2 hours in internet cafe. On the contrary, more than 15% spend more than 10 to 15 hours. The average is about 5-6 hours per week.

The second set of questions in the survey included the frequency of patterns of activities engaged at the cafes. Internet activities include as follows: 1-educational and informational use such as reading about news research were class assignments, gathering general information from governmental, educational medical and communication sites 2-communication use (making online new friends, sending and receiving e-mail, online chat, participating in forums and discussion boards) 3-entertainment use (playing games, watching movie, visiting pornographic sites) 4-business use (online shopping, online banking and paying bills).

Table 3. The distribution of using Internet for electronic mail

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	15	15.6
Rarely	13	13.5
Sometimes	18	18.8
Often	27	28.1
Always	23	24.0
Total	96	100

For electronic mail, Internet use seems to be quite widespread in Hendek. Interviews with the users show that almost all of them have electronic mail addresses. The subjects have mentioned that almost everyday they send e-mail to their family or friends and come to Internet Cafes to check their e-mails.

Table 4. The distribution using internet for searching a job or an employment

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	28	29.2
Rarely	20	20.8
Sometimes	9	9.4
Often	33	34.4
Always	6	6.3
Total	96	100

About 1/3 of cafe customers in Hendek use internet cafes to look for a job or an employment. According to the interviews in the cafes, the people prefer the internet to search for a job rather than go to the Job and Employment Office. One user mentioned that it was easier to check many sites for an employment in a short period of time and looked for many alternatives through internet. There are also some users who may want to change their jobs and that's why they often check employment advertisements for better job opportunities.

Table .5 The distribution of using internet to play games

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	11	11.5
Rarely	24	25
Sometimes	9	34.4
Often	6	9.4
Always	32	33.3
Total	96	100

Most of the Internet users in Hendek come to the Internet Cafes to play games. War and strategy games are the most played games in the Internet Cafes. All computer games in Internet Cafes have such contents as violence, war, strategy (Half Life, Counter Strike, Red Alert, and Doom). Many users have mentioned that they had played football, basketball and had gone to traditional cafe houses, *Kahvehane* to play cards, *okey* and *tavla* before the openings of Internet Cafes in Hendek. Now they say, “we sometimes play football and basketball, but we never go to *Kahvehanes* to play cards any more.” For youths in Hendek Internet Cafes are more attractive than traditional cafe houses. For many youths of Hendek playing games with friends in Internet Cafes is more interesting than spending time in traditional café houses.

Table 6 The distribution of using internet for entertainment purpose

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	13	13.5
Rarely	12	12.5
Sometimes	26	27.1
Often	27	28.1
Always	18	18.
Total	96	100

Together with television, internet is one of the most important instruments for entertainment. Many people in Internet Cafes watch videos, films, shows and advertisements but there are not many people who listen to do music in the Internet Cafes. Also only a few people play cards, chess or *okey* through internet in the Cafes.

Table 7 The distribution of using internet for research purposes

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	13	13.5
Rarely	12	12.5

Sometimes	26	27.1
Often	27	28.1
Always	18	18.
Total	96	100

Because the Faculty of Education is located in Hendek, university students come to Internet Cafes to research for their class assignments. The percentage of students using internet for research is quite high. Because of the lack of library sources and opportunities, the internet is the most important device for students to collect information for their research papers.

Table 8. The distribution of using internet for communication network

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	3	3.1
Rarely	19	19.8
Sometimes	30	31.3
Often	26	27.1
Always	18	18.8
Total	96	100

Internet Cafe users often use facebook, messenger, icq, twitter for communication purposes. Communication sites are trying to create very attractive opportunities, and offer special services to users. Most of the students have chat with their family and friends visually. Many Internet Cafe users have facebook and messengers accounts.

Table 9. The distribution of using internet for visiting educational sites

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	41	42.7
Rarely	29	30.2
Sometimes	20	20.8
Often	5	5.2
Always	1	1
Total	96	100

According to the Table 9 educational sites are rarely visited by Internet Cafe users in Hendek. Some high school students said that they visited university web pages to get information about universities they are planning to apply for. Also some people mentioned that they sometimes visited Ministry of Education and some other governmental sites such as National Social Security Services, Ministry of Tourism.

Table 10. The distribution of using the internet for porno sites

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	71	74
Rarely	14	14.6
Sometimes	9	9.4
Often	1	1
Always	1	1
Total	96	100

In the Internet Cafes, porno sites are almost never visited by the users. Because there are a lot of restrictions for not doing such a thing. Even some cafe owners put a sign of saying "entering into porno sites is forbidden". In the interviews with the cafe owners it is understood that a special attention is paid for monitoring internet users

for not visiting porno sites and some cafe owners mentioned that they had trouble with some users who insisted on watching some porno videos.

Table 11 The distribution of using the internet to follow the daily news

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	47	49
Rarely	26	27.1
Sometimes	11	11.5
Often	7	7.3
Always	5	5.2
Total	96	100

Internet Cafes users do not often follow daily news from internet. The percentage of people who read news from the internet and follow daily newspaper is very low. Because most Internet Cafe users are young people, they are not very interested in daily politics and current events.

Table 12 The distribution of using the internet to feel more comfortable

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	5	5.2
Rarely	4	4.2
Sometimes	20	20.8
Often	20	20.8
Always	47	49
Total	96	100

Many Internet Cafe users say that they can express their feelings more comfortably in virtual world than they do in real world. Because they use nicknames and hide their real identities, they express themselves freely when they are chatting with others. According to the Table 12 almost half of the participants of the study feel comfortable in the virtual world so that they write whatever they think to the people in the chat rooms. Especially the ones who are shy against opposite sex demonstrate emotional feelings through chatting with somebody who has a opposite sex. Also they participate in political and religious talks freely.

Table 13 the distribution of users' internet addiction

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	31	32.3
Rarely	26	27.1
Sometimes	16	16.7
Often	9	9.4
Always	14	14.6
Total	96	100

Internet use sometimes makes addiction for those who spend many hours on the internet. This addiction is especially valid for playing games and making chat with somebody through internet. According to the Table 13, 24 % Internet Cafe users described themselves as addicted to internet use, however 32.3 % of them think that they are not addicted to internet use all the time.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study is intended to investigate the effects of Internet Cafes on social change in a small province, Hendek. It is emphasized that the new information and internet technologies have brought new type social relations and imaginary communities by creating a new social gathering places called "Internet Cafes." This study points out that Internet Cafes have become an alternative social gathering place to traditional Turkish coffee houses, *Kahvehane* for youths of Turkey. In this study, a questionnaire about internet use and its influences on the youths of Hendek was administered and the potential impacts of Internet cafe on Turkish community are discussed.

According to the findings of the study, the activities performed in Internet Cafes in Hendek are as following. 42.7 % playing games, 52.1 % for using electronic mail, 40.7 % searching for a job or employment, 46.1 % for entertainment, 45.9 % for communication (online chat and participating in forums and discussion boards) and 36.1 % for research and education. Reading about news and current events on internet is not common in Internet Cafes in Hendek and online shopping, online banking and paying bills as well. The study shows that youngsters visit Internet Cafes not mainly for research and educational purposes but rather to access electronic games (mostly violent-oriented). They are often denied access to pornographic materials which are assumed to undermine their social and moral values.

Internet Cafes have brought some changes in social life in Hendek. For example the youths prefer not to go to traditional cafe houses (*Kahvehane*) for playing cards, *okey* and *tavla* but prefer going to the cafes for playing games in a groups or searching for fun on the internet. According to some interviews with the cafe owners the bad habit of gambling among youths in Hendek has declined dramatically with the opening of Internet Cafes. Hendek is a small conservative province and there are not many places for entertainments so the Internet Cafes have become places where youngsters often spent much time.

Considering the users' profile of the Internet Cafes in Hendek, it has been found that individuals of 15–25 years of age have usually been using the Internet Cafes. However, female population of Hendek do not often go to Internet Cafes. For example in the case of Hendek in proportion to 10 males, 1 female has been using the Internet Cafes. This result causes a digital separation both in different ages and different sexes. Female university students often go to Internet Cafes to do their class assignments. The amount of time spent at the cafes is about 5-6 hours per week. Many users come to cafes because of feeling loneliness. Therefore, they would like to engage in a social network of online communication activities with friends and other network users. Because such an atmosphere provides them to feel themselves in a group.

Internet Cafe use in Hendek doesn't displace youth's social activities because users in cafes can engage in face to face social contacts with others in the cafe especially when they are playing games in a group. The space in the Internet Cafes in Hendek isn't usually divided into cabins. This flexibility provides more social network of communication and interaction with cafe users. Moreover, Internet Cafes not only offer an alternative sphere of communication to sustain existing social ties, but also facilitates a new online social relationships that may also be continued offline. For example in Hendek there are at least two cases that their friendships started with online communication in Internet Cafes and ended with marriage in real life.

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