Chapter XV
Technology Access Points in Turkey:
A Study on Internet Cafés and Their Roles in the Society

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study is to examine one of the popular Internet access places, Internet cafés, in Turkey by focusing the missions of these places regarding gameplay, computer use, Internet use, and their roles in the society. In the study, 71 Internet cafés, existing in 8 different districts in Ankara, capital city of Turkey, were examined during 4 weeks. Data were collected by giving a questionnaire including demographic information about users and their Internet café habits. Internet café users' observation patterns were reported while they were using Internet and playing computer games. Besides, interviews were conducted with volunteer users in terms of their preferences, such as surfing, chatting, doing homework, or playing computer games, to collect deep information regarding aims of the research. Results of the study revealed that one of the main missions of the Internet cafés in the society is that they are seen as places for game play, because majority of the Internet café users preferred playing computer games. It was found that there are certain differences among café users from low and high socioeconomic districts and gender in terms of Internet café frequency, use habits, and use aims. In addition, parental control on Internet café use showed significant differences among café users. Although there are prejudices and negative considerations on Internet café use in the society, they are not harmful places to the majority of the participants.

INTRODUCTION

Internet has been an active part of social life since the mid-1990s, influencing several aspects of the daily lives such as business, military, health, education, or engineering (Gurol & Sevindik, 2007). In today's world, it has been available for public use at home, in Internet cafés, university campuses, libraries, airports, and so on. In Turkey, it has been accepted and reached wide use since last decade, when it appeared first in the society (Yesil, 2003), and nowadays, there are more than 7 million Internet users in the country (Cagiltay, 2005).

People prefer using Internet frequently, both in daily lives and work places, in order to make their activities easier, more effective and more efficient. Besides, to reach a large amount of information without any or limited restriction, Internet is very appropriate due to its characteristics. For instance, Press (2000) cited in Mwesige (2004) stated that "a more optimistic hypothesis is that the Internet's flexible, low-cost communication may lead to improved economic productivity, education, health care, entertainment, awareness of the world, and quality of life in development nations and pockets of poverty within nations, thus reducing disparity" (p.84). Also, Leagran (2002) stated "Internet is seen as a cultural medium to the wider world, opening paths for new impulses" (p.157).

Because of the characteristics of the Internet and its widespread use, the needs for Internet have been increasing speedily, and people need to reach Internet via some places. Internet cafés, one of the popular places allowing people to use Internet technologies, have been reaching wide use and gaining significance for the societies. In order to provide easy access to the virtual worlds, Internet cafés were founded (Gurol & Sevindik, 2007), and they meet the necessities of the people in terms of using Internet, chatting, surfing, reaching information, or playing computer games. Since several young people prefer spending most of their time without any limitations while using computer in these places, studies investigating Internet cafés and their missions are gaining significance.

Internet cafés have been playing important roles in sociocultural and socioeconomic issues in Turkish culture. Allowing people access to computer and Internet technologies easily without facing any restrictions have been making Internet use an active and inevitable factor of social life, depending on it for shopping, banking, registering societies, paying bills, and the like. In the future, it might be expected that Internet use becomes an inevitable part of social life, and will reach a large amount of acceptance and popularity among people in order to make their daily lives easier. Internet cafés have been showing tremendous developments and reaching a large number of users from day-to-day. This has been influencing not only the social and cultural aspects of the society, but also economic and political issues as well.

According to Gurol and Sevindik (2007), "using Internet as the means, customers can surf the Web, communicate via e-mail, do online shopping, have access to knowledge, do educational or personal research, and do all these while a quick snack and a soda" (p.60). Internet Cafés have been diffusing all over the country rapidly, and several people, especially youngsters, prefer using Internet and playing computer games in these places in Turkey. Also, for some of the people, Internet cafés were the unique places that provide them use of computer technology easily. In addition, it is obvious that for each society, Internet cafés have different roles and missions. For instance, in Turkey, according to the previous studies (e.g., Baran & Kuloglu, 2001, cited in Gurol & Sevindik, 2007) focusing on Internet cafés and their use, it is seen that males prefer going to these places rather than females, and playing computer games is one of the most popular aims among people in terms of going to Internet cafés.

Gurol and Sevindik (2007) stated in their study that David Tonge has stated "the number of Inter-

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