

# Turkish University Students' Viewpoint about Internet: A Phenomenological Investigation

YILDIZ KURTYILMAZ

Educational Sciences, Psychological Counseling & Guidance

Anadolu University

Yunusemre Kampusü, 26470 ESKİŞEHİR

TÜRKİYE

ykurtyilmaz@anadolu.edu.tr

*Abstract:* - It's apparent that internet has brought about dramatic changes in communication and social interaction, but effects of its use are still indefinite. Coming to a systematic understanding of internet and its effects in this study it was intended to investigate the users' viewpoints, the way of usage and how it was integrated into daily and social life. A qualitative study was undertaken to get a richer understanding of 20 internet users' perceptions and data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings were presented under phenomenological description of internet, purposes of internet usage, and effects of internet on daily/social life themes.

*Key-Words:* - internet, internet use, internet effects, university student

## 1 Introduction

Interactive technologies made a great outbreak two decades ago [1]. Parallel to this rapid development, video games and computer-based communication systems came on the scene. In the first half of 1990's, internet is presented to public access and escalated tremendously [2] and has affected the world dramatically since then [3]. In other words, internet has pierced daily life [4] and led to the changes in traditional communication and interaction patterns [5]. With easy access to internet, individuals start to communicate with others through internet. Although fundamentals of social patterns in social life have not changed, internet has provided new ways to cope with the demands of social life [6]. Individuals have started to fulfill their social needs by means of mail services, instant messaging, etc. [7].

While it is apparent that internet has brought about dramatic changes in communication and social interaction, effects of its use are still indefinite [5]. There are two counter arguments about uses and consequences of internet. In positive light, since internet increases the quality and quantity of communications among individuals it is expected to lead to positive psychological and social consequences [6]. Individuals being able to stay in touch with geographically distant significant others and friends [4] perceive more social support and feel themselves better [6]. However, electronic communication by e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, etc. can cause decreases in face to face communication and may lead individuals to become less socially involved with their families and friends. Therefore, internet is assumed to affect individuals negatively [6, 8, 9]. Based on these

arguments, psychological and social consequences of internet were investigated with different researches [10, 11], but the findings of these researches were equivocal [5]. Despite ambiguous findings related with the consequences of internet, it can be stated that effects of internet change according to personal strivings and interpersonal goals of individuals [3]. Therefore, coming to a systematic understanding of internet and its effects is thought to be possible only with the investigation of internet users' perception of internet, and usage patterns. For this purpose, Maignan and Lukas [2] undertook a qualitative research about the usage and perception of internet by users. Interviewees perceived the internet as a multifaceted technology. Some of them perceived internet as an object/ place of consumption and social system. Their representations of internet also made it easier to understand pattern of internet usage, activities on the internet. Thus, to grasp a better picture of the situation in Turkey in terms of internet, it was intended to understand the users' viewpoints, the way of usage and how it was integrated into daily and social life.

## 2 Problem Formulation

### 2.1. Problem Definition

Internet has become widespread in Turkey and internet population has grown rapidly. Despite this rapid growth, little is known about individuals' subjective views about internet and its usage. For this reason, this qualitative study was carried out to describe the current situation of internet usage by means of answering

following questions. 1. What are the perceptions of internet users?, 2. For which purposes do they use internet?, 3. How does internet affect users' daily and social life?

## 2.2 Methods

A qualitative study design was used to get a richer understanding of internet users and their perceptions. Since this research was intended to determine the current situation, descriptive model was utilized. Semi structured interviews were conducted to make sense of phenomena in terms of meanings individuals attribute [12].

### 2.2.1. Participants

Data was collected from 20 university students at Anadolu University, 9 of whom were female and 11 were male. Their ages ranged from 20-24 years.

### 2.2.2. Procedure

Data was collected by semistructured interview including open-ended questions after receiving consent from participants. Interview was conducted by trained researcher. All interviewees were interviewed face to face and audiotaped. Interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Interview questions were as follows.

1. What does internet mean to you?
2. For which purposes do you use internet?
3. How does internet affect your daily and social life?

### 2.2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out to identify themes, categories and patterns from the answers of participants. All audiotape records were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed by means of descriptive coding. In descriptive data analysis, thematic framework was developed according to the data gathered and the literature and conceptual framework. All transcripts were read, coded and compared in accordance with thematic framework by the researcher. For reliability, two experts also coded the transcripts, and comparisons were made between researcher's and experts' codings and agreements and disagreements were assessed. Reliability of the study was found as %85. Example quotes from participants' answers are presented within the text in order to provide supporting evidence to the reader. Data analysis was carried out by means of computer based program-NVivo 2.0.

## 3 Problem Solution

20 interviews were coded and contents of them were

organized to three main themes: 1. Phenomenological description of internet, 2. Purposes of internet usage, 3. Effects of internet on daily/social life.

### 3.1. Phenomenological description of internet

Interviewees' representations about internet were miscellaneous. In other words, internet meant more than one thing for all of the participants. For instance, one described internet both as a means of communication and a source of information. Phenomenological descriptions of participants were grouped under negative and positive headings. Themes and subthemes were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Phenomenological Description of Internet

Themes	N
Positive	
Source of information	14
Accessibility	10
Communication	8
Globalization	5
Recreation	3
Coping with problems/loneliness	2
Search engines	2
Advertisement	2
Necessity	1
Negative	
Data mess/unreliable information	2
Addiction	2
Easy access to information (limited search alternatives)	1

Under positive heading, favorable descriptions of internet are collected. Most of the participants state positive views about internet. As it is seen in Table 1., 70% (14) of the interviewees perceive internet as a source of information.

*....Internet is a giant data base. Internet means learning things for me. ....*

*.....since I don't use library, I see the internet as a source of information. ....*

*..... it is an infinite source of information and an affordable tool for reaching everything.....*

*.....internet is very useful. I can easily find a lot of things that I did not find in the library by one click.*

9 of the respondents used the "source of information" statement and three of them qualify this source with the adjective of "infinite". As it is seen from the quotes, internet is compared with library as a source of information.

Second mostly used concept in the description of internet is "accessibility". Under this subtheme, "easy access" to information, others, and everything was mentioned. Participants' statements implied that there are no boundaries between/among individuals from different countries any more. Moreover, some of them

stated that they could not get some information without internet.

*.... having rights to access particular books that can be found only at certain libraries in the world I can never reach.....*

Third subtheme in the description of internet is "communication". 8 interviewees (40%) perceived internet as a communication medium. One of them described internet only a communication tool:

*I don't see internet as a source of information, it is only a communication tool.....*

Some respondents used internet for stay in touch with their friends, some of them used it for meeting with new people. Most of them stated that internet is an incredible means to converse with others from all over the world.

*..... there are websites where we share some cultural things and develop friendship..... There are some individuals who are bored with hollow friendship of daily life and being real friends, even married by means of internet.*

*....You can send a message for four corners of the world. I start to think that the world become a giant village after internet. You can reach lots of people....*

Fourth common subtheme in the respondents' descriptions of internet was the concept of "globalization". 3 of the participants used it directly to describe internet. The other two imply this theme by means of indirect statements.

*..... I think internet has completed the globalization in terms of communication. ....*

*..... when "internet" is pronounced, immediately globalization recurs to my mind. ....*

*.....One of the most important tool that lets me connect to the world.*

The other subtheme about the description of internet was named as "recreation". 3 respondents (15%) included the dimensions of recreation such as playing games, listening to music in their description. But recreational dimension was mentioned in addition to other themes. That is, it can be stated that they saw recreative characteristic of internet less representative. One respondent perceived internet as a means for spending his leisure time.

*.....I saw internet as a source of information and communication with my friends. Recreation. ....*

*.....Moreover, it is a recreation, i.e. it supersedes spare time activities. Instead of saying "Let's read a book", I say "Let's play games".*

2 interviewees (10%) perceived internet as a means to "cope with problems and loneliness". Since internet is time consuming and divides attention, it may be used for escaping from problems and loneliness.

*.... When I have problems and there is no one to share, I am connected to internet and play games. While I am playing games I do not think them. So I start to play games. ....*

*.....talking with unknown (faceless) individual is fabulous feeling, like meditation....*

Internet means "search engines" for two

respondents. They stated that internet evokes search engines on the first impulse. They both gave an example of "Google".

Two descriptions of internet also included "advertisement". These descriptions were done by the respondents perceiving internet as search engines. It can be stated that pages of search engines are full of advertisements. Therefore, they may associate internet with search engines directly, and with advertisement indirectly.

One respondent viewed internet as a "necessity". Since internet has become widespread, it may be perceived as a necessity to cope with life better.

*.. Internet means everything to me. For learning address, applying for a job, conversing, chatting. It becomes a necessity.....*

Most of the respondents perceived internet in positive light. It can be stated that they may have positive attitudes about internet. Although most of the respondents perceived internet positively, few of them had negative views about it. Views under the negative heading were described with unfavorable statements. In other words, contents of the responses had negative connotation. Two respondents emphasized "unreliable information/ data mess" in their description of internet.

*.....it seems to me that not everything on the internet is completely correct. Disorganization of information, I mean coexistence of correct and incorrect, accurate and inaccurate information.*

*..... there is a giant data mess on internet..... internet is not good as a source of sharing information because there is not reliable information, you can not find it. You can not find the first-hand information, others' comments should be added to accessed information.....*

Two participants answered the question about phenomenological description of internet with the implication of "addiction". That is, according to their phenomenological descriptions, internet leads to addiction.

*.....I think I am internet addicts in a bad way.....*

Internet meant "easily accessed information (limited search alternatives)" for the other one,

*..... one can get information very easily. Previously, research was carried out, and lots of books were read for getting information. Lots of things were learned when these books were read. But now we get what we want to learn directly. The thing written in search engine appears with one mouse click .....I thought that internet prevents students from making a search in the library and reaching various information and limit their search alternatives. Because we find easily what we wish. The ease of getting information may have negative effects...*

Since internet provides opportunities to reach or access information easily and effortlessly by means of search engines, it may hinder the development of individuals' searching abilities. Internet may prevent individuals from looking at things from different

perspectives. At least, internet may not support the development of analytical searching and thinking.

Four respondents' view included both advantages and disadvantages of internet at the same time. They emphasized bilateral nature of it. Main theme in their descriptions was the fact that internet is a tool. To them, extreme usage makes it negative.

*.....internet is a good thing until some point and beyond this point it becomes harmful. That is, people connect to the internet for communication, but beyond some point they become disconnected with real world. ...*

*... In fact, internet is bilateral. There is one side of it in which you can do very nice things but this depends on its usage. On the other hand, it enslaves you, makes you addicted and removes you from reality.....internet by itself is not a good or a bad tool. It is just like atom bomb or robots.....*

It was seen that, in the descriptions the point internet becomes negative is the time connection with reality is lost. As a result, all bilateral views focus on the statement that effects of internet depend on users, it may become very useful or harmful.

### 3.2. Purposes of internet usage

In the second aim of the study, participants' internet usage purposes were investigated. According to the contents of their answers, purposes were grouped and presented under the "access to information", "communication", "recreation" and "shopping" titles generally. Themes and subthemes of usage purposes were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Purposes of internet usage

Themes	N
Access to information	
Prepare Assignment	19
Self-development	15
Satisfaction of curiosity	7
Getting information about grades (marks)	3
File transfer	1
Communication	
Chat	18
email	6
Recreation	
Playing games	8
Reading newspapers	7
Listening to music	6
Watching films	4
Viewing books	2
Shopping	1

As seen in Table 2, most frequent usage purpose of internet is to get information about various things. Since participants reported that they used internet to get information about very different areas for different purposes, their answers are classified under five

subthemes. All participants except one stated that they use internet for "preparing assignments".

*.....the most frequently, to prepare assignments, to do projects.....*

In addition to this, participants also reported that they use internet to get information about their fields, personal interests/hobbies and individual concerns. These three topics are grouped under the "self development" heading because their efforts were thought to lead to development in themselves. 6 of 15 interviewees indicated that they use internet to get information about their own fields. For example, one of them who will become Language teacher has been using internet to reach English and German books and sources. 4 of 15 participants stated that they use internet to obtain information about their personal interests/hobbies.

*...I am interested in painting. Internet is a great opportunity in painting and art. ....*

*...I can search and reach all the things inside my personal interests such as photography, literature through internet....*

Internet provides rich opportunities to the people having expensive personal interests/hobbies so it may become more convenient way to satisfy their needs. Thus, it may support individuals in self actualization process. Moreover, interviews indicated that two of the respondents use internet for professional development. One participant stated that he applied for a job electronically. The other one also listed a "making an application" among usage purposes. In addition, one participant reported that she use internet to collect information about individual concerns such as health, diet. Another purpose to get information by means of internet is to "satisfy curiosity". Seven participants stated they search information through internet just to satisfy their curiosity.

*..... search information about the things I am curious.....  
If I am curious about someone famous, I use it to search this...  
.....If I am obsessed with something, I use it. ....*

Three respondents indicated that they use internet to have information about their grades (marks).

*Since I'm a student, I review my grades through internet.....*

Lastly under "access to information" heading, only one respondent stated that he uses internet for file transfer.

The second most frequent usage of internet is for "communication" purposes. 18 respondents (90%) stated that they use chat programs for communication, 6 of them use e-mail. Most of them use it to keep in touch with their friends and families. Some of them converse with people from all over the world. The other two participants stated that they use internet necessarily. Therefore, they may not use it for communication purposes.

Another main subtheme of usage is "recreation". Other than two subthemes, this one is the least preferred usage purpose. Totally, 9 interviewees expressed that

they use it for recreational purposes in addition to other usage purposes. 8 of respondents stated that they use it for playing games, 7 of whom for reading newspapers, 6 of whom for listening to music, 4 of whom for watching films, 2 of whom for reading and viewing books. It can be stated that recreation is not a main aim of the participants. And only one participant emphasized the usage of internet for “shopping” purposes.

.....*Even I do my shopping through internet because I'm lazy...*

### 3.3 Effects of internet on daily/social life

Effects of internet on participants' daily/social life were presented according to whether they're positive or negative in Table 3.

Table 3. Effects of internet on daily/social life

Themes	N
Positive	
Ease of communication	7
Ease of Access to personal aims	5
Controllability of communication	1
Negative	
Limitation of social relationships	12
Interference with daily concerns (agenda)	7
Passivity/inactivity	4
Difficulty in adaptation to real life	4
Physical illnesses	1

As seen in Table 3., 7 interviewees stated that internet affects their life positively because it is very convenient and easy way to “communicate”. They can communicate easily by means of MSN despite distance. Some of them compare it with other communication tools like telephone.

...*I use internet instead of telephone because it is cheaper. ...*

Other one emphasized the internationality of internet so it allows communicating with others from abroad. That is, it eliminates barriers and distance among people. Thus, it facilitates different forms of communication.

Internet affects their daily life because it provides “ease of access to personal aims”. 5 participants reported that since they can access to everything they wish it affects their life positively. They can prepare homework easily and they can shop and check their accounts by internet. In addition, one respondent stated positive effects by focusing on the “controllability of communication” on internet.

...*I feel comfortable when I communicate with people through internet. ...Besides, I can control what I said when I chat.....*

Although there are reported positive effects, it may affect some individuals negatively. Most stated reason of negative effects is the “limitation of social relationship”. Interviewees' statements indicated that internet restricts face to face social relationships.

...*Internet makes me spend less time with my family....*

Another negative effect of internet was stated as “interference with daily concerns”. Since it was evaluated as time consuming, it interferes with daily concerns of participants. They stated that they can't manage their time.

.....*It causes to neglect my assignments and postpone other activities...*

Moreover, internet leads to difficulty in “adaptation to real life” depending on the time spent. Participants stated that they experience difficulty in adapting to real life if they stay connected to internet for long time. They stated that they feel themselves weird if they're online for hours. Adaptation to real life requires effluxion of time. In addition, internet leads to “passivity or inactivity” on users. Participants stated that internet makes them indolent, lazy, and passive. Besides, one of the participants indicated that staying online for hours causes “physical illnesses” such as hemorrhoid, ocular diseases and putting on weight. Because of negative effects, some participants stated that they try to control their internet usage for not allowing internet to affect their lives.

## 4 Conclusion

In this study it was intended to investigate the phenomenological description of internet by Turkish university students, their usage purposes and effects of internet on their daily/social life. It was seen that most of the participants' descriptions are positive. And their descriptions of internet include more than one dimension. They perceived internet as a tool more than one thing. That is, they used easy access to information, communication, globalization, recreation, coping with problems/loneliness, search engines, advertisement and necessity statements in their descriptions.

In general, most of interviewees perceived internet as a source of information and communication. Since the participants of the study are still students, they might see it predominantly as a source of information. Moreover, accessibility is thought to be important for them because they are young and may want to learn new things, meet with new and various individuals. Considering that establishing intimate relationship is also a developmental task of university students [10], significance of communication in this period may explain the inclusion of communication in their description of internet. Subthemes under positive headings are consistent with other studies' findings about nature and social uses of internet [2].

Participants use internet for accessing information, communication, recreation and shopping in general. Most frequent usage of internet for accessing information can be explained by being in an information age. Moreover, characteristics of participants may lead

to the usage of internet for accessing information, because university students need various information for various purposes. They try to develop themselves both professionally and personally because of their academic lives, developmental periods. And at the same time, they need to have a sense of belonging [13]. Internet can provide rich opportunities for the satisfaction of these needs so they might use it for accessing information and communication frequently. These findings are consistent with some researches' findings [2, 10].

Internet facilitates life by ease of communication, ease of access to personal aims and controllability of communication. This is supported by some researches. [14]. On the other hand, its effects were evaluated negatively because it leads to limitation of social relationships, interference with daily concerns, passivity/inactivity, difficulty in adaptation to real life, physical illnesses. These findings are congruent with the findings of other researches [15, 16].

This study has some limitations. Firstly, it was carried out at one university's educational faculty. And small number of participants was interviewed. Since it is a qualitative study, all themes were based on the participants' own representations. However, convergence of respondents' answers on same themes parallel with the literature is thought to be an indication of the quality of the study. But more extensive researches can be carried out.

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