How Turkish Young People Utilize Internet Cafes:
The Results Of Ethnographic Research In Ankara[1]

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Abstract

We think that the Internet cafés in Turkey are the most cheapest places where the young people meet each other and socialize both in offline and online. Young people develop a tendency to utilize the same Internet café, and thus this using practice empowers already existed social networks among the young people. The Internet cafés are the places where game culture is promoted among the young people as well. This game culture contains two dimensional game related economy; firstly, the player has to pay per hour usage fee for the equipment (pc, microphone etc.), secondly, although the most popular games played at the Internet cafés are free to play, in order to survive within the game world the player has to invest in online economy by spending his/her real money. In this context, in the first part of the paper, a brief history of the widespread of the Internet cafés in Turkey will be summarized, and then, the findings of the ethnographic field study, conducted in Ankara at micro scale will be discussed. At the end of the paper, the development of new media literacy approach stemming from both critical pedagogy and critical media literacy theory, which gives responsibility to the user and the education process itself, will be suggested against the conservative technopolitics that recently aims to protect children and young people through controlling the content of the Internet and Internet cafés in Turkey.

Introduction

In Turkey digital game culture has been introduced through both game arcades, called as "Atari salons" and Commodore 64, used in households in 1980s (Binark, 2007). Following the military coup in 1980 in Turkey, the introduction of digital game culture through these entertainment media was also very meaningful. While the Turkish young people had been depoliticized at the public sphere, the reliable leisure time activities for them were also determined by the dominant ideology. Since then, digital games and gameplay became inseparable part of Turkish young people's everyday life routines. In the mid of 1990s, the Internet cafés have been entered the public life following the introduction of Internet connection. Apart from the facilities provided from the universities and the work places, the Internet cafés are the only public places where the ordinary people could connect the network by paying small amount of user-fee (Yıldız, 2002). So, the Internet cafés could be referred as public tools to solve the problem of digital divide, occurring because of the differences in geographical location, income, education, ethnicity, gender within Turkey (Yıldız, Kaya-Bensghir and Çankaya, 2003; Gören 2003; Kaya-Bensghir and Yıldız, 2005).

Based on the interview, carried with Yusuf Andiç, the Director of Association of the All Internet Houses in Turkey, (Tüm Türkiye Internet Evleri Derneği, abbreviated in Turkish as *TİEV*) in July, 17th 2007, in Turkey there are 18,000 Internet cafés which have the registration to the local municipalities. He underlines that the charge of hourly usage in Turkey is less than other European countries, which is generally 1, 5 New Turkish Lira in a standard Internet café which is equivalent to 3 Euro. However the accessories, the comfort and the atmosphere of the Internet café also affect the price. Önder Kaplan, the Director of Internet Access Providers Association in Ankara, says that there are 23,000 Internet cafés in Turkey, and 2300 of them are in Ankara, 7600 of them are in İstanbul, 1400 of them are in Bursa.[2] Kaplan explain that the most expensive usage charge is 2 New Turkish Lira per hour, however in the case of Play station cafés the usage charge for PS3 will be 5 New Turkish Lira.

In Turkey, the coffee houses are traditional gathering places of men where people play some card games and drink non-alcoholic beverages (Çağlayan, 2001). Before the military coup in 1980, these public places were highly politicized and even divided in regard to the ideological beliefs and political identities. However, the Internet cafés have never turned such a kind of public places, but they have

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[2]   The interview carried with Önder Kaplan, is on July 30rd, 2008.

been always under control of the police forces and the mainstream media. Especially, the mainstream media cover the Internet cafés with their harmful effects to the children and the young people, and the governmental authorities generally penalize the cafés because of providing the access to anti-Turkish sentiments, separatist and terrorist propaganda, indecent, gambling sites, letting underage users in, and violating copyright laws (Yıldız, Kaya-Bensghir and Çankaya, 2003; Yeşil, 2003). One of the Internet café managers, whom we interviewed, says that:

> "Since two years, I have been in this business. Last year I was happier, but in this year not so much because of the accusation of Internet cafés…There are a lot of problems to talk. But, the media cover the Internet cafés and stigmatize the places. The journalists don't come and see the place by their own eyes. For example, some customers criticized me by saying 'how dare you are allowing the under aged children to enter in such a place'. I talked with them, and said that some families brought their children by themselves because they trust me. This place does not service any alcoholic beverages. The children do play games, do home works. These are not bad things. I think, the Internet cafés are useful for the public needs." (M, 23, high school graduate, manager of the Internet café)

Another manager also explains how the mainstream media stigmatize the Internet cafés in detail as following:

> "At television news, they say very bad things about us. From these places we have to earn our lives. I feel sorry when I see these kind of negative news, such as claiming that the Internet cafés are supporting violence, at these places people are selling drugs, etc. (M, 38, high school graduate, manager of the Internet café)

A 53 years old, male Internet Café manager who holds a PhD. degree explains the strategy he developed for this stigmatization as such:

> "Internet Cafés are recognized by the society as the places of crime. In magazines, TVs and newspapers Internet Cafés are covered as places where drugs are used, there is heavy smoke and children are reinforced to summit crime. I have some observations because I have been here since 3 years. I am the supervisor of here and my customers. I never allow any negative instances. (He shows the warning that he posted on the wall). Look what I wrote here: smoking, swearing, making noise and visiting the illegal web sites are forbidden."

When the Internet cafés have been introduced, they were located at the central areas of the metropolitan cities. At first, the users experienced to connect to the Internet through these places. Then the spread of the Internet cafés, these public places were more diversified based on their users' social, cultural and economical backgrounds. Then hardware, software, prices per hour and other related facilities were differentiated. Some Internet cafés were became popular places among the young people because of their facilities, such as providing high speed connection, new desktops computers, high quality graphic cards, and giving service of photocopying, fax, typing, as well as servicing non-alcoholic beverages and fast-food or snacks. By gradually at the peripheries of the metropolitan cities the Internet cafés were also opened. But these places had old and low speed desktop computers; and therefore, the using price per hour was low, and the features of the users were also different (Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2008a). By 2000s the Internet cafés are servicing different users, and having different symbolic implications for them. But, a standard Internet café includes the following components for the users: a desktop computer both with local area network and global network connection; sub-apparatus such as cameras, microphones, headphones; staff with embodied knowledge; some basic food and drink; the basic elements of café atmosphere (Wakeford, 2003:381-382). This atmosphere is also influential in people's attitudes towards the place. For example, in some Internet cafés, where this research has been conducted, there is home-like furniture on which people sit and chat (See Photograph 1)

Photograph 1. A Homelike Internet Café Environment

Since 2000s, the Internet cafés have also turned to be digital game centers in Turkey, and the security controls of the police forces have been gradually increased. These places became to be seen as the places where the pornographic materials are easily distributed, the illegal software is used, and the content provided to the user is considered as mentally unhealthy. Moreover, after the assassination of the chief editor of Agos, Hrant Dink, an Armenian-Turkish journalist in January 19th 2007, the Turkish government overtook the mission to regulate and to clean up these places from the circulation of the unhealthy and the dangerous content[3] (Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2008a).

Under the Ministry of Transportation, the Telecommunications Communication Presidency was established within the Telecommunications Authority in August 2005, and became functional in July in

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[3]   The assassination was organized in using Internet via the Internet café in a local town of Trabzon. Because of this reason, the governmental authorities declared that there was a necessity to regulate both Internet ant Internet cafes. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan even declared that "The Internet café managers should do the right things, if not we will do whatever it is necessary. We don't sacrifice our young people for the sake of some ones own interest" (Milliyet, January 22nd 2007).

2006, which is responsible from practicing the national filtering system and forbidding accessing some web sites, due to their harmful content (Akdeniz and Altıparmak, 2008). The Telecommunications Communication Presidency has also become the actor that lists the harmful online games, played through especially at the Internet cafés. To list the harmful online games, the information is taken by the Presidency's Hotline. For example, a letter, written by a mother on the harmful affects of gameplay addiction of Knight Online on her teenager sons, was used by the Presidency to forbid this MMORPG's gameplay at the Internet cafés all around Turkey. The Ministry of Internal Affairs declared and disseminated the arbitrage to the local police authorities.[4] The Internet cafés are regulated as a content provider by the Law No. 5651 entitled Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publications, enacted by the Turkish government on May 4th 2007 and publicized on May 23rd 2007 on the Turkish Official Gazette. Based on the articles of the Law No. 5651, The Internet cafés responsible from all the activities that violate this law. and accessing pornography and some forbidden sites that considered as menace to the unity of the nation-state, become illegal by these places[5]. Therefore, the Internet cafés are obligated to install filtering programs as well as 24 hours camera recordings at the place.

The mainstream media represent the Internet cafés in this context and label the players of digital gamers as people with some social and psychological problems. Regarding the issue a 27 years old male Internet café manager argues like that:

> "As you know, even PM has involved in this issue. There a lot of problems had not yet solved about the Internet cafés. However, instead of finding solutions to these problems, the state acts hostile to the Internet cafés. So do the people. Families think that the Internet cafés are not suitable places for their children as a result. Recently, a mother came and claimed that her

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[4] Now, the players who are at least 18 years old in the Internet cafés could play Knight Online.

[5] "Individuals are not just users of communication systems; they are also participants in political communities in which the competent formation of opinion and the making of decisions depend on the availability of information and the monitoring of the differing ideas of others." (Slevin, 2001: 214). Before regulating Internet, following the argument above, James Slevin says that nation states-governments should decide about the goals to achieve while using Internet (215). Turkish government(s) has also decided to the possible achievements via Internet usage. These goals may include "representing diverse interests, establishing a forum for the reconciliation of competing claims of these interests, creating an open public sphere, in which unconstrained debate can be carried on about policy issues, providing a diversity of public goods, fostering market competition, promoting social peace, actively developing human capital, sustaining the law, providing economic infrastructure, reflecting and shaping widely held norms and values, fostering local, regional and transnational alliances and pursuing global goals" (Slevin, 215-16). Principle of regulated pluralism is one major solution to the problem of Internet regulations. According to Slevin, for this principle governments should secure conditions that involve the deconcentration of resources and separation of media institutions from the exercise of media power (217). Other solutions like self regulations or rating and filtering systems also have certain disadvantages. The founder and director of TİEV, Yusuf Andiç prepared a rating system about digital games for the play in Internet caf**é**s. He also cooperates with some other public and commercial institutions. Slevin argues that regulated pluralism can only be pursued "if we have a more sophisticated way of recognizing legitimate moral positions" (219). This moral position on the individual level brings the ethical questions to the agenda and can be obtained and supported by new media literacy. According to Slevin, governments should take more active role in educating individuals and organizations about their rights and responsibilities with respect to Internet use (231).

children could enter bad sites from here…" (M, 27, high school graduate, manager of the Internet café)

Regarding this issue a 28 years old male Internet café manager argues like that;

"…One day an official document comes from the authorities banning some games. Another day, another document comes banning other games. One day a woman comes here to look for his son who is missing for a while. The majority of the society thinks that if a child is not studying, does not going school regularly, has problems in social relations then he is most probably in the Internet café….Also, the attitude of the government is not right, they have no branch dealing with Internet cafés. I do not know on which basis they are controlling or inspecting us."

In this paper, we assume that these places are socializing/social places where the young people could socialize both online and offline. Nina Wakeford also finds that the Internet cafés in London are places of sociality (2003:382). Wakeford observes that both of interpersonal communication and computer mediated communication at these places (388), and classifies these forms of interactions, based on which online sites are visited, which other activities are undertaken, and which are abandoned, as following: "… interactions with the computer (touching and speaking to the machine); via the computer (email, chat, web browsing); with other customers; with staff at the café; and on a mobile phone" (389). Anne Sofie Lægran and James Stewart also claim that the Internet cafés are *techno-social spaces* where the technology and human actors interact through the using practices of this particular place (2003:359). Especially, the playing multiplayer online games provide young people to *immobile socialization*[6] (Bakardjieva, 2003) in these places. The young people play digital games with their friends; become members of virtual communities, such as virtual tribes that are established in massively multiplayer online role playing games[7]. They invest in online games' economy such as buying premium cards and do some trading such as avatars, items etc.[8] The young people organize LAN parties in the Internet cafés, and watch these competitions in a similar manner of the interpretative communities. As well as these social activities, the Internet cafés have the role of serving

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[6]   The term explains that how young people locate their real life through social networking and invest in building new social capital within cyberspace.
[7]   These virtual communities do share some characteristics of neo-tribalism. Players do carry their offline habitus to online world and their virtual identities do form the virtual communities. For detailed analysis see; Bayraktutan Sütcü, Günseli (2007) "Devasa Online Oyunlarda Klan Kültürü ve Liderlik Olgusu". <u>Folklor ve Edebiyat</u>. 50: 41-56; Yıldız, Harun (2007) "Homo Sapiens'in Boş Zamanı-Homo-Ludens'in Sanal Kariyeri". <u>Folklor ve Edebiyat</u>. 50: 57-70; and Binark, Mutlu and Bayraktutan Sütcü, Günseli (2007) "The Internship for the Real Life in Silkroad Online: The Experience of Turkish Tribes" presented in <u>8th Association of Internet Researchers Conference,</u> 17-20 October 2007, Vancouver, Canada.
[8]   We claim that this virtual economy indeed develops a game-related offline economy, and players have to invest in their game-related budget (Castronova, 2005: 170-204).

some information about some other real life social activities; will be take place at the neighborhoods. The atmosphere, the sociality and the types of the service given, are the key factors, on which the person decides to use a specific Internet café.

> "At the good Internet café, the manager knows his customer, so does the customer. Everybody could come and have a seat in peacefully. For this purpose, I am working hard. For the neighborhood the atmosphere of the Internet café should suit" (M, 42, high school graduate, manager of the Internet café).

A 24 years old, male university graduate, participant of the focus group interviews summarizes this discussion like below:

> "Up to me Internet Cafés have to be divided into two. One is within the neighborhood and the other is outside the neighborhood. Who ever you ask here, whether they go to the Internet Cafés outside the neighborhood, almost everyone will say 'No'.…We do not always come here for gaming, we come together here with friends to chat, and here is our collective place."

Though, recently the young people have computers and Internet connection either at home, school or work, but they still prefer to come and use Internet cafés in Turkey. According to the data of the Turkish Statistical Organization (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu) in 2007, 18.94 percent of households in Turkey have an access to Internet, and between April-June in 2007 45.96 percent of the users connect the net from their households, 37.52 percent of the users connect the net from the work, 31.21 percent of the users connect the net from Internet cafés. The most of the users of the net are between 16 to 24 years old, the second frequent users are between 25 and 34 years old (www.tuik.gov.tr , November 20th,2007).**[9]**

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9   From the perspective of access, only 5.9% of households have computers (PC) connected to the Internet in Turkey. Internet cafes and workplaces are the most prevalent venues of access, with rates of 41.2% and 41.1% respectively. (SPO, 2006:7). In addition to low usage rates in the society and the differences observed in different groups, another problem we face is the fact that the Internet is not used very effectively. According to the results of the 2004 ICT usage survey on households and individuals, Internet is used for obtaining information and playing games (93.2%) or for communication (76.21%). Only 8.2% of the Internet users access the Internet specifically for training related to employment and the proportion of those who use the Internet to order or sell goods and services is only 3.5% (SPO, 2006: 7).

Methodology

The research universe of this paper is based on the Internet café users because of two reasons: first of all in Internet cafés we will find numerous players and secondly these places give us the opportunity to observe both online and offline relations among these players. This study is a qualitative one, so techniques like observation, in-depth interview and focus group interview are used. Focus group is one of the most favored techniques used in social sciences in general and in media studies particular. So, the focus group technique is the corpus of our study. The reason of conducting focus groups is to achieve the most possible number of the players at the very short time and to get some clues and findings which we will not be calculated beforehand, but will appear just in discussion as a result of the interaction among the participants. In order to ensure to reach the young people from different social and economical backgrounds, 58 Internet café's from different neighborhoods (Keçiören, Yenimahalle, Kızılay, Etlik, Mamak, Etimesgut, Sincan, Esat, Dikmen, Koru Sitesi, Bahçelievler, Beşevler, Ümitköy, Cebeci, Kurtuluş, Abidinpaşa, Çankaya, Demetevler, Batıkent.) in Ankara are included to this research. These neighborhoods are different form each other in terms of social and economical status of their residents. A group of 18 trained researchers did conducted focus group research in the field. The time period of the study was from September 2007 to January 2008. In the first phase, focus group technique is used among Internet café users. A semi-structured list of questions is used while conducting these focus groups. Participants of the focus group interviews are aged between 12-50 and 278 are male and 22 are female. This numbers once more support the fact that Internet cafés in Turkey are male dominated places (See Photograph 2).

Photograph 2. A typical user environment of the Internet cafés

Here, we should mention about the digital gap between genders in Turkey and its appearance in Internet cafés. Historically traditional coffee houses in Turkey are male dominated places. Women are not used to sit and chat while drinking a coffee or tea in a coffee house. Today, also these coffee houses belongs to men although other places like patisseries, cafés, restaurants are for both sexes. Again, Internet cafés are places where male population is dominant. These cafés are also transformed into game rooms, in which again female population is rare. Another factor, which results in the uneven proportion of the sexes regarding the Internet café, is the misrepresentation of these places in mainstream media, as we discussed above in brief. So, not only women but also children are not allowed to utilize these places. Two Internet café managers evaluate the low profile of female usage as such;

"The female users see this places same as traditional coffee houses" (M, 27, high school graduate, manager of the Internet café)

"There are not so much girls around here. Generally they come around afternoons. Sometimes they come with their brothers. They don't come alone." (M, 21, university student, manager of the Internet café)

This gendered use of the place also affects our research. While conducting our focus groups we encountered female users rarely. These female users do not feel comfortable and participate in full sense while the focus group interview is carried. In order to achieve more detailed analysis of the gendered use we should better make in-depth interviews with the female Internet café users. We did not include this factor into analysis, because we did not foresee any discussion regarding the gender differences. Nurcan Törenli, in his article analyses the gendered digital divide in Turkey and argues that; "The breadth of the 'gender digital divide' in Turkey is vast, which regard to both computer and Internet use. Of the total female population, 64 percent are housewives and of these, the percentage using the computer and Internet is very low. There is a gradual decrease in the use of ICT's by women as they get older and distance themselves further from school and work." (2006: 441). Mutlu Binark, also focusing on digital gap between genders in Turkey, proposes three basic elements to increase the consumption of new information technologies among women: "the e-inclusion policy of information society, the solution to the problems of infrastructure and access and the simultaneous practice of general and special education projects." (2005: 205). For Binark's proposals, Internet cafés became important as social places of access to Internet for female population in Turkey.

In focus group discussions, the participants were asked why they use a particular Internet café, what are their favorite games and reasons of their playing these games, the amount of time and money they spent for gameplay. The findings of the focus group are summarized in the next section of the paper with brief discussions. So, major categories appear again as the way and kind of their socialization, the preferred game genres and the game economy.

Findings

As we mentioned above we basically focus on three categories; the way of their (young people) socialization in Internet cafés, the preferred game genre and game economy for the purpose of this paper. Focus group discussions give us the chance to gather much more detailed and personalized data. The participants talked about many specific points, regarding the Internet café usage and gaming activities during the focus group interviews. Below are the detailed discussions of the findings derived from focus group interviews. Table 1. summarizes the demographic findings of the focus group interviews**.** To sum up, we can say that most of the Internet café users are aged between 12-25, male, single, high school and university student, have computer and Internet access at home.

Table 1. Demographic findings of the focus group interviews

Age	12-18	19-25	26-32	33-39	40 +	
	163	121	10	5	1	
Sex	Female	Male	Unknown			
	22	278	-			
Marital Status	Married	Single	Widowed/ /Divorced	Unknown		
	8	282	-	-		
Education	Uncompleted Prim.Ed.	Primary Education	High school	University (Undergrad.)	Graduate	Unknown
	1	28	163	104	-	4
Computer ownership at home	Yes	No				
	234	49				
Internet access at home	Yes	No				
	191	43				
Hours Spend in Internet	0–2	2–4	4–6	6–8	8–10	10 +
	64	71	66	27	18	49

Socialization at the Internet cafés

Lægran and Stewart explains that there are two type of Internet café users: the one is *extender*, who comes to Internet cafés to play digital games; the one is *socializer*, who come to hang out at the Internet café to kill, or fill, leisure time (2003:373).

> "I come here everyday to spend 2 or 3 hours, but not for gameplay. I come for my friends. They are here, so am I. I don't use any computers, I don't play. But, I sit and chat with them." (M, 20, university student).

We claim that in Turkey, the young people prefer to drop by in these places because of its sociality, and they participate in the Internet café's community, which exists both in online and offline. According to Lægran and Stewart, "While communicating online, users are engaging at the same time in conversations in the room; conversations that involve a considerable amount of knowledge, sharing and learning about how to improve one's games performance or find interesting sites on the web. The atmosphere of the café and the individual use of internet access also provide a space anonymity, but still within a social context" (2003: 373). Then, Lægran and Stewart, based on their field research, say that "…rather than just providing a place with access, internet cafes are social spaces where computers are used as toys as well as tools in various ways. The boundary of the café is blurred, as the Internet may expand the local space, as well as extend the space into places further way. Finally, the Internet cafés provide community building as well as anonymity within the sociality online as well as offline" (374). Some focus group participants explain the uses of Internet cafés as social places like this;

> "Yeah, the Internet cafes are places where the social activities are providing for the young people. I mean, instead of sitting at home and doing alone something, the youngster could enjoy their time at the Internet cafes" (M, 19, high school graduate).

> "We have a friend circle here, I mean a brotherhood. Some guys are social and go some places, travel a lot. But we come here, and have a seat and talk. Here, we try to act together such as acting together within the game. So we are not seemed social at the first appearance, but in fact, we are social in offline." (M, 22, university student).

When we look at our data gathered from the focus group interviews we can state that most of the Internet café users utilize the same Internet café and they mention some reasons about their

preferences which support our argument of Internet cafés are places of socialization: they visit the same Internet café because their friends are there, because they like the positive attitude of the manager and prefer the hygienic conditions and high quality of the hardware in Internet cafés. The physical distance of the Internet café to their houses, the variety of the games found in the desktops and the opportunity of playing/using on credit are again mentioned by the participants. For example;

> "The Internet café, I go, is close to my house. I accustom to this place, and moreover my friends come here. We do gameplay together. The Internet café is our meeting point" (M, 23, university student).

> "Since year, I am at this place. I prefer to come here is the friendship environment at the first hand. Secondly, the workers at here. Their attitude and manner for the customer are so good" (M, 23, high school graduate).

The statement of a 17 year old, male high school student participated in one of the focus group discussions clearly explains the economical reasons and dynamics behind his Internet café usage as a techno-social space in Turkey.

> "We also want to be hung on Starbuck's, but it is very expensive." [10]

So, it is obvious that the Internet cafés are socializing places for the young people from these reasons. In that manner Internet cafés are not different from the other public places the young people utilize in Turkey.

The preferred game genre by the Internet café users

Almost all of the focus group participants prefer team games instead of solo games. One of the participants of the focus group interviews explains the reason of preferring team game as such:

> "A team game is better because we chat in. If you play solo game, you'll get bored. It will last few hours. On the other hand, a team game requires more time, dedication. While playing a team game, you'll have some responsibilities, you have to do. You'll talk in global and the team members as well." (M, 22, university student).

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[10] Dal Yong Jin and Florence Chee also mentions the same issue as following: that "…because of the cost-effectiveness of socializing at these venues as opposed to other more costly places" (2008: 51).

This finding once more draws attention to the fact that Internet by itself and digital games don't transform people into asocial individuals. This effect of digital games can be considered as a myth which is produced by the mainstream media. As to Aphra Kerr, "Game playing in Internet cafés and LAN parties is seen by game players as a way to socialize and to play co-operative games." (2006:126). Some participants of the focus group interviews explain their genre preference in regard with the socialization within the game and the offline environment (See Table 2 and See Photograph 3):

"...they see the digital game players such as RPG, WOW, Knight Online as antisocial people; on the contrary you'll make friends in these games. We are indeed social." (M, 24, university student).

"I prefer to play Knight Online. I spend some time, I have fun. Besides, I sell the char; I could earn some money-pocket money" (M, 16, high school student).

"I prefer shooting games. I play usually Counter-Strike. I like guns. Even I like to see some blood, that's why I prefer Counter. It narrates the reality to me. I suggest everyone to play" (M, 19, high school graduate).

"I play Knight Online. Because it is free. There are some other games, which have good graphics, but to play them I need to pay a subscription fee. So I can't ply them. I am a student, what else I do?" (M, 18, high school student).

"I play sporting games. Because I want to be football player" (M, 14, primary school student).

"I am interested in cars. So, I play racing games" (M, 20, high school graduate).

"I play strategy games. Why? Because they are related with using your brain and intelligence" (M, 35, high school graduate)

"I play Counter-Strike. Because it is a team game. Besides, it is a strategy" (M, 24, university student).

Photograph 3. The game players at the Internet café

MMORPG's are one of the most popular genres of digital games, played in the Internet cafés in Turkey. As they are free to play at the first instance, games like Knight Online and Silkroad Online easily become well known phenomenon among Turkish players. Especially the level up system forces players to play the game for long hours and the communication within the game bounds up the players to the game more than any other genre. Because of the long hours spent in front of the PCs, MMORPG's are very much covered in mainstream media. As expected, the discourse of media coverage in regard with online games is negative. That's why the participants of the focus groups interviews are asked about MMORPG's positive and negative sides. Meeting with new people from different cultures, enhancing the language skills, learning about commerce and interpersonal relations via the game are positive sides mentioned by the focus group participants. Edward Castronova also emphasizes the necessity of establishing online communities by defining them as "forced cooperation" (2005: 115), stemming from

the scarcity of the game resources (i.e. items, game money), so, a solo player has either to cooperate or come into conflict with the other players.

> "While playing MMORPGs, you are making a social network. I have friends from Antalya, Ankara, İzmir. I can even visit some of them. This is the difference among the normal digital games and the MMORPGs" (M, 21, university student).

> "I like the MMORPGs because you could interact with people from different cultures. I like intercultural communication" (M, 20, high school graduate).

Table 2. The preferred digital genres at the Internet cafés

Name of the game	Genre	Number of people playing this game (Some participants mentioned more than one game)
Counter-Strike	Strategy	204
FİFA	Sport	103
Knight Online	MMORPG	105
WOW-Burning Crusade	MMORPG	63
Need for Speed	Racing	62
Call of Duty 4	Strategy	41
PES	Sport	34
Warcraft-Dota	Strategy	30
Warcraft III	Strategy	30
GTA	Action	25
Age of Empires	Strategy	22
Half - Life	Strategy	18
Football Managers	Sport	17

Like Internet itself, the dominant language of the digital games is English. So, an ordinary player should at least know the basic level of English in order to follow the directives within the game. Especially in online games, while facing with gamers from different cultures languages other than English are also used. To exemplify this;

> "For example there is a Spanish player who rejects to communicate in English, so you have to understand what he says. In most cases, I use dictionary to look at a word." (M, 24, university graduate)

Long playing hours affecting the daily routine, the increasing amount of money spent for in-game events and the usage of swearwords are the negative sides of the MMORPG's mentioned by the focus group participants.   For example:

> "There are some negative aspects of playing MMORPGs. They cause an addiction, and consume your time. Sometimes, they disturb your relations with your friends. Some of them never understand why you are on from 8 pm to till 11 pm. Especially female friends never understand" (M, 19, university student).

> "You'll be addicted. You want to play continuously. Some players crossing the borders, and mix the real and the virtual. For me, I had to repeat the class. I had some problems with my family." (M, 18, high school graduate).

> "I don't have specifically negative points about the MMORPGs. If you limit your gameplay there will be no problem. There are 2,900,000 gamers from Turkey at the game. So you'll prove yourself…The only negative thing, is to pay money" (M, 24, university student).

Some of the focus group participants have a kind of awareness and make a self criticism about their gaming practice as such:

> "Once I was negatively affected by online games. Once my char was dead, I knocked my head to the chair….Now, I am ok." (M, 17, high school graduate).

The participants are also asked about the representation of digital games in mainstream media. They mostly mention that they have no idea about the representation of the digital games in mass media as follows:

> "I don't see any news about the coverage of digital games. Indeed, I don't watch TV. News" (M, 23, university student).

"Last year in December, the WOW's last version is sold through D&R bookstores, the newspaper covered the issue like that 'the gamers are on line to buy'. Even I encountered with an interview in front of D&R. The journalist said that you'd better do something else instead of buying a game" (M, 24, university student)

"Some of the things media say are true. But they exaggerate. The media say that online game make an addiction. It is true. But, after the next step of WoW, we're going to be drug addicts. This is an exaggeration" (M, 19, high school graduate).

"…two days ago I think, I saw in news in TV. There is news about WOW. Even the facial expressions of the interviewer about the topic are insulting. He/she looks to WOW most probably like that: 8 million people are visiting this game/system. How could it be?" (M, 20, university student).

Game economy

Most of the focus group participants spent money for the gameplay. When they are asked about the proportion of their payment they mention that most of the money they spent is on hourly usage fee of Internet café, then monthly subscription payment, premium[11] and for in game commerce. For example:

"The game I play only requires monthly subscription fee, which is 20 New Turkish Lira. I pay this fee, and then I don't spend anymore" (M, 19, high school student).

"I don't spend money in games. I only pay the using fee for the Internet cafés." (M, 17, high school graduate).

Moreover, there is a need to underline that some online games are free to play, at the upper levels a player cannot survive without buying "premium" cards. Besides, the player needs to buy some virtual items that are charged in real life. These kinds of exchanges develop a game-related offline economy,

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[11] In Turkey, a player who wants to buy a premium, that is a special pin code that enables a player to connect the MMORPG's quickly and gives some privileges, has to pay at least 15 New Turkish Lira for thirty days. In order to manage this system, a Korean Game Company, Joymax has three marketing strategies: firstly, using pay-pal system; secondly, using local firms such as Game Sultan, GameTurk, Üyelik-al and Game Master; thirdly using Internet café managers. To see detiailed localization strategy of foreign game companies in Turkey see: Binark, Mutlu and Bayraktutan-Sütcü, Günseli (2008b) Kültür Endüstrisi Olarak Dijital Oyun. İstanbul: Kalkedon Yayınları.

and players have to invest in their game-related budget (Castronova, 2005: 170-204, Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2008b). In game commerce, players exchange money within the game and buy some items and accessories useful for playing (See Photograph 4)

> "Because of playing Knight Online, I have to buy premium. By premium, I buy the necessary items. For a month I generally spend 300 or 350 New Turkish Lira" (M, 19 years old, university student.

Photograph 4. A price list of GB on the different servers of Knight Online at one of the Internet café

Another interesting finding is that they also earn money from the game. There are many ways of earning money from the game; the most known way of this is selling characters-avatars. Selling other items and exchanging money are also other ways of earning money from the game, for example:

> "I invested in my char, and introduced my char in game related forums. I publicized my char at MSN. Than I found a mediator to sell it. At the end, I sold the char" (m, 18, high school graduate).

> "I am cultivating chars in Knight Online, and after growing them up, I am selling them. I earn good pocket money, approximately 300 New Turkish Lira" (M, 19, university student)

"Now, I am at level 80. My char has an exchange value around 2 milliar New Turkish Lira at the market. But with some items, I am going to sell it for 4 milliar… to create this char I invested a lot, such as premium, ticket, I bought…" (M, 21, university student).

 "We have sold a character to 7500 New Turkish Lira with full accessories; I mean items, to an Israeli." (M, 24, university graduate).

"Even some people offer their cars in order to buy the character in the game." (M, 16, high school student).

As it is seen, game-related economy has transformed into sizeable and complex online economies that go far beyond both the traditional and the national/local borders of digital games (Castronova, 2005). Moreover, some of the focus group participants mention that they earn material gains from their friends by playing for money or food. For example, the looser of the game have to pay the hourly usage fee of Internet café for the whole group or team participated within the game.

Conclusion

In this paper we suggest that instead of regulating and censoring the content, forbidding accessing some web sites through Internet at the Internet cafés in Turkey, critical new media literacy should be developed as a part of civic education and critical pedagogy as well. Critical pedagogy has been rooted in interdisciplinary contributions from education, cultural studies, feminism, post-structuralism and post-modernism, to which Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Michael W. Apple, Maxine Grene, Peter Mc Laren, bell hooks, Donaldo Macedo are contemporary contributors to its development (Binark and Gencel-Bek 2007). In Peter Mc Laren's words, critical pedagogy will contribute in to establish the democratic public sphere and to cultivate a politicized citizenry, who has an interest in equality and social justice and is a capable of fighting for the development of civic culture (cited in Sholle, 1994:13). Henry A. Giroux also underlines the importance and the necessity of critical pedagogy and suggests that "Students need to learn how to read these new cultural texts critically, but they should also learn how to create their own cultural texts by mastering the technical skills needed to compose television scripts, use video cameras, write programs for computers, and produce and direct documentaries." (2000:33).

For Douglas Kellner, literacy means "gaining competencies in effectively using socially constructed forms of communication and representation and involves 'gaining the skills and knowledge to read and interpret the text of the world" (2002:91). Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share connects critical pedagogy and critical media literacy as such: "The influential role that broadcasting and emergent information and computer media play in organizing, shaping, and disseminating information, ideas, and values is creating a powerful public pedagogy (Giroux, 1999; Luke, 1997). These changes in technology, media, and society require the development of critical media literacy to empower students and citizens to adequately read media messages and produce media themselves in order to be active participants in a democratic society" (Kellner and Share, 2005, 2007: 3). Instead of protectionist approach, the several applications of censoring to the use of media and undemocratic pedagogy, critical media literacy expands the conceptualization of literacy, and relates the text, the reading act and the production process within the classroom environment. Critical media literacy is, therefore, closely related to the development of the consciousness of citizens who can read media texts critically and intervene in the production process. Douglas Kellner compares the protectionist approach and critical media literacy as follows: "A traditional 'protectionist' approach would attempt to 'inoculate' young people against the effects of media addiction and manipulation by cultivating a taste for book literacy, high culture and the values of truth, beauty and justice, and by denigrating all forms of media and computer culture….Critical media literacy not only teaches students to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways, but is also concerned with developing skills that will help create good citizens and that will make them more motivated and competent participants in social life" (2002:93).

We define *new media literacy* within the same context. Thus, new media environments, Internet, Internet cafés and digital games as techno-social spaces, could be used as instruments of social communication and democratic alteration. We should develop public pedagogy (Giroux 2007, 2008), and new media literacy should connect the real life determinations with the cyberspace; and should provide insights about the social, political, cultural, economical and historical contexts about real life and cyberspace. We claim that the recent regulative technopolitics of the governmental authorities towards the Internet cafés and Internet-here we mean cyberspace- are derived from the new right politics and neo-conservative ideology in Turkey (Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2008a). Henry A.

Giroux says that the media texts re-create already existed cultural topography (2000). Thus, the using practices of the Internet cafés by the young people and the digital game culture of them should not be isolated from the macro politics of everyday life. Therefore, after providing these macro and micro political insights and the ability of critical analysis to the use of cyberspace, the individual could take the responsibility of the things, he/she does in the online world. Besides empowerment of politicized citizen, critical pedagogy and new media literacy do also emphasize the responsibility of other social and political actors like family and public institutions both in the macro political and economical contexts.

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