

Social Communication in Third Places: A Case Study on Cafés in Balıkesir*

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Abstract: Cafés which are one of the places of entertainment and socialization reflect the change in social relations. Nowadays, along with popularization of the internet, these places have various roles in social communication and gain different meanings. This paper aims to examine cafés in terms of public space and third places in the context of social communication. It shows that as a public space, third places affect social network connection and social communication in cafés and the changes through internet and social media. It is conducted on young people who go to cafés in Altıeylül and Karesi districts of Balıkesir, 40 observations are made at 18 cafés and 40 participants are contacted to participate. The paper aims to compare the two groups (high school and university students) in terms of social communication in cafés. Also, the paper will argue how smartphones and their applications, internet and social media change individual's perceptions, practices and meanings of social communication by being active in everyday life.

Keywords: public space • third places • social communication • cafés • Balıkesir

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The public space is the area outside the house and opens to public use. Public spaces where the patterns of change are exhibited help to understand behaviors and activities in the routine of the society. Third places which are the part of public space and the outside the home and work enable creative interactions. According to Oldenburg there are eight basic features of third places and these are neutral ground, leveler, conversation as its main activity, accessible, regulars, low profile, playful mood and lastly a home away from home. Along with the development of technology, the internet and social media have taken a strong place in everyday life and third places with different qualities which are not mentioned by Oldenburg have emerged. The transfer of third places' activities to these areas has not diminished the importance of traditional third places, but in addition to these places it became possible to be mentioned places with different qualities. Today, one of the important parts of the third places which are actively used by young is cafés.

Cafés which are one of the places of entertainment and socialization reflect the change in social relations. Nowadays, along with popularization of the internet, these places have various roles in social communication and gain different meanings. This paper aims to examine cafés in terms of public space and third places in the context of social communication. It shows that as a public space, third places affect social network connection and social communication in cafés and the changes through the internet and social media. It is conducted on young people who go to cafés in Altıeylül and Karesi districts of Balıkesir, 40 observations are made at 18 cafés and 40 participants are contacted to participate. The paper tries to compare the two groups (high school and university students) in terms of social communication in cafés. Also, the paper will argue how smartphones and their applications, internet and social media change individual's perceptions, practices and meanings of social communication by being active in everyday life.

The research will try to show that the internet service has transformed the café to a hybrid third place; the internet and social media have a strong place in everyday life, the café has an important place as a reflection of social identity; the location applications have changed the way of communication in the café; there are differences between the high school and university students in the context of internet usage and communication tools. This research that aimed to examine the social networks of young people in cafés was constructed on the basic of qualitative research and was carried out through an ethnographic, phenomenological approach. In the research, data was collected by using semi-structured observation and interview form and 18 cafés which were mostly used by young people in Altıeylül and Karesi districts of Balıkesir. The universe consists of young people who go to the café. The sample group comprises of young people who spend their time in cafés in the districts of Altıeylül and Karesi and maximum variation sample was used in the research. 40

observations were made at 18 cafés, 12 cafés were selected from observed cafés that were found to be more intensive than the others in terms of student population. Besides, 20 secondary education and 20 higher education students were interviewed in the research. After the research finished, the data were coded into different categories in the Maxqda 12. The encoded data was divided into specific topics. In this way, in-depth analysis of interviews and observations is provided.

As a result of the research, it was observed that cafés, one of the third places, turned into a hybrid third place along with the spread of the technology. The hybrid third places which were not mentioned by Oldenburg were formed by the internet and social media with by virtue of taking a strong place in everyday life. Nowadays, cafés have started to offer internet as a service by giving their customers wi-fi passwords and sometimes it seemed that the using of internet started to become the most important thing in the cafés. In fact, the internet is required for smartphones' applications and young people are trying to overcome the lack of internet packages with the internet service which is provided by cafés. The young people's desire of being lasting 'online' with smartphones' applications causes the internet to be seen as an important need in the cafés. Moreover, 'swarm' application, which young people (especially high school students) use frequently and share their locations with, has an important and different place in everyday life. This application gives tips on why high school students go to the cafés, how they look new acquaintances and close acquaintances with foreign people. The high school students use 'swarm' application firstly to get to meet different people and then (expressed as the main purpose) to be a dear.

Although the café which is considered as the modern status of coffee houses shows a positive aspect in terms of gender diversity, it cannot be said to have the same characteristics in terms of social communication. Strengthening technology, smartphones, social media and the internet reduce the communication even at the same desk. The fact is that the free internet in cafés stimulates the use of the phone. The young people who want to use free internet focus on their phones and they do not communicate with their friends. Thus, they miss flow of life in everyday life. On the other hand, the high school students and the university students have different perception in terms of social communication. For instance, conversation-based communication among the university students is higher than among the high school students. According to the most of the university students, social communication in the café must increase by way of friends' network; because they seem as a risk to communicate and be sincere with strangers in the café. In addition to these, the high school students emphasize the contribution of the café in the social communication. This point of view is a sign that the high school students have different practices in the café. In the context of social communication, whereas they have mostly communicated with strangers, the university students have mostly communicated with their friends or their social networks.

As a consequence, the research tried to show different meanings which do not take part in the current literature with comparing the social communication perceptions between the high school and university students in the café. The investigation of the café culture that has not been researched before in Turkey and the café where it has been used extensively by young people is important to understand and explain social change, because the technological developments give us clues about the change of social structure. It is an important indicator that the café turns into a place where it is used internet intensively while the café was a place where it based on conversation. There was a close and inevitable relationship between the place, the relationship network and the cultural structure in cafés. Because of these changes nowadays it has become a place to host different services, uses and meanings because of the internet and social media and the pattern of behaviors and differences in behavior in this place has also changed the routines of everyday life in the third places. In this context, the café is not the only place to get together with friends but also it is a place where individuals can show themselves in the social media, identify themselves through these places, and is able to meet strangers through the location application. To sum up this research discuss the cafés in Balıkesir, but when the third places are examined in different cities and different social groups, we can see they will give important information on social structure and social change.

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