

Turkish Elementary School Students' Facebook Experiences Reflected in Their Drawings

Ali Ersoy

Anadolu University, Eskisehir, Turkey

Abstract

The aim of this study was to find out the perceptions of 10/11-year-old elementary school students of Facebook by means of their drawings. Among qualitative research approaches, the phenomenology pattern was used in the study. The study enrolled 25 fourth grade students in a public elementary school in the province of Eskisehir in Turkey. The participants had approximately one-year Facebook experience. Research data were collected by means of the students' drawings about Facebook, the interviews with them about their drawings and their opinions written down by them about their Facebook experiences and then data were analyzed descriptively. Two main themes emerged in the study: Children's Perceptions of Facebook and Children's Facebook Experiences. Perception of Facebook included communication and entertainment sub-themes while Facebook Experiences included the students' positive and negative experiences as sub-themes. A further recommendation could be introducing children to other uses of Facebook as well as communication and entertainment and they could be provided with a model about that.

1. Introduction

Online social networks are currently used by highly heterogeneous people with different ages, education levels, gender, social status, language, and culture who participate and incorporate social networks into their daily lives [1]. That is because some online social networks provide services which make it possible to use different cultures and sub-cultures in local languages in addition to English. These services can contain appealing features and add new services each day.

Online social networking has deeply penetrated our social life. Through the continuous innovation of web technologies, people are increasingly influenced by the virtual world [2]. It can be seen that online social networks have changed the ways people communicate, interact, study, collaborate, solve problems and learn-teach, or at least have

brought a new dimension to these ways. In addition, due to the services of online social networks which differ day by day, intended uses vary according to users, the number of users is increasing and the average age of the users of these sites is declining.

It could be suggested that, among online social networks, Facebook attracts people's attention, especially the young's and children's attention most. Social websites like Facebook are very popular among today's children, who are called "digital native" [3]. Websites like Facebook may appeal children for a number of reasons. For example, it is user-friendly and offers a flexible interface and it offers entertainment and fast, easy and cheap communication opportunities that children may find appealing. Another reason is that, by offering services in local languages like Turkish in addition to English, Facebook has spread all over the world and transformed into global cultural products. By 2009, social networks including Facebook had accessed to 70% the world's Internet population [4].

Online social networks provide platforms for individuals to express themselves. More importantly, using social networks individuals can maintain their relationships friends, colleagues and family members as well as with relatives [2].

About ten years ago, Prensky (2001) stated that future generations will consist of "digital natives" that consist of individuals who are born into an environment of present-day technology and grow up with computer, video games, digital music players, camcorders, mobile phones and Internet technologies, and learn technology just like learning their mother tongue [3]. Today, the relationship of 10-year-old children with digital technology is in line with Prensky's anticipation. Digital communication tools are just a part of many of today's children's daily lives. They also use these digital tools to connect to online social networks such as Facebook.

The use of online social networks is rapidly increasing in Turkey, like all over the world. However, little is known about the share of children in this use, how children perceive Facebook and what they do out there. In this

regard, it could be suggested the use of online social networks is common in Turkey but research into users with different characteristics concerning the use of social network is quite new.

The number of Internet and social media users and the rate of home Internet access have rapidly increased in recent years in Turkey. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute [TSI], home Internet access ratios in Turkey gradually increased from 8.6% (2005) to 42.9% (2011) [5]. Additionally, between the years of 2003 and 2008, 94% of the elementary schools in Turkey were equipped with Internet access by the government [6]. Today all elementary school students aged 6-14 are provided with Internet access in school. There are currently about 11 million elementary school students in Turkey.

As of November 2011, there are 800 million Facebook users and 31 millions of them are from Turkey. This high number of users put Turkey in the 4th rank after USA, Indonesia, and United Kingdom [7]. Social networking statistics show that Facebook penetration in Turkey is 39.17% compared to the country's population and 87.07% in relation to the number of Internet users. Out of 31 million Facebook users in Turkey, approximately 19% of 13-64 age group users consists of teenagers aged 13-17 [8]. This number does not include children using Facebook who are 12 years old or younger.

Although it is not clear how many of the total Facebook users in Turkey are children, a recent research study conducted on January 2011 shows that the age of Facebook users dropped down to 9 [9]. That study was conducted in Turkey with children aged 9-16. The findings of that study were published by some newspapers with the headline "Don't look for your children in the garden because they are on Facebook" [10]. In addition, it should also be considered that some children aged 9-12 use Facebook through someone else's Facebook account (parents, friends or brothers and sisters, etc.) even if they don't have one.

All these developments indicate that use and access of the Internet and social media such as Facebook have become widely common. Various strategies and research approaches can be employed in investigating children's perceptions of social networks such as Facebook.

One of the best ways for children to express how they perceive the events, phenomenon, people and objects around them is drawing pictures. Children, with the help of the pictures they draw, organize and interpret their own thoughts; thus, they express the way they perceive the outer world. Today's children live

in an environment surrounded by fast-growing and spreading technology. This creates new life styles for children which are both technologically and culturally dense [11].

How children perceive the Facebook in their daily lives, and how they reflect it in their drawings appear to be an important research topic. Therefore, the Facebook perception in the drawings of children might show us what purpose children have in the use of the Facebook.

The research on the use of Facebook is mostly about college students and adults. There is relatively new and limited research on children's use and perception of Facebook specifically in relation to Turkish culture. The intended uses of Facebook for children may be closely related to their perception of it. Finding out how children perceive Facebook can be useful in many ways. Thus, adults, teachers and parents as well as "Digital Immigrants", who live together with the technology but lead a technology-free life can better understand today's children world. For this purpose, understanding children's world by means of different ways of communication such as pictures through which children can express themselves may be functional.

In the pictures they draw, children reflect the properties of the environment they are in and the meanings they create in this environment [12], [13]. Moreover, drawing pictures is both a leisure activity and a narrative technique [12]. Children tend to reflect "what they know" in their drawings as well as "what they see" [14]. Because of this, it is necessary we chat with children about their drawings. In this study, the children drew pictures and the authors talked with them about their drawings in order to find out their perception of Facebook.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to understand experiences of elementary students with Facebook in their daily lives. Thus the following research question were asked:

- How do elementary school students reflect their perception of the Facebook in their drawings?
- What do the students think about their drawings?
- What are the students' unforgettable experiences about Facebook?

3. Methodology

The study was conducted based on qualitative paradigm. Phenomenological design was used in order to collect and analyze the data in this study. Phenomenological design helps to reveal individual perceptions or viewpoints related to a specific phenomenon [15]. When analyzing children's drawings with a phenomenological design, various meanings, the context formed by these meanings and being open to the world view of the owner of the drawing [16].

3.1. Participants and setting

In phenomenology research, the data sources are the individuals or groups who experience the focus phenomenon of the research and can express or reflect it [15]. Participants of this study were 25 4th grade students who were enrolled in a public elementary school in Eskisehir province in Turkey. The participants were selected with purposeful sampling. It was determined that there were a total of 30 students in the participants' class at school and 25 of them actively used Facebook. After that, written permission was taken from the school administration and the participants' parents. The research was conducted at the school then. Among the participants, 15 were 10 and 10 was 11 years old; 13 were boys and 12 were girls. The participants' characteristics in relation to the use of Facebook are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Facebook use characteristics of the participants

Questions	f
How many years are you using Facebook?	
Less than a years	12
1-2 years	8
More than two years	5
How many already have an account on Facebook?	
1	15
2	3
3	2
4 or more	5
How many hours a day using Facebook?	
Less than 1 hour	15
1-2 hours	6
3-4 hours	4
How many have your friends on Facebook?	
75 and less	14
76 and more	11

According to Table 1, 12 students used Facebook for less than 1 year and 15 students used it for less than 1 hour a day. Among the students, 14 students had less than 75 friends while 11 students had more than 76 friends on Facebook. The lowest number of friends was 11 and the higher number of friends was 376. A general examination of the participants' Facebook experience indicated that the majority of the students used Facebook approximately for 1 year.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The data of the study were collected in accordance with qualitative research methods such as open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, and children's drawings. Participants of this study were asked to draw an image of Facebook that would reflect their perceptions of Facebook. In addition, they were asked to write an essay on the best and the worst memory regarding Facebook. Then the students were interviewed about their drawings. Three different data collection methods were used to increase trustworthiness.

The data were analyzed descriptively in four phases as initial impressions, matching the data, sorting the data and analysis of data [17]. At the initial impressions stage, initial matching was carried out by bringing students' written comments and their drawings together based on their general features. In the matching the data stage, the matching applications performed in the initial impressions stage were reviewed. In the sorting the data stage, the students' drawings and their opinions about their drawings were correlated and grouped. In the analysis of data stage, all these steps were reviewed and then the analysis was completed.

4. Findings

Two main themes emerged when the Facebook drawings of the students, their explanations about their drawings and their best and worst memories about Facebook were analyzed: *Children's Perception of Facebook* and *Children's Facebook Experiences*. While perception of Facebook consisted of communication and entertainment sub-themes, Facebook experiences included positive and negative experiences.

4.1. Children's Perception of Facebook

The perception of Facebook in the students' drawings was found to have communication and entertainment sub-themes. Some of these drawings emphasized either communication or entertainment alone whereas some of them expressed communication and entertainment themes together. The students' drawings concerning communication dealt with what types of communication (e.g. verbal or verbal) are realized over Facebook and how this process takes place. The drawing by a 10-year-old girl who said that she drew about communication is shown below:



Drawing 1. A drawing on communication by Ece, 10 years old, who drew her own Facebook page

In her drawing, Ece shows with whom and how she communicates. As you can see, the left part of the drawing shows she has 260 friends and 7 of these people were family members; there five friend requests and two messages. The center shows that she is chatting with her friends Melisa and Fatma and the right part shows that 18 of her friends are online for chatting. Ece, like the rest of the other students in the class, drew this drawing in a classroom environment where there were no computers. Therefore, the fact that Ece drew the Facebook profile page almost identically points out at important clues about the position of Facebook in her life. Ece's comment on the subject of her drawing is below:

There are 5 friend requests, 2 messages, and 21 notifications on the left side of my Facebook profile page. On the right side, many of my friends are online. My classmates, best friends, old classmates and finally the daughter of my teacher are online. I am chatting with all of them. I am looking at what my friends have shared on their wall. I am looking at one of my friends' pictures from his profile. (Ece, 10, Drawing 1, Interview).

Some of the students in the study stated that they both communicated and played games on Facebook and therefore covered both of these subjects in their drawings. A 10-year-old girl named Sevgi drew about the games she played on Facebook and the names of the people she chats with while playing these games in her drawing below (Drawing 2). Therefore, we could suggest Sevgi expressed that she used Facebook for both communication and for entertainment.



Drawing 2. Sevgi's drawing on game and communication themes

In Sevgi's drawing, the right bottom corner shows those people online for chat, the right upper part shows her favorite games and the center and left parts show the screen image of one of these games. Sevgi stated that she particularly liked playing games n Facebook. The following are Sevgi's comments on her drawing:

First of all, I wrote down homepage, profile and account. Chat, I wrote who is online for chat. Then I drew the games at the top, Ice Tower, Petville, Farmville, Neighbour Farm. I

enjoy playing these games very much. I feed my dog, grow my vegetables in Neighbour Farm. I buy new furniture. I enjoy playing this game. (Sevgi, 10, Drawing 2, Interview).

Some of the students said that the main theme of their drawings about Facebook was communication and entertainment and, at the same time, they reflected their own sense of humor in their drawings. For example, Hasan, a 10-year-old boy, drew a human face and a book or just on the right of this face. Hasan also wrote the word Face in a speech bubble under this face and the word “Yüz” (Turkish equivalent for the word face in English) under it. He did this for the book, too. In addition, Hasan wrote the names of his friends who he chatted with and the names of the plays he played on Facebook in his drawing. Hasan’s drawing is shown below.



Drawing 3. Hasan’s humorous drawing on communication and entertainment theme

When asked what he wanted to tell in his drawing (Drawing 3), Hasan made the following comment:

I drew Facebook as a face and a book in Turkish. I have found the meaning of the English words and drew a picture. I drew what I talked with my friends online. I drew the games on Facebook. (Hasan, 11, Drawing 3, Interview).

Analysis of the students’ drawings which reflect a perception of Facebook with communication and entertainment themes and their opinions about these drawings indicates that the students were pleased to communicate and play games on Facebook. It was also found that Facebook’s communication and

entertainment features were emphasized in the students’ drawings and the participants’ perception was in line with this.

4.2. Children’s Facebook Experiences

Almost all of the children in the study stated that they had both positive and negative experiences about Facebook. However, these experiences seem to be an expression of likes and dislikes about Facebook. To begin with, the students really like it when they communicate with friends- especially distant ones-, when they accepted as friends by their teachers, when the videos and photos they share are liked - especially by their teachers and when they play games. They stated that they did not forget experiences like that and these experiences thrill them.

Those students who considered their Facebook experiences as negative mentioned watching videos containing negative examples (e.g. reality shows), swear words on their walls, being blocked by their friends or being excluded from friends list, having quarrels during chats and being tagged in a mocking way.

You can see a Facebook profile page in Ali’s drawing below (Drawing 4). In the centre of this page, like on Facebook, there is a column which includes people’s photos on the left and their announcements, comments and contents they like on the right. These announcements are drawn as sharing a written opinion, videos, images and buttons of like, comment and share. This drawing also includes a keyboard, which probably shows that the content on the screen is controlled by this keyboard. Ali mentioned that he felt especially comfortable with videos containing swear words and perversion. This drawing was made by an 11-year-old boy.

About his unpleasant experiences of Facebook, Ali said “Facebook is fun with videos. But then they have made videos with swear, slander and perversion.” And about his goof experience he said “I talk to friends from other countries and cities on Facebook. We can play games together”. As you can see, Ali had first hand positive and negative experiences of Facebook.



Drawing 4. 11-year-old Ali's drawing of his Facebook experience

Melis, 10 years old, drew about her conversation with one of her girlfriends on Facebook. She drew herself on the right side and her friend on the left. About her negative Facebook experience which she reflected in her drawing (Drawing 5), she said *"Having fights while chatting with friends on Facebook. My friends putting bad words on my wall etc."* In the same drawing, Melis expressed the incidence by saying *"The thing I like the most on Facebook is chatting with my friends. Sharing nice things on my wall and having friends like them."*

The students' positive and negative experiences about Facebook actually include issues they encounter in daily life such as being liked, swearing, or humiliation. The students reflected their first hand positive and negative experiences in their drawings. However, it is interesting to note that they did not mention issues of security and privacy.



Drawing 5. Drawing by Melis, a 10-year-old girl, of herself and a friend chatting

5. Discussion

The students' drawings about Facebook were grouped under two main themes: *Children's Perception of Facebook* and *Children's Facebook Experiences*. The students' perception of Facebook consisted of communication and entertainment sub-themes. Communication sub-theme was reflected in the drawings of Facebook showing its uses for communication. These drawings contained topics such as chat, written communication, making comments on friends' pictures and shares, getting information about teachers, friends and relatives, sharing their own photos and images on Facebook.

In the interviews about their drawings, the students stated that they were very pleased to communicate on Facebook and came up with drawings highlighting Facebook's communication dimension. However, the study revealed that sometimes the students were negatively affected by the language used in the communication process and mocking and humiliating comments made by some of their friends about some pictures or other shares.

Drawings and statements of the students are mainly focusing on the communication and game purposes of using Facebook. Most of the students are new on Facebook. Examples can be provided showing different uses of Facebook

other than communication and games. Facebook can be used for sharing home works, carrying discussions etc. The students' drawings only reflect what they are doing on Facebook. The fact that neither the drawings nor the statements made by the students included anything about privacy policy children's rights and sexual abuse and other negative uses on Facebook could be interpreted in various ways. This might have been caused either by the fact that the students in this study had not encountered or felt shy of mentioning that even if they had or that their awareness about security and privacy on Facebook had not developed.

In this study, only the children's drawings and findings obtained from their comments on these drawings and written statements were discussed. There is a need for further research with larger samples on children's Facebook use processes. In conclusion, it was found that Facebook was not reflected on the elementary fifth grade students' daily lives in terms of entertainment and communication only but they regarded being liked and added as friends by people older than them (e.g. class teachers, close relatives, etc.) important for social acceptance. Therefore, students' meeting a social media like Facebook at an early age effectively helps them socialize and find acceptance by others.

6. References

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