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15 Social Networks as a Communication Tool from Children’s Perspective: A Twitter Experience

Abstract: Popularity and use of social networks among all ages for various purposes brings up the necessity for investigation of these networks on human psychology and interpersonal communication. As contrasted by different researchers, displacement and stimulation hypotheses arose on either side and resulted in the need for a wider examination of social networks. However, inferences neither theoretical nor practical descent alone will fail to enlighten every spot including effects of social networks on structure and wealth of the society. Thus, research is necessary to examine the influence of social networks all demographics within society, with the present chapter focusing on children.

This chapter discusses the effects of social networks on lifestyles and behaviors of people both psychologically and socially by linking theory and practice. The chapter itself is comprised of two sections; the first section presents an evaluation of role of social networks on children and its use as a communication tool, while the second section presents a sample case of from the social network Twitter.

The study was carried out in a private primary school in Turkey with 51 students. Use of Twitter was promoted by organizing a contest on Twitter. Communication through twitter was also promoted and experiences on use of Twitter as a communication tool are examined in detail. In terms of data collection, the study used a case study and a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, as well as open ended questions.. In this study, social networks were evaluated from children’s perspectives and discussed in the light of theories.

15.1 Introduction

Technological advancements in interpersonal communication have made communication an even more important field of study. In particular, social networks like Facebook and Twitter are the most popular online communication tools within Turkey and worldwide (ICTA, 2011). In terms of children, Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, and Rainie (2011) report that 88% use social networks for instant messaging and chatting with their friends. Besides chatting, children use social networks for publishing status updates, commenting on friends’ status updates, sharing and commenting on photos and videos, as well as playing online social games. Another report claims that 51% of social network users are children aged 13-17,
who visit social networks on a daily basis (Common Sense, 2012). Social network use habits of Turkish children between 9-16 ages were reported in a survey conducted by ICTA (ICTA, 2011). Participants’ membership distribution varied as follows: Facebook (99%), Twitter (9%), MSN (8.6%), Netlog (4.6%), and MySpace (4%). Childrens’ motives for using social networks were: communicating with friends (83.6%), exploring social media (32%), finding old friends (31%), and following friends’ activities (28%). Results from this survey suggest that Turkish children within the 9-16 age range are mainly using social media for communication and Facebook the favored social media.

Social networks also have substantial importance in children’s lives. Online communication is among the leading motives for children’s social network use and it is an important part of their social lives. Indeed, children generally use internet for communicating their friends (Gross, 2004) by making use of communication oriented systems like blogs and social networks along with instant messaging, e-mail, and text messaging services (Subramanyan & Greenfield, 2009). However, while cyberspace may allow children to freely communicate with their peers; one should also note that strangers can take advantages of cyberspace to engage with children. The internet facilitates communication and learning, however children’s benefits depend on its proper use.

15.2 Social Networks and Communication

Ever since technology became a part of our daily lives its effects have always been an issue of discussion. In several studies, it is reported that the Internet has both negative and positive effects on social interaction between individuals (Erwin, Turk, Heimbeerg, Fresco & Hantula, 2004; Hills & Angyle, 2003; Swickert, Hittner, Harris & Herring, 2002). Social networks could be said to be among the most important and common tools that aim at allowing individuals to establish communication with each other. Social networks are treated as important tools for social learning, communicating with new and old friends, peer support, and conducting school activities (Baruah, 2012; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Both displacement and stimulation hypotheses argue that online communication can affect individuals’ relationships with their social environment (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Displacement hypothesis tries to explain the internet’s side effects on children. Displacement hypothesis argues that, the internet harms existing friendships by reducing or replacing individual’s effective/meaningful face to face social interaction with friends (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson, & Crawford, 2002; Kraut, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, Scherlis, & Patterson, 1998; Mesch, 2003; Nie, 2001; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002). Another assertion of this hypothesis is that the internet encourages children to communicate with strangers online (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). This effect is exacerbated with individuals who have problems in making new friends. However,
proper and effective use of online communication tools can reduce these risks. Conversely, stimulation hypothesis argues that online communication can foster friendships by supplying individuals with more communication time and facilities (Hampton, Sessions, Her, & Rainie, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2011 Wang & Wellman, 2010). As such, according to stimulation hypothesis online communication facilitates interaction with existing friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2011; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000; Hampton et al. 2009; Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadtl, & Alvarez, 2000).

15.3 The Role of Social Networks in Student Engagement

When social networks are used for the purpose of hybrid learning, or as a follow-up of face-to-face education, they strengthen communication and sharing not only between the teacher and students but also between the students themselves as well as helping achieve student engagement, especially out of class (Reynard, 2007, Coates, 2007). In this respect, it is pointed out that groups established or sharings made regarding courses on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook play an important role in increasing student engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; HERI, 2007; Junco, 2012; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011; Mix, 2010). Further, Cole (2009) stated that Wiki had influence, even a little, on student engagement. However, the fact that students use Wiki efficiently and that technology-related course designs are not interesting or effective leads to a further decrease in this influence. On the other hand, in their study Welch and Bonnan-White (2012) reported that the participants who enjoyed using Twitter had a higher level of engagement when compared to those who did not. In order for both social networks and other information and communication technologies to contribute substantially to student engagement, it is important to choose these technologies considering students’ demands and to integrate them effectively in courses (Cole, 2009; Dietrich, 2012; Hancock & Betts, 2002; Hede, 2002; McGrath, 1998; Strom, Strom, Wing & Beckert, 2010).

If such environments and technologies such as social networks are not attractive for students or if technology is not effectively integrated, then benefiting from technology and increasing student engagement becomes problematic. In addition, while choosing the technological tool or the environment to be integrated into the course, considering the tools or environments favored by students could not only help them use social networks for the purposes of communication and sharing but also contribute to their interest and motivation in the course. Therefore, it is important that students, just like teachers, use these environments and keep communicating with other students out of class (Dietrich, 2012).
15.4 Twitter in Education

Twitter, one of widely-used social networks like Facebook, is a text-based social media application. Twitter differs from other social networks due to its restriction of the total number of characters to 140. Although this situation is considered to limit its usage, this restriction could, from a different point of view, be said to lead to creativity. The number of young individuals using Twitter, also favored by all other age groups, is gradually increasing. Depending on the examination of the youths’ use of Twitter, it could be stated that Twitter, when compared to other social networks, has fewer young users. When children are considered, it could be quite difficult to say for what purposes children use Twitter because Twitter users cannot put photos as clear as they can using Facebook or Instagram; because instant messaging is not available in Twitter; and because Twitter is rather text-based. However, with its new features added, Twitter is seen to be increasingly popular among young people (Wasserman, 2013). Generally speaking, Twitter can be used by high school and higher education students for such purposes as providing them with feedback, allowing them to ask questions, share and make comments during in-class activities or conferences, share activities following courses, rehearse or revise what has been learnt in class, as well as to increase socialization and establish communication (Dhir, Buragga & Boreqqah, 2013; Elavsky, Mislam & Elavsky, 2011; Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008; Hsu & Ching, 2012; Reinhart, Ebner, Beham & Costa, 2009; Tyma, 2011; Wright, 2010).

Knowing that communication is one of the most important elements of educational environments, an educational use of Twitter has huge potential. Twitter can facilitate collaboration and comprehension, support personal and informal learning, facilitate distribution/sharing, support classroom activities, and establish personal learning networks (Anderson, 2011; Galagan, 2009; Greenhow, 2009). Users can utilize Twitter for communication, asking questions, requesting support, and participating in discussions (Grosseck & Hotescu, 2008; Tyma, 2011). Furthermore there are some users seeking popularity by increasing their follower counts (Utz, Tanis & Vermeulen, 2012). Considering the steep development curve of technology and learners’ expectations for rapid information exchange, Twitter is expected to be a resourceful tool in educational environments. Twitter can be utilized for various purposes in educational environments. Teachers can use Twitter as a rapid feedback channel; for mediating communities within classroom activities; or as a communication channel for out-of-school activities (Galagan, 2009; Stieger & Burger, 2010). Besides, users have a second chance while writing, thus Twitter facilitates a healthier communication in comparison with simultaneous communication tools like the telephone (Gordhamer, 2010).
15.5 Twitter as a Communication Tool

Communication is one of the leading reasons for using microblogging systems (Morris, 2009). These microblogging systems are an extension of social networks, with Twitter being a well known example. Twitter itself is a social messaging and microblogging system that supplies users with blogging opportunity without establishing blogs. Personal of institutional Twitter users can swiftly reach masses and exchange information with interest groups (Brock, 2011; Ivey, 2009). Children frequently use twitter to update their statuses, keep updated with their favorite musicians/bands/celebrities, stay current with world phenomenons, and keep their friends up to date about themselves (Techcrunch, 2009). Twitter can prove beneficial for daily and educational use. Even though some students claim the 140 characters restriction to be a negative property, this can develop their critical thinking and creativity. Baruah (2012) recognizes that social media like Twitter can be used extensively for the purpose of communication in education, so effective integration of Twitter into educational context may result in better interaction and communication (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011; Kop, Fournier & Mak, 2011; Lowe & Laffey, 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011; Wright, 2010), formal and informal learning opportunities (Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011), increased collaboration and motivation (McWilliams, Hickey, Hines, Conner & Bishop, 2011; Perifanou, 2009), increased discussion possibilities (Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009), and increased sharing (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Perifanou, 2009; Wright, 2010).

What makes Twitter special amongst other social networking tools is its ability to facilitate an actual communication channel with a massive receiver repertory. Twitter users can exchange information, organize events, ask for help, and publish up-to-date information (Joly, 2009). Twitter gained widespread use with its open access communication mechanism among its users (Smith, 2009). Albeit users have the option to protect their accounts, most of the users keep their accounts accessible. Thus, masses can read and participate in debates.

Most of the literature on using Twitter within educational environments focuses on higher education. However, contrary to its widespread use amongst children, there is little research concerning primary school children’s Twitter use. In fact, use of Twitter within primary school children should be encouraged to understand whether they will also use Twitter for educational purposes. It is known that inclination to use technology is the predeterminer of the achievement brought with it. Ribble (2008) claims that use of different media by students also allows them to use the appropriate manner for that media. It is therefore that students should gain awareness and the necessary skills for new technologies. A review of international and especially Turkish literature reveals no studies focusing on the use of Twitter for communicative purposes among primary school children (Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012).
The study presented below examines utilization of Twitter as a communication channel among primary school children. In this context this study will try to answer following questions:

Q1. To what extent do primary school children use twitter for communication?
Q2. What are primary school children’s experiences of using Twitter for communication?

15.6 Method

15.6.1 Research Design

This research is a case study trying to describe Twitter’s use as a communication tool among primary school children. A case study is a research model within naturalistic research. Yin (1994) explains a case study “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. Since this study does not intend to generalize findings, as well as the procedures and context being authentic to this research, researchers selected case study as the research method. Exploratory design was chosen since the study has been considered as a prelude to further social research and the framework of the study was created ahead of time (Tellis, 1997). The means of data collection were questionnaire, document analysis, and interviews. The study was designed as a holistic single case design which allows a single unit to be analyzed holistically to investigate all the changes and the process (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1989).

To answer the first research question of the study, a questionnaire and semi-structured interview were utilized. The questionnaire was given to all students, whereas only five students were interviewed. Document analysis was used to gather information about Twitter use during a 12 day period. Open ended questions were then utilized to answer the second research question. Table 15.1 presents research questions, data collection tools, and data analysis methods.

Table 15.1: Research questions, data collection tools, and data analysis methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection Tools</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do primary school children use twitter for communication?</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Frequencies analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interview forms</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are primary school children’s experiences on utilizing Twitter for communication?</td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open ended questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15.6.2 Participants

The participants were 7th grade students studying in a private primary school in Turkey within the 2011 – 2012 academic year. 17 female and 34 male students aged 12-13 participated in this study. All 51 students had signed up for Twitter or organized existing Twitter accounts as requested before this study. However, only 32 students tweeted during the research. The students were all aged 12-13, a standard age for 7th grade students in Turkey. They all had a similar social background and thus they represented normal private primary school students in Turkey.

15.6.3 Data collection

Researchers tried to promote reliability and validity within the research by utilizing various data collection procedures. Data collection tools, reliability, and validity procedures are explained below.

Questionnaire: An edited questionnaire form was administrated to 51 students. Nine of the 51 students were Twitter users already. Two of these nine students were selected for semi-structured interview. In addition to this, 47 of 51 students were Facebook users currently. Three Facebook users were selected for semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students (two Twitter users and three Facebook users) prior to an informative seminar about Twitter. The aim of these interviews was to determine students’ communicative Twitter use prior to study. In this context, recordings from the five students’ interviews were analysed using content analysis to determine students’ social network use for communication.

Document Analysis: Participant students tweeted for 12 days during the study. Content analysis was applied to these tweets. All 51 students had signed up for Twitter or organized existing Twitter accounts as requested before the study. However, only 32 students tweeted during the study.

Open Ended Questions Survey: Researchers prepared a survey with three open-ended questions. These questions were subjected to expert opinion prior to their use. The Open-Ended Questions Survey was then administrated to all participants seven days after the study. Students were required to be as detailed as possible when answering the survey questions. Three questions contained in the survey were:

- Have you had any difficulties while asking your questions for the competition on the Twitter?
- What do you think about Twitter as a communication tool?
- Considering this study, do you intend to use Twitter for communicating with your friends?
Table 15.2 summarizes data collection tools and their utilization in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tool</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Dec 09, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Recordings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 minutes x 5</td>
<td>Dec 09, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>At the end</td>
<td>Tweet</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12 days</td>
<td>Dec 09, 2011 - Dec 21, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open ended questions</td>
<td>At the end</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Dec 23, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers requested family permission for data collection procedures and using collected data for research. Oral permission for voice recordings was also requested from students prior to interviews.

15.6.4 Data analysis

Two researchers analyzed all qualitative data separately. Inter-rater reliability of analysis was evaluated. Researchers compared their findings after completing all analyses. After establishing consensus between evaluations, findings were reported. Tweets were evaluated with the document analysis technique, in which tweets were categorized into groups according to their relationships. Researchers evaluated contents of these tweets in the context of communication. While analyzing the open-ended survey data researchers noticed that 19 students did not participate in the study (did not tweeted). Thus, data belonging to these students were left out of evaluation. Data from 32 students were transcribed and inputted before being evaluated with the content analysis techniques.

Procedures

15.7 Results

To what extent do primary school children use twitter for communication? Pre-study data will be utilized to represent participants’ social network use prior to this research. These data includes survey data administrated to 51 primary school students and semi-structured conversation data coming from interviews with five students.
Survey data suggest participants’ social network use as follows; 47 of 51 students were Facebook users (92%), nine students were Twitter users (18%) and two students were MySpace users (1%). Participants who reported to be Twitter and MySpace users were also actively using Facebook. 31 of the students (60%) reported that they were primarily using social networks for communication. Participants were asked why they were not using Twitter. The majority of children (n=34; 67%) stated they did not find Twitter as an interesting platform. Furthermore 26 of these 34 children (76%) stated they had not any friends using Twitter.

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with two Twitter users and three Facebook users to gather detailed data about their use. A question in these interviews was: “What do you think about Twitter as a communication tool?” Student A’s response was:

“I would rather use telephone even if my message reaches three minutes later. Since Twitter has no offline coverage, I never may know the time of my message’s arrival or even my message reached. Thus, I do not consider Twitter for communication. Besides, since most of my friends don’t use Twitter, I would rather use Facebook for messaging.”

Student H stated he was rarely using, and that he was not sharing much information via Twitter. Generally both Twitter users said they were not using Twitter for communication and they were not intending to use it in the future. The primary reason for this situation was their friends’ absence on Twitter. Students argued that they should know if friends are online in order to communicate with them via Twitter. Nevertheless Facebook users also reported that they did not use Facebook primarily for communication, yet they reported occasionally using Facebook’s messaging facilities. They also stated that they did not think about using Twitter and that they found Facebook more engaging.

Overall, the majority of these students were Facebook users. In comparison between the two social networks, students found Facebook more engaging and visual than Twitter. Furthermore, Facebook facilitates private messaging better than Twitter. It was due to these reasons that these students prefer Facebook to Twitter. These findings suggest that Twitter is not a popular social networking tool among primary school children.

What are primary school children’s experiences on using Twitter for communication?

After collecting data concerning students’ social network use, researchers conducted a seminar on effective Twitter use. Students were requested to direct their questions about the competition through Twitter. In this way students were supposed to gain tweeting experience. Students were observed tweeting about competition rules, competition period, editing user profiles, and the Twitter platform itself. A total of 105 tweets were transferred between researchers and participants. Of these 105 tweets, 51 came from students, whereas 54 of them came from researchers. Besides
this participants also tweeted on their profiles or send tweets to other participants. However these tweets were left out of data analysis.

The analysis of student tweets revealed students’ hesitations about tweets and their arrival. In particular, 11 novice Twitter users sent “trial” tweets to researchers. Furthermore, four participants asked whether the tweets had arrived. For example, Student C’s tweet was: “Do tweets appear on the page. I am in doubt if they arrive”. Student H wanted to make sure his name appear on the tweet and asked: “Hi, my name is _____. Did my tweet arrive?” These tweets can be considered rather strange for Twitter. However, this is due to their lack of experience with the Twitter platform.

Students’ experiences concerning the use of Twitter for communication were collected via open-ended survey. Results from the analysis of these data are presented in Table 15.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive views about their</td>
<td>Twitter is a good/usable communication tool</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicability</td>
<td>I did not have difficulties in communication</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can follow celebrities via Twitter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>140 characters is long enough for communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impractibility</td>
<td>Twitter is not a good/usable communication tool</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>140 characters is not long enough for communication (I find Twitter restrictive)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative views about their</td>
<td>Everybody can read my Tweets</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing to use</td>
<td>I had difficulties in communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I did not communicate with anybody</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I did not participated in the activity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferring other media</td>
<td>I would rather use Facebook than Twitter (Facebook is better)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All my friends are on Facebook. I would have used Twitter if my friends used it.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would rather use the telephone for communication than Twitter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 14.3, 16 themes emerged from analysis of students’ responses to open ended questions. Of the students, 19 students stated they used Twitter for communication during the study. Furthermore, 28 of the students viewed Twitter as a good communication tool and stated their intention to use Twitter for communication. Some students’ responses within this theme were:

“Twitter allows easier communication, it can help.”

“When it comes to communication via Twitter, it is a good option. We can hear from friends and learn what they are doing.”

Nevertheless, 12 of children reported they do not consider Twitter a good communication tool or that they have no intention to use Twitter for communication. The following are views of students within this theme:

“It is ridiculous to use twitter for communication.”

“When it comes to communication I believe Twitter is behind other social networking tools. I don’t find it much of a communication tool.”

Students also stated that they are accustomed to Facebook’s communication and chat facilities and had difficulties in using Twitter’s messaging mechanisms. This theme also emerged in different tweets. A total of ten participants stated they found Facebook a better option for communication and that they preferred Facebook to Twitter for communication. Some comments within this theme are:

“Facebook is yet more qualified for communication.”

“There must be a chat system like the on in Facebook. I believe Facebook is better.”

Analysis of conversation and survey data revealed reasons for students’ preference between Facebook and Twitter. According to their responses, students find Facebook more visual and user friendly for sharing media. Furthermore, Facebook’s popularity over Twitter, Facebook’s forerunner role as a social network, Facebook’s higher user count, and having more friends on Facebook makes it more engaging for students. In interviews prior to this study three of the students reported that they use Facebook to communicate their friends, talk about schoolwork, and organize meetings. The other two students stated that they find communicating over social networks difficult since users are not constantly online. Within the same theme Student H reported his anxiety regarding the accessible nature of tweets. He wanted to chat with friends in private. A section from this student’s statement is:
“Messaging is the sole option to communicate friends in private, that’s why I love Facebook more than Twitter.”

Six students reported they found Twitter’s properties restrictive and stated their discomfort with 140 characters. Some views from students within this theme were:

“I don’t like communicating with Twitter because of limited tools repertoire.”

“I may use it, but message length restriction may cause problems.”

It is clear that students are comparing Twitter’s communication facilities with Facebook in their comments. In this way, the students’ hesitation with message length restriction can be explained by their accustomance with other social networking tools.

The findings from this study can also be associated with group psychology. It is a known fact that children influence each other with their attitudes and this can also reflect upon their use of technology. In line with this, five students reported all their friends were Facebook users and they would only shift to Twitter if their friends did. The same theme was also expressed in pre-study interviews. Some students’ comments regarding this theme were as follows:

“Everybody is on Facebook. Some of my friends outside the school said they did not find Twitter interesting. I may use Twitter if only my friends use it.”

“I would like to communicate all my friends. It would be better if my friends have used Twitter.”

Twitters unpopularity with adolescents can be explained by the characteristics of adolescence. Children want to act with a group, and seek participation and reference. Despite these negative comments Twitter’s characteristics gathered attention from students. Five students stated they could follow celebrities and communicate them via Twitter.

“Generally we can follow celebrities and learn about them.”

“I can follow and learn about my favorite actors/actresses and musicians.”

Despite social networks’ proliferation and widespread use, students do not prefer these tools for ubiquitous communication. Student G stated that she prefers the telephone for private communication. Another student shared this idea within the pre-study conversation.

“I do not intend to use Twitter for communication. It is not as good as telephone for communication.”
Children are not familiar with the notion of accessibility in Twitter. Tweets on Twitter are accessible to all users unless specified contrary. Therefore, three students stated they would not use Twitter for communication because of the accessibility of tweets.

“I do not intend to use Twitter for communication at all, everybody can see what you write.”

“I do not communicate friends through such an open channel.”

This line of thought can be explained by the fact that these students are not familiar with Twitter and they are novice users. It is also known that children seek security and privacy. A review of participants’ views and themes listed in Table 3 reveals that throughout this study students used Twitter for communication, learning about friends’ updates, and following celebrities.

15.8 Discussion and Conclusion

The literature hosts a number of studies concerning social network use for communication. However, the majority of this research focuses on high school and college students (Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012; McCool, 2011; Wright, 2010). In this way, studies conducted with primary school children should enhance the literature in this area. Communication is a crucial part of our lives. Thus, improving students’ communication competences is sine qua non for their social development. Encouraging adequate and efficient technology utilization for communication in children will be beneficial for society. Klien (2008) utilized social networks to overcome the communication barriers of the traditional educational environment, finding that children communicated better and established more efficient collaboration within social networking tools than traditional classroom settings. Furthermore, other research revealed that children use social networks for effectively communicating with peers outside the classroom (Holcomb, Brady & Smith, 2010; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). The present study aimed to examine Turkish children’s experiences in using Twitter for communication and their views and expectations about this online communication tool. Furthermore, children’s bias against using Twitter was also questioned. The children’s views and experiences on using Twitter for educational and communicative purposes may help guide the improvement of educational environments through the incorporation of a microblogging system.

Findings from this research demonstrated that participants use Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace (92%, 18%, and 1% respectively), with these findings being consistent with results from other studies (ICTA, 2011). The study also highlighted that children pay more attention to visual social networking tools. Indeed, children stated that they preferred Facebook to Twitter both before and after taking part in the study. In this
Discussion and Conclusion

Way, Facebook’s communication and chat facilities are preferred by children. This may be attributed to children’s unfamiliarity with Twitter, with better communication with online tools requiring a moderate body of literacy. Nicol, Minty and Sinclair (2002) differentiate face-to-face communication from online communication. Online socialization is learned through sufficient face-to-face communication experience in real life settings. Thus, one can conclude that children prefer visual mediums because they have not yet established adequate mental schemes for online communication.

Since the majority of children use internet regularly (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009), the effects of children’s online communication is a common discussion topic among researchers. While some researchers support displacement hypothesis (Kraut et al., 2002; Kraut et al., 1998; Mesch, 2003; Nie, 2001; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002) which suggests that online communication reduces social interaction and communication. Other researchers support the stimulation hypothesis which claims that online communication facilitates social interaction and communication (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2011; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000; Hampton et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2000; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2011; Wang & Wellman, 2010). Overall, literature tends to support stimulation hypothesis rather than the displacement hypothesis (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). In line with this, the current study found that participants tend to select the social networks preferred by their friends, a finding which supports the stimulation hypothesis (Techcrunch, 2009). The participants of this study did not prefer to use Twitter with respect to their ages and friendships. A report from Common Sense (2012) suggests that 49% of children prefer face to face communication, 33% of children prefer SMS (texting), 7% of children prefer social networks and 1% of children prefer Twitter for communicating with their friends. The findings of the current study suggest that, while children consider Twitter to be a communication tool, they do not prefer Twitter for communicating their friends.

Valkenburg and Peter (2007) argue that online communication has positive effects on children’s relationships with existing friends. The findings of the current study suggest that children prefer to use online communication tools widely accepted by their peers. Therefore, students’ and their peers’ social network preferences must be taken into consideration while integrating these tools into educational contexts. In this way, while research suggests that Twitter is a good option for communication within educational environments, primary school children hold a rather different position. Children’s preference for face-to-face communication over online communication (Bonetti, Campbell & Gilmore, 2010) challenges Twitter as a communication tool among children. Since texting is quick, private, easy to use, and allows children to consider their responses, it is the option of choice among children for communication (Common Sense, 2012). Children consider Twitter lame, uncommon among their age range, complicated, and hard to use for communication (Techcrunch, 2009). Similarly, participants from the current study claimed they do not use Twitter as a communication tool for following reasons, Twitter is uncommon.
among children, lacking a chat option, lacking privacy for communication, lacking audiovisual properties, restrictive for communication in terms of message length, and that it is considered to be a sharing platform rather than a communication tool. Since Twitter is a text oriented social network participants are reluctant to Tweet and read Tweets. They consider Twitter as time wasting, complicated, pointless for communication, and boring (Antenos-Conforti, 2009; Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011; Techcrunch, 2009). These factors challenge Twitter’s integration into education. Furthermore, Lowe and Laffey (2011) claim that over-tweeting and information overload caused by Tweets alienate students from Twitter. Participants of the current study reported that they do not prefer Twitter for communication because they find Twitter complicated and unreliable. Instead, they prefer to use the telephone or more common social networks among their friends.

While the majority of children expressed positive views about their Twitter experiences, most of them quit using Twitter after this study. They also stated they would not use Twitter for communication or any other purposes. However, recently there has been some research examining the use of Twitter for educational purposes. Grosseck and Hotescu (2008) reported that students used Twitter for communication after classes or activities. Furthermore, Twitter can be utilized for facilitating class communication within educational environments. Kroski (2008) reported that total strangers who were reading the same book communicated through Twitter. Schmucki and Meel (2010) indicated that Twitter utilization promotes staff and student communication in primary schools. Johnson (2011) found that Twitter creates opportunities for continued communication among college students after classes. Reinhart et al. (2009) reported participants used Twitter for communication before and during a conference. Furthermore, utilizing Twitter for communication within education settings facilitates student-student, student-teacher, and teacher-teacher communication and collaboration (Johnson, 2011; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011; Leaver, 2011).

In this study primary school children were invited and encouraged to use Twitter for communication. While participants had some minor difficulties getting accustomed to Twitter, they managed to successfully use Twitter for communication. This conclusion was drawn from children’s responses and tweets within the study. However, the majority of children did not consider Twitter as a communication tool and were observed to stop using Twitter after the study. They found Twitter unproductive and restrictive for communication. Furthermore, Twitter’s low popularity among their peers was also a problem. If this was not a global trend among children (ICTA, 2011), this result may have been explained culturally due to the Turkish culture of sharing and communication. Since this is not the case, this study suggests that social networking tools favored by children should be integrated into educational cases in order to gain instructional benefits for primary school children.

Even though this research lasted only for a week, participants used Twitter for communication, keeping updated with their friends and favourite celebrities. Related
literature suggests Twitter as a viable tool for communication, sharing, interaction, learning, education, and collaboration (Baruah, 2012; Borau et al., 2009; Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012; Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009; Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011; Kop, Fournier & Mak, 2011; Lowe & Laffey, 2011; McWilliams et al., 2011; Perifanou, 2009; Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011; Techcrunch, 2009; Wright, 2010). While this body of research demonstrates the benefits of Twitter, it is hard to use Twitter as a learning tool. However, using Twitter as a complimentary/supportive tool within educational contexts can be beneficial. Furthermore, since most of the research within this literature was conducted with adults and youngsters, the apparent benefits may not be applicable to children.

Learners have social network preferences. Thus, one must consider learner preferences while integrating social networks within educational contexts. Twitter can support educational contexts with following dimensions.

- Increasing communication, social interaction, and collaboration among stakeholders of education
- Supporting lifelong learning by extending in-class communication to outside of the class
- Supporting learners with fast questioning and feedback opportunities
- Creating environmental and societal awareness
- Supporting mentoring processes among learners and experts
- Serving as a evaluation and monitoring tool for learners
- Developing students’ self-expression skills
- Forming interest groups
- Developing participants’ tolerance for counter ideas
- Creating a discussion environment
- Serving as a means to operate projects with collaborative sense
- Developing critical thinking skills
- Allowing hesitant students to participate and express themselves

Educational contexts need major arrangements in order to benefit from what Twitter has to offer. Among these arrangements are resolving infrastructure issues, as well as raising awareness and motivation among stakeholders, families, students, teachers, and policy makers. The present study suffered from limited numbers of participants, time limitations, and participants’ prejudices and lack of motivation towards Twitter. The time limitation of the study originated from participants’ lack of knowledge about Twitter. Furthermore, this study was limited to a state school and a class taking the Guidance and Counseling Lesson. These limitations are believed to reduce the generalizability of the research. However, findings from the study suggest Twitter to be a promising tool in educational contexts, although additional research is needed to rigorously examine its potential within different educational levels and contexts.
References


