

Socio-Psychological Impact of Internet Cafés on Frequent Attendants

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Abstract: Great strides have been taken in today's world toward utilizing information technology to serve humanity effectively and to link cultures, civilizations and spread knowledge around the world. The use of this technology has transformed our world and has undoubtedly affected its users in many ways. The objective of this study is to assess the social and psychological impact of this medium on its users. Although information technology has presented to the world a holistic experience from a scientific and a mechanical perspective, it has impacted our lives in many other ways that have been less than desirable. This study focuses on the psycho-social effects of Internet cafés on their clients. The sample population used in the study is one hundred users derived from the six governorates in Kuwait, and being from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, commensurate with, and representative of, the client base of Internet cafés in Kuwait.

Key words: Information technology, Psycho-social effects, Internet café

1. Introduction

Arab societies should define their position toward the information age, and their role in the new global environment in which we live, particularly from the perspective that the cultural invasion ensuing from this process threatens the traditional Middle Eastern personality/persona and character. Our approach and attitudes toward the age of information should be holistic; and not one that is relegated to the limited act of

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purchasing hi-tech products, which covers only one aspect of the information age. In fact, it is imperative that Arab societies develop a clear vision in their approach to the information age, not only from a technical standpoint, but also from a socio-economic outlook, by utilizing it effectively to develop and upgrade their human resources and to improve their environment and surroundings, in an effort to meet and serve the real needs of our societies.

If Arab consumers continue to receive an overflow of technological services that do not serve their real needs, they will develop passive futures. This is one of the primary problems that is faced by Middle Eastern societies in this information age, especially when countries in this region vary in their preparedness for embarking upon its experiences, and in accepting the inherent transformation and benefits of this technology. There is also the concern about retaining the original identity, traditions, norms and value systems of these cultures.

However, the pivotal question to be addressed is whether the benefits of using this medium, the way it is currently used by the segment of the population identified in this study, offset the social and psychological costs, or not. This study aims to address many of these pressing issues and questions by identifying and evaluating the social and psychological impacts of Internet cafés on their users.

The Internet café phenomenon has been described as a resurrection of “the original notion of the coffee-house where people gathered to read newspapers, gossip and generally do what is now known as networking” (Lee, 1999). In many countries, the cyber café combines the cultural and social dynamic of the traditional café with the more global prospective that the Internet provides. One of the leading Internet café resources is the online-the Internet guide (<http://www.netcafeguide.com>)-a list 4000 cyber cafés in 165 countries.

Mewesige (2004) examined the prospects and problems of Internet use in Africa, focusing on a profile of Internet café users in Uganda. According to the results of his survey, 60% of the Internet café customers were males, 73% were single, 78% had no children, and the median age was 25. 80% of the Internet café users were under 30, less than 4% over 40, and 39% were college graduates. Baran and Kologlu (2001) studied the profile of Turkish Internet café users and found the 80% of them in Ankara were males, and 90% were single males, mostly students. (Lee, 1999), who investigated Internet café use in Southeast England, also

found that students were the second largest user group, the first being professionals. Even in the United States, younger, and more educated people use the Internet cafés.

(Minges, 2001) stated that most of the Internet café attendants use the net for e-mail and downloading software or music. (Robbins, 2002) described the Internet café landscape in Senegal as dominated by students who predominantly use the Internet café to check e-mail and check out entertainment sites. Lee (1999) also found that e-mail use was the most predominant use in an Internet café in Southern England. Baran (2001) also found e-mail to be the most popular use in Turkish Internet cafés. El-Nawawy (2000) examined the profile of the Internet and Internet café users in Egypt and found that most of the users were the younger people who mainly used these cafes for e-mail, playing games, and entertainment. In Kuwait, Internet cafes started in the early nineties and now are spread all over the country, and are attended by both nationals and expatriates. Internet cafés users are generally young or students in intermediate and high school.

This is an explorative study that aims to address the social and psychological impact of modern forms of telecommunications on users, in addition to the problems and challenges that these groups may face.

2. Plan of Research

This study will focus on the social and psychological factors that impact Internet users throughout various stages of their professional and personal lives, by using a carefully designed survey. A list of Internet cafés used for the survey is included in Appendix 2. Internet café users form the study sample for this research. This study will hopefully initiate a series of other related studies that focus on how modern forms of communication affect users socially and psychologically.

3. Significance of the Research

This study aims to profile the background of the sample selected by typologizing their individual living, cultural, familial, attitudinal, and educational levels and standards, and then attempting to correlate these factors with the type and level of usage.

4. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are to do the following:

1. Collect data about the psycho-social factors typical of users of these communication facilities and devices.
2. Identify psycho-social factors prominent amongst users.
3. Identify the types of psychological disturbances (if any) that Internet users may face.
4. Give professional benefits to the various applied administrative bodies in the country that address these issues.

Having presented the objectives of this study and its importance, we find that it is imperative that we address the following issues:

1. Social problems.
2. Psychological problems.
3. Attitudes of these individuals.
4. The propensity of additions amongst these individuals, especially additions to substances that include primarily caffeine, which may affect their thinking.
5. Addiction to using the Internet and other computer devices.

5. Research Methodology and Results

5.1 Methodology

This study focuses on identifying psycho-social factors that affect Internet café users. The research team for this study prepared a survey that is composed of 26 variables, at several levels (refer to appendix 1). The sample population is made up of 100 individuals that are derived from diverse geographic, educational, ethnic and social backgrounds, and hence, are representative of the country geographically, educationally, ethnically and socially. In addition, gender and age have been factored in to the sample, so that the sample is representative of the population at large. The sample group has been selected carefully in order to reflect the challenges and issues that face Kuwait's youth today.

5.2. Sampling Procedures

Non-probability samples were found to serve the purpose of the presented study, as the population of study is widely dispersed and non-homogeneous. Judgment or purposive samples were collected using the snowball technique, (Edris, 2005).

Through this technique, the sample size will be suitable to the time

and effort available, the sample will represent the study community more reliably than the probability sampling techniques, and the sample will serve the aims and objectives of the study. At the first stage, Internet cafés were listed in the Kuwait Yellow Pages (Kuwait United Company for Advertising, Publishing and Distribution, 2004/2005, : 84).

Then a sample of 17 cafés covering the 5 governorates were selected (Appendix 2). To each moderator in the cafés a list of specifications was offered. They were asked to phone the assistant researcher on two nominated days per week if a customer that fit the requirements was present in the café. The targeted customer was subsequently interviewed and a questionnaire was collected. A gender-wise distribution of respondents from each café is also given in Appendix 3. This resulted in 100 questionnaires representing all the parameters of the study community.

5.3. Results

This study revealed the following characteristics about Internet café users. The following is a summary of the findings (Table 1):

1. Young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 compose 88% of the target population, or Internet café solicitors. Of that 88%, 52% are between the ages of 16 and 21 and 36% are between the ages of 20 and 31.
2. Males compose 76% of Internet café users, which is three times as many as their female counterparts.
3. The ratio of Kuwaitis to non-Kuwaitis is 70% to 30%.
4. Unmarried individuals compose 78% of users, which is three times as many as those that are married.
5. 40% of clients are high school degree holders and 50% of users are college degree holders.
6. 64% of clients earn an average salary of KD 150 (\$500) (high school goers), followed by those that earn salaries in the range of KD 250(\$750) to KD 300(\$900), and they compose 17% of users, and then by those that earn between KD 500 (\$1650) to KD 1,000 (\$3300) per month, who also compose 17% of users.
7. Users spend 3 hours and 30 minutes daily, on average, at an Internet café.
8. 84% of clients have between 1 and 2 years of computer experience.

Table 1. Profile of the Internet Café Users in Kuwait

Age Groups → Variables ↓		16-20	21-30	31-40	40 +	Total	Percentage %
Sex	Male	34	30	8	4	76	76
	Female	18	6	0	0	24	24
Nationality	Kuwaiti	48	20	2	0	70	70
	Non-Kuwaiti	4	16	6	4	30	30
Marital Status	Single	52	24	2	0	78	78
	Married	0	12	6	4	22	22
Educational Level	Intermediate	10	0	0	0	10	10
	High School	34	10	2	0	46	46
	College	8	26	6	4	44	44
Monthly Income	< \$ 750	50	12	2	0	64	64
	\$750-1000	2	14	0	0	16	16
	\$1000-1650	0	2	0	0	2	2
	1650-3300	0	10	4	4	18	18
Total		52	36	8	4	100	100
Percentage (%)		52	36	8	4	100	100

However, qualitative results that show social and behavioral factors may be summarized as follows:

1. Approximately 75% of the sample believes that they have had good relationships with their friends throughout the time that they have been patronizing internet cafes.

2. 28% of the sample that participated in the questionnaire claim that opportunities for making new friendships have been few.

3. 72% of Internet café clients sampled are non-smokers: however, those clients that are smokers report that they tend to smoke excessively while patronizing an Internet café.

4. 78% of the Internet café clients questioned report that their consumption of tea, coffee and carbonated beverages did not increase during their presence at an Internet café.

5. Interactive activity with friends also remained constant.

6. 68% of participants in the questionnaire feel that their attitudes and behaviors have become more negative.

7. 56% of participants in the questionnaire believe that they have become more sensitive with friends.

8. 72% of participants in the questionnaire are mentally pre-occupied with computers.

9. 80% of participants in the questionnaire report that their academic and scientific skills have improved.

10. 68% of participants in the questionnaire report that their family problems have increased.

11. 58% of participants in the questionnaire report that they have become more anxious, nervous, and temperamental.

12. As far as physical complaints are concerned, eye tension and neck and upper back pain are the only ailments reported.

The following figures show the relationship between the age of the participants and various variables that include differences in behavior, family problems and stress.

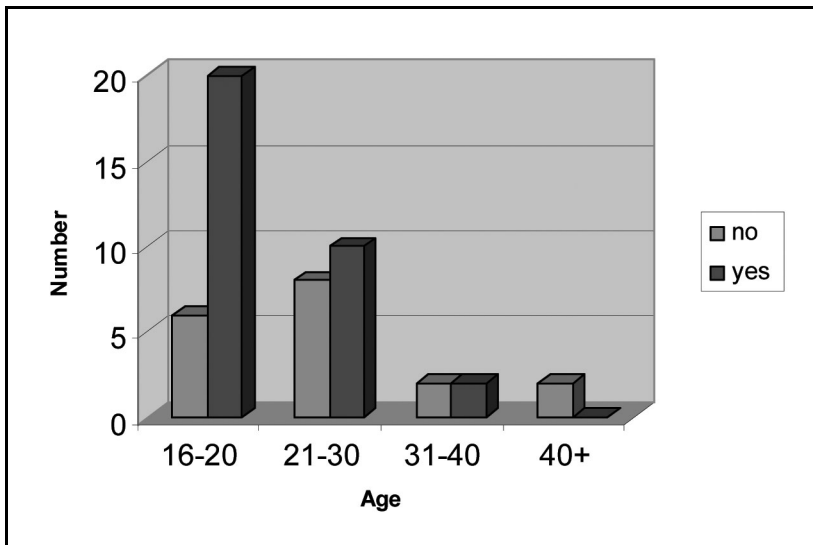


Figure 1. Correlation Between Age and Difference in Behavior

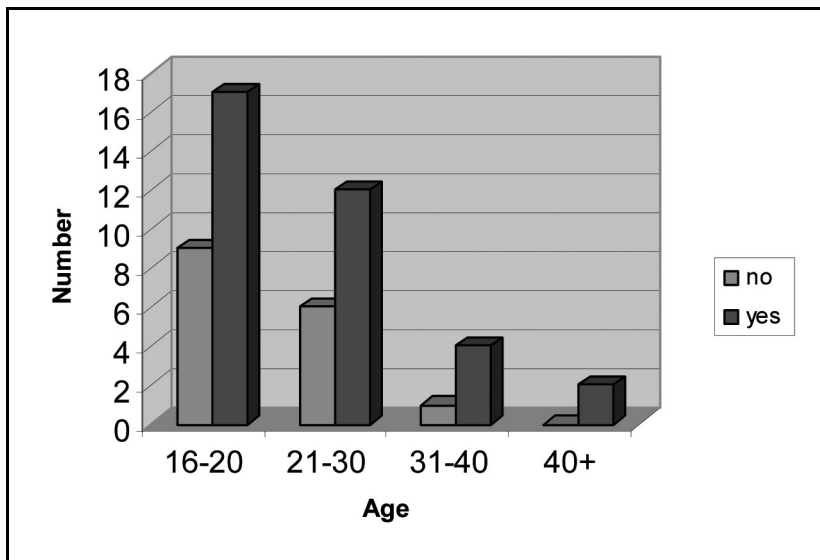


Figure 2. Correlation between Age and Family Problems

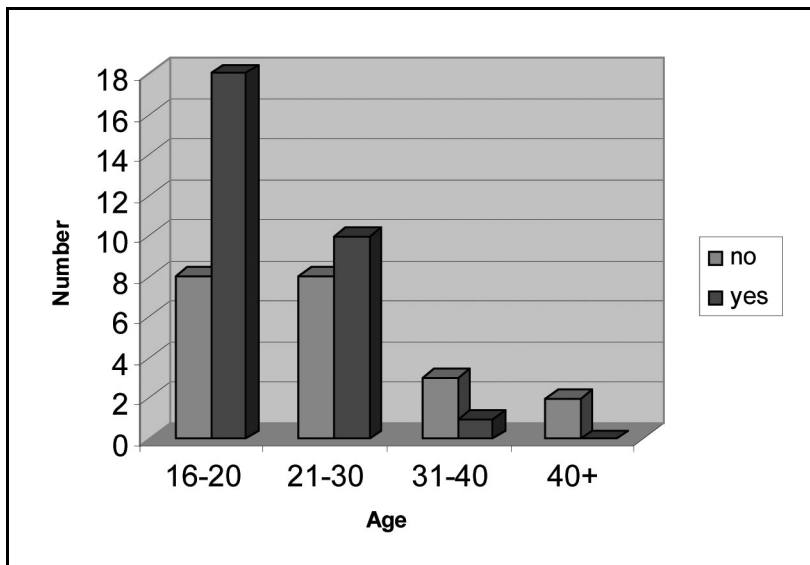


Figure 3. Correlation between Age and Stress

6. Analysis and Conclusions

Upon intricate analysis of the results of this study, the following psychological, behavioral, and social trends amongst participants in the study have been observed:

1. 75% of clients enjoy good social relationships with their friends and acquaintances who also patronize Internet cafes for educational and entertainment purposes. This is a positive outcome, whether it is on an individual or a communal basis.

2. Also, the fact that Internet cafes are, in fact, gathering points for many teenagers and young adults creates opportunities for developing new friendships and bonds between people from diverse cultural, educational, attitudinal and behavioral backgrounds. That in itself fosters the development of a more culturally diverse and cosmopolitan society.

3. Non-smoking awareness, and hence, decreased smoking has spread to Internet cafes, in spite of the fact that smoking is allowed. However, because of the threat of smoking to people's health, it is advisable that smoking be banned in these cafes.

4. Intellectual activity and intense involvement in computer-related technical and substantive issues have been noticeable at Internet cafes, and this has spurred a sense of constructive competitiveness amongst users trying to know and practice the latest computer techniques and acquire the latest know-how and information.

5. Concurrently, 68% of the young clients that were sampled underwent many undesired, negative attitudinal changes that included greater periods of isolation so that they could, in effect, spend greater time with their computers rather than socialize with their families and friends or interact with their natural surroundings. This overwhelming connection to a machine spurs social and psychological problems.

6. Over-sensitivity with family and friends is also noticeable amongst users, often due to the fact that they are stressed while learning how to become efficient users, and moreover, feeling shameful and over-sensitive to seek help, which consequently spurs attitudes of in lack of confidence and poor self-esteem.

7. Attitudinal changes rooted in psychological impacts may also arise from sitting in front of the computer for extended periods of time

while communicating exclusively with the machine, which spurs an internal subconscious cognitive preoccupation with the machine and its processes, as if it were a very intimate friendship.

8. Also evident from the survey was a 68% increase in social and family problems due to the users' absence from time designated for family activities and social gatherings. Time spent on the computer is usually at the expense of other social or family obligations, outings, and commitments. These extensive computer related sessions give thrust to a stressful, argumentative home environment, especially when the user is a student and his/her parents are concerned about the time that he/she is spending away from school studies and formal responsibilities. In the case of a married user, the situation is even more impacted and more complicated since the neglect is usually toward the spouse and the children and the users' responsibilities toward them, and since he/she, in effect, is the care taker and is seen by the other party as a negligent partner and care taker.

9. It has also been noticed that with increased usage of the machine and increased lengthy, conversational sessions with the computer, users become more nervous, angry and easily irritable and agitated, due to the fact that they become increasingly demanding with the pace and speed of retrieving information, data, and any other application from the machine. Computer glitches and slow downs are an imperative and inevitable. This unhealthy attitude that users inevitably carry out with their computer sessions extends to other facets of their lives, manifesting itself socially, psychologically, and physically.

10. Having discussed the social and psychological impacts earlier, the physical impacts may include neck and back pain and visual and ophthalmologic weaknesses and disorders that are mainly due to not using a screen filter.

11. However, one of the main advantages and positive outcomes of developing a habit such as the one researched in this study is the fact that users are utilizing a scientific, knowledge based tool or instrument, and hence, undoubtedly acquire useful technical skills that may be put to use in more productive, professional settings, maybe later on in their lives.

It is evident from the results of this study that the majority of those that patronize Internet cafes are school goers and college students, whose

ages do not exceed 25 years, which is a critical period in a person's life when ones personalities, characters, and attitudes toward life are being formed. They spend an average of 15 hours per week and KD 100 (\$330) per month at an Internet café.

7. Summary

En route and integral to the globalization process, information and communication technology is being developed at an increasingly fast pace to serve and develop humanity by drawing its cultures and knowledge closer to each other; as a response, our societies are transformed. The objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the social and psychological factors that impact high communication technology users, mainly those that patronize Internet cafes regularly and form their client base.

Assessment and evaluation of pertinent social and psychological study factors has shown that although the vast and extremely sophisticated information and communication technology available today has brought about a scientific and engineering revolution, it has also transformed our societies and impacted our cultures in many negative ways that are less than desirable, and that these are manifested socially, psychologically, and physically.

Having carried out the empirical research and discovered the above mentioned data, parents, caretakers, and educational and health professionals must be completely aware of and educated about the repercussions of spending excessive hours at a computer and at 'Internet cafes,' as they are called. There is definitely an opportunity cost to wasting valuable mental, financial, and time resources.

In addition, with respect to users that are above the age of 30, the research has shown that their usage is somewhat different than their younger counterparts, since their usage is toward more professional and knowledge oriented applications. Nevertheless, the majority of this group of users has reported that their familial problems have increased, and that their home lives have deteriorated.

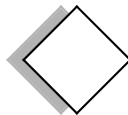
In closing, it may be concluded that tools of modern technology may be put to use to serve mankind and its development, or they may be used adversely to compromise the livelihood of people. Therefore, it is up to us to make that choice and decide how we will use these tools.

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Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

Part 1

- 1.1. Name:
- 1.2. Age: (16-20), (21-30), (31-40), (over 40)
- 1.3. Gender: male () Female ()
- 1.4. Nationality: Kuwaiti (), Non-Kuwaiti ().
- 1.5. Marital Status: Single (), Married (), Divorced (), Widowed ().
- 1.6. Level of Education: Literate (), Middle School (), Diploma (), College (), Graduate Studies ().
- 1.7. Monthly Income (in KD, 1 KD = \$3.3): (250-300), (300-500), (500-1000)

Part 2

- 2.1. How many hours do you use a computer per day?
1 hour (), 2 hours (), 3 hours (), More than 3 hours ().
- 2.2. How many year have you been using a computer?
1 year (), 2 years (), More than 6 years ().
- 2.3. How many hours do you spend around a computer per day?
2 hours (), 4 hours (), 6 hours ().
- 2.4. What is your time limit for using a computer per day?
2 hours (), 3 hours (), 4 hours ().
- 2.5. How well has your relationship been your friends throughout this period?
Good (), Mediocre (), Poor ().
- 2.6. Do you have opportunities to make new friends?
Many (), Some (), Very Few ().
- 2.7. How often and how much do you consume coffee, tea and carbonated beverages?

Appendix 2

List of Internet Cafés of Five Governorates in Kuwait used in the Study with their Contact Numbers and Number of Respondents from Each Café

Sr. No.	Name of Café	Contact No.	Number of Respondents
I. Capital Governorate			
1	Ultra Net Café	241 3107	9
2	Princess Diana Internet Café	246 1830	8
3	Bayan Internet Café	240 5788	7
4	Internet Palace	244 6073	5
		Total	29
II. Hawally Governorate			
3	Arizona Café Net	573 7889	6
2	Clean Café	571 5595	6
3	Jambo Net Café	264 9000	5
4	Kempa Internet Café	261 6646	6
5	Kar Kadero Internet Café	561 6672	6
		Total	29
III. Al-Farwaniah Governorate			
1	Al Hoot Internet Café	472 2013	6
2	Al Khaiah Interent Café	471 4908	5
3	Lobby Internet Café	474 5225	6
4	Florida Internet Café	476 1163	4
		Total	21
IV. Al-Jahra Governorate			
1	World Net Café	381 1366	4
2	Spider Internet Café	433 7328	5
		Total	9
V. Al-Ahmadi Governorate			
1	Oasis Café	392 43023	8
2	Quality Internet Café Center	3911 520	4
		Total	12
	Total Respondents		100

Appendix 3
Gender Distribution of Respondents of each Café
Used in the Study from the Five Governorates in Kuwait

Gender	Number of Respondents	%
Capital Governorate		
Male	21	72
Female	8	28
Total	29	100
Hawally Governorate		
Male	23	79
Female	6	21
Total	29	100
Al-Farwaniah Governorate		
Male	17	81
Female	4	19
Total	21	100
Al-Jahra Governorate		
Male	7	78
Female	2	22
Total	9	100
Al-Ahmadi Governorate		
Male	8	67
Female	4	33
Total	12	100
Total Males	76	76
Total Females	24	24
Total Respondents	100	100

الواقع الاجتماعي النفسي لمقاهي الإنترنت

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ملخص: لقد خطا العالم خطوات واسعة في استخدام تقنيات المعلومات لخدمة البشرية وتوثيق أواصر الاتصال بين الثقافات والحضارات في العالم، ولا شك في أن هذه التقنية قد أثّرت تأثيراً قوياً على مستخدميها بطرق شتى. ويمكن الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة في تقدير الآثار الاجتماعية والنفسية على مستخدمي تقنية المعلومات، وعلى الرغم من أن هذه التقنية قد قدّمت تجربة مميزة من حيث البعد العلمي والآلي فإن لها آثاراً سلبية أقل ما يقال عنها إنها غير مرغوبة، وتركز هذه الدراسة على تأثيراتها النفسية والاجتماعية على رواد مستخدمي مقاهي الإنترنت، وقد استخدمت في الدراسة عينة تتكون من 100 فرد يمثلون محافظات الكويت الست، وتنوعوا بين مختلف شرائح المجتمع الكويتي، وتمثل العينة قاعدة مستخدمي مقاهي الإنترنت وروادها في دولة الكويت.

المصطلحات الأساسية: مقاهي الإنترنت، التأثيرات الاجتماعية والنفسية، رواد الإنترنت.

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