A Study of Digital Natives' Tendency to Digital Games in the Context of the Consumer Society

Tüketim Toplumu Bağlamında Dijital Yerlilerin Dijital Oyunlara Yönelimi Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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ABSTRACT

With the infiltration of world variables into life, societies have begun to approach each issue from a different perspective. Consumption has started to reach quite different dimensions especially with the development of communication technologies and becoming difficult to control. This development process not only experienced in new communication technologies, while affecting the consumer society also prepares the ground for the 21st century children, who are described as digital natives, to become a part of the consumption process. The concept of play, which is an important element of childhood, has also undergone an important change and transformation process from the past to the present, and even with the effect of communication technologies, games have been transferred to digital environments. The games on these digital platforms create a need for child users and child users are encouraged to consume in this way. The aim of this study is to analyze the consumption trend of today's children, who are considered as digital natives, towards consumption through digital games with the qualitative content analysis method and to reveal the consumption effect of digital games on the child user.

Keywords: Consumption society, digitalization, digital natives, kids, digital game

ÖZ

Dünya değişkenlerinin giderek hayatın içine sızması ile toplumlar her konuya farklı bakış açısı ile yaklaşmaya başlamışlardır. Özellikle iletişim teknolojilerinin giderek gelişmesi ve kontrol edilmesi güç haline gelmesi ile birlikte tüketim de oldukça farklı boyutlara ulaşmaya başlamıştır. Yeni iletişim teknolojilerinde yaşanan bu gelişim süreci, tüketim toplumuna etki ederken özellikle dijital yerli olarak nitelendirilen 21.yüzyıl çocuklarının da tüketim sürecinin bir parçası haline gelmesine zemin hazırlamaktadır. Çocukluk döneminin önemli bir unsuru olan oyun kavramı da bu süreçten payını alarak önemli bir değişim ve dönüşüm sürecine girmiş ve iletişim teknolojilerinin de etkisiyle birlikte oyunlar dijital ortamlara taşınmıştır. Bu dijital platformlardaki oyunlar, çocuk kullanıcılara yönelik ihtiyaç doğurmakta ve çocuk kullanıcılar bu şekilde tüketime teşvik edilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı dijital yerlilerin bir parçası olarak nitelendirilen günümüz çocuklarının dijital oyunlar aracılığıyla tüketime yönelişlerini nitel içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz ederek dijital oyunların çocuk kullanıcı üzerindeki tüketim etkisini ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketim toplumu, dijitalleşme, dijital yerliler, çocuk, dijital oyun

Introduction

Do we live in the digital world or is the digital world inside us? The continuity of need since the existence of human beings has led societies to some production and consumption dynamics, first in primitive and agricultural societies, and then in industry and information societies, especially the concept of consumption has been in a continuous transformation. Looking at the basis of economic events, it is seen that there is a system of social relations in which technological processes take place, and therefore agriculture, industry and information societies tend to produce by discovering technology. Although the most important feature of the information society is to obtain information and to carry out some production with this knowledge, the increase in different production activities in different regions of the world with the developments in economic, cultural, social and technological fields in recent years causes different consumption behaviors. The execution of production and consumption dynamics in different areas is not only a development and change specific to the region, but the individual, who is in constant interaction, becomes more active in the society due to the development of communication technologies and the intensification of transportation and cultural interactions. As a result of this interaction and change, as today's consumption has evolved from a modern structure to a post-modern structure and has entered into change and transformation, it is no longer needed and the search for identity has started to be used as an indicator of entertainment, reputation and even power. Changes in the consumption habits of social life create a trend towards digital consumption from traditional consumption with digitalization. In this context, with the increase in the number of

users benefiting from new communication technologies, the ease of reaching target audiences belonging to different demographic groups is provided. As users, individuals affected by this digital consumption undoubtedly constitute children who directly interact with digital media and represent digital natives. Digital natives represent the new generations that open their eyes to the world in the digital media environment and grow with this environment, generally called the internet or net generation (Prensky, 2001). With the children representing the new generation, the concept of childhood is now digitalized and reproduces itself. It is expressed as the indispensable and most effective tool of childhood culture (Sormaz & Yüksel, 2012). With the digitalization of games, the consumption of digital indigenous games reaches a different dimension and opens the doors of the virtual world to children. It is stated that digital games, which appear as a result of the new communication technology and seem to have various social purposes such as entertaining and spending time, actually play an active role in the delivery of consumption messages and cause children to be positioned as consumers and the formation of various attitudes and behaviors in this context. In this respect, the content produced with the consumption messages transmitted in digital games, which occupy a large place in the lives of digital domestic child users, highlights the effects of the consumer society on child users. In this study, the orientation of children who are in the digital indigenous position in the consumer society to digital games and how these games are turned into potential consumers through the messages they convey will be examined by qualitative content analysis method.

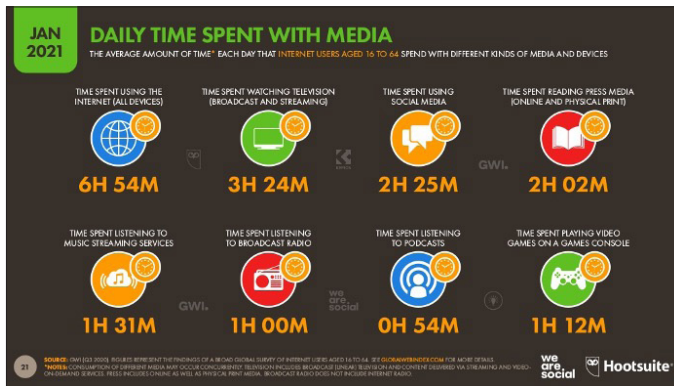## Digital Natives' Journey to Consumption with Digital Games

Technology, which is no longer needed for human beings and has become one of the basic life resources, affects all living spaces from communication to transportation, from education to health and entertainment. According to Erkan (2000), when looking at the basis of economic events, it is seen that there is a social relations system in which a technological process takes place. For this reason, agriculture, industry and information societies have an effort to discover technology and produce technology, and technology is a tool for everything people can learn in their lives throughout their lives (Bredekamp, 2018). Thanks to technology, the rapid progress of interaction with digital tools affects the lives of billions of people around the world and children are the most affected by this interaction. Children of today are in interaction with the digital world from the moment they are born (Brito et al., 2017; Plowman & McPake, 2013). However, as they get older, digitalization begins to affect children's lives more (Chatfield, 2013; Kol, 2017; Lauricella et al., 2015; Nevski & Siibak, 2016; Rideout, 2017; UNICEF, 2017). In the virtual world, the digital generation, which is mostly made up of online individuals, has brought different concepts with it. While researchers describe this new community that spends most of their time using the internet and other technologies as generation Z (McCrindle, 2006), internet generation (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005), students of the new millennium (Pedró, 2006), technological native (Monereo, 2004) and digital native (Prensky, 2001). However, the concept of digital native, expressed by Marc Prensky, has become a very popular term in recent years. Gibson, Koontz, and Van Den Hende (2008) state that the birth of digital natives took place in 1987 and that this new generation, born in the late 1980s, was familiar with online environments and fell asleep while playing with game consoles. Prensky (2001), on the other hand, emphasizes that the mother tongue of digital natives is digital computers, video games and the internet, and even today's children have changed dramatically in recent years, and the new generation of children are native speakers who can speak the language of digital devices. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) added the third group to the digital generation and created the concept of digital settler, in addition to Prensky (2001), who expressed the people who used new technologies at certain periods of their time as digital immigrants, even if they were not born in the digital world. Digital settlers refer to individuals older than digital natives and digital immigrants. Both digital natives, digital immigrants and digital settlers benefit more or less from new communication technologies. Digital generations in the consumption society have started to move from traditional consumption practices to digital consumption. With this changing dynamism, children's understanding of play changes and transforms into new structures and traditional game preferences are replaced by digital games (Sapsağlam, 2018). Digital tools are the forefront in children's lives as well as in the daily routines of each individual (Bozkurt, 2014). With the increase in the variety of digital tools, it is seen that today's children, who constitute the main characters of digital natives, use these tools actively and in this direction, both their creativity and problem-solving skills are supported and they have fun (Chiong & Shuler, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2009). These children, who opened their eyes to the digital world, have now abandoned traditional games and started to focus more on digital games that are realized through digital tools such as computers, mobile phones and game consoles. The differentiation of games in terms of form and content are the basic elements that distinguish digital games from traditional games (Hazar, 2018). While the place of television has been in the lives of people for a long time in the rapid change and transformation t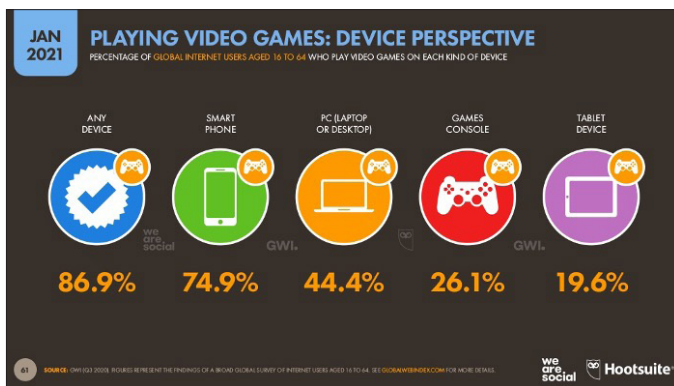hat has taken place from the past to the present, the internet has become an indispensable place in all areas of the lives of individuals by making a serious difference in the 1990s. According to the We Are Social Digital (2021) report, it is seen that 4.66 billion people use the internet worldwide and social media users exceed 4 billion. Looking at Figure 1, it is stated that approximately 60 percent of the world population spends time online and this rate has increased by 316 million, or 7.3%, since last year.

With digitalization taking such a large place in individual life, it becomes inevitable that social habits change direction. Internet use among digital natives starts from childhood, and 1.690 billion children aged 0-12 around the world access online media. However, the increase in children's age is parallel to their access to digital tools (Lauricella et al., 2015; Nevski & Siibak, 2016; Palaiologou, 2016). As can be seen in Figure 2, it is stated that individuals between the ages of 16 and 64 spend an average of 6 hours and 54 minutes online, and the average time spent for games is 1 hour

Figure 1.
Digital 2021 Global Overview Report (We are Social Report, 2021).

Figure 2.
Daily Time Spent with Media (We are Social Report, 2021)

Figure 3.
Video Game Devices (We are Social Digital Report, 2021)

Figure 4.
Global Ecommerce (We are Social Report, 2021)

and 12 minutes. When digital games are considered as leisure or entertainment activities, it can be said that the time individuals especially digital native children spend on digital games is undeniably important.

In particular, the digitalization of everything and the ability to access all parts of the world with a single click drives societies into an inactive and passive lifestyle. As a result, individuals' thoughts and attitudes change and many life practices in daily life are shaped accordingly. Games, which are one of the basic life practices and especially indispensable to children, also take their share from this effect and change. It is seen that traditionalism was at the forefront before, but the games that changed shape with the digital world adapt to the virtual environment both in terms of playground, game tools and form and content. As can be understood from Marshall McLuhan's declaration "the medium is the message", it is as important as the content of the message which communication tool and channel is used in ensuring the effectiveness of messages (McLuhan & Fiore, 2012). When looking at digital games from this perspective, it can be said that it is much more effective to convey these consumption messages to consumers who are a part of the consumer society, especially to children born and raised in the digital world. Considering Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, it can be said that the consumption phenomenon created through the messages transmitted in digital games is easier to embed in the minds of digital natives than digital immigrants or digital settlers. The conclusion that George Gerbner wants to arrive at based on the difference between viewers who are more or less exposed to television in his research is similar to the result of the difference between those who are prone to digital games and those who are not (Yaylagül, 2014). It can be argued that the increase in the time and frequency of children playing digital games and being exposed to more consumption messages will be advantageous and effective in creating attitudes and behavior changes towards consumption.

Considering that playing digital games is a communication tool to escape from the monotony of life, sometimes to escape from the intensity of lessons and sometimes to provide social status in the context of the consumer society, it is stated that this sector is one of the rapidly growing sectors worldwide. Especially in America and China contributed to the rise of this sector and Turkey is also emphasized that this contribution from the affected about 30 million people in a serious interaction with digital games (Ankaraga. org, Date of Access: 2020; Dijital Oyun Raporu, 2020. It is possible to classify digital games in three categories: offline games, which include games played via game consoles or computers such as the Play Station, online games that include games played through mobile devices or personal computers, and games played on social networks (Zepplinn.com, Date of Access: 14.02.2020). As can be seen in Figure 3, it shows that 86.9% can access digital games with any device and that there is no problem in reaching digital games that have become a part of daily life. In this context, it is possible to say that especially digital native children are made a part of consumption through these digital games that they can easily access and play an important role in changing their attitudes and behaviors in this direction and that they prepare the ground for more consumption of children.

In particular, it is inevitable for children to perceive the messages presented in online games, to create a certain need for products and services in children and to be mobilized for consumption. In this way, giving the feeling that it is imperative to meet the consumption need that is both benefiting from digital games as a social need and trying to be created within the game, unwittingly draws children into consumption (Tran & Strutton, 2013). For example, in most digital games, after a certain stage has progressed, a certain fee is required to see other stages. There are two factors that direct the consumption of digital games played by child users who fall into the digital domestic category. The first of these is in game advertising applications, which include video display advertisements that express advertising messages placed within the digital game and include product placements placed within the game subject. The other is interactive games designed by institutions and organizations called advergame to promote a product on its own website. Advergame

aims to attract potential customers - mostly child users - to websites through games and direct them to consumption by enabling them to spend more time in this environment and creating product awareness (Kavoğlu, 2012). It is stated that digital children prepare a stimulating ground against consumption by matching the brand created through digital games and the messages conveyed by this brand with the product. By collecting data through advergame, information such as the frequency of visiting the game site in a certain time period, the duration of the game, the number of people playing the game, and even the age range can be reached in a short time. It is stated that the game users especially children give detailed personal information without hesitation and adopt the product or service as a result of their experience, therefore they are prone to consumption (Tosun, 2010). Hogg and Vaughan (2011) stated that attitudes are not congenital, and therefore they are a part of social life, and that digital games are suited for developing consumption attitudes in this context. These digital game lovers, which especially digital native children learn and adopt step by step and extend to addiction, bring the phenomenon of consumption. When looking at the learning approaches of the individual who deals with consumer behavior in different aspects, it is seen that there are three approaches, namely cognitive, learning and habit-based, and the consumer performs the decision-making process based on these three approaches by evaluating the options directed to him (Tosun, 2010). Kar (2008), states that children between the ages of 2 and 7 constitute the initial period in which feelings and thoughts begin to form in the cognitive development process, that the concrete operations period in which social balance will be achieved includes children at the age of 7 and 12, and that the age range above 12 is the period of abstract processes dominated by cognitive and free thinking. It is seen that digital game creators pay attention to the development process of children, and therefore, although consumption messages are tried to be conveyed to users from an early age, they are more likely to fall on children aged 12 and over, who have an effect on feeling free, the feelings of proving and the attitudes and behaviors accompanying them. Progress in new communication technologies transforms especially children into potential consumers by engaging individuals who are users in the virtual environment with the real world. Consumption messages sent within digital games are presented to everyone regardless of user discrimination, and it is aimed to attract the attention of users to the products or services offered with these messages (Aktaş Arnas, 2005). All users are exposed to messages in digital games in order to create a certain attitude or behavior. Through these messages that direct consumption, users realize this consumption attitude even if not at that moment. However, as mentioned above, children's cognitive learning abilities are more open and broad than adults. For this reason, it can be said that it is easier for these children who are not alien to technology to consume the content offered in digital games without fear and without hesitation than digital immigrants and digital settlers.

Looking at Figure 4, it is seen that in the global world, internet users between the ages of 16 and 64 spend $ 135.8 billion annually on video games for 2020 and now every individual buys something online almost every month. According to the GameByte Report (2020), 91% of children between the ages of 3 and 12 who spend money on digital games ask for permission from their families before making online purchases, and 27% of the reasons for purchasing these games are to customize or personalize the characters in the digital game. It is stated that 13 of them want to buy the product in order to reach other parts of the game. So much so that today's marketers pay special attention to digital games that include product placement. Kim and McClung (2010) state the reason for this as individuals adopt and easily remember the product placement messages they see in digital games compared to other communication tools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the digital world that can meet all the basic needs of users and produce solutions with the privileges they offer to individuals, the phenomenon of need is created in daily life, individuals are guided in this direction, thus making consumption an indispensable part of routine life. Reaching potential users in the technology world and within a social, cultural and competitive order, directing them by creating new attitudes and even changing their attitudes is possible with effective and strongly organized communication strategies. It is important to keep up with the dynamics of the age when using these communication strategies. Because technological developments have destroyed the classical demands that individuals expect from communication tools and in the current environment offered by the digital environment, dialogues have started to establish a new dimension by going beyond time and space. Especially digital natives who open their eyes to the digital world are not strangers because they are born in this environment. Since digitalization is at the forefront in the life practices of digital natives, their consumption habits are also shaped in this direction. In the consumer society where the distinction between the real and the simulation world has disappeared, individuals begin to consume consumer products not with the fact of need, but with the impulse to create a social privilege, gain status and provide reputation. From a post-modern perspective, it is possible to say that digital natives are individuals who seek instant gratification, want instant feedback, do not delay their needs, are more interested in form rather than content, and have made themselves an image ready for consumption. There is a tight link between social life and digital tools. Along with the developments in new communication technologies, traditional game understanding has also taken its share from these close ties and changed the environment by directing game tools and methods to other channels. The new game culture emerging in this context is expressed as digital games. With the change of digital and traditional game concepts in terms of content, form and form, the concept of game has left itself to virtual game environments. Digital games, with a rate of 86.9%, are positioned as one of the important communication mediums of the new media, as they are one of the channels where routine consumption is seen the most. Looking at the development in the world, it is seen that there are online users of almost all ages, but it is stated that especially children, who constitute a large part of digital natives, spend a significant part of their time with digital games. These games, which are sometimes used for entertainment and sometimes for learning purposes, create virtual environments that offer effective advantages for advertisers and brands to reach consumers. Although game production was initially made to gain the appreciation of consumers, it aims to direct sales rather than creating use value with the consumer society. The digital game industry is in a very attractive situation with the opportunities it has in terms of diversifying the game tool, catching the opportunities in the sector, making people feel unique with the privatizations it offers. By using various elements of digital games, individuals, especially children, are becoming dependent on these environments in order to make products that are not normally interesting enough to make them more fun and to provide users with more enjoyable time. With this addiction, children acquire detailed information about

the product or service transmitted in digital games, experience and transfer these experiences to their peers with the multiplier effect, and begin to exhibit certain attitudes and behaviors. Thus, digital games are not only satisfied with the target audience at hand, but indirectly reach new audiences and lead to the consumption of their products or services. The messages in the digital games cause the product to be remembered by promoting the product, thus it succeeds to create new attitudes and behaviors and finally to realize consumption. Thanks to the powerful communication methods used in digital games, children can feel themselves as having a voice, feel that they are in a comfortable environment and realize themselves in these games. Thus, children, who are already natives of the digital world, voluntarily enter the consumption channels offered by these games and take an attitude in this direction. They can press the purchasing buttons without fear of making mistakes in their accustomed environments and do not hesitate to be an element of consumption. Because while children are instilled with excitement and pleasurable emotions with digital games and marketing communication applications added to these games, children are directed to purchase with implicit messages placed in games or it can be ensured that existing purchasing requests in this area are reinforced. At the same time, these virtual environments, which make children a part of consumption with digital games, provide users with an environment of interaction with different users and convey product messages. The main purpose in digital games is to establish an emotional bond between the product and the target audience, to activate consumption and to receive feedback more easily. Thus, the concept of games becomes one of the important tools that affect consumption habits in the time span from games played on computers to games played with game consoles. As a result, these digital games, which are popular among today's children, who are in the digital native category, are becoming increasingly common with the requests such as having fun, making use of their free time, being accepted by their peers, not being excluded by their peers, and keeping up with new trends. Therefore, the messages they are exposed to increase in this direction, the possibility of discovering a new product every minute without fear increases and thus they find themselves consuming.

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