

## **The Second Generation and the Use of the Internet: Communication and Friendship Structures of Young Turks in Vienna, Austria**

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### **Abstract**

*How does new media and technology influence migrants and their children? Based on a sample population of young Austrians of Turkish descent, this research project links questions of identity creation and social networks of the second generation with the controversial discourse about the potential usefulness and risks of new media and technologies.<sup>1</sup> We investigate the Internet use of members of the second generation whose background is working-class differentiating between the consumption of information and entertainment technology and active involvement and creative work through gaming. Focusing on identity formation and friendship structures, our findings point to education as the key distinction between the young Austrians of Turkish descent who regularly engage online in creative high-threshold activities and those who use the Internet for low-threshold consumption purposes only.*

**Key words:** second generation, Internet, online games, social networks, entertainment

Recently interesting work has been published on the second generation (for example, Skrobanek 2009; Scott and Cartledge 2009; Portes, Aparicio, Haller and Vickstrom 2010) language skills (Kallmeyer and Keim 2003; Keim 2009; Becker 2011) and social networks (Franz 2008; Drever and Hoffmeister 2008; Franz 2009) in the German Turkish community. Building upon these studies, this pilot project focuses on analyzing the Internet and new media exposure of young Austrians of Turkish descent. We were especially interested in the effects of the new virtual environments on the integrative capacities of the users, such as the establishment of social relations across ethnic borders and the accessing of information that could lead to increased inter-ethnic understanding. To what extent does the medium provide its users enhanced social capital? Social capital is created by generating the capacity to access resources based on group membership (Coleman 1988; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). New media and Internet exposure might result in a rise in social capital and in increased opportunity structures for immigrants and their offspring, for example, to enter the labor market with enhanced information technology (IT) skills.

For example, Horx (2007) found that online gaming enhances IT and language skills which in turn would certainly add to the market capital of individual members of the second generation. The use of the Internet in general might enhance language skills (Esser 2000; Kissau 2008: 170) or lead to new, culturally overlapping communities (Hepp 2009). Social capital could be increased through enhanced new friendships and social network structures, created online, as Parks and Roberts (1998) found in the early days of the Internet, and Kim (2002) validated for migrants in the United States. Initially we assumed (perhaps somewhat naively) that the Internet would provide young Turks with ample opportunities to find and engage in inter-ethnic friendships. However, the results of this current project do support this assumption. Instead, young Turks maintain homogenous friendship structures. We argue that only if and when these homogenous structures are broken within the virtual or the syncretic worlds can the young Turks' exposure to new experiences and people be enhanced and integrative processes occur.

The ultimate outcome of this project is multifold. It challenges the understanding of integration as a state-centered endeavor as well as post-national theoretical notions of integration. We seek to expand our understanding of integration to include what happens between individuals in cyberspace, as an interactive and potentially integrative platform. In addition, a contentious dispute rages currently over the future of the Internet. The question is whether the Internet and social network platforms should remain free spaces or become mere extensions of businesses and thus replications of real-life behavior and experiences. The latter option would increase governmental and business oversight of the Internet and also be deficient in privacy applications (Boyd et al. 2011). A case in point is the fact that Facebook and Google already sell the personal data they receive through their Internet services. The “anonymous” internet is not only a safe place for ethnically and racially discriminated groups, dissidents and political activists, but also for people with migration background because the cyberspace-identity does not automatically reveal differences in speech and look. In particular, inter-Muslim discussion groups on the Internet provide anonymity. Moreover, women profit from anonymity provided on advice web-based columns and other Internet applications (Brouwer 2004). The “anonymous” player in social games on the Internet might find it easier to disengage from cultural restrictions (e.g., religion) or to reflect on his or her actual lifestyle in real life. Due to rapidly increasing computer/ processor capacities game designers were able to establish new graphical, participatory social environments that attract up to hundreds of thousands of gamers as in, for example, “World of Warcraft” (Kuhn 2009).

Our central research question focuses on the apparently thriving Internet culture within a cohort of young Austrians with Turkish roots: in what ways do media and technology use allow young people of Turkish descent living in Vienna’s 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> districts—both working-class and immigration hubs—to engage more fully with the dominant society? What elements of media and technology use contribute to the alienation and segregation of this group? What aspects of media use encourage patterns of inter-ethnic communication and friendship structures?

This paper falls into five parts. The first part elaborates on our research question and design. Emphasizing online game playing, the second part focuses on the identity formation, especially gender and class issues, of young people with Turkish background through their creative involvement with the new media. This part also identifies social network sites as forums where young men, in particular, construct elaborate personal pages whereas young women are much less inclined to do so. In the third part, we distinguish between online games as encouraging social networking *outside of* one’s in-group and social network sites as *community-creating sites* that fundamentally enhance real-life friendships. In contrast to online entertainment and consumption, third-person games provide players with environments where social approximation is feasible across ethnic groups. The fourth part links our findings to the larger discourse on media literacy and education and the particularities of the Austrian educational system, which hold clear disadvantages for non-native speakers. The fifth part briefly describes the development of one online game as a social game that could help bridge the current gap between young Turks and “native” Austrian youth.

### **Research Design and Question**

Our survey included demographic questions, particularly about the age, education, highest degree, employment, media ownership accessibility of the interviewee, his or her parent’s employment, and open questions conducted in front of a computer, about the interviewee’s use of new media and the Internet. This functional method was quite useful because the young person could demonstrate what web pages were visited frequently and what games were played. We interviewed 23 young people who were born in Austria or who had migrated to Austria as infants of Turkish descent between the ages of 14 and 20 (of whom 3 are female). All interviewees’ socio-economic background is the working-class milieu of Vienna’s outer districts. Two-thirds of the interviewees attend low-level middle school, some are unemployed, and only a few have an apprenticeship or a job. They frequently join youth centers. The population of girls in these centers is rather small, so we could not talk to more than three girls. To overcome the scarcity of female interviewees we included the work of Sehidoglu (2009) who conducted seven qualitative interviews with female Turkish students concerning their media behavior. Her material was included and reanalyzed together with our data. A total of 30 interviews were used for this analysis. Despite the fact that most interviewees had multiple sites of access to computers (at home, at school, in the library, and at the youth center), they use Internet cafes and the youth center equipment for “private” access – unsupervised by parents and siblings. The interviews were about 1 hour long. The vast majority of them were conducted in front of computers—allowing for direct demonstrations of various online behavior routines.

The selection of interviewees was based initially on contacts already established in Vienna, followed by snowball sampling. Our starting points for this pilot project were two youth and street work centers located in two outer districts of Vienna that are heavily populated with Turkish immigrants. The findings of this pilot project were supported by the results of the first interview wave of the project “Serious Beats,” which is based on 48 semi-structured personal media interviews with 16 teenagers with Turkish roots, 16 with Eastern or Southeastern European as well as North African backgrounds, and 16 young Austrians without migration background (Kayali et al. 2011).

We were specifically interested in the use of online social games and social network sites in this survey. Online games—including Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games or MMORPGs—are relatively popular among the young immigrant cohorts (Götzenbrucker 2001, 2009; Utz 2001, 2003; Kampmann 2003; Castronova 2005; Taylor 2006; Kuhn 2009; Hemminger 2009; Wimmer et al. 2010). In Austria, most games are played on German-language servers. An increasing number of online games are free and our interviewees preferred to play free games. Easily established and informal, digital games seemed to enable the creation of social networks beyond and outside of the usual in-groups where members of the second generation typically mingle. Participation in digital games is a low-cost entertainment: computers are very common in Austrian households (80% own a PC), and 80% of all Austrians have Internet access (ORF Medienforschung 2010). This finding is supported by a 2010 study conducted by the Österreichischer Integrationsfonds (Potkanski and Yildiran 2010). Based on 100 interviews with young people with Turkish background 94% of the interviewees possess a computer and have Internet access at home; 57% percent state that they use the internet daily and 23% say they use it at least two to three days per week.

Within social network sites young people design their own identities; they also play various online games, and engage with other people via instant messaging (‘chatting’), emailing, skypeing etc. Within this paper we emphasize gaming (especially MMORPGs) as an online activity with a high threshold that is different from other forms of online behaviors, so-called low-threshold activities such as watching movies and downloading music (Youtube), because gamers can gain social capital and engage in communicative and social relations with new friends who are members of out-groups. Like reading, writing, and composing, gaming is here considered a form of creative communication that encourages the individual to think in complex, non-linear, often social and interactive dimensions.

### **Identity Formations: Virtual and Real**

Many young immigrants and members of the second generation discover digital environments in addition to their physical world. Within the virtual world, and particularly in gaming (as well as blogging and online research) environments, however, they might gain market capital through applicable knowledge and engage in communication and social relations (Kuhn 2009). This is the case in game environments, particularly when the game’s structure centers upon avatars as the graphic representatives of the individual gamers. This third-person perspective allows the gamer to use an avatar as a virtual representative and to experiment with different identities within a virtual but safe environment. Muhammed, the 18-year-old young man, currently an unemployed mason of Turkish descent, describes his avatar in the game Runescape as follows: “a man with long white hair and a beard who uses sword and ax as his weapons but he also has magic powers.”<sup>ii</sup> Playing “Cabal,” Murat, an 18-year-old student uses his avatar “Blader,” a swordfighter whose most outstanding ability is speed. Similarly, Ismail, a 15-year-old currently unemployed painter, explains:

I play about 2 to 3 hours per day, although I actually wanted to stop. I prefer to play Runescape on the German server. I’ve played there since 2007. My avatar is a distance fighter. His name is kongal68 , who is not in all skill levels at 99 [percent] yet. I’m pretty advanced but I’d like to advance further.

Abdullah, the 17-year-old unemployed youth explains that he stopped playing six months ago but he loved to play Merit2:

My avatar was Sura, a worrier with a metal armor. He strengthened your body with bells and fans. There are 1500 gamers playing the game right now. I was banned. I often played in the late night. I got to know some other gamers during my 9 months of playing but it began to cost too much time.

Enhancing the immersion into game playing, these media platforms allow for a certain personality and identity development to occur within a sphere that is unhindered by parental supervision and the protection or guidance of in-group friends.

For example, as a Muslim, Ismail observes Ramadan in real life, but his avatar is allowed to break with this tradition. Ismail explains: “Strength and earning capabilities are important. I go into the Christian church to gain strength.” While mosques exist in the game they are not sources of strength and thus relatively uninteresting for kongal68, Ismail’s avatar, for he already is familiar with Muslim rituals and is looking for new experiences that would expose him to Christian culture. However, a real-life visit to a Christian church is unthinkable and would most likely be frowned upon by Ismail’s family. Visiting an actual Christian church also holds little attraction for the young Turk because it does not provide him with the obvious benefits that a virtual visit does.

Identity formation remains of crucial importance for members of the second generation and the virtual world allows them to experiment with various character and personality traits in new and creative ways. Young Turks refuse to define themselves through essentialism. For example, all of them exclusively label themselves as “türkische Gastarbeiter.” The term “Arbeiter” means worker but few of them actually hold jobs. Some work seasonally such as during the summer months. When asked if they hold Austrian citizenship—18 out of 23 did—they say they do without recognizing the potential of conflict between these two identities. Ibrahim, the 23-year-old young businessman dismisses this apparent incongruity: “When I am in Austria I am Austrian—when I am in Turkey I am Turkish.” At least in the cultural context and within the media world, the communal and national identities are often overlapping and multifaceted whereas differences based on gender, generation, and socio-economic status are more clearly pronounced; thus, questions of identity remain central.

### **Gender Variations and the Internet**

There are large gender differences regarding the use of new media, specifically social network sites, such as Facebook and Netlog.de (Sehidolgu 2009). Social network sites are good examples for self-expression and self-enhancement, but they are also risky (Livingstone 2008; Wächter et al. 2011; Valkenburg 2010; Götzenbrucker 2011). Potkanski and Yildiran (2010) found that Facebook was by 72% of their interviewees and YouTube by 41%; these are the most popular web sites. According to the authors, of these 62% use the German version of Facebook, 22% use both the Turkish and German versions, and 13% use exclusively the Turkish version. The male teenagers of our sample prefer to use Netlog.de, which functions as an online dating site. Young male Turks in particular use Netlog.de playfully, creating their own profile sites, with lots of detail and work invested in portraying a cool image, often with the help of uploaded pictures. The Hip Hop attitudes used by these adolescents are striking. The site also includes self-composed texts and “rhymez.” Youth of Turkish descent use the site for identity construction and management, and also to improve their reputation: the more friends the better; the more blond women among their friends, the better!

Many have actually dated some of these Netlog acquaintances. Abdullah explains:

Yes, I’ve met many. All girls. I’ve met all of them in reality [in person]. At least two or three times. I even had one longer relationship. It lasted 2 years.

Others elaborate their descriptions:

Yes, I’ve met many via Netlog. About 15 people I’ve met personally. It was good [“eh gut”]. It was fun to be out with them. I’m still in contact with about 10 people. Most of them are also second generation from Turkey. Some are from Serbia.

Mikail, the 18-year-old DJ with a part-time job in a grocery store, describes what happened with his social network acquaintances in the following casual way:

I’ve met people over the Internet. Sometimes I write to them, sometimes they write to me. I’ve met 6 ladies. Some called every day. I was picky and cheeky. I meet a few in person. With one I had sex. The sex was okay [“eh gut”]. I met a 30-year-old Austrian; and also a Croatian and a Polish woman.

The 20-year-old Ibo, who is currently in a short-term vocational training course explains his experience with Netlog:

I found one girlfriend on Netlog. Our relationship lasted 6 or 7 months. It was a 27-year-old woman from Vienna. She worked as an A1 [cell phone company] manager. We wrote to each other for 2 weeks and then we exchanged numbers. Then she called me. We went to the Millennium Tower for a romantic dinner with red wine and spent an amorous night together. I like only older women. They have more experience. Not only sexual but in general. With the younger ones there are always problems.

While it remains unclear how much of these stories are true and how much represents the machismo of adolescent male Turks, none of these relationships based on Netlog were intra-ethnic; in fact all of them were cross-ethnic. None of them resulted in longer relationships. This represents an interesting contrast to “real-life” friendship structures. Under real-life conditions, we find primarily intra-ethnic friendships, as studies of Janssen/Polat (2006) and Janssen (2010) also found in their analyses of second-generation teens’ ego networks: the networks of teenagers of Turkish descent were less permeable and more family-centered than the networks of other second-generation groups.

Male teenagers use the platform mostly to represent themselves and to get to know women. Female teenagers of Turkish descent are much more careful with the distribution of their data. This shows that especially for social networking sites, cultural restrictions cannot be overcome, if real-names instead of anonymous icons, pseudonyms or avatars are used. For example, Sibel, a 15-year-old girl of Turkish descent, explains: “I cannot go where my brothers are.” The girls’ main argument against Facebook or Netlog is the fear that their private data (including pictures, feelings, and relationship information) will become public and that their family could find out. As the 14-year-old Naghian insists: “Boys only what one thing! They cannot be friends.” Naghian implies that she cannot trust young male Turks because “they only look at the photos, everything centers on women—never mind whether she is pretty or ugly, as long as she is a woman.” These young women know that creating a profile on one of the public social networks could lead to dangerous conflicts with their fathers and male siblings, who feel that their daughters and sisters should behave in accordance with the honor and behavior codes of their Turkish culture. For example, 15-year-old Irma discusses her media situation at home “We have one computer for the entire family. I cannot use that one when I want to.

Therefore I really want my own laptop.” Concerning social network sites the 17-year-old Iskra explains, “I once had a profile on Facebook but deleted it because I didn’t like it and everybody said it’s dangerous.” The 16-year-old Svetlana concurs. “I believe Facebook is very dangerous for young girls. They should not publicize their personal data.” These young women do not trust Facebook and similar social networks applications. None of our female interviewees had a Netlog.de account. Even if they have a Facebook page, many are very cautious on the social network site: “I have about 19 friends on Facebook. I know all of them personally and no strangers. I chat with my [female] cousin.” However, most seem to stay away from this new medium. Svetlana clarifies: “I have only one [girl]friend who is on Facebook.”

They prefer the use of chat rooms, email, and cell phones. On the one hand, they online chat only with well-known (mostly female) friends; on the other hand, they also communicate with strangers but only anonymously. As 14-year-old Sedika explains, “I mostly chat with my friends in MSN. But no real chat-sites; only persons that I know.” Those who decide to create their own personal page, however, prefer to cover their faces in the depictions of themselves that they put on the Internet. In an interesting contrast to their male compatriots who dominate the German social network site Netlog.de, young women frequently surf Turkish Internet dating sites like “Charismatic” and “Cingene” where they use pseudonyms as in the chat rooms. Young women also like to show themselves in enigmatic and mysterious photos or to use pictures of stars rather than themselves. Their real photos only get to be exchanged in person-to-person meetings.<sup>iii</sup>

Although MMORPGs, social networks and other new media allow for the construction of new identities, none of the members—male nor female—have used that option yet. Thus, while the Internet has the potential of aiding in overcoming real-life gender dilemmas these options are not popular with young Turks of either gender. Young Turkish cliques are aware of the fact that even opposite-gender relationships, an absolute impossibility in the tangible realities of most young people of Turkish background, could be easily established in game environments that are based on the use of pseudonyms. However, at this point we speculate that these features are less popular because most Internet activities involve at least some real-life friends, so radical alterations, such as gender-swapping, would be difficult to carry out without being stigmatized by one’s own peers.

### **Virtual Reality: Gaming as a High-Threshold Activity**

Under certain conditions Internet activities, especially gaming, might increase the players’ social capital and aid in developing social skills and networks. Online social costs are reduced, because the lack of social context clues restricts the possibility of discrimination. The gamers’ names, dialects, and facial features remain concealed and expressions, such as mime, gestures, and style so fundamental in face-to-face meetings, are irrelevant online. The establishment of social relationships is voluntary, which might help overcome ethnocentric boundaries.

Gaming is thus considered a social activity that not only strengthens the circle of friends but also causes the gamer to move beyond his close-knit band of associates. The clan structure of some of these games, such as, Counter Strike, compels players to leave the familiar group of friends and acquaintances in search for other, unfamiliar gamers. The game structure encourages players to get to know the new gamers they meet (at least in the online environment). In online role-playing games such as “RuneScape,” “Metin2,” and “Cabal,” players can also establish relationships with a large number of previously unknown gamers. The configuration of the game supports group and community creation in the form of guilds because an individual player cannot perform many game tasks. We assume that these kinds of online relationships can develop from short-term strategic alliances to long-lasting sincere (gaming) friendships.

These games are based on establishing group relations. Online gamers usually build communities and guilds that have common goals, characteristics, and attitudes (Thimm 2011). These features promote equal status among the players. While behavior in the game is regularized through rules and codices, these activities require the individual gamer to communicate, negotiate and agree with other gamers on certain arrangements and group configurations within the game, which—with increased levels of difficulty—become more sophisticated and complex. Gamers have similar psychological profiles, for example, they have congruent interests (mastering difficult tasks) and similar hobbies (reading adventure stories). Long-term engagement in MMORPGs and other online games could provide the gamer with skills, such as, computer programming and English language skills, needed to integrate into various aspects of the mainstream society and the virtual meta-society.

More than all other activities in the syncretic world, gaming provides ample opportunities to expose second-generation and native-born Austrian youth to each other within *one* digital environment: the virtual world of the game. In these encounters the playing field is leveled. The rules of the game enhance equality by forcing cohorts to act according to certain codices and conventions, and eliminate ethnic and other advantages (because of the relative ease with which identity markers can be cloaked). In such an environment friendships might develop more easily between second-generation and Austrian youth. Friendship practices between immigrant cultures and the host culture might in turn reduce prejudices like fear of crime or the “cultural takeover” by an immigrant culture. Thus, interactive Internet activities that are based on complex social behavior, such as building a civilization, defending one’s group members, and sharing ideas, provide youngsters with the opportunity to create relationships and friendship structures above and beyond their own in-groups. For example, Sinan, a 15-year-old male gamer of Turkish background who attends high-school, explains how the game RuneScape has substantial integrative features.

I know a lot about other gamers and have approximately 10 friends within the game. I met one of the other gamers in a café. He is [a non-migrant] Austrian [citizen] who lives in another district of Vienna. Transforming a virtual friendship into a real-life friendship, this particular case demonstrates that gamers can extend their social network and overcome social, local, and cultural restrictions of friendships and kinship groups. For example, the 15-year-old gamer Momo has an expansive list of friends in the game—more than 20 people. He explains:

Some I know personally, especially the young Turks from Back Bone. But I also knows others—a German player and an Austrian, Johan587 with whom I sometimes play online. We help each other, but I have not yet met them in person.

Online Role Playing Games can enhance one’s computer and interactive skills and thus augment human capital. However, and perhaps more importantly, MMORPGs can also be seen as platforms for cultural approximation, settings for different ethnic groups to meet and interact in (Lina et al. 2010, McGonigal 2011). In these spaces, a process of hybridization could finally take place. MMPORGs have the potential to lead to personal enrichment of the gamers and to expand the social networks of the individual players.

However, few gamers play MMORPGs. Almost half of our male sample (8 out of 20), however, frequently plays other online games and thus uses a relatively broader segment of the digital world. Like Muhammed and Murat, Sercan, the 18-year-old gardener apprentice, for example, plays for about three to four hours a day but mostly during the winter months. In summer they enjoy being outdoors, socializing with friends in local parks and other public facilities. Young people of Turkish descent are less likely to play games that cost money, such as “World of Warcraft,” but are instead more likely to play free games that are also widely available on the web.

Our interviewees also paid less attention to games based on SciFi and fantasy plots and were more interested in action games that use humanoid avatars. Ali, a 16-year-old who just had started his apprenticeship to become a baker says: “World of Warcraft is stupid; it’s all just fantasy.” Muhammed concurs and adds “car racing in GTA is just like real!”

Instead of MMORPGs, most young adolescent gamers of Turkish descent play sports games, (“Fifa 09”) and race games (“Need for Speed”), both of which are in the top ten charts of the game market, as well as “Grand Theft Auto” and the online shooter game “Counter Strike.” This data correlates with the gaming behavior of German adolescents, according to the 2009 JIM (Jugend, Information, Multimedia) study. For example, 6 interviewees frequently played Counter Strike, an online shooter game that is played in teams. Each team (or “Clan”) consists of 4 to 8 persons. The rules of the game pit policemen against terrorists. While some of our interviewees preferred to be policemen in the game, Sercan explains why he always prefers to be a terrorist: “I’m a sniper. You get money for the people you kill. Then you buy more guns. It’s awesome. The police really has no chance.” Mickail concurs “it is almost real [es ist wie echt]. I’m relaxed after the game.”

A number of authors (e.g., Williams 2006; Bushman and Anderson 2009) have argued that these rather antagonistic and violent games lead to increased aggression and hostility as well as the potential for the individual gamers to become more isolated and secluded. The counter-arguments state that these games actually might provide relief from daily frustrations, allowing young people to learn to deal with their own feelings. Shooter games most importantly provide young people with laboratories in which different identities and relationships can be tested (Turkle 1998). Cheryl K. Olson emphasizes the positive learning effects of these games exactly because young people can “try out” other identities and experience what it feels like to be, for example, stressed or powerful. Our findings support the latter point. A number of gamers engaged in aggressive, provocative, and even banned behavior while playing games. Sinain, for example, admits:

I was excluded from the game because of a number of offenses. I was forced to be silent for ten days because I had called another player “a nerd!” I also was once totally excluded from the game. My account was reopened based on a letter of support from a friend.

Sinai tests limits. Within the gaming environment, he attempts to test moral limits and the implementation of codices. He argues and insults other players, which is behavior Sinai would never exhibit openly in real life because he is very shy. In these group games players can learn how other gamers behave in certain situations, and how their friends act in certain circumstances (usually young people like to play with acquaintances and friends). In virtual gaming environments, experimental acting and probing is possible without risk.

Frequently, gamers also compensate real-world shortcomings in the game environments. For example, for 16 year-old-Isam strength, money and work are important in the game. He has no job and lacks money in his daily life. His Avatar is employed and goes regularly to work. These young men also create Avatars who “live” outside of Muslim customs and are unencumbered by religious traditions, such as, Ramadan. Young Turkish women gamers engage in online games focused on collecting and growing produce, such as Farmville, Fishville, Cafeworld, and PetSociety. They spend on average much less time playing these games (20 minutes to 1 hour daily) than their male counterparts (whose estimation always ranked higher than 1 hour. The average gamer claims to playing 3 to 4 hours daily). Apparently compensating for parental directives, young women are also interested in beautification and make-up application games, such as the free Bubble Games. The life-simulation game The Sims, however, is the most popular game among the young women gamers of Turkish background.

In Vienna, young people of Turkish descent demonstrate a rather extensive use of the Internet in general. However, their interest in gaming in particular is limited. While they use the Internet daily, often for hours at a time, our cohort is in general more interested in entertainment and socializing than in gaming and information. Our findings concur with the survey by Moser (2009) who found these kinds of Internet behavior and routines in Switzerland. Moser found that Google, Netlog, YouTube, and msn were the most popular features and services and that watching videos, chatting and downloading music were the most popular activities among young migrants (from various countries of descent). These activities were not significantly different from youngsters without migration background in Switzerland. Viennese teenagers of Turkish descent also use the Internet for visual stimuli, music consumption, and low-level chat as well as for shopping.

Almost all of our interviewees use the Internet to listen to music and watched movies on Youtube and similar sites. Correspondingly, Potkanski and Yildiran (2010) found that 60% of their interviewees use Internet to download music and 69% watch movies and TV series online. Frequently groups of male young Turks get together to watch Turkish adventure and action movies, easily accessible online, such as the 2006 action hit *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak) directed by Serdar Akar. Both young men and women also watch comedies--particularly interesting perhaps "Was Guckst Du?" an ethno-comedy hosted by Kaya Yanar, broadcasted initially from 2001 to 2005 by the German channel Sat 1. Young Turks enjoy watching the comedy depicting funny often stereotypical interactions between migrants, mostly Turks, and Germans on YouTube. YouTube (films and music) is preferably watched in groups, such as in youth and streetwork centers, because the young people do not own a private computer at home or there is frequently not enough room or privacy in the parental home.

### **Education and Social Relations: Opening up Closed Networks**

The key difference between online MMORPGs gamers and gamers who prefer shooter games and non-gamers is education. There appears to be an overlap of economic, educational, and social factors rather than a patchwork of separate aspects that influence young adults in their online behavior. Young Turks with the fewest years of education are more likely to be interested in low-threshold Internet activities, such as watching movies on YouTube and listening to music. Those youngsters, however, with basic levels of higher education, such as, one or two years in the *Höhere Technische Bundeslehranstalten* (HTBLA, Federal Higher Technical Institute) are more likely to engage in more sophisticated Internet behavior. Education and media literacy remains one key variable in the young Turks' encounter with both the tangible and the virtual worlds.

A number of studies following the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) compared the educational systems of the various participating countries. These data revealed that the performance of children with a parental migration background differs strongly across countries (see for example: Herzog-Punzenberger 2005 and Breit and Schreiner 2006). The system of early tracking or streaming into different-ability schools at age 10 that is practiced in Austria has consequences for efficiency and distribution of educational outcomes (Burtscher 2004, Breit and Schreiner 2006). Educational researchers argue that the system of early differentiation by skill level has a negative impact on the school performance of children who come to school with language and social deficits, a vast majority of whom have immigration background (Entorf and Lauk 2008: 634). In Austria, the proportional distribution of students with Turkish background in special needs schools and in high schools with academic orientation (AHS) is 60:40 whereas for Austrians without migration background this ratio is 6:94 (Herzog-Punzenberger 2005:205). Early streaming may not provide these children with necessary basic skills before they are separated into better or weaker school systems. Early streaming reinforces segregation effects, such that migrants who mainly attend special-needs or the lowest-level secondary school (e.g., the *Hauptschule*) receive relatively few benefits from separated high-ability natives of the same age. Thus, for young people with Turkish background it remains much more difficult to achieve higher education in Austria. Instead, many young Turks frequently gain only rudimentary educational credentials and are forced to seek jobs in the low-skills labor market.

Our study shows that young gamers of Turkish descent limit their social relationships and social milieu to certain localities (Vienna, and even specific Viennese districts) because they maintain strong relationships with their parents and other family members and rarely leave the district they reside in. Additionally they receive no support from so-called institutional gatekeepers such as teachers, athletes, the cultural sector, or schoolmates, which might be also a crucial point for successful integration and enhancement of social capital, as Hollstein (2007) has shown. Expressed through close friendship cliques, the close networks of young Turks are usually based on age and gender homogeneity and include only very few people of non-Turkish descent. Loose acquaintanceships, such as less intense relationships with schoolmates, neighbors, teachers, and social workers, are almost exclusively a function of geographic proximity. Nevertheless, close friendships are relatively scarce and highly valued among this cohort. When asked how many close friends he has, Sercan answers "one, one good one. But I have many 'bad friends'." Similarly, Mikail explains:

I have only 5 very close friends[...]. Maybe I have a total of 15 friends, but these are all boys. They are all from the same neighborhood ["Wohnblock"] in the 20<sup>th</sup> district. Most [of them are Turks, maybe two are Austrians, and 3 or 4 are Croats.



Similarly, Muege, the 18-year-old unemployed girl of Turkish background explains:

I have 20 to 25 friends. We are together every day. We got to know each other during truant. Now we are real friends. The others are all boys. They like me because I'm not like other girls. I understand and can forgive. I was brought up more like a boy. We are like brothers and a sister. We are so close—you cannot call this friendship. Even if we argue, we help each other. We are truly different than other relationships.

These young Turks, like many others in our sample, found their associations and developed relationships mostly in the nearby districts, neighborhoods, parks, schools, and youth clubs. They rarely venture beyond the city borders. Close friendships are frequently built on values of trust and support activities (both of which can be found more easily and shared by individuals who originate from the same cultural background), as well as the direct recognition of other group or clique members. To achieve this status, the young Turks must show dedication to these relationships and demonstrate a high commitment to their peer groups over long periods.

### **Online Games as Network and Community-Creating Instruments**

Authors have argued that relationships based on strong exclusive friendship bonds can be partly compensated for by computer-mediated communication, and new relationships can be formed via the Internet (Götzenbrucker 2001, 2008; Utz 2001). Some of the young Turks engage more fully in the world of gaming and often those with more than minimal years of education managed to expand their relationship networks to include out-group members within their structures. The 15-years old Sinan has been playing RuneScape for one and a half years and explains that he got to know several other gamers: “We know each other (Man kennt sich einfach).” He has about 10 good friends in the game—some of whom are Austrian—who help him solve problems and achieve higher competency levels within the game.

Many young people like Sinan engage in friendships that are outside their cliques but within online games and thus expand their real-world friendship groups. About one third of our male sample (6 out of 20) plays MMORPGs and other role-playing games at rather advanced levels and engage with other online players frequently, independently of the other players' cultural background or geographic location. All six gamers, however, have gone beyond the minimal necessary level of education in Austria. Thus, we speculate that education influence the choice of spare-time activity of these young Turks, encouraging their engagement in high-threshold online activities, rather than simply in low-threshold consumption. These gamers also own their own PCs and have Internet access at multiple locations--at home, at school, in the library, etc.—in contrast to other interviewees, especially Turkish girls, whose Internet access appears to be more controlled and restricted. Online young Turks—both men and women—tend to engage more in low-threshold activities, such as listening to music and watching videos.

While net communities thrive, their basic premise is identity formation, for example, through social network sites, rather than community and friendship creation. However, if there was a social game, accessible to all Internet users, that stirs the imagination and incorporates both genders, perhaps by using anonymous Avatars, online social games could become “serious games” (Klimmt 2009) for “social change.” Seeking to bring more focus to the micro-level and utilizing network theory, game design, and critical communication studies, our applied research project's objective is to design a social game for social change. For members of the second generation of Turkish, Serb and other ethnic backgrounds as well as “native” Austrian students, we hope to increase inter-ethnic communication and interaction levels among these groups in and outside of Vienna's schools (Kayali et al. 2011) by designing a social game that interests all major teen groups with various ethnic backgrounds. This game might be able to create a forum that supports community creation and contributes to social change from the bottom up.

### **Conclusion**

This paper analyzes the identity construction and social network creation of teenage members of the second generation of Turkish descent within the broader Austrian mainstream society through Internet activities. We found that young Turks who used the Internet to engage in creative work and interactions usually hold higher degrees or are in the process of attaining them. Although only a minority of interviewees engages in high-threshold activities, such as gaming and blogging, we realize that these teenagers do so in spite of substantial economic barriers and other real-world deficits. The majority of our interviewees, however, use the Internet almost exclusively for low-threshold activities, such as listening to music or as an online dating resource.

Entertainment is the most popular use of the Internet. Despite their attraction, social network sites appear to be not very useful resources for the development of heterogeneous relationship structures. However, these kinds of relationships, more so than many other interactions, are helpful and could provide the potential for personal and career advancement. Our male cohort is very much focused on finding short-term romantic partners on social network sites. Women, in general, are less interested in social network sites because of the potential for family conflicts if their personal data were to become public.

In contrast to social network interactions, in online role-playing games the players are encouraged to engage in long-term relationship building that is not exclusively based on specific relationship qualities, but rather centers on the gamers' performance within the structure of the game. In addition to fine-tuning their interactive skills, gamers also can improve certain skills sets, such as English language and programming skills. Moreover, in-game activities rigidly structured by a leveled playing field could encourage all kinds of interactions not limited to inner-ethnic or in-group communications. For the interviewees of our study, however, friendships are centered on closed relationships, usually based on age, gender, and ethnic homogeneity and include only very few people of non-Turkish descent. These strong relationships do not provide new access to resources or to other social groups which is exactly why diverse, weak networks are seen as crucially important for societal integration. New media and technology--albeit offering the potential to do so--do not provide the second generation with sufficient incentives and opportunities to create the weak networks necessary to begin to overcome the structural inequities created through the educational system.

It has been shown elsewhere that educational attainment of young Turks in Austria is limited both by barriers upheld by the dominant society and the rootedness in their own peer groups, families, communities, and neighborhoods. To overcome these dilemmas macro- and microstructures would need to change, including an amplification of school and educational opportunities and a decline of job market discriminatory practices against young Turks. This paper proposes an online gaming as one way to bridge the gap between immigrant and native teens.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> All young people born to one or two Turkish parents who identify themselves with Turkish heritage, culture, and traditions, independent of the language spoken in the young person's household and his or her citizenship are included by the authors as "second-generation Turks." Such children and young people were frequently born in Austria, raised as Austrian citizens, and speak German as their mother tongue. Many of these individuals have not been fully integrated into the Austrian majority society for reasons that have escaped notice by the research community. For simplification, we refer to this group either as youth of Turkish descent, second generation, or young Turks.

<sup>ii</sup> This and all following quotation are translated by Barbara Franz. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were used throughout the text.

<sup>iii</sup> Personal conversation with Ivana Martinovic, journalist for "das Biber," an Austrian monthly whose readers are immigrants and immigrant children of Southeast European descent, as well as academics and public policy activists.

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