Abstract

Introduction
This study employed metaphor analysis as a novel approach to explore college students’ metaphorical representations of the Internet and their associations with problematic Internet use (PIU). It aimed to find out whether normal and problematic Internet users conceive the Internet through the same cognitive framework.

Methods
The sample included 370 college students in Turkey. A questionnaire was conducted to gather metaphorical conceptions of the Internet, patterns of Internet usage, and PIU status. Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Results
Of the sample, 8.6% were diagnosed with PIU. Home access and entertainment gratification were strong correlates of PIU. Gender and major had no effects on PIU. Participants produced 66 metaphors that were grouped into eight conceptual categories: information source, immensity, basic need, addictive substance, double-edged sword, transporter, mood regulator, and supporter.

Discussion
PIU was the highest in the addictive substance category, followed by basic need and mood regulator categories, with cigarette, water, and friend being the dominant metaphors in these categories, respectively. Problematic users are less likely to conceptualize the Internet as a supportive entity. Normal users are able to verbalize the good and bad aspects of the Internet, but those negatively affected appear to have lost sight of the most useful function of the Internet.

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