

Understanding students' activities in Wi-Fi coffee shops in Aceh: A survey and narrative interview report

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate and comprehend more in-depth information about students' daily lives in the Wi-Fi coffee shops, specifically in Aceh, a province of Indonesia. The study explores how the wireless Internet in coffee shops relates to college students' activities. The surveys of 619 students were conducted as a preliminary report. An in-depth phenomenological interview was employed to collect data from three university students who regularly spent many waking hours in coffee shops. Findings from the preliminary survey revealed that more male students visited coffee shops than women, with an average time of more than three hours daily. Accessing information through the Internet was not the primary purpose of visiting the coffee shops by most students instead of gaming, meeting up with friends for a chat, and enjoying the coffee. Qualitative interviews reported that students often visited coffee shops for various purposes, including completing homework, meetings with friends, and finding freelance online market jobs. Wi-Fi coffee shops are essential for those who do not have Internet access at home, particularly young people and recent transplants with low incomes but high educational capital. Although the Internet in coffee shops can have both negative and positive effects on students, if users or students can access these facilities rightly, they will acquire many benefits to support their education and future

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career. However, if misused, it may negatively affect their lives. Suppose the Internet in the coffee shop is used properly for educational purposes. In that case, it will push for greener and healthier information practices for students who may favor low-tech environments or lack personal infrastructure or resources.

Keywords: *Wi-Fi coffee shops; College students; Internet access; Aceh; Internet for education*

1. Introduction

Indonesians have a long-standing custom of consuming coffee as part of their daily routine. One of these groups is the populace of the Indonesian province of Aceh, which is found at the northern tip of Sumatra Island. As a religiously conservative region, Aceh is also known as the "land of a thousand coffee shops." Coffee consumption and socializing in coffee shops have been integral parts of Acehnese culture for a significant amount of time (Tucker, 2011). Coffee shops in this area provide the experience of drinking coffee and furnish freedom of expression in public space, which helps promote cultural values that are meaningful to the local community. The coffee shops have become a zone where people from different communities can meet, discuss their interests, and exchange information.

Coffee shops rarely fail to address important topics, whether decades-old debates or current events. Issues such as politics, social phenomena, football, and information sharing related to business and agriculture are among the common topics of discussion that can be found among coffee customers in coffee shops. In the same way, coffee shops in the rural areas of Aceh also serve as a gathering place for the villagers, making it easier for them to obtain information (Samuels, 2012).

However, a cultural shift occurred in this coffee shop's presence around the same time that globalization and digitalization occurred. Students now utilize its space not only as a place to socialize with coworkers over a cup of coffee or for other similar activities, but also as a place to connect to the Internet for various academic and other purposes. In addition, the traditional aesthetic of coffee shops has given way to a more contemporary aesthetic as society and the economy have advanced. As a result, today's coffee shops are outfitted with contemporary conveniences such as high-speed Internet access, international TV channels, comfortable rooms, and round-the-clock service. According to Samuels (2010), the Wi-Fi coffee shop is a product of post-tsunami Aceh, and it has since become a lifestyle spot for people of all ages to congregate and socialize with one another.

"Facilities" refers to everything that can be made available to ensure the happiness of coffee shop patrons. The quality of the coffee shop in Aceh can be evaluated based on its different amenities: Wi-Fi connection, meeting room, praying room, television, fan, and communal television viewing. The number and quality of available facilities factor into calculating a facility's total score. According to Asmawaty (2011), "there is a direct correlation between the product component, prices, locations,

promotions, and physical facilities of the consumer's decisions in using the services of a business." Asmawaty also noted that "there is a direct correlation between the product components, prices, and locations" (Kasimin, 2017).

Nowadays, the province of Aceh attracts a wide variety of people, including members of the law enforcement community, political figures, academics, officers, workers, farmers, tourists, and students, among others, to visit and talk over a cup of coffee (Sarmini et al., 2017). To add insult to injury, the introduction of Wi-Fi coffee shops has rendered the Internet kiosks in this area obsolete. As a result, the vast majority of students now go to coffee shops in order to connect to the Internet. As a result, the sight of a large group of students, each with their electronic device (for example, a laptop or a smartphone), has become increasingly common in the city's coffee shops. They bring their laptops and other electronic devices and spend countless hours, days, and even nights, working in coffee shops.

The debate gains a new facet when ubiquitous wireless networking is considered. From a scholarly perspective, it is time to focus on the topic because of the expanding changes made possible by the widespread adoption of the wireless Internet. The observation that Hampton and Gupta (2008) made of people using Wi-Fi in coffee shops demonstrates that people's communication patterns are affected when people use Wi-Fi in public places. Users of Wi-Fi networks typically communicate with others who are co-located with them and whom they meet while working in public spaces. This fact lends credence to the notion that widespread Wi-Fi use may have an impact on the structure of social networks and how people interact.

Students seek a change of scenery or escape from traditional study locations such as the library or their homes' frequent coffee shops that offer wireless internet access (Sanusi & Palen, 2008). Therefore, working or studying in public places with Wi-Fi access is expected. In addition, previous research indicates that using wireless Internet in public places such as coffee shops increase the likelihood of chance encounters (Hampton & Gupta, 2008; Sanusi & Palen, 2008). However, it is still being determined whether using the Internet in coffee shops will facilitate or decrease face-to-face interactions with existing social contacts and whether this will negatively or positively impact students' lives.

In addition, not much is known about why students spend so much of their waking time in Wi-Fi coffee shops or the types of websites that most of these people access the most frequently. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate and comprehend more in-depth information about students' daily lives in coffee shops through the use of surveys and personal semi-structured interviews and, in particular, to respond to the following two research questions: What are the purposes and benefits students obtaining from spending hours in the coffee shops that offer Wi-Fi?

In addition, the purpose of the current study is to clarify controversial issues and perceptions held by the people in this region. For example, some of these individuals believe that people who spend significant time in coffee shops are lethargic and without

jobs. On the other hand, this research hypothesizes that people who are very productive, like writers, bloggers, online business owners, or web designers, have a great time in coffee shops.

2. Method

A survey and a phenomenological approach were employed in collecting the data, focusing on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group of people. This study explores how the wireless Internet in coffee shops relates to students' daily activities with survey data from 619 students. In addition, students' attitudes regarding internet use in the Wi-Fi coffee shops were investigated.

Besides, a phenomenological interview was employed to collect data from three university students who regularly spent many waking hours in coffee shops. Creswell and Poth (2017) mentioned that phenomenological research is a qualitative method used to describe how human beings experience a particular phenomenon. Since phenomenology uses various qualitative methods in collecting the data, such as interviews, conversations, and participant observation (Van Manen, 2016), this study employed personal interviews to collect information from college students' lived experiences in coffee shops. In this study, we interviewed three undergraduate university students who regularly spent many waking hours in coffee shops. We chose male students as the sample for the study, given that most coffee shops' customers are males.

The interviewees were selected based on their average time in the coffee shops, with more than five hours per day being the minimum. All participants names in this study were pseudonyms (fictitious names), aiming to provide confidential personal information. The first interviewee was Jamal, a third-year undergraduate university student who claimed he spent more than ten hours/day in the coffee shops. The second was Amir, a last-year undergraduate university student who claimed he spent approximately eight to ten hours per day on Finally, the last student was Farid, a first-year post-graduate student who spent around five to eight hours per day in the coffee shops. The interview activities took place in three different coffee shops around Banda Aceh city, the capital of Aceh, and the characteristics of the coffee shops were similar; all were equipped with Internet access and crowded with university students. The data for this study was collected from April to December 2021.

The data analysis process for the survey employed descriptive statistics, while the qualitative interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. This is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Azungah, 2018). The steps for the thematic analysis were conducted via several steps: familiarize with the data; create initial codes; collate codes with supporting data; group codes into themes; review and revise themes; and write a narrative report (Tuckett, 2005).

3. Findings

3.1. Survey reports

The report reveals that the questionnaire surveys were responded by 619 students, with 414 male and 205 female students making up the total number of respondents. Five questions were asked regarding the frequency of visiting coffee shops per day, gender, purposes of visiting coffee shops, devices used to access the internet in the coffee shops, and the most popular website types accessed by students in the Wi-Fi coffee shops. According to the study's findings (Figure 1), 66% of male students and 18% of female students went to Wi-Fi coffee shops daily. Additionally, the average time spent in the coffee shops daily was more than three hours (Figure 2).

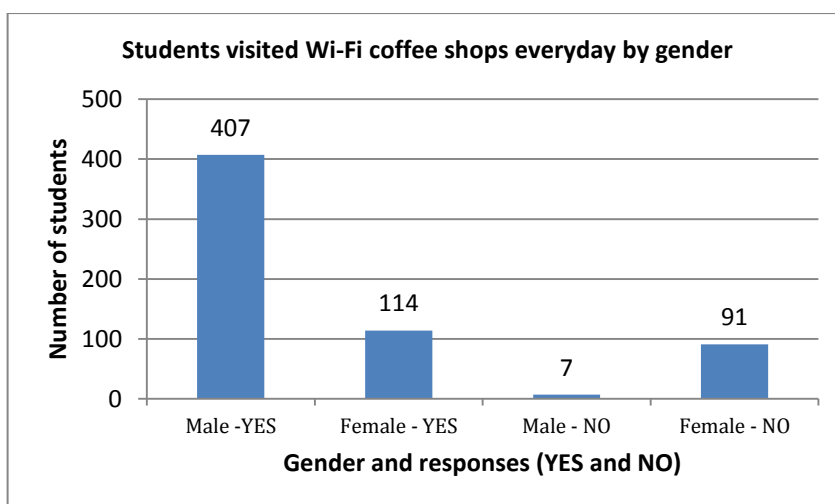


Figure 1. Students visited Wi-Fi coffee shops daily based on gender

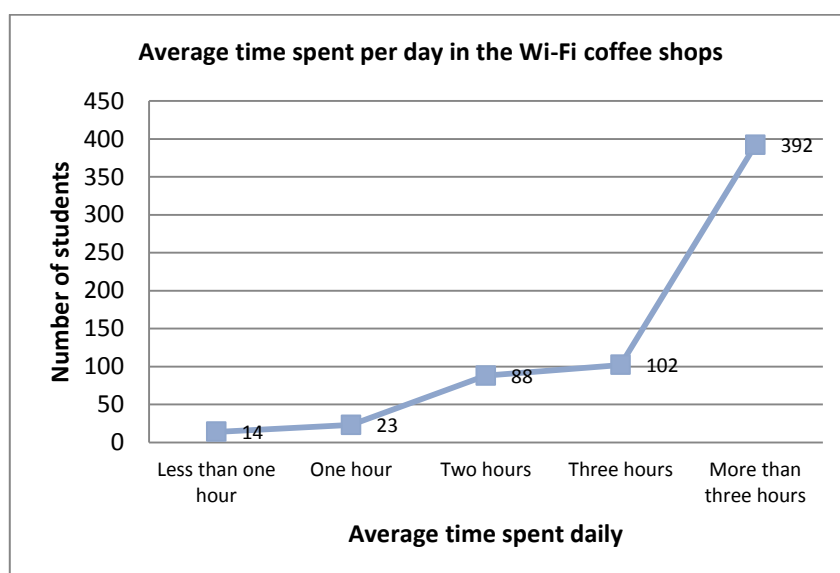


Figure 2. Average time spent per day in the Wi-Fi coffee shops

In terms of their purpose for visiting the Wi-Fi coffee shops, the students could select up to three answers in the questionnaire survey. According to the findings, the three most common reasons for visiting coffee shops were to drink coffee, meet up with

friends, and play a game (Figure 3). Unsurprisingly, those students visiting coffee shops for learning purposes, accessing e-information, and reading a book were less popular than those playing video games. However, witnessing youth playing an online game in coffee shops has become a common sight in the province.

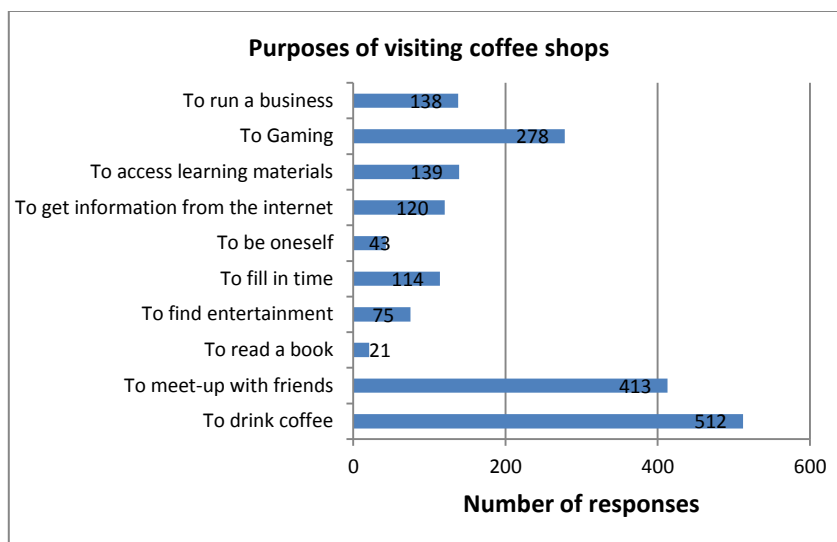


Figure 3. Purposes of visiting coffee shops

More students (356) used their smartphones to access the internet in the Wi-Fi coffee shops, followed by laptops (247 students) and tablets (15 students). An e-reader like the Amazon Kindle was unfamiliar among students, and only one reported using this device in Wi-Fi coffee shops (Figure 4).

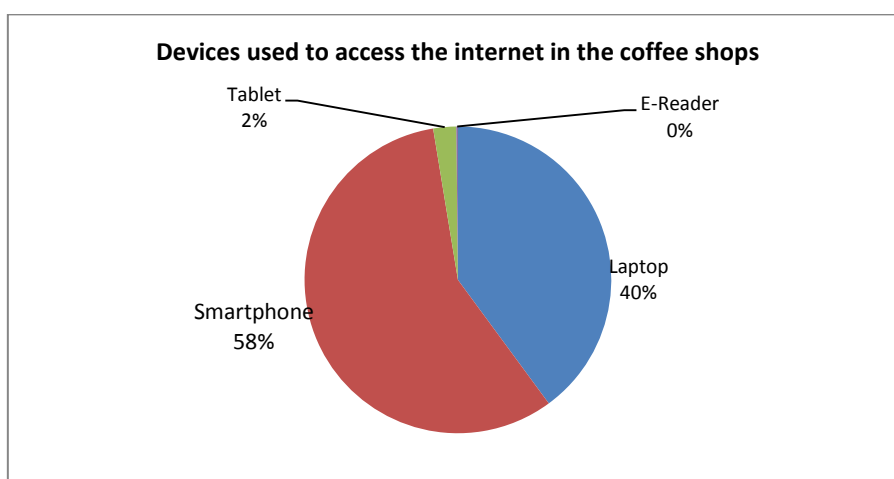


Figure 4. Devices used to access the Internet in the Wi-Fi coffee shops

In terms of the most popular website types accessed by students in the coffee shops, they were allowed to select up to three types of websites that were regularly

accessed. It shows that the three most popular websites visited were social media, games, and YouTube.

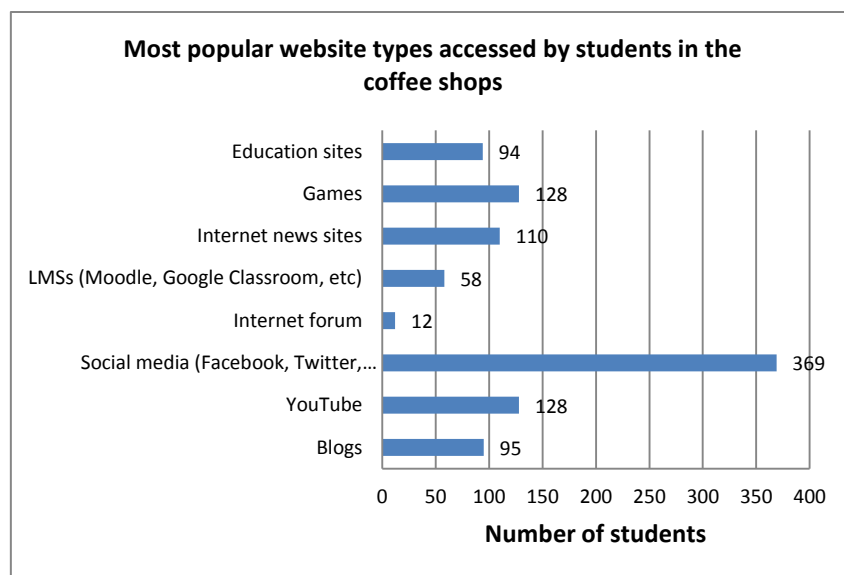


Figure 5. Most popular website types accessed by students in the Wi-Fi coffee shops

3.2 Qualitative interviews

We observed that almost all college students were in groups and carrying laptops and smartphones in the three coffee shops. Although they were seated in a group, most appeared preoccupied and oblivious to their surroundings. Some students appeared to be playing online games, while others accessed social media sites, primarily Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. We discovered that only a small number of students read online newspapers and articles, accessed learning materials, and watched educational or training videos. Nevertheless, Amir acknowledged in the interview that Internet access has become his primary need and that he cannot live without it as a source of information and social interaction. A typical answer was:

... because it is easy to access the Internet. I can access the Internet the whole day with a cup of coffee. I don't need to buy internet data. All information can be accessed with a price of a cup of coffee and my phone.

Jamal, a third-year undergraduate claimed the same thing about himself, stating that he frequently visited coffee shops to access the Internet. Moreover, he acknowledged that using public Wi-Fi to access the Internet in locations such as coffee shops could help him save a substantial amount of money, which he would otherwise spend on purchasing personal Internet data. He argued that students who lived a significant distance from their families were required to find ways to save money whenever possible. Jamal's strategy included going to any public location or coffee shop with an unrestricted Internet connection and using it. As a student who spent more than

ten hours per day in the coffee shop, Jamal observed that the coffee shops had become a second home or a second university for some people. Due to the availability of Internet-based learning resources, this is the case. Jamal spent over 10 hours per day in the coffee shop. Then, he stated that the coffee shops provided Internet access that was significantly faster than what was available at his residence or college, and that the locations were also more comfortable. He declared that:

There is no need to spend much money; we can access the Internet 24 hours. The coffee shop is like my second home or my second college. I spend most of my time here [coffee shop]. I don't need to spend much money to buy expensive food, just a cup of black coffee. So, many positive things can be accessed with my laptop or gadget, and the most important thing is that the Internet speed here [coffee shop] is faster than on my campus or library.

Following this notion, Beavis et al. (2015) conducted a study in which they discovered that young people frequently spend time in LAN cafés. Most home and university Internet connections are too slow for students to access social media or play online games. The initial conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the two students is that coffee consumption and social interaction are not the primary reasons why members of today's generation (digital natives/generation Z) frequent coffee shops. This is very different from how their ancestors have done things for a long time.

In the meantime, generation X, comprised of individuals born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, continues the culture of coffee drinking, socializing, and interacting with one another. Some members of Generation X prefer to frequent non-Wi-Fi coffee shops, also known as traditional coffee shops, rather than the Internet cafes frequented by the younger generation. This finding suggests, on the one hand, that the availability of technology in coffee shops has resulted in positive outcomes. This is because it enables students to access an infinite amount of information from educational websites and makes it simple for them to be information or knowledge seekers.

When asked about the meaning of social interaction and antisocial behavior, the informants confirmed that social interaction activities occur not only physically, as older adults believe, but also digitally. This statement reveals how digital technology and the globalization era have strongly influenced the thoughts and perspectives of native digital students concerning the term "social." However, the third interviewee in this study, Farid, a post-graduate student who appeared older than the previous two interviewees, stated that the Internet was not the primary reason he frequented coffee shops because he could easily access the Internet at home via mobile Internet or a USB Internet modem. Instead, he asserted that socializing with friends over a cup of coffee is an essential activity. He declared:

The Internet is not the main factor in visiting the coffee shop because I have my own Internet data connection on my phone. The important

thing is socialization with friends. The coffee shop in Aceh has become a place to meet people, talk, share information, and exchange thoughts.

As a graduate student, this interviewer's response appears more diplomatic than the other candidates. We assume he attempted to portray himself as a mature student who utilized his time in coffee shops rationally and effectively. In addition, when asked about the websites he accessed most frequently in coffee shops, Jamal, an undergraduate student, confidently stated that he primarily visited social media sites and occasionally played online games. Similarly, based on our observations, we discovered that most students spent most of their time on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as playing online games. Jamal said in the interview that he used the Internet for about five hours a day and five hours a night at different coffee shops.

He acknowledged that Internet access and social media should not always be viewed negatively. However, he claimed that the X generation needs to become more familiar with many positive social media sites, such as interacting and discussing online businesses in groups or updating information such as scholarship or internship openings. In addition, he claimed that social media access would enable him to earn a substantial amount of money through the Google AdSense program. He also posted articles on a blog and videos on his YouTube channel, which helped him make money from the online business program.

Yes, I am accessing Facebook, chatting with my friends, and updating my FB status. When I get bored, I play an online game. Not all social media is negative, as many assume. I joined a group on social media about online business, and I can discuss and share more information related to business projects. I can also earn money from social media and Google AdSense. These are positive aspects. I also receive information about scholarships on social media.

Likewise, Amir also reported a similar response, stating that he mainly accessed social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, he did not clarify the term "positive sides" of social media. Instead, he said he liked watching some of the most popular videos on YouTube and other videos related to a stand-up comedy show to entertain himself and have some free time.

Many internet users spend their time on Facebook, including me. I spend the majority of my time in coffee shops, either on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter, or playing online games. So, we can post our ideas and find new information on social media, including up-to-date news and comments.

However, only Farid claimed that he used the Internet in the coffee shop for academic purposes. In the interview, he mentioned that he usually accessed the Internet

to complete homework, download journal articles, enroll in an online course, and search for scholarship information. Besides this, Farid declared that he could also meet friends in the coffee shop to discuss homework. When asked about academic sites usually accessed, Farid could explain several learning sources such as TED-Ed, Coursera for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), and Google Scholar for searching academic articles. Farid also declared that he spent most of his time watching some learning sources on YouTube and TED-Ed. Farid claimed he wanted to improve his English listening and speaking skills through these sources. Nevertheless, the two other undergraduates in the interviews could only notice a few academic sites on the Internet. Amir, for instance, only mentioned the name of an online local news site, while Jamal alluded to Google Scholar.

The students made a number of suggestions and recommendations during the interviews and surveys. In order to maintain the success of their businesses in the face of intense competition, students generally advised coffee shop owners to make their establishments spacious, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing on the inside, as well as easily accessible. Every coffee shop service provider should strive to ensure that their customers are completely satisfied with the products and services they receive. To achieve this objective, coffee shop providers employ a variety of strategies, including the following: offering product diversification; providing dependable service; setting prices commensurate with customers' income; designing promotions and distribution systems; and constructing coffee shops in strategic locations until the supporting Wi-Fi is super-fast, allowing customers to easily access any information they need while sitting and drinking. Finally, we recommend that coffee shop owners provide customers with a comfortable area where they can relax and feel at home. It is suggested that the coffee shop provide a non-smoking area as well as a private, comfortable learning area for customers who wish to use the Internet for educational purposes. Another creative idea for the coffee shop could be to fill some of the space with books and let customers use them.

4. Discussion, limitation, and recommendations

This study demonstrates that coffee shops in the Aceh region not only sell coffee but also provide a comfortable atmosphere for customers, such as Internet access, international TV channels, and student prices. The main purpose for which students visited the coffee shops in this region, as reported in the present study, was to access the Internet, saving them money that they would normally spend on buying personal Internet data. Other reasons cited were to make money with Google AdSense, run an online business, access learning resources, or complete homework. In line with this, the Z or iGeneration, a generation born during the advent of digital technology, reported having developed a much higher instinctual relationship with technology and spending more time online than any other generation (Spires et al., 2019; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2019). They spend most of their time updating and sharing information on Facebook or

Twitter, uploading videos on YouTube, playing online video games, doing online business, or searching for learning resources (Atay et al., 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2018).

In terms of the sites most frequently accessed by the students in this report, social media and online games dominated. In line with this finding, Facebook is reported in previous studies as the most popular social networking site in the world, followed by Twitter and Instagram (Arora et al., 2019; Waterloo et al., 2018). YouTube has also emerged as the app with the highest concentration of millennials (Bisht et al., 2019; Uşaklı et al., 2019). Besides, one big reason why they are hooked on the usage of the Internet is the presence of online mobile games. Millions of games are available, some of which are free. So much is the love and craze for online mobile games that they have become part and parcel of people's lives nowadays (Kerr et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, this study demonstrates that only some students who spend significant time in coffee shops are slothful, as some strive to earn money from their online business programs. This may require them to spend a significant amount of time in front of the Internet and at coffee shops all day and night. Some also stated that they used the Internet to find information about their class work. Meanwhile, only some students' activities in the coffee shops can be considered positive, especially those which involve a great deal of time playing online games, watching YouTube videos, and accessing social media without effort or just killing time without any specific purpose. In line with this, Campbell et al. (2015) mentioned that technology is a two-sided coin with both negative and positive impacts. If it is used correctly, there will be numerous benefits, but if it is used incorrectly, it might negatively affect people's lives. The main conclusion of this study is that the good and bad things that students do in coffee shops cannot be judged or looked at from just one point of view, especially not from the author's point of view, which would be from the Y generation.

Moreover, for the Acehnese community, just sitting in a coffee shop and chatting with the surrounding community can be a valuable experience and activity. This gathering activity can also be used as a means of socialization to disseminate information and culture that exists, both personal and organizational (Samuels, 2012). This is in line with Kasimin's (2017) statement that traditional or modern coffee shops like Starbucks are the third most visited places by people worldwide, after homes and offices. Visiting a coffee shop is a worldwide way to enjoy different kinds of facilities and social interaction. As reported in this study, millennials affirmed that social interaction activities occur in a physical sense, as older adults assume, and in a digital sense. This sentence shows how native digital students think and feel about the word "social." This is because digital technology and the globalization era have greatly impacted how people think and feel about the word "social."

In terms of learning activities and information seeking, one of the interviewees acknowledged that he used this spot to do academic activities such as accessing learning video sources on TED-Ed, YouTube, and Google Scholar for searching academic articles. This finding implies that twenty-first-century skills have been formed in the

students' beliefs in which they have implemented the concept of a ubiquitous learning environment. Indeed, the iGeneration must encourage gaining information and knowledge as information seekers and not as information receivers. They must be able to use any space for positive and productive activities, even in coffee shops. Learning in the twenty-first century can occur not only behind the classroom wall but also anywhere outside the classroom, including Wi-Fi coffee shops, and not just from teachers as the sole source of information but also from various digital sources.

This study also confirms that the physical environment significantly affects social-emotional well-being and student social-emotional learning. For example, traditional student desks encourage students to follow the rules, while seating, like in a coffee shop, encourages community building and creative problem-solving by emphasizing communication and working together.

The coffee shop-style seating encourages community building through an increased and intentional emphasis on communication and collaboration. Think about how we feel when in a trendy coffee shop like Starbucks. Environments like these are alive. They promote creativity and conversation. It feels good to work in that space. How might we channel that energy and bring it into our classrooms? The instructors must set up their rooms intentionally if they want students to work together toward a common goal. The plan is to throw out the traditional student desks and replace them with couches, armchairs, coffee tables, and high tables with stools, restaurant-style tables, standing tables, or rugs.

Starbucks has created an environment where students can comfortably work alone or in groups, can text, surf, watch videos, and go online and do their school work (Ardichvili et al., 2006; Collins & Halverson, 2018), and thus, it could be an alternative that Wi-Fi coffee shops in Aceh province can imitate. It is common to see teachers marking assignments in Starbucks, office workers holding meetings over a cuppa, and others who want a quiet place to watch videos or use free Wi-Fi. Our students accommodate us by sitting in straight rows in our classrooms, but when they get to Starbucks after school, they enter their natural environment—and probably become much more creative. If we could take some of the Starbucks concepts and incorporate them into our learning space and teaching strategies, we might be more successful in reaching today's young people.

Based on the findings of this study, we suggest several reasons why the appropriate use of the Internet will support students' education. First, by establishing good connectivity and communications through the Internet with people worldwide, this activity will help strengthen international collaboration to support students' education and future careers. Second, the healthy use of the Internet, particularly in coffee shops, allows students to search for meaningful information related to their studies, including scholarships. Third, it will aid students' independent study. They are not required to attend academies or pay for courses because they can learn quickly and for free at the coffee shop by only purchasing a cup of coffee. Third, they can learn through various

online courses available on the Internet from home or in coffee shops. Fourth, they can earn part-time online through blogging, digital marketing, web design and development, and any service provided on the digital freelance marketplace. Fifth, students can practice on the Internet, such as learning English, programming, and other skills. Finally, there are many other benefits, like being able to plan their career with the help of the Internet, getting help with assignments and presentations, getting faster updates and the most recent information, and talking about things online on social media platforms.

Last but not least, this study has some limitations that must be pointed out. One obvious weakness was that the sample size was small ($n = 3$), and all were male students. Therefore, the findings of this study may not represent the female perspective. Thus, future research should examine larger samples and involve both male and female participants. Furthermore, since this small study was carried out at three coffee shops in a province in Indonesia, the findings may not represent other geographic regions in Indonesia or other countries. It is highly recommended that similar studies be done in other places to learn more about how different things happen in different places and cultures.

5. Conclusion

This study indicates that coffee shops in Aceh province are unique among public places that offer free Wi-Fi service. Because of the large student population, coffee shops are a prominent feature of the local culture. Students and freelancers often use coffee shops for various purposes, such as studying, meetings, and other work. As a result, they are among the first establishments to offer free Wi-Fi in this district. Although many people in Aceh province go to coffee shops to do silent work, many coffee shops remain social spaces—technology likely pervades the habits of someone who uses the Internet at the coffee shops. Meeting friends in a community is also why most students visit coffee shops. The existence of college students in a coffee shop indirectly binds them to a community. In addition, Wi-Fi coffee shops offer an important option for those who may not have Internet access at home, particularly young people and recent transplants with limited income but high educational capital. Although the availability of the Internet in the coffee shop can be a two-sided coin with both negative and positive impacts for students, we believe that if the users or students are facilitated to access these facilities in the right way, there will be numerous benefits received. However, if used inadequately, it might negatively affect their lives. We also believe that if the Internet in the coffee shop is used appropriately, it will push for greener and healthier information practices for students that may sometimes favor low-technological environments or the lack of infrastructure or resources.

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