

# Online Polygamy or Virtual Bride: Cyber-Etnographic Research

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Uğur Batı<sup>1</sup> and Bünyamin Atıcı<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

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## Keywords

virtual, polygamy, ethnographic study, Turkey

## Introduction

The transformation of the Internet café, which is opened by Hasip Yıldırım in Gökçe village of Mardin and which is used mostly for finding spouses by the men population of the region into the service of “online finding fellow wife” is mentioned in Christian Science Monitor in United States (Schleifer, 2009). The newspaper, which quotes the words of Yıldırım “Everybody comes here to find a spouse,” wrote that the “modern technology” also encouraged being a fellow wife in an interesting way. According to the newspaper writing the men of the village in which Arab-origin people live were previously going to Syria to bring a fellow wife, now it is changed, thanks to Internet. The men of Gökçe village of Mardin, which is a province of the Southeast region of Turkey, who benefit from the “virtual matchmaking” service, prefer the Morocco women who do not need to take visa to come to Turkey in particular. A total of 10 brides were brought to the village from Morocco, in the

<sup>1</sup>Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Firat University, Elazig, Turkey

## Corresponding Author:

Bünyamin Atıcı, Faculty of Education, Firat University, Elazig 23119, Turkey  
Email: baticig@gmail.com

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## Abstract

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## Keywords

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## Introduction

The transformation of the Internet café, which is opened by Hasip Yıldırım in Gökçe village of Mardin and which is used mostly for finding spouses by the men population of the region into the service of “online finding fellow wife” is mentioned in Christian Science Monitor in United States (Schleifer, 2009). The newspaper, which quotes the words of Yıldırım “Everybody comes here to find a spouse,” wrote that the “modern technology” also encouraged being a fellow wife in an interesting way. According to the newspaper writing the men of the village in which Arab-origin people live were previously going to Syria to bring a fellow wife, now it is changed, thanks to Internet. The men of Gökçe village of Mardin, which is a province of the Southeast region of Turkey, who benefit from the “virtual matchmaking” service, prefer the Morocco women who do not need to take visa to come to Turkey in particular. A total of 10 brides were brought to the village from Morocco, in the

<sup>1</sup>Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Firat University, Elazig, Turkey

## Corresponding Author:

Bünyamin Atıcı, Faculty of Education, Firat University, Elazig 23119, Turkey  
Email: batıcı@gmail.com

recent decade. After friend finding and spouse finding in the virtual environment, the fashion of “finding fellow wife” started, also at the international level. And Gökçe, which is an Arab village of Kızıltepe district of Mardin province, carries a banner in this phenomenon.

Three Internet cafés, which are situated in Gökçe with 4,000 people, are usually used by the men who want to find a second wife. French, English and Spanish speaking Moroccan women come to marry as third or fourth wife to these men, who can speak only Arabic and sometimes Arabic and Turkish. Most of the Moroccan women who come to this poor town of Kızıltepe district of Mardin are university graduates and professional workers. The men of the town met them through Internet. And even, the families of the women give the approval by means of viewing the bridegrooms during videoconference. The cost of bringing the women to Turkey and marrying them is about 2000 dollars. It should also be taken into consideration that the cost of marriage with the wedding ceremony reaches 20,000 Turkish Liras because of the bride price which is a usual tradition of the territory. The men who meet the female introduced in “habibti.com” in Internet after a long conversation send the passport and road moneys of the girl that he wants to marry. After that, a religious marriage ceremony is solemnized with the Moroccan girl and then she is taken to the town. The men who marry the girls from Syria in the past are marrying from Morocco by means of also using their native languages through Internet environment. H.Y., who is 29 years, father of 6 children and in marriage preparation, explains the situation that “it is difficult to bring fellow wife here. The bride price is about 15–20 thousand Turkish Liras. If we marry from Morocco, we incur expenses with only 2 thousand dollars.”

The Internet usage level is very high in the town where approximately 70% of the houses have Internet connection. The men of the region, who express that they do not know much about Internet, know to be in front of the web cameras to the extent to take the women as a second wife. There is nearly no house without computer in this town where the main source of living is trucking and the difficult of subsistence is felt all over. The Internet café which is opened 2 years ago provides services for the persons who do not have or do not know to use computer. Internet is used only for “chat” in the region. Internet is so much involved in the daily life in the town that to be on newspaper or television is replaced with the expression “to be in Internet.”

## Virtual Motivation on the Subject of Polygamy

Polygamy is a fact seen in a lot of communities such as Athenians, Chinese, Indians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians. According to the researches that are carried out by the Sociologists and Anthropologists, polygamy is performed based on a lot of reasons such as religious and philosophical believes, population increase, lack of children, early will of children, labor supply, political reason, traditions, social organization, providing penetration and power, and so on. Turkish society is also a society where polygamy is observed from the past to the present day (Kardam, 2005). The concept such as “fellow wife” is also in question on this subject. A fellow wife means the wives who are married following the first wife, that is to say the principal wife. A fellow wife is the women married after the first wife that is to say the principal wife as a historical fact (Gokalp, 1989, p. 72). Although there is no official figure kept by the state authorities, there are some estimated figures obtained through the sampling in the researches performed. In a study carried out by Serim Timur in 1972, it is revealed that the region where polygamy is most frequently encountered is East/Southeast Anatolia (5%) and the region where polygamy is less frequently encountered is Western Anatolia, that is to say Aegean and Marmara regions (0.2%). In a study carried out by Hacettepe University Population Institute in 1988, the polygamy rate is 1.6% at the country basis. In a study carried out in the beginning of the 1990s, the Southeast Anatolia and East Anatolia regions are seen at the highest lines as the percentile among all of the regions throughout the country was 4.7% (Hacımirzaoğlu, 1998, pp. 173–192). The most important reason of polygamy seems to be the

agriculture-based economy. The nomadic structure of the Southeast region and the traditional values in the country are the primary reasons for continuing polygamy at present. For instance, the need for labor in agriculture, providing penetration, power, and prestige, and marrying the second wife after the woman was infertile and without children could be ensured through polygamy.

It is estimated that there are 29 million Internet users in Turkey (Turkey loves Internet, 2010). Internet now reinforced its place in our lives. We heard about interesting news such as demanding marriage with a girl through Internet. Let us have a look at our news, we nationalized the Internet and inserted it into all parts of our lives, we are now arranging and marrying fellow wife through the virtual environment. The Arabic women in Syria are contacted from the Internet café in a village of Mardin, and they are persuaded to be fellow wives of our men and then the fellow wife event happens between the countries. The researches performed also indicate that the Turkish people show a great harmony with the virtual environment. Even the next generation is in the nature of marking an era in the future. Even our young people at the ages 15–16 have thousands of websites in Internet. With the change in the curriculum of the vocational high schools, as a result of providing the students in the computer branch with the programming languages, now no problem is encountered on the subject of computer programming in the country and it will be never encountered in the future as well.

Turkey is the most active Internet using country in Europe, with 30 minutes per day per person. More and more people from different age groups, occupations and locations spend increasing time on the Internet each day. In addition to this, a vast majority of the users do not consider shopping in Internet secure and its commercial side remains weak or wants to see the commodity before purchasing the same because of their habits.

## Online Polygamy or “Virtual Bride”: Cyber-Ethnographic Research

A qualitative research that is based on the observation fundamentally and richened with a survey and in-depth interviews is carried out in accordance with the ethnographic research that is used in this study (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994, p. 485). The behavior-oriented observations are performed and the oral reports are arranged with the requirements that the research is performed in the natural environment (Elliot & Elliot, 2003, p. 216). For this purpose, the research people are observed in their homes, workplaces, schools, or Internet cafés, and the behaviors of such people are tried to be understood in this manner. The stipulation that a description which is directed at the social behaviors of the persons without understanding the symbolic worlds of the persons who are the subject of this study could not be developed is taken into consideration. Because the group is small in the research, the observation is performed without participation and the observations are recorded as notes in the process of the research. There were also open-end questions in the in-depth interviews in the ethnographic research used, and the flexibility is ensured in our comments in this manner.

### *The Data Obtained by Research and Analysis of Findings*

*Demographic characteristics of participants in the research sample.* The research revealed some demographical data concerning the participants in the first stage of the research. According to this, 37.2% of the participants are male and 62.8% of them are female in the research; 43.4% of the same participants have primary school education, 27.8% of them have secondary school education, and 9.8% have university education. 34.1% of the participants are between the age ranges 18–24. On the other hand, 17.8% are between the age ranges 25–29, 9.5% between the age ranges 30–34, 21.8% between the age ranges 35–39. 36.1% of the participants are traders, 22.6% are workers and 22.4% are self-employed persons and 18.6% of them are unemployed.

**Table 1.** Most Favorite Purpose of Using Internet by the Participants

	<i>n</i>	%
Shopping	13	14
Entertainment	41	44
Communicating with other individuals	39	42
Total	93	100.0

According to this, 72.1% of the participants have their own computers and 71.6% of them have Internet access. When we look at the data concerning the period of using Internet by the participants, it is stated that 34.1% of the participants have been using for 3–5 years, 23.8% for more than 6 years. The data concerning where the participants have access to the Internet are also mentioned in the frame of the research. According to this, 8.2% of the participants have Internet access from home, 10.2% from workplace, 23.2% from home and workplace, and 58.4% from Internet café (Table 1).

The participants use Internet mostly for entertainment (44%), communicating with the other individuals (42%), and shopping (14%).

It is seen that most of participants (42.3%) define themselves as the regular users. When the results concerning the evaluation how the participants consider the place of Internet in their lives are examined, 67.8% of the participants stated their opinions as important and very important. According to this, 26.7% of the participants use Internet website, for example habitbi.com between 21 and 40 hours, 28.8% above 40 hours, and 15.7% between 10 and 12 hours.

*Attitude scale of the participants toward virtual polygamy.* The study field of the research is composed of 93 persons in Gökçe town of Kızıltepe district of Mardin province, where finding fellow wife in virtual environment is observed quite frequently. A 24-item scale is developed by the researchers for determining the feelings of the participants concerning finding fellow wife in virtual environment. The 24-item scale which is formed by means of benefiting from the related literature and expert opinion is applied on 286 persons first to determine the factorial validity. Principle components analysis/varimax rotation were used to investigate the factor structure of the scale. According to the analysis results, those with the factor load 0.35 and higher are selected for the second analysis, and a total of 18 items are seen in operable condition. The results of the fundamental components analysis rotated according to the prime axes indicated that the scale is a single-dimension scale. The  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient of the scale as a whole is calculated as .84 (Table 2).

As a result of the factor analysis performed, it is found that Barlett's test = 5420.570 and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = .84. According to the Barlett's test, there is a correlation between the variables, and the factor analysis is applied on these variables. Because the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient of the scale is .84 as a whole, it could be said that the scale is a secure scale. According to this, the highest point to be taken from the scale is 90 and the lowest point is 18.

## Findings and Comments

57 percent of the participants are male ( $n=53$ ) and 43 percent are female ( $n=40$ ). The attitudes of the participants concerning being a virtual fellow wife are presented in the Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, the average attitude point of the female participants ( $n = 40$ ) is 62.32. Being the median 62 and its proximity to the arithmetic mean indicate that the participants are near to the normal distribution. When the average attitude point 62.32 is evaluated over 5, it counts 3.46. The average attitude point of the male participants ( $n = 53$ ) is 71.64. Being the median 72 and its

**Table 2.** Result of the Factor Analysis Performed About Virtual Fellow Wife

Factor No.	Point No.	Points	Factor Load
1	2	Virtual life is a game	.658
2	4	Virtual life is more real than real	.747
3	1	I consider myself away from the problems in virtual life	.736
4	6	Virtual life is a rescue from a life	.698
5	5	Relationships are safer in virtual life	.733
6	7	There is no benefit in the relationships in virtual life	.735
7	3	I am free in virtual life	.803
8	8	People behave as they want to be in virtual life	.812
9	18	People play the personality desired by the opposite person in virtual life	.680
10	9	Bringing a fellow wife is not a question, it is our tradition	.824
11	16	Bringing a fellow wife is included in our culture	.756
12	10	What is important is the happiness of our wives	.721
13	17	Bringing a fellow wife is not immoral but a need	.623
14	15	This is a need also for the women who come as fellow wives	.746
15	13	I have been never remorseful because I am brought/I come as a fellow wife virtually	.875
16	12	My wives are very happy to be together	.693
17	14	There is a difference between bringing a fellow wife and flirting	.759
18	11	Bringing a fellow wife is to cheat one's wife	.815

**Table 3.** The Attitudes of the Participants Concerning Being a Virtual Fellow Wife

	<i>n</i>	Range	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{X}$	Median	<i>SD</i>
Woman	40	16	55	71	62.32	62	3.83
Man	53	21	60	81	71.64	72	4.55

proximity to the arithmetic mean indicate that the participants are near to the normal distribution. When the average attitude point 71.64 is evaluated over 5, it counts 3.98. According to this, it could be said that the male participants have more positive attitudes than the female participants concerning being virtual fellow wife. In addition to this, the arithmetic means and standard deviations concerning the attitude points are given in the Table 4.

According to this, the responses to the items given by the male and female participants could be evaluated as follows:

- Men stated that virtual life is a game ( $\bar{X} = 3.90$ ); however, women stated that it is not a game ( $\bar{X} = 2.30$ ).
- Women think that virtual life is more real than real ( $\bar{X} = 4.35$ ).
- Men consider themselves away from the problems in virtual life ( $\bar{X} = 4.79$ ).
- Women tend to believe virtual life is more real than the real life itself.
- Relationships are safer in virtual life for men ( $\bar{X} = 4.39$ ). But this is not true for women ( $\bar{X} = 2.67$ ).
- About the existence of stakes/benefits in the relationships in the virtual life, men tend to be indecisive ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), whereas women think stakes/benefits do exist ( $\bar{X} = 2.02$ ).

**Table 4.** The Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations Concerning the Attitude Points

Gender Items	Male			Female		
	<i>n</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>
Virtual life is a game	53	3.90	1.00	40	2.30	0.96
Virtual life is more real than real	53	3.54	1.23	40	4.35	0.69
I consider myself away from the problems in virtual life	53	4.79	0.40	40	2.40	1.15
Virtual life is a rescue from a life	53	4.11	1.17	40	4.72	0.67
Relationships are safer in virtual life	53	4.39	0.98	40	2.67	0.79
There is no benefit in the relationships in virtual life	53	2.92	1.50	40	2.02	0.83
I am free in virtual life	53	4.52	.66	40	4.17	0.90
People behave as they want to be in virtual life	53	2.39	1.18	40	2.17	1.19
People play the personality desired by the opposite person in virtual life	53	4.13	0.98	40	4.72	0.50
Bringing a fellow wife is not a question, it is our tradition	53	4.60	0.53	40	3.97	0.65
Bringing a fellow wife is included in our culture	53	4.54	0.57	40	4.15	0.57
What is important is the happiness of our wives	53	3.88	1.08	40	4.47	0.78
Bringing a fellow wife is not immoral but a need	53	4.94	0.23	40	3.85	0.86
This is a need also for the women who come as fellow wives	53	4.98	0.13	40	3.37	1.10
I have been never remorseful because I am brought/I come as a fellow wife virtually	53	3.58	1.02	40	3.02	0.89
My wives are very happy to be together	53	3.86	1.22	40	2.20	1.24
There is a difference between bringing a fellow wife and flirting	53	4.71	0.45	40	4.70	0.46
Bringing a fellow wife is to cheat one's wife	53	1.77	0.69	40	3.02	0.99

- Men think that they are free in virtual life ( $\bar{X} = 4.52$ ).
- Both think that people behave as they want to be in virtual life.
- Both think that people play the personality desired by the opposite person in virtual life.
- Men think that bringing a fellow wife is included in our culture ( $\bar{X} = 4.60$ ). For women, this proportion is less ( $\bar{X} = 3.97$ ).
- Men think that bringing a fellow wife is not immoral but a need ( $\bar{X} = 4.98$ ). This factor load for women is ( $\bar{X} = 3.37$ ).
- Men have been never remorseful because I am brought/I come as a fellow wife virtually ( $\bar{X} = 3.58$ ).
- Men think that their wives are very happy to be together ( $\bar{X} = 3.86$ ). This factor load for women is  $\bar{X} = 2.20$ .

The independent group's *t* test is applied to determine whether there is any difference between the attitude points in terms of gender (Table 5).

According to the results of the independent group's *t* test performed, a significant difference is found between the attitudes in favor of the male participants in terms of gender. According to this, it could be said that the male participants have more positive attitudes than the female participants.

### **Exemplary Cases From Online Polygamy as a Continuance of the Ethnographic Research**

*Example Case 1 (H.Ö., age 38, grocer, male).* H.Ö. at the age of 37, working as a grocer in the town, prepared for his second marriage with the woman named M. from Morocco whom he knew through Internet 3 years ago. H.Ö., who already has 11 children from his previous marriage, officially got divorced with his former wife and then performed official marriage with M. H.Ö., who continue to live in the same house together with both of his wives, has one child from his Moroccan wife

**Table 5.** Independent Groups t Test Results Concerning the Attitudes of the Participants in Terms of Gender

Groups	n	$\bar{X}$	S	SD	t	Significance Level
Female	40	62.32	3.83	91	10.44*	$p < .000$
Male	53	71.64	4.55			

Note. Levene test value = 1.227; significance level = .271.

\*  $p < .05$ .

M. H.Ö., who states that he loves his wife very much, says that “My Moroccan wife is an university graduate, and she knows French and English. We speak Arabic at home. We have a great marriage.”

*Example Case 2 (N.Y., age 60, driver).* S., 35 years, is brought as the second wife from Morocco by N.Y. who is 60 years, working as a driver, and not educated at all. S., who states that they knew and talked to each other via a webcam through Internet, tells that “It is a matter of destiny. There are 8 children from my fellow wife. I am performing the daily house works and handle the cleaning of the children, wash their heads, and comb their hairs. I am also trying to relieve my longing for my homeland by means of watching the Arabic channels through satellite. I am having video conference for twice in a week with my family that lives in Morocco.”

*Example Case 3 (H.Y., age 29, driver).*

An Internet café is opened in the town a short period ago. Ö. met and married with a girl from Morocco in ‘habibti’ chat page opened there. After that, all of the village residents started to find a Moroccan bride in this manner. If it will go on in this way, then there will be Moroccan bride in all of the houses in the village. My wife does not object to my re-marriage. Nobody here wants to give fellow wife. And who gives wants higher amounts of bride price. We could not meet such needs. So we go without any expense and marry or bring fellow wife by means of spending 2 thousand dollars only.

*Example Case 4 (A.E., Morocco, female).* A.E. finished university in Morocco. The young woman, who taught French for the children in a kindergarten in Rabat, also knows French, English, and Arabic, came to the poorest house of this poor village, because of love, in her own expression. Her meeting with İ.E. via Internet one and half years ago changed her life completely. Because İskender, who has a daughter with his first wife with whom he married Imam/Moslem wedding (religious marriage that has no legal standing in Turkey); he immediately performed a civil (legal) marriage with A.E. He says that he told A.E. about his poverty, unemployment, and previous marriage, and then A.E. said that “I accept all of the conditions,” and she showed the greatness of her love in this manner. Aziza points out the love as the only reason for leaving her comfortable life in Morocco and coming to this town. A.E., who is pregnant for 7 months, will have a girl.

*Example Case 5 (Y.M., Morocco, female).* Y.M. tells that her Turkish husband says that “If she will be a woman from Istanbul, maybe she would not come to and live in this village.” Y.M. tells that the Moroccan women make such a choice actually because of the economical grounds. According to her opinion, poverty in Morocco is one of the most important reasons for the desire of lots of women to go to the foreign countries, particularly to Europe as a fellow wife.

## Conclusion

With the development of Internet, the changes in the social structure are closely connected with the lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors of the people. The structure of today’s individual, which is

difficult to be satisfied, includes the variable behavioral types as well. The area mentioned in the article, is a geographical area of Turkey that has been long struggling against separatist terror, unemployment problem, violence in family settings and society, and feeling of alienation from the more civilized parts of the country. The region encountered different daily life practices with the introduction of Internet into their livings. While these people realize everything that they could not find in real life such as relationship with women, chats, words and dreams with Internet, as a matter of fact it does not express a total change. For example, the mater of polygamy and being fellow wife as mentioned in this article is a phenomenon that has been present for centuries in the region. However, we see that this activity changed form with the intensive usage of Internet.

In the research, when we look at the attitudes with the highest factor loads, we see that the participants normalized and even considered a tradition a life practice that has been continuing for centuries, such as polygamy and being fellow wife. In this research, we see that two arguments such as “I have been never remorseful because I am brought/I come as a fellow wife virtually” and “Bringing a fellow wife is not a question, it is our tradition” showed the highest attitudes. And this shows that an information world like Internet could not completely change the world of imagination of its users instead its increasingly widespread usage, on the contrary, serves for such lifestyle. In addition to this, the attitudes with the highest factor loads became the expressions “Bringing a fellow wife is to cheat one’s wife” and “I am free in virtual life” in the research. These two propositions indicate the hesitation and complexity of their world of imagination of the participants. The proposition that “Bringing a fellow wife is not immoral, but a need” is another indicator of this hesitation as well. However, it should be stated at this point that when it is looked at this item on the gender variables, the men ( $\bar{X} = 4.94$ ) believe more than the women ( $\bar{X} = 3.85$ ) that “Bringing a fellow wife is not immoral, but a need.”

In addition to this, in the research, the arithmetic means and standard deviations concerning the attitude points of the participants are taken on the gender variable. According to this, the research showed that the men expressed that the virtual life is a game on one hand, they consider them away from the problems in the virtual life, on the other hand. However, the women showed an attitude that the virtual life is not a game but is more real than the reality itself. This attitude difference between the genders shows that the women consider the life as more real and free from private purposes. As a conclusion, in line with this comment, it should also be remembered that a fact like being a second wife is experienced because the men want so and the women feel obliged to be. As seen in the findings, men felt indecisive about the existence of stakes/benefits in the relationships in the virtual life ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), whereas women think stakes/benefits do exist ( $\bar{X} = 2.02$ ).

In addition to this, women seem to be indecisive in regretting to be a virtual second wife, while men incline to be a bit more regretful. In line with that, while the men believe that bringing fellow wife does not mean cheating one’s wife, the women showed attitude at the indecisive level on this subject. When considering the present social structure in the region, this situation is normal. As a result, when it is looked at the social gender definition experienced in the region, they stated that the happiness of the spouses is important. For the women ( $\bar{X} = 4.47$ ) this rate obtained is as much higher than the men ( $\bar{X} = 3.88$ ).

As it could be understood from the example case examinations, the men consider the tradition of being a fellow wife normal, irrespective of its number. The preference of the women makes emphasis rather on the situation of obligation. Considering that the fellow wives that are found through Internet are mostly foreigners, it should be stated that it is understood that the expectations of these women are a better life expectation and rescue from their previous lives. It is further contemplated that the images pumped through the Turkish movie industry and media in the recent years are also effective at this point.

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### Bios

**Uğur Bati** is an assistant professor and is the member of Yeditepe University Communication Faculty located in Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: [batiugur@gmail.com](mailto:batiugur@gmail.com).

**Bünyamin Atıcı** is an assistant professor and is the member of Firat University Education Faculty located in Elazığ, Turkey. E-mail: [batıcı@gmail.com](mailto:batıcı@gmail.com).