CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
More than two decades after the Internet popularization on 1990s, the Internet has been integrated in almost all aspects of human societies. It explains why “the Internet can capture contradictions, paradoxes and dynamisms of today’s societies, probably better than any other social phenomenon” (Semati, 2007). Today, indicating the conditions of societies without understanding the Internet is impossible.

The Internet is inherently a social phenomenon. Even technological understanding of the Internet inevitably requires social explanations about it. As a social phenomenon, the Internet has been gradually weaved on social fabrics through a bilateral process of process of acculturation and immersion. The Internet simultaneously affects societies and mutually it is being affected by social dynamisms.

In an ideal social study of the Internet, the researcher should acquire in-depth understanding of the both, the particular society in which the Internet is being studied as well as a holistic understanding of the Internet as a highly pluralistic social phenomenon.

Relying on a longtime ethnographic tradition, particularly on unique methods such as "participant observation", anthropology has special chance among other social sciences to effectively study the Internet. Anthropology can provide reliable theoretical and appropriate methodological framework to study the Internet. As the cornerstone of anthropology, ethnography has been the key methodological strategy in anthropological studies of the Internet (Bell, 2006). Rooted in anthropology, ethnography has been increasingly practicing by many other social scientists who are interested in the Internet as the subject of the study.

The current research is a "virtual ethnography", an ethnographic research to study the Internet among the Muslim community of Mysore. In this study, which is led by a qualitative approach, descriptive goals are set to be discovered. The fieldwork was conducted during three years from 2011 to 2014 on the both real world as well as online space. In overall, 517 members of the Muslim community of Mysore were selected as the samples of the study.
1.1. The rise of the Internet

Technically, the Internet – Interconnected Networks – is the global network of interconnected computers which allows millions of users all around the world to be connected to each other and exchange information. The Internet has developed out of the attempts to transfer information between computers during 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. These attempts were at the intersection of military and academic demands in the United States and later in some other western countries.

The Internet did not become popular until the early 1990s when the Internet popularity dramatically exploded which usually is known as "the Internet boom". It has been estimated that in 1990s the “year to year” growth rate of the Internet population was about 100% and in 1996 and 1997 it was even more (Coffman and Odlyzko, 1998). Since 1990s until today, the Internet population continues to grow at a significant rate. The Internet has attracted more and more users all around the world. The Internet world Stats estimates world Internet population 3,035,749,340 for June 30th 2014.

The exponential rate of the Internet population growth within such a short time has several reasons. It was coincided with the invention of "World Wide Web" or (WWW) in the late 1980s which facilitated the use of the Internet and as the result allowed many unskilled users to enter into the "cyber space". More Internet users turned the Internet to a tempting new market. The commodification process of the Internet accelerated and amplified the process of Internet population growth.

The rise of the Internet was also the natural consequence of the global conditions in the late 20th century and the early 21st century. High interdependency of societies, activities of international corporations beyond the national borders, formation of global chains of production and consumption, international political and economic integrations, proliferation of mass medias, considerable improvements in long distance communication technologies and developments in transportation were some of the factors that provided favorable condition to the rise of the Internet.
Sustainable living in the interwoven global society of the late 20th century and the early 21st century required rapid and long distance communication settings to eliminate restrictions and barriers. The Internet unprecedentedly eliminated many "temporal" and "spatial" boundaries as individuals who were geographically dispersed could instantaneously communicate with each other at any time through the Internet.

Millions of people around the world today regularly spend their time on the Internet and accordingly the Internet has assimilated into everyday life of people in a way that it is hard to believe life without the Internet. The Internet has becomes an inseparable part of their lives as a common appliance in their households, a vital tool at schools and offices, and increasingly an inseparable part of public space. People create communities, find friends, and fall in love, do business, and use the Internet services such as online communities, social networking platforms, instant messaging services and many other online services on regular basis.

The Internet has been increasingly embedded into the context of everyday life of people. As the result, "physical" and "virtual" activities of Internet users are intermingled on a new ‘synthetic space’; it means that the daily life of people is increasingly take place in parallel "online" and "offline" spaces. The fact that the Internet is highly integrated into daily routines of people explains why the Internet should not be understood as “exotic and removed from real life” (Cartera, 2011).

The Internet has great consequences for social life. The advent of the Internet has dramatically affected the ways through which people behave, organize, and interact. The Internet has transformed the processes of learning, ways of entertainment, and ways of doing business. “The Internet has woven together humanity in new ways” (Kirmayer et al. 2013). New forms of groups and communities have been shaped and human relations have been rapidly expanding into this new "social space".

In this new "social space" people can be connected regardless of their place through different combinations of textual and audio-visual digital communication environments. Accordingly, the Internet not only has altered the older forms of human
relations, but it also has provided unexampled new forms of private and public communications.

Widespread use of the Internet has made it a natural setting for anthropological research. The Internet is worthy of anthropological attention and as the Internet has gradually assimilated on social dynamisms the anthropological attentions to the Internet are accumulated on an emerging sub-discipline of social-cultural anthropology. There are different terminologies to call this anthropological inquiry such as "cyber anthropology", "digital anthropology" or "virtual anthropology" and each of these terms represent certain anthropological perspective to study the Internet.

In an overall view, anthropologists have encountered with the Internet through three major approaches; 1) studying the Internet as a "social phenomenon" with considerable social implications, 2) studying the Internet as a new "social space" where new social experiences and different forms of virtual culture have been emerging, and 3) using the Internet as a new research tool to conduct anthropological researches. In simple words, “study the Internet, on the Internet and by the Internet”.

Anthropological inquiry about the Internet has been increasingly concerned to understand how people experience the Internet, how the Internet operates within the framework of everyday life of people (Helen Gerth, 2009) and how the Internet has embedded into the social fabrics. As time passes anthropologists increasingly engage to explore the dichotomous complex relationships between real and virtual social experiences and cultural forms. So, anthropological study of a group of people in their "natural habitat" inevitably includes studying their "online habitat" as well (Hallett and Barber, 2013).

As the Internet entered into the anthropological inquiry, anthropologists applied theoretical and methodological approaches in anthropology to study the cultural practices on the Internet. The Internet also provided an effective new tool for conducting anthropological researches. Using the Internet, anthropologists can easily have access to articles, references, news reports and etc. (Gobo and Diottia, 2008).
1.2. Ethnography and the Internet

Ethnographers have long been concerned with how individuals and groups live out life in social spaces (Hallett and Barber, 2013). As a qualitative field of research, ethnography aims to construct in-depth understanding of everyday life of people, through direct engagement, prolonged participation, observations and interviews. Many of the anthropologists who are interested to study the Internet believe that “ethnography is the best strategy to study the Internet” (Hine, 2000).

"Virtual ethnography" is the “modern, digital equivalent of Malinowskian ethnographic forms” (Masten and Plowman, 2003) and entails much of the same procedures of traditional ethnographic researches but with a different approaches. "Virtual ethnography" provides detailed profiles of what a particular people find on the Internet and what they make out of it (Miller and Slater, 2000).

The strength of "virtual ethnography" approach to study the Internet is that it provides an “internal view” of the “actual contexts” of people’s understanding and use of the Internet (Ito et al. 2008). While traditional methods of ethnography participant observations and informal interviews continue to be useful, ethnographers need to re-conceptualize several fundamental concepts of traditional ethnography to adapt to the new "social space" of the Internet.

Some of these concepts which need re-adjustment in "virtual ethnography" are ways of entering the field and being in the field, the boundaries of the field effectiveness online observation, the best ways of communicating with study samples, how to define the "field", how to implement new online tools to collect data on "online space", how to conduct online participant observation and how to conduct interviews on the Internet.

Among all these challenges, the discussions about the meaning and boundaries of "field" in virtual ethnography are highly crucial (Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz, 2014). Fieldwork is an important feature of ethnography and central to this approach. In an overall view two major perspectives can be recognize on how to define the boundaries of so called “field” in a virtual ethnography.
One approach focuses mainly on the Internet as a new kind of social space where online interactions and communications develop an enriched field for ethnographic study; based on this perspective, the Internet is a unique place where has its own rules, its own cultural norms, traditions and rituals, its own educational centers, associations, its own economy and its own political movements. Accordingly, the Internet, virtual spaces and online communities are “complex, organized and worthy of study” (Constable, 2003).

In construct, based on the opposite approach the ‘cyberspace’ is not considered as a separated and independent feature from the real world. Instead, the two realms of "real world" and "online space" are considered as inseparable grounds (Hine, 2000). The ways through which people use the Internet “reflects the core dimensions and contradictions of their history and society on the online space” (Miller & Slater, 2000).

Based on this perspective, the Internet is not a “placeless phenomenon; rather it is numerous different technologies which are being used by different people on divers locations” and “as a meaningful phenomenon only exist on particular places” (Miller & Slater, 2000). The Internet creates a dialectic between online and offline events, perspectives, and interactions” (Wilson and Peterson, 2002). Accordingly, the field in an ethnographic study of the Internet should be “multi-sited” network of intersecting offline and online grounds and an ideal ethnography of the Internet is not limited to study the online behaviors of the studied people, rather how the Internet is embedded on the context of their everyday.

1.3. The research problem

The mutual interaction between the Internet and societies illuminates an ideal anthropological study of the Internet. In such an ideal anthropological study, the researcher should investigate the Internet in the context of everyday life of people. As the result, the research will acquire understanding of the both, the particular society in which the Internet is being studied as well as the Internet as a highly pluralistic social phenomenon. A series of such ethnographic studies about the Internet gradually would provide enough materials for of cross-cultural comparison to show how the processes of embedding the Internet are unique in different social fabrics.
This research is a "virtual ethnography" among Muslim community of Mysore. Such as any other ethnographic study, this research is a "descriptive research". Accordingly, the main aim in the study is to provide descriptions about how the Internet is understood and used by Muslims of Mysore and how the Internet is embedded in the context of their everyday life.

The Internet turns to be more "local" (Postill, 2008). The ways through which people conceptualize and use the Internet, and the ways of assimilation of the Internet on their everyday life, vary from one society to another society. Each society localizes the Internet on a unique way. Accordingly, in an ideal virtual ethnography, instead of generalizations about the Internet and its impacts, it is necessary to investigate the Internet on the specific context.

1.4. The research objectives

As a "virtual ethnography" descriptive goals are set to be discovered through qualitative approach. Such descriptions should portrait the Internet among Muslims of Mysore. Accordingly, the following research objectives are set to be achieved through this study:

1. Investigating and describing the “online context” among Muslims of Mysore
2. Investigating and describing the ways through which Muslims of Mysore conceptualize the Internet
3. Investigating and describing how Muslims of Mysore use the Internet on their everyday lives
4. Investigating and describing how the Internet is embedded in the lives of Muslims of Mysore and how it has affected their daily lives

1.5. Research necessity

Despite the importance of the Muslim community, as the largest minority population in Mysore, there are very few social studies (e.g. anthropological studies) which are dedicated to study this population. A review of the existing literature about the Muslim community of Mysore reveal that their social, cultural and economic conditions
and their lifestyle are issues which are not scientifically discussed enough and needed to be discussed in more details.

Studying the Internet in such community will provide valuable information about their conditions, their social dynamisms and their lifestyle. The ways through which people use the Internet, as well as the pattern through which the Internet embed in a society can largely reflect their social dynamisms. Accordingly, an in-depth study of the Internet among Muslims of Mysore can effectively portray not only the internal dynamisms of the community, but also the ways through which they interact with other local and global forces.

In other hands, the traditional Islamic forces enact among Muslim community of Mysore along with other local, national and global factors and together shape the reality of their social experience. The Internet can be seen as one of powerful global sources with considerable social and cultural impacts. Studying the Internet among Muslim community of Mysore, will provide a reliable source of understanding the way through which traditional and modern forces coexist and work together.

1.6. The research benefits

In the era of digital explosion almost every aspects of social life are affected by the Internet. It would be difficult – if not impossible – to find any aspects of social life which have not been affected by the advent of the Internet. As the Internet is growing rapidly, both in terms of its population and its social implications, it has turned to be an important part of any sustainable development program in the 21st century. The Internet and the technologies related to the Internet can offer remarkable solutions for the complex challenges 21st societies. Reasonably, conducting an ethnographic research about the Internet is important because it can provide valuable information for government agencies, civil societies, academia and all those social forces which are engaged on sustainable development.

In other hands, conducting an ethnographic study about the Internet can provide historical account about the Internet and the particular population among them the
Internet is studied. The telegraph was “the Internet of Victorian era” (Thurlow et al., 2004). Reading an ethnographic description full of reach details about the ways in which people used the telegraph and how the telegraph was embedded on the context of 19th and 20th century provides wonderful historical record for today’s scholars.

The same is true about the ethnographic studies about the Internet. Considering the fast technological shifts we can assume that the Internet and its social-cultural dynamisms will change very rapidly and what is the cutting edge technology today, in a very short time will be an old technology. Over time, the detailed descriptions about how a particular group of people conceptualize and use the Internet will provide remarkably valuable information for the coming scholars who will study the history of the Internet and its impacts on the early 21st century.

Another important benefit of this ethnographic research is its contribution to the consolidation of the anthropological theory and method to study the Internet. Considering the fact that the Internet itself is a relatively new phenomenon, naturally, the anthropological researches about the Internet also do not have a long history as well. Improvement and consolidation of anthropological frameworks to study the Internet needs more time and more contributions. The current anthropological research about the Internet can participate to enrich the literature of this field.

1.7. The research limitations

Generally, the nature of ethnographic studies about the Internet is similar to the traditional ethnographic researches. Both share many similar limitations as well. Although working with the Internet can help us to reduce and ameliorate some of these limitations, but at the other hand, an ethnographic study about the Internet has some special and extra challenges which root on the nature of the Internet.

Metaphorically, ethnographic study about the Internet is similar to “shooting a very fast moving object”. The online landscape rapidly changes and it imposes a real challenge on conducting ethnographic research about the Internet. What is correct today
can be changed in a very short time. Accordingly, any anthropological interpretation about the Internet needs to consider the fast technological shifts on online space.

1.8. The thesis structure

In the second chapter, a selected of contributions in the field on anthropology of the Internet has been reviewed. In this chapter, a review particularly concerned with mobile phone studies and reviewing some contributions on Internet studies on the context of India also have been provided.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodological procedures of conducting this ethnographic study. The processes of field entry, sampling, data collection along with the ethical considerations on conducting a virtual ethnographic research have been explained on this chapter.

Chapter 4 provides some accounts about Muslim community of Mysore through looking at geographical distribution, family structures, education level, economic level and some other properties of Muslim community of Mysore.

In chapter 5, the ethnographic report, descriptions about digital context among Muslims of Mysore, motivations and barriers of accessing to the Internet, their patterns of accessing to the Internet, their patterns of Internet usage are provided. In chapter 6, summary and conclusion is represented.