

# ‘World Wide Journey of the Needle: Cross-Cultural Web Radio Experience’

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## Abstract

This article examines cross-cultural web radio use of university students coming from strictly distinguishable countries (Turkey and the Netherlands) with respect to both cultural characteristics and the development of the radio cultures. Our research builds on a conceptual framework combining two interrelated variable sets: Cultural value orientations and the factors determining the formation of radio culture in these countries. The proposed conceptual framework is used to interpret the data derived from qualitative analysis that employs a multi-method approach based on a three-step procedure: pre-experience, experience and post-experience. As a result, this study concludes that despite some evident distinctive practices found at user experience level, the use and understanding of the web radio seems to be pressing towards a standardized listening practice characterized by customizable music box.

**Keywords:** Culture, Web, Radio, Cultural Variables, Cross-cultural

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## Introduction

Today Internet technology, which facilitates many aspects of the computer-mediated communication, is widely articulated around the concept of "electronic democracy". By providing a horizontal communication opportunity, the Internet has the potential of creating public spaces, arenas for the free engagement of citizens in deliberation and public debate. This evokes hopefully the view of Enzensberger on the *emancipatory use of media* - decentralized, linking many to many, fostering interactivity, collectively produced and actively used, promoting collective mobilization (Enzensberger 1974:113). The Internet, on the other hand, as the first mass medium providing the qualities of instant dissemination, worldwide reach, and customization, offers an attractive opportunity for the media industries to augment their competitiveness in the increasingly crowded media marketplace (Ren and Chan Olmsted 2004:6). This dualism provokes a vital question with respect to the future and the potentials of computer mediated communication: Is web based media developing towards a sphere of expression in which different experiences all over the world meet and distinctive cultural characteristics are represented, or towards a standardized media use in which the dissimilarities melt in the same pot prevail increasingly the opportunity to a pluralistic media use?

To shed light on this issue we examine the use of web radio as a communication tool by two different informant groups of university students from strictly distinguishable countries (Turkey and the Netherlands) with respect to both cultural characteristics and the development of the radio cultures. More specifically, we seek to identify cultural differences associated with web radio by performing a cross-cultural comparison of user experience. To

our knowledge, there are only a very limited number of user-centered researches that focuses directly on the user experience provided by the web radio medium. Moreover, in order to make an in-depth analysis on cross-cultural web radio experience, our research builds on a conceptual framework, which combines two interrelated variable sets. Adopted from the anthropology literature, the first set is defined by Hofstede (1980), which compares similarities and differences between two cultures. The second set conceptualizes the factors that determine the formation of radio culture in these countries. Developed by the correlation of two sets, the proposed conceptual framework is used to interpret the data derived from the qualitative analysis. We collected data by adopting a multi-method approach and employing various data collection techniques. Specifically, we use a three step procedure –pre-experience, experience and post-experience-, which is based on an analytical approach developed along successive studies describing experience as a subjective, constructive, holistic and spatio-temporal phenomenon (Dewey 1934; McCarthy and Wright 2004, Vyas and Van der Veer 2004).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Next section outlines the theoretical background of the conceptual framework and briefly summarizes the relevant literature. Section three outlines the methodology, followed by the findings, discussion and conclusions.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Culture and Cultural Value Orientations**

There are various definitions for the term ‘culture’ especially in the field of cultural anthropology. Hofstede’s definition, underlining the notion of common experience, supports our research approach: "Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it is learned" (Hofstede 1996:5). According Kroeber and Parsons (1958), culture is transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas and other symbolic meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced. Similarly, Triandis (1972) states that cultural experience is expressed in objective artifacts. Both definitions suggest that the way people view the world around them is expressed in cultural products such as paintings, books, folklore and clothing. In this sense, besides the radio listening experience at the other end of the communicative interaction continuum lies the radio production which can also be defined as a cultural artifact.

It is difficult to measure culture and its effects, but ‘cultural value orientations’ or ‘cultural variables’ as identified in anthropological research can be used to classify and evaluate different cultural groups. In cross-cultural research, cultural orientations such as those developed by Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars (1993) and Hall (1959) can be used to offer a detailed description of the cultural background of the groups involved, predict users’ behaviours, develop a protocol for communication with each of the cultural groups, evaluate understanding in terms of cultural orientations and finally match findings and responses with participants’ expected behaviour (Evers 1999:332). Between 1978-80, Hofstede identified four dimensions and rated 53 countries including Turkey and the Netherlands on indices for each dimension. The dimensions he offered are as follows (Evers 1999, Simon 2001, Marcus and Gould 2000): *Power Distance* refers the extent to which everyone in a society (particularly the less powerful) accepts the unequal distribution of power. This translates into the importance of information about status and organizational structure. *Uncertainty Avoidance* deals with how societies accommodate high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity in

the environment. These cultures search for a certain structure, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable. Members of the low uncertainty avoidance cultures, on the other hand, tend to have fewer problems with taking risks, and exploring the unknown.

*Individualism and Collectivism* describes the way in which cultures perceive the role of the individual in a group. In collectivistic cultures, the interest of the group comes before that of the individual and people prefer working and making decisions in groups rather than to be represented by an individual with decisive power. *Masculinity and Femininity* focuses on the traditional assignment to masculine roles of assertiveness, competition, and toughness, and to feminine roles of orientation to home and children, people and tenderness (Hofstede, 1980).

Hofstede's cultural orientation values for Turkey and the Netherlands are shown in Table 1. These values indicate that there are significant differences between the two cultures at each variable.

**Table 1** Cultural Orientation in Turkey and the Netherlands (Marcus and Gould 2000:452)

	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>Turkey</b>
<b>Power Distance</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Individualism</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Uncertainty Avoidance</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>85</b>

### **Evolution of Radio Culture in Turkey and the Netherlands**

A thorough investigation of radio history in Turkey and the Netherlands reveals three major phases in the evolution of radio culture: public broadcasting, diversification, and commercialization (see Table 2). We discuss the distinct characteristics of these phases subsequently.

By following the model offered by BBC, public radios affected the radio broadcasting systems in European countries until the early 1990s to a considerable extent (Mutlu 1999:24; Dunaway 2002:69). Although the European Public Broadcasters have common principals, there are some differences between the countries in terms of organizational structures and degree of autonomy (political, financial, and productional). For example, the relationship between political control/accountability and broadcaster independence has been organized differently throughout Europe (Blumler 1992:13) underlines the distinctions between the public broadcast systems due to three forms of organization with respect to their engagement in politics: (i) formally autonomous system-as in Britain though also in Ireland and Sweden, (ii) politics-in-broadcasting systems as in Germany, Denmark and Belgium, and (iii) politics-over-broadcasting systems as in Greece and Italy and France in the past (Kelly 1984:73). The Turkish public broadcast system can be considered as a mixture of the last two categories, whereas the Dutch broadcasting system is mostly known as an exception in Europe and cannot be incorporated into any distinctive category.

The specificity of the Dutch system depends on the 'pillarisation' of its society, according to which the social structure was being divided into various social-religious groups (Van der Wurff 2004:222; McQuail 1992:96). This structure also determines the implementation of the pluralism in a way that the term is being interpreted as a connotation of vertical pluralism, which refers the pluriformity of the society instead of unity (Wieten 1979:172). Therefore, the Dutch public broadcasting system is made up of a collection of individual, independent and member-based broadcasting organizations instead of a single broadcasting organization as in most of European countries, where the public broadcasting systems have tended to develop as part of the centralizing and homogenizing apparatus of the state (Daalmeijer 1993:101; Cormack 1993:101).

Contrary to both Western European and the Dutch systems, Turkish public broadcasting, including the ten years 'private wireless' period, was shaped under the strict supervision of the state (Kejanlıoğlu 1998:42). Therefore, the Turkish system cannot be understood without referring to its centralist and national character. Certainly, also in Europe and in USA, the radio had an important role on the construction of the 'nation' and its everyday life until 1950s (Crissel 1997; Hilmes 1997). Nevertheless, as distinct from Western versions, Turkish public radio had taken over an additional mission, which can be described as 'westernization'. With a repressive/paternal character, which implied many prohibitions, public radio tried to zeroize the social memory in order to erase the former cultural identity, which has been usually in conflict with modern formations (Ahıska 2005:30). It is obvious that the state-oriented character of the public broadcaster caused also the 'politization' of the radio across the political challenges of next years. Such that, the 'partisan' radio of the 1950s was one the justifications of the military coup in 1960 (Taşer 1969:86). The *politics-over-broadcasting* form of radio always kept the debates on the autonomy of the system alive. Throughout the period in which the system was shaken up by military coups and interventions, the protectionist, state-oriented structure of radio has been transformed into an intrusive form in which the paternalism and the politicization existed in conjugation with each other. It was the peculiarities of the system, which have determined the conditions of a prohibitive, partial, formal, standard and distant radio culture until the privatization of the radio sphere. Another major factor that had an important role on the embodiment of radio culture in Europe was the evaluation of alternative forms of communication. As a result of this evaluation, decentralized small-scale media projects emerged. This movement was strongly related with the need of setting the communication process beyond the realm of mass communication, "*where the communication process is addressed not only in representative terms ('for people'), but in participatory terms as well ('from the people')*" (Vatikiotis 2004:4). According to Hollander (1992), decentralization was an identical element of these alternative radio projects which took part along anti-authority and anti-imperialism while refusing the domination by political, cultural, ethnic, and communicative orthodoxies. Concordantly, beginning from 1950s public radio began to be threatened by pirates throughout Europe. The basic presumption of uniformity in audience, stated Dunaway, "one nation, one broadcasting service" was challenged (Dunaway 2002:69). This movement pushed the existing broadcasting systems to be diversified in decentralized small-scale media projects. The process acquired a dualist character in time: the emergence of commercial radios and evolution of community radio concept. With its decentralized structure, it was the Dutch system, which generated the most number of community-oriented local radios in Europe (Prehn 1992:254).

Contrary to European experience, Turkish system was being diversified in only one direction: commercialization. In this period of privatization, the radio sphere was entirely organized as a market place (Topuz 1990:133). In this sense, the diversification in Turkish system implied

the elimination of the concept of public service instead of the creation of a free sphere for ‘voiceless’, whom public radio never takes into consideration. That is why the Turkish privatization was mostly described as a model with *many microphones dispersing the same voice* (Duran 2000:25). Thereby in Turkey, a non-compliant and inordinate commercial radio culture has resulted from this sudden and monolithic privatization, which brought along an eclectic popular culture depending on magazine and entertainment. This period also represented the emergence of a new radio language, which was more familiar than that of the former radio distant and formal. Mostly interpreted as a fictive familiarity, this pragmatic strategy of *giving people what they want* was being constructed under a crossbred format radio identity (Cankaya 1997). Contrary to Turkish privatization, especially in the Netherlands, commercialization was relatively a long-term process, which lasted according to a controlled changeover towards the protection of public interest. However, that is not to say that commercial broadcasters in Europe do not threaten public communication. Nowadays, radio industry is being mostly organized to answer personal needs in a customizable way rather than to address shared interests. Despite the huge expansion in radio activity emerged by the necessity to feed such fragmented, individual demands, commercial stations fail to maintain a real diversity in radio listening experience (Hendy 2000:65), as they committed and unfortunately seem to set a bad example for independent media experiences (Dunaway 2002:73).

**Table 2** Evolution of radio culture in the Netherlands and Turkey

	<b>NETHERLANDS</b>	<b>TURKEY</b>
<b>PUBLIC BROADCASTING</b>	Decentralized Pillarisation Voluntary self control Not national	Centralized Unity Repressive paternal – politicized National
<b>DIVERSIFICATION</b>	Activist-adversative Beyond mass communication Community based-pluralistic Reformulation of public communication	Not adversative Under mass communication Commercial oriented Elimination of public communication
<b>COMMERCIALISATION</b>	Controlled Individualistic Regulations toward protection of public interest	Non-compliant/inordinate Familiar Regulations toward protection of state

## User Experience Research

The term "user experience" is associated with a wide range of meanings. However, a definite theory of experience does not exist. According to Forlizzi and Battarbee's (2004:262) extensive literature review on user experience different models and theoretical approaches can

be grouped in three categories: (i) *product-centered models* that provide applications for design practice, (ii) *user-centered models* that help designers and developers to understand the potential users, and (iii) *interaction-centered models* that explore the role of products in bridging the gap between designer and user. In this last category, approaches from a number of disciplines are melted in one pot. For example, the philosopher John Dewey has been instrumental in helping designers understand the qualitative and definitive aspects of experience (Desmet 2002; Dewey 1980). Based on Dewey (1934), McCarthy and Wright (2004) and Vyas and Van der Veer (2006:138) describe experience as a subjective, constructive, holistic and spatio-temporal phenomenon.

Experience as a "subjective" phenomenon is concerned with the values and meanings products bring through technology to users' lives. Experience as a "constructive" phenomenon is reflexive and recursive (Wright et al. 2003). During their interaction with technology, users do not engage in experience as a ready-made entity, but they actively construct the experience using their interpretation. Experience as a "holistic" phenomenon argues the 'totality' of users' interaction with the system. Experience as a "spatio-temporal" phenomenon indicates that experience can be best understood in real use, i.e., in the actual practice that may have social, political or cultural significance. According to Wright et al. (2003), all types of experience have a spatio-temporal thread (Wright et al., 2003).

This approach leads us to the impact of culture on user experience. A vast number of studies employing cultural variables focus on cultural differences in user experiences (Evers 1999; Choong and Salvendy 1998; Marcus and Gould 2000; Bourges-Waldegg and Scrivener 2000; Dam et al., 2005) and show that the expectations, attitudes, and understanding towards an interface differ between users of different cultural and national backgrounds. Evers (1999) points out to a gap in previous cross-cultural research: Findings are mostly based on self-reported quantitative data rather than actual observation of user behavior.

Web radio literature seems to predicate the same gap. Previous studies on web radio (Potter 2003; Lind and Medoff 1999; Ren and Chan-Olmsted 2004; Pitts and Harms 2003; McClung 2001; Murphy and Rayho 1997; Murphy 1999; Moody et al. 2003) also adopt a quantitative approach and collect data through surveys. The interest of media marketplace and the radio industry for the interactive potential of web radio seems to lead the studies in the field. Researchers restrict their studies to initiatives undertaken by commercial radio stations on the web (Van Selm et al. 2003). By mainly focusing on Web radio as a medium for audience interaction, the research of Van Selm et al. (2003) can be defined as a break from the mainstream in radio research in which they illustrated how web technology was used to facilitate interaction between a web radio programme and its listeners.

### **Conceptual Framework: Radio Culture and Cultural Experience**

In cross-cultural studies, referring only to cultural value orientations may not be enough to provide the solid basis alone for a detailed analysis of the user experience (Ess and Sudweeks 2005). As mentioned in the review above, cultural value orientations can be referred to explain user attitudes observed. However, media use is a complicated process, which is shaped by various socio-political and cultural factors. Moreover, user diversities increasingly shift and change, especially as the globalization leads to new "third" identities that represent complex and shifting hybridizations of earlier cultural patterns (Ess and Sudweeks 2005). Specific expressions and phenomena of online media use might be more appropriately and fruitfully examined through alternative frameworks of cultural analysis that go beyond

Hofstede. Therefore, it is assumed that an in-depth investigation towards the evolution of the medium can provide an additional basis for the analysis framework. In this sense, this framework is proposed to provide a more complementary explanation of cultural characteristics, which allows us to analyze the web radio user experience in a cross-cultural study.

From the viewpoint that both radio listening and radio production are cultural experiences; we can state that there is reciprocity between the radio culture and the overall cultural experience. Indeed, in both countries, we observe an apparent correlation between the variables concerning the formation of radio cultures and the cultural variables of anthropology literature. This correlation shows that the variables offered by anthropology literature match substantially the factors determining the differences between the evolution of radio culture in the Netherlands and Turkey. Accordingly, the conceptual framework is developed by combining two interrelated variable sets (see Table 3).

**Table 3** Conceptual Framework: Radio Culture and Cultural Experiences

		CULTURAL VARIABLES						
		1. Power distance	2. Individualism	3. Collectivism	4. Masculinity	5. Femininity	6. Uncertainty Avoidance	
NETHERLANDS	VARIABLES DERIVED FROM THE FORMATION OF RADIO CULTURES	PUBLIC BROADCASTING	pillarization	decentralized				
		DIVERSIFICATION		beyond mass communication			community based	
				activist			pluralist	
		COMMERCIALISATION		controlled/Regulation towards protection of public				
				individualistic				
TURKEY	VARIABLES DERIVED FROM THE FORMATION OF RADIO CULTURES	PUBLIC BROADCASTING	unity		centralized			
			repressive, paternal, politicized					
		DIVERSIFICATION			under mass communication	commercial oriented		

		COMMERCIALISATION			regulation towards protection of the state	non compliant/inordinate		regulation towards protection of the state
						familiar		

The framework provides us reference points for the analysis of web radio experiences. We mainly focus on differences and similarities in experiences of users from different cultural origins with presumably different radio cultures. Specifically, we seek to identify to what extent web radio experience differs due to (1) the cultural origin and (2) the radio culture of the users.

In this study, it is expected that the findings should also reveal the differences that the conceptual framework presented.

**Methodology**

Many researchers point out the difficulty of gathering reliable data on cross-cultural user experience. Social sciences research tradition demands various methods for investigating cultural issues. From the point of anthropology, exploring cultural experiences demands long-term observation-based field studies. However, through a vast number of user-centered studies on interactive environments, human-computer interaction research can provide various methodological instruments for collecting data by means of a structured procedure (Preece et al. 2000)

**Procedure**

As one of our focal constructs is web radio usage we collected user experience data in three major stages according to description of experience adopted (see section four): pre-experience, experience and post-experience.

The "pre-experience" stage included the background questionnaire, which provides information on respondent's demographics, computer-Internet experience and usage frequency, cultural background and radio listening experience. In the subsequent "experience" stage, we employed observation-based methods of data collection to gain better insight in cross-cultural user experience. An unstructured task was designed in a way that the participants could interact with a web radio site without any limitations. The participants were asked to navigate in "role-playing model" and all the navigation was directly observed and recorded on a structured observation sheet by the researcher. During the observation, additional data was collected by "think aloud" procedure and a flash-based software, which recorded all the mouse movements as the respondent browsed the web radio site. The final "post-experience" stage included a post-experience questionnaire and a semi-structured debriefing interview. In the post-experience questionnaire, the participants were asked to describe their overall experience with the web radio they just used by choosing from a list of factors and to motivate their choices. The questionnaire was developed by the personal meaning construct technique that allowed subjects to come-up with meanings associated with the technology in an easy and usable manner (Kelly 1955). Specific adjectives were chosen to



represent the variables in the conceptual framework. Asking the likes and dislikes of the participants about the site and a final evaluation of their web radio experience in their overall radio experience, the interview provided complementary findings.

The study was conducted in English. The language itself can also be considered as a cultural variable which may affect the user experience as well. But in our study, as the official language of the chosen web site was English and all participants could speak advanced level of English fluently, this possible variable is deliberately *excluded*. The cross-cultural findings were mainly evaluated qualitatively with simple complementary quantitative data, as qualitative research methods allow the researcher to delve deeper into contextual issues in investigating the user behavior and understanding in their particular social and cultural context (Evers 1999).

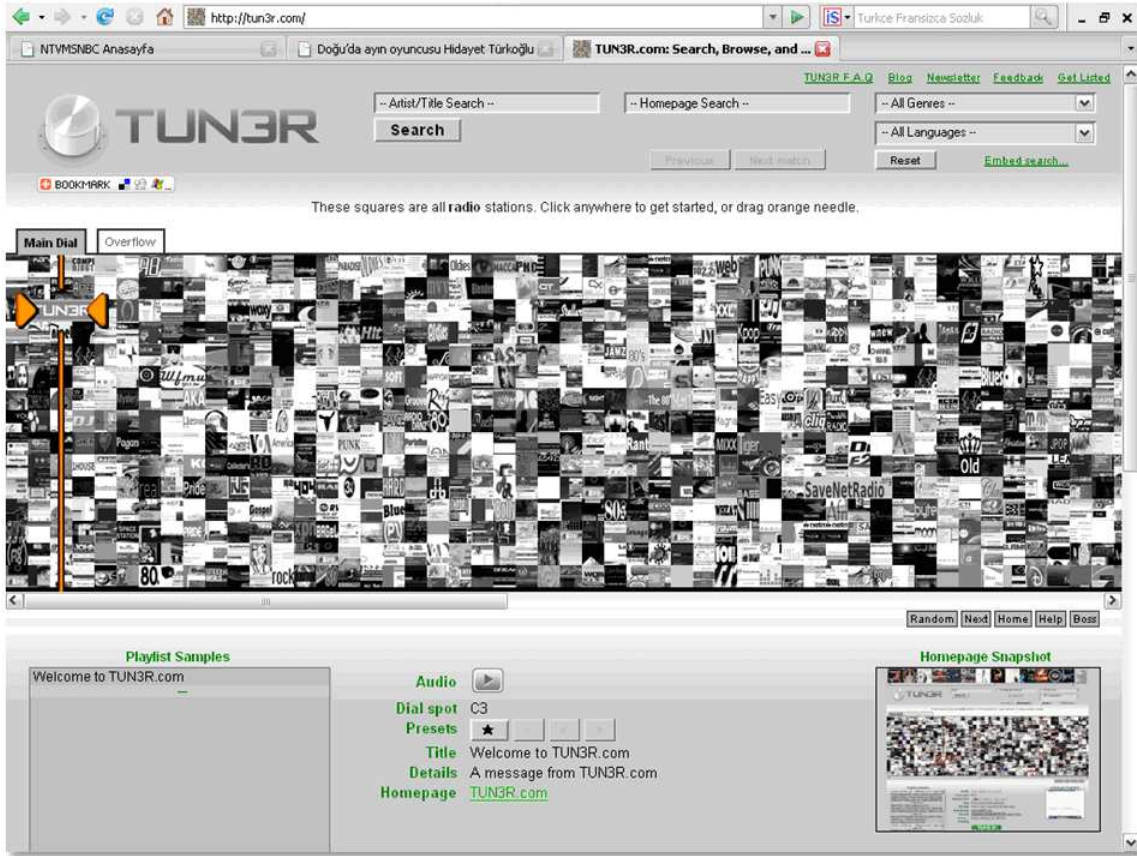
### **Sample and Research Web Radio Site**

Having opposing aspects in the context of both cultural variables and radio culture, the national cultures included in this research were Turkish and Dutch. In addition to that, the lack of cross-cultural user experience and media sociology research on Turkish and Dutch culture was one of the important reasons for the choice of this sample. Turkish sample included 15 participants whereas Dutch sample included 14 participants. Aged between 23-24, all the participants were senior or graduate students of social science faculties in Turkey and the Netherlands with an average computer and Internet experience. By attempting to control for individual differences in computer experience and education level, differences in user experience can be attributed to cultural orientations and radio cultures.

The web radio chosen for this study was TUN3R ( <http://www.tun3r.com> ) (see Figure 1). TUN3R is a US originated web radio site, which enables access to more than 2000 web radio stations from all over the world. TUN3R shows Internet stations, represented by small tiles on a dial, which are generated from the homepage screen shots of the stations. TUN3R is a virtual AM/FM dial complete with an orange tuning needle. Simply by dragging the needle around the dial, the user can instantly hear reduced audio samples from hundreds of stations around the world. Besides giving access to a big number of web radio sites, the ludic interface of TUN3R based on an analogous radio metaphor seems to be a distinctive aspect among other major radio portals. FAQ page in TUN3R web site points out to this aspect (TUN3R, 2008):

*TUN3R actually feels like a real physical radio tuner. It's fun to play with, and encourages serendipity. Our goal is to connect listeners to new Internet radio 'stations' in a fun, interactive way. We'd like to recapture some of idle pleasure provided by tuning an analog radio dial. We also believe that the process of finding radio stations is part science and part randomness.*

**Figure 1** TUN3R web radio site



In a way, TUN3R can be considered as a first attempt for the embodiment of the future projections on web radio, which aims to redefine the web radio experience by re-offering a well-known traditional analogous radio listening experience through wireless and ubiquitous hand-held devices.

## Results

We start by summarizing the main findings following the order that the study was conducted. A detailed analysis of these findings using the conceptual framework is provided in the discussion section.

### Experience Before Use: Pre-Experience Stage

At this stage, a background questionnaire was used to collect data on demographics, computer-Internet experience and usage frequency and cultural background of the users. Besides the findings on these issues that are already briefly presented in the sample section above, this questionnaire also provided data about the everyday radio listening experience of the users and their opinions and expectations towards the radio medium. Although the participants have different cultural origins and radio experiences, no dramatic differences can be found between their responses.

Participants in both groups have 10-15 years of radio listening experience, but they do not seem to be dedicated radio listeners. The frequency of radio listening for both groups is 3-4 days per week. Both groups prefer to listen to the radio alone at home and on the way. All participants listen to the radio through FM/AM channels whereas only half of the participants in both groups are also users of web radio. This ratio seems to reflect the statistics concerning

the radio listeners. According to Bridge Ratings LLC, by 2008 the number of monthly web radio listeners is around 146 millions whereas the number is around 280 millions for terrestrial radio listeners (Bridge Ratings LLC 2007). It was also found out that "Playlist" was considered as an indispensable tool in web radio technology.

Participants in both groups considered "entertainment" function as most important. "Information" seemed to be the second most important function chosen. This finding is consistent with the responses given to the question asking the users to evaluate their radio listening experience through communicative interaction. Participants defined their experience mostly as "pleasurable" and "informative". However, the responses given to these questions also revealed a slight difference. Besides the most important functions mentioned by both groups like "entertainment" and "information", the Dutch participants also associated the radio with "education". On the other hand, "culture" and "recreation" were the frequently observed functions in the Turkish sample. This observation reveals that the expectations of the Dutch participants are shaped by an alternative model of public based participatory radio culture. In this sense, the responses of the Turkish responses seem to reflect the experience of a radio culture, which is transformed from a protectionist, state-oriented structure to a non-compliant and inordinate commercial one that depends on an eclectic popular culture of magazine and entertainment. Findings in following stages also provide support for this idea.

### **Experience During Use: Task Execution Stage**

In the task-based actual usage stage, the participants were asked to navigate freely in the web site till they thought they had enough information about the site. Participants in each group explored the site for an average of 12,5 minutes, which is reasonable for such a portal. Although a common significant navigation approach can be observed in both groups, the two cultural groups showed different behavioral aspects during the navigation.

During the task analysis, a common significant pattern dominated the navigation and hence, the overall experience. This pattern was the persistent effort to access to music as fast as possible. It was obvious that all the participants reduced the function of the medium to a music box. The main goal for both groups was to listen to the music that they demanded: "*I want some music please (NL1)*". In order to achieve this goal all the participants employed the search engine and playlist tools found in the website. However, in case of a failure, each group showed different attitudes, which resulted in distinctive navigation approaches.

Mostly attracted by the ludic interface of the website, which employed an analogous radio metaphor, Turkish participants were very involved in exploring the website, even if they were not able to achieve the goal of listening to music. It was obvious that they liked the idea of using a needle to tune among different radio stations that are represented with little tiles: "*To play with the orange needle is just like tuning a radio station. Very amusing!*" (TR3). Although they expressed negative opinions about the functionality of the website, these statements did not result in user frustration and abandonment of the website. Contrarily, they were observed to be persevering for exploring and understanding the services presented in the website. However, this approach resulted in an unstructured task execution. It was observed that Turkish participants mostly adopted a "trial and error approach" that is based on random operations rather than definite strategies: "*I'm tryin' out, just clickin' randomly*" (TR15). Mainly focusing on the graphical elements rather than the textual elements in the website, this approach mostly resulted in a disorganized and unstructured navigation.

On the other hand, Dutch participants were observed to adopt a structured navigation, which was based on an analytical strategy including definite steps. In order to access to music, most of the participants preferred to use textual content at first. They read the "3 easy steps info" to use TUN3R which led them to the "search" tool. If they failed to access to music, they tried alternative help tools like FAQ. They seemed to be irritated by the metaphorical interface features like the tuning needle: *"It's really annoying that you have to drag the needle so far from one station to another... It's too much work, to keep searching for the station you like"* (NL7). They seemed to be more interested in aspects like efficiency, speed, functionality, etc. Therefore, different from Turkish participants, the experience proposed by TUN3R led them to frustration and abandonment of the website. They simply preferred not to deal with such a flawed system at all. *"I'm done with this site. I didn't understand the point of this website"* (NL14). *"If I was on my own, I wouldn't use this site"* (NL11). These negative opinions brought detailed critics and even proposal of some revisions on the design and functionality of the interface. The critics focused on the demand for a more controlled and usable website with a simple layout and definite choices: *"It's not user-friendly in my opinion, it's not really fast. I would prefer a website that gives results when you enter something"* (NL2).

Finally, we found out that most of the participants in both groups did not pay any attention to the interactive features such as blog, e-mail and newsletter in TUN3R during the navigation. It can be stated that the effort for reaching music instantly dominated the navigation and resulted in the ignorance of alternative tools of interaction.

### **Experience After Use: Post Experience Stage**

In the last stage, the participants were asked to describe their overall experience with TUN3R using a multi-choice questionnaire listing several factors. The participants were also asked to indicate the reasons for their choices. The final semi-structured interview provided a validity check for the data collected.

Both groups described their overall experience with TUN3R as "customizable". The participants justified this statement by referring to customizable aspects of TUN3R, which could satisfy various user needs and demands. These aspects were defined as playlist and favorites options, language and gender filters in the search tool and a huge database of international web radio stations. "Addressing any personal taste" with these features was a dominant and significant argumentation for both groups: *"Very customizable, you can decide everything. It's very personal and adaptive to your own taste"* (NL12).

Both groups also described their experience with TUN3R as "innovative". However, argumentations in these two groups differed in terms of expectations towards an "innovative" medium and understanding of the term "innovative". Overlapping with the findings in the previous stage, it was evident that Turkish participants emphasized the "tuner" metaphor, which provided a ludic experience as an innovative feature. Also the ability to easily manipulate the listening activity seems to support this opinion: *"The page is innovative, because it gives the possibility to find manually the station which you want according to your music taste"* (TR4). On the other hand, the interest of Dutch participants towards TUN3R went along with a critical approach, which evaluated the innovative aspect of the medium from a distance. Despite the fact that they were open to innovative features, they preferred to evaluate these features through the communicative needs. This analytical and critical approach corresponded to the findings in the previous task analysis stage: *"I think it is innovative, but not very user friendly yet"* (NL4).

As a significant pattern, Turkish participants associated "common cultural and national values" factor with their interaction with the site. The opportunity presented in the website for accessing to web radio stations that broadcasted in different languages other than English and music from different countries was the reason for this association. These tools were considered as the utilities, which enabled to discover different national values and cultures and even the relations between different cultures. They evaluated TUN3R as a medium that highly valued multiculturalism. *"The existence of different music and language underlines the importance of different cultures. You can discover different values and cultures"* (TR6). The emphasis on the national and cultural identity seemed to unveil the importance given to the protection of the national values by the Turkish participants.

Final debriefing interview in this stage enabled to re-evaluate all the data collected in the previous stages. The findings were consistent with the ones in the previous stages and showed that web radio experience for both groups was dominated by the will to access music as easy and fast as possible. Reducing the function of web radio to a customizable music box, all the participants appraised the individualistic use of the medium. Differences in the findings for both groups appeared to repetitive. Having been attracted by the "tuner" metaphor, the user experience of the Turkish group was shaped by an achievement-based trial and error approach. Contrarily, Dutch participants mostly valued a controlled user experience in which the medium provided a schematized, clear and simple navigation. As a last repetitive finding, the opportunity to discover different languages and music of different cultures was emphasized as a positive aspect that enriched the user experience.

## **Discussion**

In this section we discuss the findings of this study using the conceptual framework developed earlier. It was found that there are distinct cultural differences concerning the attitudes in web radio experience, which can be explained by referring to both radio culture and cultural value orientations. However, above all, there is a common approach that dominates the overall web radio listening experience for all the participants and leads us to evaluate these differences as minor findings at the user experience level. Firstly, the differences observed in web radio user experience will be evaluated using the two variable sets. This analysis will then be followed by a detailed discussion on the observed dominant pattern in overall experience.

### **Differences in Web Radio User Experience**

#### *Inordinate-Masculinity and Unity-Power Distance*

It was strongly evident that Turkish participants appreciated the ludic aspects of the graphical user interface based on an analogous tuner metaphor. Despite the negative opinions expressed during the navigation about the functionality of the site, the needle and the dial used to tune between different web radio stations encouraged the participants towards exploring the site ambitiously. In contrast with the findings on Dutch sample group, the predictions of the owners of TUN3R towards offering fun and serendipity while connecting listeners to new Internet radio stations, seemed to work for Turkish group. The random use provided in TUN3R enabled to recapture the idle pleasure provided by tuning an analog radio dial: *"The needle is a good idea. This is just like a former radio, but this time with stations from all over the world"* (TR8), *"It's amusing to use such a metaphor. You're clicking and here comes the station. I also liked the needle. To move it is cheerful"* (TR10). However, the pleasure fed by

the randomness proposed, brought along an unstructured navigation based on a goalless trial and error approach. This finding can be interpreted by referring to the non-compliant and inordinate commercialization dominating the broadcasting area in Turkey in recent years. The disorganized structure, which is formed by an eclectic entertainment culture depending on magazine and speculation, seem to influence the approach of the Turkish participants towards the web radio site.

This statement can also be investigated through the meaning constructed upon the term "innovative". Tuner metaphor of the website was evaluated as "innovative" by nearly all the Turkish participants. However, it was observed that they preferred to define the term "innovative" through a subjective and abstract context rather than an objective and functionalist point of view. Positive statements about the innovative aspects of the site mostly included expressions like "nice, aesthetic, chic, etc." Surrounded by a standard broadcast of private commercial radios based on format concentration and a limited number popular songs, the tools and strategies of the site seemed to provide a so-called new experience for the participants: A customizable listening experience that can be shaped by personal preferences. In the context of media use, this approach can be interpreted as a result of a disorganized and uncontrolled private radio sphere, which is far away from serving to diverse demands and expectations through communicative interaction. This approach can also be associated with the "unity" and "centralist" character of Turkish radio culture, which was shaped under the strict supervision of the state. As discussed in previous sections, the protectionist state-oriented structure of Turkish radio sphere showed prohibitive, partial, formal, standard and distant aspects until the privatization of the radio sphere. However, rather than enabling an alternative model of public-based participatory radio culture, privatization brought along the organization of the sphere towards a market place which can be described as a model with many microphones dispersing the same voice. The approach of Turkish participants seemed to reflect this structure. "Innovative" and "diverse" features in TUN3R were associated with the potential to satisfy subjective demands rather than the pluralism and the opportunity to enable the emergence of free initiatives.

The repressive/paternal character of Turkish public broadcast system, which was committed to create and preserve the national identity, can be referred for explaining the emphasis of Turkish participants on "national and cultural values" during the evaluation of TUN3R. Turkish participants idealized TUN3R as it provided access to discover different music and cultures: "*You can find different radios from other countries. This gives the opportunity to discover different cultures. You can find national music*" (TR6). Moreover, the ability to search for Turkish web radio stations was also appreciated: "*There is the Turkish language option in the search tool. This is very important for me. I can make a search in my native language*" (TR4), "*When I saw the name of my country on a page, I feel very happy*" (TR11). However, these expressions are not limited to a focus on the presence of Turkish identity in this site. Defining national and cultural values as original values that should be conserved, a protectionist attitude seems to emerge against oppressive cultures, which can be considered as an outcome of nationalist point of view. However, in some participants, the emphasis on national and cultural values seemed to reflect a different approach, which is something more extraverted. In this context, the emphasis on "national" becomes a curiosity about "the other", which is a powerful reference for "self-defining" especially in nationalist cultures: "*The site reflects national values. This is a positive characteristic for me. You can find the values of different countries and cultures*" (TR15).

In contrast with the Turkish group who defined "culture" as a structure peculiar to national character, Dutch participants seemed to consider it as a sum of produced or shared values. Therefore, Dutch participants did not express concepts like "national value, identity, culture, etc." Even if the opportunity to access music from different countries were valued, internationalism was the concept that became prominent in the expressions.

Besides the discussion held through the differences in radio cultures of both countries, possible explanations for these attitudes could be made by referring to the cultural variable scores from the relevant literature. According to Dam et al. (2005), achievement of tasks is important in masculine cultures. Therefore, web features like games are highly appreciated among the members of these cultures. The significant interest on the tuner metaphor and the preference of a randomized navigation based on a persistent trial and error approach can be associated with the high masculinity score of Turkish participants. In addition to that, the emphasis of Turkish participants on national values can be associated with their power distance variable. The Turkish high power distance score and resulting respect for authority could perhaps play a role here.

### *Controlled - Individualistic*

In every stage of the study, Dutch participants expressed their demands for a controlled and structured use of the medium. Aspects like simple structure and easy navigation with clear clues were mentioned as basic requirements of functionality in such a medium. Departing from a rational point of view, it was stated that the medium should provide the content in a logical and clear system. This approach was crystallized in their navigation strategies. The relation established with the site was shaped due to first impressions they had about the site. Dutch participants searched for concrete, rational and pragmatic reasons in order to continue to use the site. If not provided, resulting frustration easily led the participants to the abandonment of site. This schematized media use which seemed utterly contradictory with the use of Turkish group, was interpreted as a code in radio culture that was defined by a rational and systematic use: A controlled radio listening practice in which the listeners are really aware of what they want and what they can expect without any reservations. The radio sphere in the Netherlands, which was organized to enable the public communication for different communities of interest by excluding an inordinate media structure and use, seemed to shape this practice.

Similar to Turkish participants, Dutch participants also evaluated the TUN3R interface as innovative. However, the meaning constructed around the term "innovative" seemed to differ when compared to Turkish sample. Rather than evaluating the innovative aspects through a subjective conceive for a new experience, they critically preferred to interrogate these aspects by the extent that the new medium answered their expectations. This approach can be associated with a radio culture comprising a wide range of alternative media experiences, which is developed through communicative needs emerging in the society.

The cultural variable scores of the Netherlands can be employed to interpret these findings. Dutch participants' serious and analytical approach to the given task and their casual and confident manner during the navigation could be associated with their high individualism score. In individualist cultures personal initiatives are encouraged for decision making. The findings that are in contradiction with the findings of the Turkish sample above could also be interpreted by the low scores of Dutch culture at masculinity and power distance variables. The demands of the Dutch participants for simple and clear navigation corresponded to the

uncertainty avoidance variable. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance score search for a certain structure, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable. As Marcus and Gould stated (2000), members of such cultures expect for simple and clear metaphors, limited choices, restricted amounts of data and redundant cues like color to reduce ambiguity. However, according to the previous literature Dutch culture presents a low score on this variable. Therefore it was found out that this attitude deviated from the cultural variable scores proposed by the literature. In this sense, it should be noted that it may not be always possible to identify a clear one-on-one match between cultural value scores and observed behavior.

### **Radio as a Customizable Music Box**

Findings support the notion that both groups identified the web radio medium with the music function. Despite the differences in attitudes observed during the navigation, which can be explained through the variables derived from the radio cultures and cultural anthropology literature, it was strongly evident that all the expectations pointed out the reduction of the medium to a simple music box. A very strong demand for accessing to music, which would address a personal need, dominated the overall experience: "*I expect uninterrupted music from web radio*" (TR9). It is obvious that this significant pattern emphasized a subjective and individualistic experience provided by the recent emergence of web radio medium, which seems to be rooted in the technological development of the medium. In the last years, there seems to appear a tendency in the radio industry towards providing various options for personal preferences. The developments in web technology carried out this tendency to an advanced level by enabling the establishment of various web radios that were equipped with tools for customization. The occasional structure of the classical radio based on definite playlists created by DJs was evolved into a more audience-centered structure, which enabled the listener to create his own playlists and listen to uninterrupted music. By proposing a customizable experience, this strategy determined the expectations towards the radio medium, which resulted in the discredit of classical radio:

*When I want to listen to something, I expect to find it instantly. The moment I push the play button, the medium I use should give me the music that I want. Radio is an unpredictable medium. I don't like this kind of listening* (TR2).

*In the Internet it is quite easy to find the music you like. You just click on it and hear the song just in a couple of seconds... On the radio, there is a lot of talking and the news, I don't like that. The pleasure for me is music* (NL11).

Each new web radio medium contributed to this overall experience by offering new features for customization. The expectations of the participants towards web radio set forth the variety of these features experienced in different web radio media: "*It should be more individualizing and customizable. For example it would recognize my music taste and make recommendations. I also want to see my favourites in the site*" (TR14).

It is evident that in the expanding radio market, developing strategies to offer a wide range of customizable content for each listener segment, even for each individual if possible, seemed to be a *sine qua non* for any media organization. This strategy revives a new identity conceptualization, which can be defined around the term "self-entrepreneurship" (Rose 1999:190-191). Such a strategy in radio industry, despite all the cultural differences, draws interest at a global level, but also results in the quantitative augmentation of choices, which



can be described around the metaphor of "supermarket", rather than a real diversity: *"It is very good to be able to access to a lot of radios. This is just like a supermarket. You can buy yoghurt while you have aimed to buy detergent"* (TR3).

Furthermore, despite the assertion that customizable structure of web radio presented a rich listening experience, it was contrarily observed to confine it to a monolithic/standardized one. The findings showed that none of the participants paid any attention to the interactive features in TUN3R. Both groups had the intention to use the medium as an isolated private space, which excluded any interaction and only supported the music listening activity. It can be stated that the customizable features in web radio medium lead the participants to ignore the interactivity and participation potential of web radio, rather than using the medium as a meeting point in which different experiences could be shared.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the variations in cultures and the distinctions in radio cultures as proposed by the previous literature, this study concludes that the use and understanding of the web radio seems to be pressing towards a standardized listening practice. Our results indicate that web radio increasingly transforms the listening habits towards a common experience, but still some distinctive practices are evident at user experience level.

To explain the observed differences we developed a conceptual framework by using variables derived from the formation process of radio cultures and cultural variable scores derived from previous literature. The findings show that observed attitudes were mostly in line with expectations derived from the proposed framework. However, as the findings on the attitudes of Dutch sample indicate, it may not be always possible to identify a clear one-on-one match between each cultural value score and observed attitude. Even so, concerning the difficulty of measuring the effect of culture, it should be noted that existing, original measurement instruments in the literature should preferably be used to compare results.

The impact of an overarching global web culture based on an individualistic and customizable use seems to eliminate the cultural differences in radio listening experience. However, as a customizable 'music box', which offers a multi-choice music database to the listeners all over the world, web radio causes today an illusion of diversity. The huge expansion in radio activity seems to remain quantitative rather than qualitative in that the intention of maximizing the capacity of individuals to choose is seen as leading the way to a competitive market place: A market place, which allows the emergence of the most cost-effective delivery of the most 'preferred' radio services such as advanced music search engines, playlists in embedded players, pod cast technology and etc. Therefore, web radio moves towards a globalized pattern of production while increasingly serving fragmented and individual aspirations. Accordingly, listening activity is becoming a standardized experience, which differentiates only in detail despite having a wide range of customizing possibility.

To summarize, the study can be seen as an attempt towards a better understanding of the socio-cultural use of the web radio medium through an original conceptual framework. The study also assesses the applicability of an observation-based methodology derived from human-computer interaction literature as a method to evaluate cross-cultural web radio experience in a media sociology study. For the purpose of this study, the methods were found adequate. However, generalization of the results of this study should be made with abstention, as the study was conducted with a limited number of participants. Future research should

involve larger user groups from different cultures. Also this study was realized in English as the chosen research web radio site was in English and all the participants could speak advanced level of English. However, it should be noted that further studies conducted in the native languages of the participants may reveal interesting findings on cross-cultural web radio experience. Moreover, further examination of web radio experience including both the implementation and listening practices is required. Nevertheless, we can pretend that the medium will increasingly be perceived as a 'music market' if we do not focus on its potential towards reciprocity, exchanging ideas and freedom of expression.

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