

Transforming radio, changing listener

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Abstract

The new media concept, which emerged with the rapid change of technology, has also changed the perception of society to mass media. It is an absolute reality that the changing radio concept in the digitizing period has changed and transformed the listener along with it. It has also reformed the new media audience, which has been reformed with the convergence of mass media with technology, not only as an audience but also as a participant. As a result of convergence, new concepts such as interaction, synchronicity and mass unification have emerged. While interaction in the traditional media is provided at a limited level, content in the new media is often determined by the audience. From the point of view of new media and user relations, radio has become the medium of communication that can adapt to this change in the easiest way and change contents in this direction. The Internet has offered a radio technology to radio listeners that allows the radio to establish its own radio. All these technological developments and the activation of the audience have reshaped the radio and listener relationship. The main aim of this study is to reveal how the radio, a warm communication medium, is shaped its own language and the relationship established with the audience through technology. In this direction, a structured in-depth interview will be held with 24 people working at Anadolu University in February 2018. These people will be randomly determined according to their socio-economic status. According to the Socio-economic Statutes, 8 faculty members, 8 civil servants and 8 workers will be selected. The selected sampling will ask questions such as radio listening habits, why they listen to the radio and what the effect of participating in radio programs for a democratic society will be in order to define the link they establish with the radio.

Keywords: media, radio, mass communication

Introduction

Radio, once a threat to the popularity of written press, has now become a target of the same dangers with the emergence of television. Although the birth of new technology is usually considered as a threat to the popularity of the previous one, in this case, the television having visual qualities lacked by other mass communication tools, radio never lost its ability to impact the masses. In other words, the spot held by radio as a tool of communication was never downplayed (Kırık, 2013: 2). Radio, due to its dynamic nature, has always managed to meet the continually changing demands of the public by adapting and updating itself. To this end, there have been changes in the functions of the radio (Kuyucu, 2013: 373). Radio, having been forced to change with the emergence of every mass media tool, has expanded its area of influence by adjusting its size and exploring new techniques in broadcasting with the aid of digital broadcasting technology and internet (Bay, 2007: 30). The changes in radio hardware and the understanding of broadcasting have also brought about a transformation in the concept of audience. The advancement in methods of listening to radio arising from the convergence of radio with the updated technologies has made radio available to access from all devices with internet. This easy accessibility has led to the transformation of listening habits in addition to broadcasting habits (Tufan, 2009: 88).

Although technological advances such as digitalization and internet were at first interpreted as threats to raise's popularity, radio has managed to benefit from these technological improvements and solve its chronic problems. The radio, which solves the problems of sound quality caused by analog audio transmission in digital transmission and voice transmission has increased the diversity of access and has become easily accessible everywhere. Resulting from the convergence between radio and the internet the audience of radio has become more active and established a permanent communication line with broadcasters and assumed a role of shaping the content that of broadcasts (Özel, 2014: 169). Although the audience was content with what was offered to them at the beginning, having the audience at an active position where they provided constant feedback became much more critical as time went on. Due to the changes brought by the technological improvements, radio broadcasts have now become appealing to not only masses but also to individuals as the experience

of listening to the radio is far more customizable. Radio interfaces which could be accessed from almost any device presented the audience with multiple contents at once. Being able to access broadcaster content via websites, apps, new media tools, and similar platforms to acquire information about broadcasting schedules, get in to contact with other listeners, and such interactions are becoming more involved in radio broadcasts (Ataman: 2013: 97).

Moreover, one more reason why internet broadcasting is endorsed by more and more broadcasters each day is that user habits can be recorded and analyzed (Hendy, 2000). In addition to this, yet another benefit of internet broadcasting is the accessibility of every program whenever and wherever the audience wants thanks to "podcasts." The users, thanks to the convergence between radio and internet, are now available to access instant lines of communications and avoid problems caused by time restraints. Radio, after experiencing a transformation due to technological advancements has expanded into newer domains. Listeners of radio who utilize social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Periscope have both the ability to create momentary lines of communications and video broadcast. Thus, they can communicate news about themselves in addition to adding visual components to their broadcasts (Ataman, 2013: 97 - 98).

Method

The research done in this work aims to define the changing radio listening habits. To this end, a series of comprehensive interviews have been conducted with 12 individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds on April 2018 in Anadolu University Faculty of Communication Sciences. These individuals were divided into three main groups depending on their socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, the research group of 12 individuals includes four individuals of higher socioeconomic status (University Professors), four individuals of average social-economic status (middle-class officers) and four individuals of lower socio-economic status (workers).

The distribution of the interview subjects according to their socio-economic status is as follows:

Lower socio-economic status: Ayşen Karababa, Zeki Toygar, Kadir Karnuş, Nesrin Yaren.

Middle socio-economic status: Tamer Olcay, Fidan Turan, Sejda Vatanserver, Zeynep Kiracı.

Higher socio-economic status: Ozan Yıldırım, Haluk Birsen, Deniz Kılıç, Hakan Ayaz.

The interviewees were directed with the following questions:

Do you listen to the radio?

What is your purpose of listening to the radio?

To which radio station(s) do you listen to most?

Why do you prefer to listen to this station(s)?

Which types of programs interest you the most?

Can you name the three programs you listen to the most?

Which time of the day do you listen to the radio?

Can you name the radio program host you like to listen to the most?

Do you listen to the radio via a device that is not a radio (e.g., phone, computer)?

Do you listen to Podcasts?

If you were a radio broadcaster what type of programs would you like to do?

What do you think is the difference between radio and other mass communication devices?

Have you experienced any changes in your radio listening habits throughout the years?

What type of role did the radio play during your childhood years?

How do you remember radio broadcasting?

Have you ever taken part in a radio program? If yes, what type of program was it?

Do you think that participating in radio programs has a positive effect on democracy?

The data collected from the interviews have been evaluated and analyzed to achieve the aim of this investigation.

Radio listening habits

When they were asked whether they listened to the radio or not the participants Ayşen Karababa and Nesrin Yaren from the lower socio-economic status group had answered that they hardly listened to the radio apart from the times when they were running errands at home. Karababa has also gone on to explain the reason why she rarely listened to the radio: "I do not listen to the radio these days as much as I did in my youth. Seldomly I listen to it when I am at home, running errands like cleaning the house. The reason behind this is that I now have a mobile phone. I use it to listen to the songs I like from Youtube. Also now I am married with kids and cannot spare the time to listen to the radio as much as I did in my youth." However, male participants have stated that they actively listened to the radio. A participant from the middle socioeconomic status group, Sejda Vatansever has reported that she greatly enjoyed listening to the radio while Zeynep Kiracı from the same group said that she rarely listened to the radio. Tamer Olcay has given the answer that he mostly listened to the radio in his car, and Fidan Turan told that she only listened to the radio in her workplace. Turan also added that she had fond memories of listening to the radio as a child but she now hardly had the time for it due to work.

Haluk Birsen and Denix Kılıç who are from the higher socio-economic status group have stated that they frequently listened to the radio and that they had certain stations they followed. Ozan Yıldırım and Hakan Ayaz have said that they listened to the radio now and then.

Among all three groups, participants who were in their forties have been recorded to be frequent listeners of radio compared to the younger participants. In addition to this, participants with higher levels of education liked to listen to the radio more.

To continue with, the answers to the questions "What is your purpose of listening to the radio?", "To which radio station(s) do you listen to most?", "Can you name the radio program host you like to listen to the most?" and "Which time of the day do you listen to the radio?" were as follows:

Participants from the lower socio-economic status group Karababa and Yaren said that they listened to the radio only for music while Toygar and Karnuş said they listened to the radio for news in addition to the music. Yaren also added the follows: "I usually choose to receive the news from the TV, radio is something I solely use for listening to music as it helps me relax. I go back to the old days when I'm listening to the radio, it makes me think that I used to dance to this song and reminds me of good times." Kiracı from the middle socioeconomic status group said that radio for him was a means of spending fun time while Vatansever said he used the radio to get news and listen to music. Turan answered that he utilized the radio to get information regarding his interests.

Moreover, Turan went on to add the following: "I mostly listen to the radio to get informed about my areas of interest because I feel like I can use my imagination more when I am just listening. The absence of a visual component lets me use my imagination". The members of the higher socio-economic group all gave the answer that they saw radio as a source of news and entertainment. Birsen said that listening to the radio was an old habit for him and Yıldırım gave the information that he kept the radio on for background noise in the house. It has been observed that this group tends to utilize the radio to receive news, stay updated on culture and art developments and stay tuned on local developments. The participants who told that they used the radio for receiving news also added that radio was the option for them in environments where internet and TV were absent. So it can be concluded that generally, radio is mainly seen as a tool for listening to music apart from its side function of delivering the news.

The interviews ultimately led to the conclusion that there wasn't a significant relationship between radio listening habits and socio-economic status. Another result uncovered is that traditional radio listening habits have changed over the years. Considering that participants all came from the age range of 30-45, it can be said that they all adapted to the newer listening habits.

When they were asked which radio stations they listened to, the participants from the lower socio-economic status it was observed they did not have specific preferences. More specifically they described their habits as they listened to "whatever comes up that I like." However, stations such as Power FM, Metro FM, Radyo Fenomen and Number 1 are national stations

chosen by the participants. The only local station mentioned by the participants of this group has been recorded as Radio A. From the participants of the middle socioeconomic group only Olcay has been able to provide station names saying that he listened to Power FM, Number 1 and Radio A.

It has also been observed that the higher the socio-economic status group was able to provide more specific answers regarding their station preferences. Yıldırım, from this group, has said that he followed Radio A and TRT news and he did not listen to local radios. Birsen stated that he listened to Power FM for music and NTV radio for news. Kılıç gave the answer that he listened to Pal FM, Power FM, and Radio A and finally Ayaz said that he listened to Radio A, NTV radio and Power Turk.

The questions "Which types of programs interest you the most?", "Can you name the three programs you listen to the most?" and "Can you name the radio program host you like to listen to the most?" have all received negative answers regarding program names regardless of the socio-economic status. However, a member of the middle socioeconomic group, Olcay has given the names Kaidr Çöpdemir and Cem Ceminay. Member from the higher socio-economic group Birsen has given the names Nihat Sırdar, Zeki Kayhan Coşkun. This showed that participants were unable to name radio programs regardless of their socio-economic status.

The questions "Which time of the day do you listen to the radio?", "Do you listen to the radio via a device that is not a radio (e.g., phone, computer)?" and "Do you listen to Podcasts?" have received similar answers from all participants. The general response has been recorded as all participants listened to the radio when they are driving to work or home and during weekend hours. The participants revealed that they listened to the radio in their cars from which it can be deduced that radio was preferred when there was no access to TV and the internet. Female participants had emphasized that they listened to the radio during weekends when they were at home running errands. The participants who owned personal vehicles have been observed to listen to the radio inside their cars while the participants who did not own cars have been observed to listen to the radio in their homes, mostly during the weekends. Finally, the participants from the lower and middle socioeconomic status group have replied to the third question saying they did not know what a podcast was while the higher socio-economic status group responded that they do not listen to podcasts even though they knew what they were. The interviews have revealed that the participants were not familiar with the concept of podcast radio even though it is one of the key transformations of current radio broadcasting.

Expectations from the radio

The participants were asked *"If you were a radio broadcaster what type of programs would you like to do?"* The aim behind asking this question was to uncover the expectations the audience had regarding radio broadcasts. The answers given were indicative of the statement that the socioeconomic status created different expectations. For example a radio program is seen as a remedy to get away from the troubles of the daily life for the lower class, a tool for entertainment and information for the middle class and finally, a verbal tool that can produce content for various specialties for the higher socioeconomic status group. The interviews showed that the participants who belonged to the lower socioeconomic group saw radio solely as a tool for entertainment and music. Karababa from this status group describes his view of radio as follows while answering the above mentioned question: *"We all need to laugh, that's why I would like to host comedy program. I feel like those types of programs are more likely to grab the readers attention. Such programs let you forget about the troubles of daily life."* In addition to this statement, Yaren, who is also from the same socioeconomic status group has stated that she would like to host a program about music and daily news. However the main focus of this program would be music.

The interviews with the middle socioeconomic status members show that expectations start to differ from the previous group. The members of this group state that they would want to make program that is directed towards woman, child development and self development which involves expert opinions and informs its audience. They also state that they would be interested in such programs. Vatansver from this group says the following about the program he would like to host: *"I would take great delight in listening to a program that has woman as its main audience, therefore I would take the most joy in hosting such a program. I would also include music in it but most importantly it has to address issues regarding woman rights."* Kiracı from the same group expresses her opinions as: *"I would like to host a program about children. A program where topics such as pedagogy, nutrition and education were discussed by experts would be wonderful."* Turan talked about her ideal program saying the following: *"I would want to make program that is in touch with the daily life. I take great interest in topics of self development so a program that revolves around such topics would appeal to me. Such a program*

could also include talks about movies and books. Because literary works have so much to say about self development. I feel like a program about these would be extremely pleasurable to listen to when combined with some music."

The interviews have also showed that the participants from the higher socioeconomic status group had expectations that were centred around receiving news information. For them an ideal program should have fresh and rich content at all times. The teaching staff of Universities point out that they would want to create programs about technology, politics, history and culture that tap into local and national issues and thus, they liked to listen to such programs when they come across them. They have also mentioned the shortcomings of today's media when it comes to receiving local news adding that a program that gave quality local news would be much appreciated. Kılıç talks about his expectations with these words: *"I would want my program to be an informative broadcast about the time period we live in. Such a program would examine in detail the times we live in with valuable insights from Turkey's recent history. I would also like to host a program that goes through local newspapers. It would be significantly valuable to be informed about the traffic situations and what preventive measurements are being implemented. A program like this would be particularly appealing if it involved the statements from the authorities in it."*

It has been observed that the programs the participants would like to create are mostly verbal programs. However, verbal programs do not hold a sizeable spot in Turkey's current radio programs. Most verbal programs are now replaced by podcasts except for thematic radio stations. It would be mistaken to say that today's audience is only interested in programs of music and entertainment as there is a significant interest in news programs as well. Educated populations hold radio in a valuable spot when it comes to satisfying their need of receiving news. Listeners of the radio from all socioeconomic backgrounds say that they are interested in listening to radio programs that they could benefit from and that they are not familiar with podcasts as they either do not know what it is or do not use it. This unfamiliarity is quite understandable when it is considered that the interviewed individuals are digital immigrants.

Defining Radio (past_present)

The questions "do you think that there is a difference between radio and other mass communication devices?" and "Have you experienced any changes in your radio listening habits throughout the years?" were answered "yes" by all members of the lower socioeconomic status group. They also emphasized that radio appeals to the receiver's imagination as it does not have a visual component and that it has a different language. Karnuş uses this statement to describe the relationship between radio and imagination: "I think that radio has a different feel, it lets you merge what you hear with your imagination. TV lets you see what is being described, but only the radio gives me the unique pleasure of imagining. It is definitely more effective on me as I enjoy using my imagination" The members of the lower socioeconomic group have also said that their radio listening habits have changed dramatically over the years and that they did not listen to the radio as often anymore due to the low quality of the newer contents and lack of time.

The middle socioeconomic group have also defined the radio a warm and sympathetic tool as it appeals to one's imagination. Vatandaş describes the close relationship the radio establishes with its audience by saying "It's as if it is talking just to me." And when it came to answering the second question, the members of this group have stated that they did not have enough time anymore to listen to the radio. They also mentioned that the increasing amount of advertorials of the radio repelled them.

It can be stated that the higher the socioeconomic status group listens to the radio more than the other groups. The participants say that they listen to the radio mainly for the purpose of receiving information as the primary interest for this group is being informed about the latest developments in areas such as culture and the arts. This group also said that they listened to the radio a lot less compared to the past, but their reasons were different. For the members of the higher socioeconomic status group, the main reason was that the content of the current radio programs was no longer satisfactory.

Participation and Democracy

To understand the relationship between radio and democratic involvement the interviewees were asked if they ever participated in a radio program. The members of the middle socioeconomic group said that they never took part in a radio program for reasons such as lack of courage. Kiracı described this as "stating my opinion in front of a large crowd is something that I rarely dare to do." Vandever also talks about this by saying "I am a bit of a coward when it comes to facing the spotlight.". In addition to these answers, Turan also gives his opinions about democracy and participation with following words: "When I am expressing myself on the radio it is very much likely that I am also speaking for other people. Perhaps

when a stranger hears that there are other people out there who agree with him or her, that person could get the courage to act". However, Yıldırım from the higher socioeconomic group says "I don't think that mass communication tools, including radio, have a contribution to democracy." When his opinion about the relationship between democracy and participation is asked. Birsen, on the other hand, disagrees by saying the following: "As an ordinary citizen, if you were to be granted the ability speak out and get your message across to the masses, that would contribute to democracy." Kılıç also supports this by saying "Of course there is a contribution, the TV doesn't ask me my opinion, but radio does. If a radio program offers quality and informative content many individuals will want to participate and discuss their opinions. Writing doesn't have a soul, but the voice bears many emotions in it. So, a radio program with good content is always a good opportunity for democratic improvement. Even the smallest local radio is a means of reaching the masses. So when the entire community says they don't want something, everyone can hear it". Ayaz makes another point by saying "the fact that you are invisible on a radio platform could encourage many people and therefore let more opinions be heard. So it would not be wrong to say that there is a contribution to democracy." From these answers, it can be said that more educated participants are aware of the relationship between participation and democracy.

Conclusion and Evaluation

All participants from various socioeconomic background find the content of the current radio programs to be lacking. With the impact of digitalization, today's radio allows everyone to produce and broadcast their own content. This opportunity radio offer makes the audience more powerful. However, the conditions Turkey is in at the moment do not foster an environment that is politically and culturally ripe for content production. Both in television and radio, the content is getting less and less productive each day. The technical opportunities provided by the internet are not enough on their own. The belief that radio is a tool solely for music is repelling audiences. Regardless of their level of education and socioeconomic background, all listeners are missing the old programs with richer content and are frustrated with the increasing amount of ads on the radio. It also cannot be denied that internet radios are yet the be embraced by all members of the society and podcasts are unknown to many individuals.

To continue with, radio is a democratic tool given that it is platform suitable for the participation of audiences. However, the audience is finding it hard to think that the radio has a critical power in a democracy and therefore choose not to participate.

In conclusion, radio is regaining its old value as it appeals to the imagination, provides a platform for democratic discussion and can easily be accessed.

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