

Tell me your ethnicity and I will tell you what you are: culture as a key factor of creativity in business

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ABSTRACT Culture is an important element of creativity which makes novel ideas useful and valuable for customers, for example, in the construction industry. This grounded theory exploratory mixed methods study seeks to establish the preferred housing variables of two contrasting cultural groups. The study also seeks to establish the existence of a relationship between ethnicity and the preferred housing style, and to propose a practical, consumer-dwelling choice marketing research approach. The research took place in two stages—it began with 29 in-depth interviews in Turkey and Russia and followed by email survey-questionnaire, of which 237 useful replies were received from customers of two real estate companies based in Istanbul and Moscow. All quantitative data was analysed using IBM-SPSS-20 software. Findings indicated a positive relationship between belonging to Turkish or Russian cultural group and preference of the certain group of cultural variables in housing styles.

Keywords: intercultural marketing, creativity, housing preferences, culture, image-based survey

Introduction

Creativity is often defined within the overlapping themes of product, process, personality and environment. Amabile (1996) defined creativity as the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain. In order to be considered creative, a product or an idea must be different from what has been done before. But the product or idea cannot be merely different for difference's sake; it must also be appropriate to the goal at hand, correct, valuable, or expressive of meaning. Creativity seems to be very useful for improving business performance in highly fragmented construction industry. The construction industry in many countries is a very competitive industry, characterised by high risks and generally low profit margins when compared to other industries in the economy (Mochtar and Arditi, 2001). Given this competitive nature of the industry, it is very natural that construction companies would try to reduce the operating costs by applying standard designs to the whole market.

The importance of culture in standardizing designs in the construction industry cannot be overemphasised. According to Lenartowicz and Roth (2001), almost 10% of all the articles published in 10 leading journals in the business and related fields during 1996–2000 used culture as an independent variable (see also Lenartowicz and Roth, 2001). The main debates on design standardization relate to the customization of cross-cultural marketing. Many scholars have asserted that advances in information and communication technology has created

such a level of convergence among consumers across national markets that national culture should no longer be cited as a barrier to international standardization (Moon and Jain, 2002), but doubt remains as the efficiency of the standardization approach.

On the surface, cultural differences seem to become less significant as the world moves towards a universal, global and homogeneous culture, at least far as consumer behaviour is concerned, but cultural differences remain crucial and might even be enhanced by the phenomenon of globalisation (see also Vanraaij, 1997).

The growing body of cultural studies in business disciplines is indicative of the general awareness in academic community of the significance of cultural values in consumer behaviour; but practitioners, especially in construction industry, still do not consider cultural factor as an important element in their type of business.

Aim of study

This study addresses cultural variables that influence consumers dwelling decision-making process in Turkey and Russia. The purpose of this grounded theory exploratory mixed methods design is to propose a more precise approach of intercultural residential marketing research, to develop an instrument based on participants' views; and to test hypotheses formulated according to the results of the qualitative stage of the research. The following research questions are asked:

- Is there a difference in consumers' dwelling preferences in different cultural groups, for example, Turkey and Russia?
- What are the main patterns of dwelling preferences in each of target groups?

Methodology

The first phase of this grounded theory exploratory mixed methods study is a qualitative exploration of cultural meanings of home in two target cultures. Qualitative data based on interviews were collected from a sample of 17 Turkish and 12 Russian participants. Statements from this qualitative data were used to generate the requisite hypotheses which were developed into an instrument for its testing the sample participants in two cities—Turkey and Moscow. The second stage this grounded theory exploratory mixed methods is quantitative testing of hypotheses developed at the first stage of the study that were based on participants' views. The instrument is image-based questionnaire. Photographs used in the instrument are chosen based on categories emerged during the Focused coding cycle (see appendices).

The research sample, instruments and procedures

The research was conducted in Turkey and Russia and it focused on two cultural groups—Turkish and Russian. The regions for the research were selected by virtue of accessibility. The participants were selected based on belonging to certain cultural group (for example being native Turkish), house ownership and having an experience of changing a house. The samples are 17 Turkish and 12 Russians homeowners experienced at least one house changing, with an age range from 17 to 80. At the second phase of the study, the questionnaires were sent to customers two real estate companies INCOM (Russia) and TURKAP (Turkey)

situated in Istanbul and Moscow. These two cities have the largest network of the branches of the real estate companies. Usable responses were received from 120 Russian and 117 Turkish customers of these companies. The data collection instrument used in the first stage of the research is semi-structured in-depth interview—because of its flexibility and the capacity to provide more detailed, deeper insights of the participants' feelings and thus more relevant information. Informal and relaxed atmosphere during semi-structured interviews allowed participants to be as open as possible, thus increased the validity of the data obtained. Instrument of the second stage of research is image-based questionnaire.

Data Analysis

At the first phase, all recorded interviews were transcribed into MS document. All transcripts were coded in three cycles: In-Vivo, Focused and Theoretical coding. Concepts were coded even if they appeared in different forms but meant similarly enough (Table 1, 2, 7 in the appendices). The coding was conducted manually, jotting down concept occurrences. After the third cycle of coding, core categories for each group were found. In the second phase, data was coded, and recorded on hand-written spread sheets. Once these had been completed, the data was then entered onto the SPSS statistical package dataset in preparation for analysis. The data was checked for inaccuracies twice – once when the data was put onto the hand-written spread sheets and again when the data was put onto the SPSS dataset. The next step was the data analysing process: a non-parametric analysis was undertaken.

Findings

After the first few interviews in each group, certain patterns appeared. The researcher was able to determine the meanings of common words used by participants. During the first interviews with Turkish participants, the common words used were “Spacious”, “White”, “Light-well”, “Without crowded furniture”. In contrast, Russian participants' used common words such as “Warm”, “Small house”, “Oven”. The difference was quite clear; for example, a 36 years old Turkish female participant said: “Comfortable usage of the rooms, I would I prefer bigger rooms...Spaciousness of the house is critical for me...Spaciousness is light-well and without crowd furniture...without crowd furniture, spacious, comfortable and light-well house...My house must be without a lot of furniture inside, I must be able to move freely inside...and light-well house is enough.”

In contrast, a 60 years old Russian male respondent said: “It was small but extremely comfortable...There was an oven in the big one...Outer entrance hall is used to keep the house warm...imagine oven and loft...imagine a Russian oven; wooden loft (a bunk) was built at a same height at a 1 meter distance from it. It was high because it is warmer there; so, my first memory is jumping from oven to loft and back with my friends...there was not oven, that time almost everybody destroyed ovens, but lack of it is a large hole. I even built a small one to be able to sleep there”.

Cleanliness in the hot climate is necessary for surviving of the population, especially a nomadic population. That is why cleanliness is given an important priority in Muslim religion. This assumption is validated also by Turkish respondents: A 32 years old female respondent said: “I want white colour because it gives me a feeling of cleanliness. I do not like messy bugs...Balcony is very valuable for aeration...I want design cleaning easily ... Dressing room is essential because...stops dusting...” A 55 years old male respondent said: “Place with clean air” A 28 years old female respondent said: “It must be white, but it must be truly snow-

white...First of all, white means innocent, clear....”

For the Russian group the core category is ‘heat’, it may be inferred from the followings. The centre of the house in the cold climate is an oven. The heat is necessary for surviving in this geography region; so, the oven was a starting point of the house (Marsalova, 2009). It is interesting to note that in contrast to the cleaning traditions in the hot climate, in Russia it was a bad luck to clean something including own body during the holidays. The oven, heat and heater theme is reflected in responds of Russian participants. Interviewer: “What the first thing coming to your mind when you hear a word home?” A 47 years old female participant said: “Something warm” A 57 years old female participant said: “It was a little warm house”. A 60 years old male participant said: “There was an oven in the big one. Outer entrance hall is used to keep the house warm... Russian oven... It was high because it is warmer there...” An 80 years old female participant: “Oven, big Russian oven, old, huge...some of us were sleeping on the oven; it was very nice and warm. Most of all I loved to sleep on the oven; we were sleeping there with my sister. It is truly warm there”

In terms of the quantitative findings of the study, the instrument for obtaining the data is image-based questionnaire, the objective of which was previously explained. The Table 4 in the appendices shows the main statistics for Turkish group. Each variable was calculated with 117 Turkish respondents in total. B and L variables have received the highest Median scores with the highest range and standard deviation scores—well in line with the suggestions made in the first stage of the study.

Concluding remarks

What is immediately striking is that a certain group of respondents scored significantly higher comparing with the other groups on categories emerged during focused coding cycle of interviews with their own cultural group respondents (Picture 3 in the appendices). Turkish group’s Medians for BLF group variables were higher than the others Medians for the same variables. Similarly, Russian group’s Medians for SOC were higher. Respondents from the cultural groups in this study look for different cultural characteristics of housing during their residential choice. Turkish respondents clearly preferred the housing style with categories of Big House, Light-well/White and Simple Furniture categories; while Russians preferred housing style with Small House, Oven and Warm Colours. In devising a marketing strategy for the housing market, attention should be paid to the fact that each of the target cultural groups has its own specific national culture and their own way of thinking. According to this research, respondents from different groups have different cultural preferences during dwelling decision-making process (see Table 7 in the appendices).

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Appendices

Table 1: Categories for Turkish group

Category	Extracts from the interviews
Big house (B)	<p>“Spaciousness of the house is important for me” “feeling of spaciousness” “white color means spaciousness” “more spacious” “Wide house” “I want very big house, I mean it may be even really huge house because I love huge” “feeling of spaciousness” “I want very spacious, wide, useful house” “spaciousness and light-well makes me very tranquil” “White makes house bigger that is the most important” “When you come into the house it must be spacious”</p>
White and light-well (L)	<p>“light-well house is enough” “Big windows, light-well, white walls” “light-well is necessity” “white color” “I said lets make light color” “it must be white, but it must be really snow-white” “white makes me tranquil” “light-well house makes me very very happy”</p>
Simple furniture (F)	<p>“without crowd furniture” “less furniture” “I do not like rooms with crowd furniture” “a very few furniture” “I want comfortable place without crowd furniture” “I do not want to be drowned in that crowd furniture” “I like simplicity” “nonsense of furniture makes me feel good”</p>

Source: Author's elaboration, 2013

Table 2: Categories for Russian group

Category	Extracts from the interviews
Small house (S)	<p>“I have a fear when you are along in a such big house” “I think my house is ideal for me, it is not too big” “it was a little warm house” “it was small but very comfortable”</p>
Oven (O)	<p>“oven, big Russian oven, old, huge, it was very nice and warm” “Most of all I loved to sleep on the oven” “but lack of it (oven) is a big hole. I even built a small one to be able to sleep there”</p>
Warm colors (C)	<p>“Calm tones” “something warm” “warm colors”</p>

Source: Author's elaboration, 2013

Home design images can be coded according to these categories. The following Picture 1 shows examples of some categories in the images.

Big, spacious



Small



Warm



Cold



Simple furniture



Crowded furniture



*Picture 1: Examples of categories in the images
Source: Author's elaboration, 2013*

Home design image can contain a mix of these categories in different proportions (Picture 2):

Table 3a: Encoding of the images for testing instrument

<p>Image 1</p> 	<p>Highly spacious (2B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Furniture is quite simple (F)</p>
<p>Image 2</p> 	<p>Highly Warm colors (2C), Very clearly Oven – Heater (2O)</p>
<p>Image 3</p> 	<p>Very clearly Garden (2G), Spacious (B), Clearly Yellow-Green (2Y) Quite Light-well and white (L)</p>
<p>Image 4</p> 	<p>Highly spacious (2B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Furniture is quite simple (F)</p>
<p>Image 5</p> 	<p>Very Small (2S), Quite Warm colors (C), Clearly Oven-Heater (O)</p>
<p>Image 6</p> 	<p>High amount of Wood (2W), High Warm colors (2C), Clearly Garden and trees (G)</p>
<p>Image 7</p> 	<p>Highly spacious (2B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Furniture is quite simple (F)</p>

Table 3a: Encoding of the images for testing instrument









<p>Image 8</p> 	<p>Highly Warm colors (2C), Very clearly Oven – Heater (2O), Very Small (2S)</p>
<p>Image 9</p> 	<p>High amount of Wood (2W), Clearly Garden (G)</p>
<p>Image 10</p> 	<p>Quite spacious (B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Furniture is quite simple (F)</p>
<p>Image 11</p> 	<p>Highly Warm colors (2C), Very clearly Oven – Heater (2O), Clearly Wood (W), Clearly Yellow (Y)</p>
<p>Image 12</p> 	<p>High amount of Wood (2W), High amount of Yellow (2Y), Very clearly Garden and trees (2G), Highly spacious (2B), Warm colors (C)</p>
<p>Image 13</p> 	<p>Highly spacious (2B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Furniture is quite simple (F)</p>
<p>Image 14</p> 	<p>Quite Warm colors (C), Clearly Wood (W), Clearly Yellow (Y)</p>
<p>Image 15</p> 	<p>Quite spacious (B), Highly Light-well and white (2L), Clearly Wood (W), Clearly Yellow (Y)</p>
<p>Image 16</p> 	<p>Highly Warm colors (2C), Very clearly Oven – Heater (2O), High amount of Wood (2W)</p>

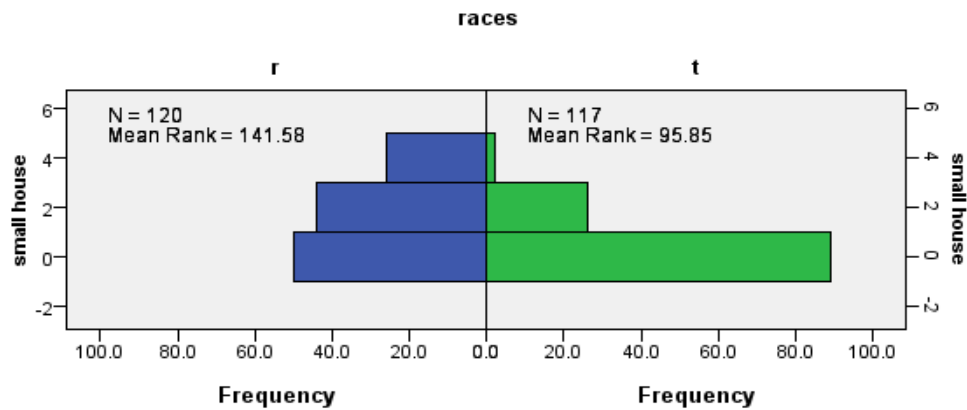
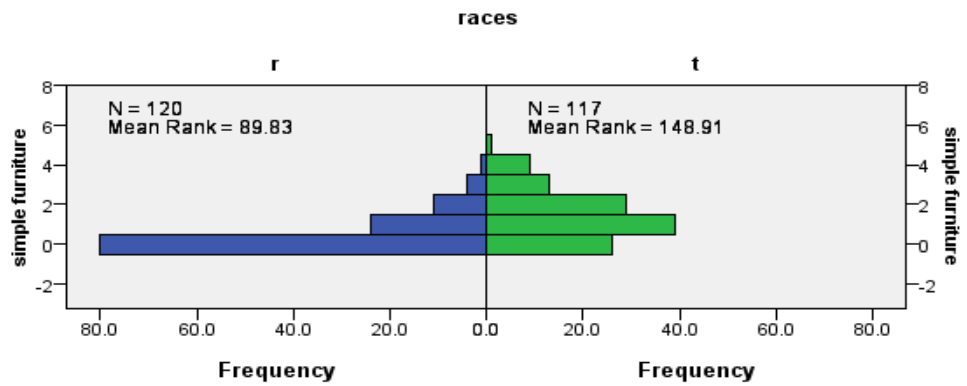
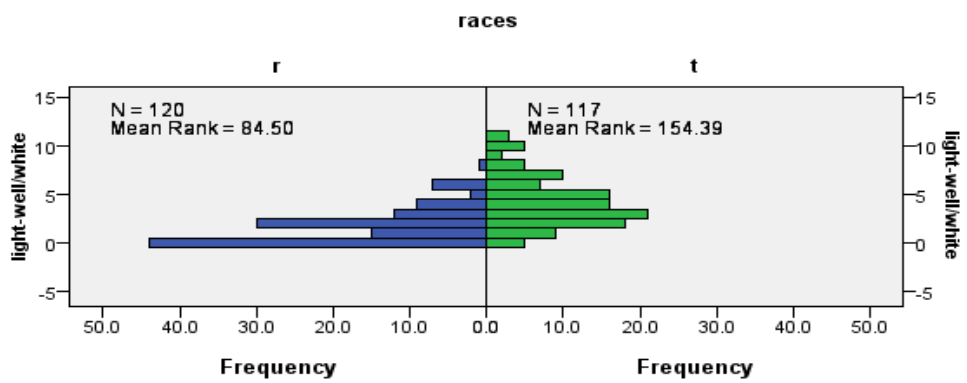
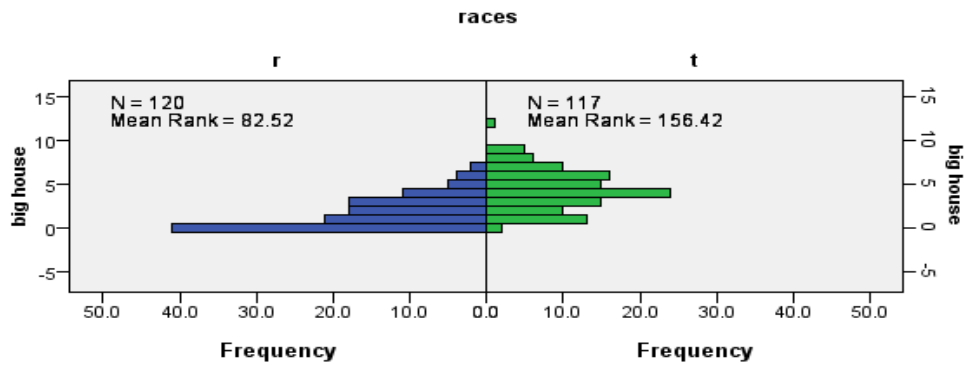
Table 4: Turkish group statistics

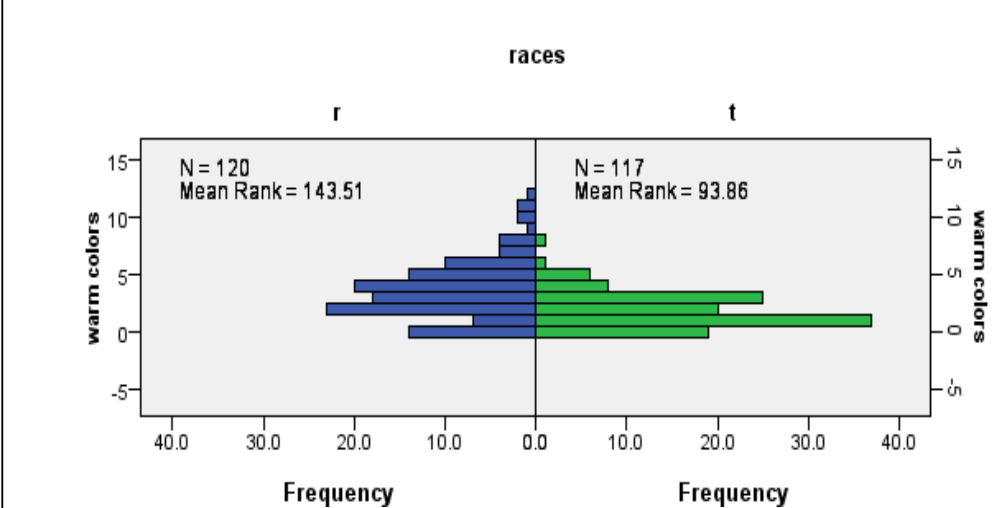
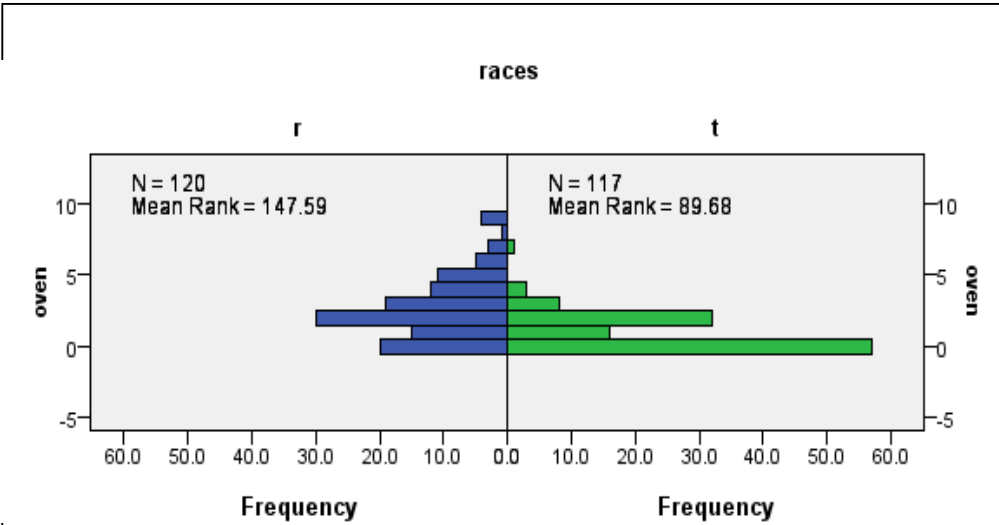
		big house	light-well/ white	simple furni- ture	small house	oven	warm colors
N	Valid	117	117	117	117	117	117
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.44	4.32	1.51	.51	1.05	1.95
Std. Error of Mean		.216	.248	.113	.088	.116	.143
Median		4.00	4.00	1.00	.00	1.00	2.00
Std. Deviation		2.339	2.680	1.222	.952	1.258	1.542
Skewness		.345	.683	.633	1.607	1.354	.920
Std. Error of Skewness		.224	.224	.224	.224	.224	.224
Minimum		0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		12	11	5	4	7	8

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 20, 2013

		big house	light-well/ white	simple furni- ture	small house	oven	warm col- ors
N	Valid	120	120	120	120	120	120
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.82	1.72	.52	1.60	2.75	3.67
Std. Error of Mean		.168	.167	.078	.141	.202	.236
Median		1.00	2.00	.00	2.00	2.00	3.00
Std. Deviation		1.838	1.824	.860	1.547	2.209	2.587
Skewness		.853	1.076	1.763	.363	.923	.852
Std. Error of Skew- ness		.221	.221	.221	.221	.221	.221
Minimum		0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		7	8	4	4	9	12

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 20, 2013





Picture 3: Summary of frequency charts for each category
 Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 20, 2013

The Hypotheses defined are as following:

H_0 = The distribution of B, L, F, S, O, C is the same across categories of races.

H_1 = The distribution of B, L, F is significantly different across categories of races with the highest values for the Turkish group.

H_2 = The distribution of S, O, C is significantly different across categories of races with the highest values for the Russian group.

Table 6: Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	χ^2	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Big House is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	92.954	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Light-well/White is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	152.316	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Simple Furniture is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	198.316	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Small House is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	79.519	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
5	The distribution of Oven is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	263.717	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
6	The distribution of Warm Colours is the same across categories of races.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	206.152	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 20, 2013

Mann-Whitney U Test analysis results at Table 6 revealed the followings:

1. The distribution of Big House (Chi Square= 92.954; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank= 156.42), Light-well/White (Chi Square= 152.316; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank=154.39), Simple Furniture (Chi Square= 198.316; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank=148.91) is significantly different across categories of races with the highest values for the Turkish group. Thus, H1 is accepted with 0.05 level of significance.

2. The distribution of Small House (Chi Square= 79.519; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank= 141.58), Oven (Chi Square= 263.717; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank=147.59), Warm Colors (Chi Square= 206.152; $p= 0.000$; Mean Rank=143.51) is significantly different across categories of races with the highest values for the Russian group. Thus, H2 is accepted with 0.05 level of significance.

Table 7: Categories emerged for the target groups.

Cultural Group	Categories	Core Category
Turkish	Big House (B)	Cleanliness
	Light-well/White (L)	
	Simple Furniture (F)	
Russian	Small House (S)	Heat
	Oven (O)	
	Warm colours (C)	

Source: Author's elaboration, 2013