

The Internet as a Cultural Forum: A European Perspective

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Jensen and Helles' model for studying the Internet as a cultural forum describes six prototypical communicative practices based on synchronicity and number of participants. This study seeks to examine the validity of their model in a broader intercultural setting. Using data from a large-scale, cross-European research project, the study reveals that mass media, particularly the synchronous media (television and radio), maintain their place as the most time-consuming communicative practice, and that there is a somewhat greater intensity of many-to-many practices than one-to-one practices. Many significant differences among subsegments of the sample are also reported. The results reflect inclinations and trends that were well documented in recent audience research. Consequently, they support the applicability of the model and demonstrate its strength.

Keywords: communicative practices, cross-cultural comparison, audiences, sociodemographics, synchronicity

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Introduction

Several years ago, Jensen and Helles (2011) published an article examining the extent to which the Internet, with its unique interactive genres and social networks, is evolving rapidly into the dominant cultural forum. They limited their inquiry by stressing that they were not implying that the Internet possesses the status of "unified equivalent." Rather, they claimed that because of its intermediality, intertextuality, and the interconnectedness of different media, together with its unique time-relevant aspect—namely, support of both synchronous and asynchronous communicative practices—the Internet has developed into a "distinctive social resource of communication" (p. 518), posing a complex challenge for media researchers.

Jensen and Helles' study had three goals: (a) to depict different types of communicative practices that traverse various traditional and new media; (b) to construct a conceptual model suitable for exploring the evolving digital media environment; and (c) to produce an empirical map of media practices prevalent in Denmark in 2008, serving as a baseline for future research on media use trends. They emphasized explicitly that the subtitle of their article, "Implications for Research," was not just an academic courtesy but an authentic invitation to communication scholars to reconsider the classic questions of communication research about communicative practices in the digital media environment, offering an opportunity for new reflections on established concepts and models of communication.

We accepted the challenge and the model developed was used to analyze findings of a recent cross-cultural audience research. Our study aimed at revisiting and reworking Jensen and Helles' pioneering study by extending it to a larger cultural context and addressing two distinct yet interrelated questions. The first explores the potential of the Internet, a metamedium that combines traditional communicative practices with new practices, to supplant or at least greatly reduce the intensity of such dominant communicative practices as reading books and newspapers and watching television, while the second question concerns the universality of these social phenomena and explores the degree of variation in nine participating countries and in social groups defined according to demographic and sociocultural variables. The typology suggested by Jensen and Helles served as an abstract common denominator, ensuring a non-culture-bound analysis and thus enabling us to study the communicative practices of people from different societies and various social groups within the same conceptual and operational framework.

Theoretical Approaches Relevant to the Internet as a Cultural Forum

New information and communication technologies, personal computers, the Internet, and cell phones have profoundly and radically changed norms and practices in all life domains. They affect and transform access to politics and culture and the manner and intensity with which people participate therein in both the private and public spheres. They change the way people spend their time, determine cultural preferences, and develop social ties and networks (Bryce, 2001; Castells, 1996, 2000; Cheng, 2006; Nimrod & Adoni, 2012).

Jensen and Helles (2011) were interested in the communicative practices of audiences around two basic aspects of mediated communicative action relating to source and message destination dimensions, as

well as the differential time flow between message transmission and reception—specifically, synchronous or asynchronous communication. While traditional media are either synchronous (e.g., radio, television) or asynchronous (e.g., books, newspapers), one prominent characteristic of new digital media use is the simultaneous presence of synchronous and asynchronous message flow. Jensen and Helles (2011) argued that both practices have their advantages and that none is particularly preferable to the other. Others, however, noted that people generally prefer synchronous communication, possibly because of its greater similarity to natural, face-to-face interaction (Cappella, 1991; Kock, 2001) and the high level of involvement it requires (Nimrod & Adoni, 2012).

Furthermore, while Jensen and Helles, like many other scholars, suggested a dichotomy between synchronous and asynchronous practices, others suggested that new media synchronicity should be treated as a continuum (Kalman & Rafaeli, 2007; Nimrod & Adoni, 2012). Synchronicity is not necessarily a matter of technology but rather of its use. Instant messages, typically classified as synchronous communication, may become asynchronous when the pace of message exchange is slow, while e-mail, typically regarded as asynchronous, may allow for rapid communication. Consequently, we suggest that in Jensen and Helles' model, this dimension differentiates between "highly synchronous" and "highly asynchronous" communicative practices.

The second aspect of interest in Jensen and Helles' typology was the number of senders and receivers, with the model differentiating among one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communications. Mass media consumption is chiefly based on one-to-many communication, while the new digital media offer their users at least these three options for source-destination interaction (the many-to-one option, as in the case of numerous citizens simultaneously sending e-mail messages to their prime minister, is very rare and was not included in the model).

These aspects address the most basic elements of the communicative action: the source of the message, its recipient, and the time flow of the communication. Accordingly, Jensen and Helles' model is relevant to several theoretical perspectives. In their original article, Jensen and Helles (2011) chose to link their model primarily with the "communication as culture" perspective, rooted in the theories propounded in the seminal works of Carey (1989) and Newcomb and Hirsch (1983). Newcomb and Hirsch claimed that television, the dominant medium of the mass communication era, became the chief depository of society's principal values and narratives and constituted—according to Carey's notion of communication—a cultural basis of communal existence.

At this stage of revisiting Jensen and Helles' study and extending its research questions, it is important to expand their reference to functional theories, especially the "uses and gratifications" approach. This consumer-oriented perspective defines media consumption as an active process of utilization in which individual consumers attempt to satisfy some of their psychosocial needs through selective self-exposure to specific media and content (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz & Adoni, 1973; Katz et. al., 1999; Rosengren, Palmgreen, & Wenner, 1985; Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). A voluminous literature based on empirical studies indicated that each medium specializes in fulfilling certain types of needs for its consumers.

These studies also demonstrated varying degrees of interchangeability among the media in fulfilling users' psychosocial needs. They concluded that there is no full functional equivalence among different media, and that they may consequently continue to coexist independently (Himmelweit & Swift, 1983; Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). Similar conclusions were also reached by Neuman (1986, 1991), who suggested that we view media functions through the prism of synergy theory, whereby consumers develop a capacity to choose among different media and optimize the use of each to fulfill their idiosyncratic needs.

This description of fulfillment of audience needs by various independent media obviously belongs to the past. The Internet, the metamedium, converged the elements of different media and gave its users the opportunity to fulfill their psychosocial needs through a wide range of communicative practices within one screen medium (large, medium, or small), thus endangering the autonomous existence of the traditional media. An assessment of the intensity of use of various communicative practices will improve our understanding of how the Internet contributes to fulfilling media consumers' psychosocial needs.

The Internet also changed the nature of public opinion and the public sphere. Habermas' (1989) seminal notions addressed interaction among dominant communicative actions in a given society, namely using a specific medium (reading newspapers) and discussing it in sociocultural settings (cafés and salons in England and France). As a metamedium, the Internet enables us to receive information (previously disseminated by newspapers, radio, and television) and discuss it, thereby potentially constituting a new digital public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Nevertheless, recent political campaigns in Europe and the United States, as well as the events of the Arab Spring, showed that agenda setting was still fulfilled primarily by one-to-many communicative practices (cf., Levin, 2012; Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheaffer, 2013). The Internet's principal strength was displayed in mobilization of activists and in the organizational potential of many-to-many communicative practices that clearly embody the potential evolution of a digital public sphere that is free of the political influence of powerful, established parties, thereby enabling rapid change in public opinion and recruitment of human and economic capital. Involvement of economic and political stakeholders in both old and new media might jeopardize free access and freedom of expression in the public sphere, as is evident in the old, mainstream media, constraining full realization of the Internet's potential to become the new Habermasian public sphere (Fisher, 2010).

Focus on the centrality of the Internet apparently links Jensen and Helles' model to the basic notions of Innis (1951) and McLuhan (1962), who maintained that prolonged and constant use of a dominant medium over a period of time will affect the social structure, characteristics of the culture, and cognitive processes of individuals, ultimately displacing the previously dominant medium. In his later works, McLuhan modified this thesis (Levinson, 1999) and some of his followers (Baudrillard, 1983; Meyrowitz, 1985) were less extreme about displacement phenomena, although the notion still occupied a sizable share of their thought and research.

Sociological and sociocultural research trends have been implicitly critical of the technological deterministic approach to the dynamics of media interrelations for having failed to corroborate displacement theory. Such research demonstrated that the diffusion patterns and functions of print were by no means universal, as they were influenced by the unique social and cultural characteristics of different societies (Eisenstein, 1980; Goody, 1968; Goody & Watt, 1963; Havelock, 1976). Furthermore, they showed that the

relationships among the various media are far more complex than predicted by the simplistic postulate of technological determinism, according to which the dominant media render all others obsolete.

Deliberating these classic media research questions in the new digital media environment, Castells (1996, 2000) succeeded in converging sociological and economic theories, with strong emphasis on the role of new technologies in modern societies and economies. The title of one of his books, *The Internet Galaxy*, even echoes McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), which analyzed the historical effect of print and the rise of the new dominant medium, television. The outdated McLuhanian metaphor of machine (*The Mechanical Bride*, 1951) was replaced with that of network in both social and virtual reality.

In his most influential oeuvre, *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996, 2000), Castells argued that modern societies are increasingly structured around the polar opposition of *net* and *self*. The term *net* relates to the network principle of organization that is gradually replacing organizational hierarchies, while the phenomenon of *self* denotes the practices used by individuals, such as their lifestyle, cultural preferences, and media consumption, to construct and reaffirm their individual and social identity under rapidly changing social and cultural conditions.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) also linked media, political structure, and sociocultural conditions, comparing media systems in 18 Western democracies and providing a systematic and utilitarian approach for analysis of differences and similarities among these countries. The key features explored in this context were: political history of the country—patterns of conflict and consensus; consensus or majoritarian government; individual versus organized pluralism; role of states; and rational-legal authority. As our second research question bears on cross-cultural comparisons, their typology of different countries is most relevant to examination of the interrelationship between political and media structure and idiosyncratic use of the Internet and other media.

From the early stages of Internet use, it was obvious that broadcast technology and the competence and skills necessary to operate it are not distributed equally among different social groups and countries. This sociocultural phenomenon was termed "the digital divide," that was perceived as separating the "North"—denoting Western, rich, and industrialized countries such as most European states—from countries in the poor and underdeveloped "South," particularly in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia (Chen & Wellman, 2004). Insofar as social groups are concerned, early empirical studies (e.g., Kaye & Johnson, 2003) showed that the "digital divide" was most pronounced between younger and older people, between those with considerable and little schooling, between high- and low-income families and individuals, and between men and women. Thanks to the meteoric rate of new technology diffusion in the Western world, significant use of personal computers and the Internet is evident in all social groups. However, in terms of age, education, and socioeconomic status differences, empirical data suggest that the old patterns still prevail and that the best predictors of frequency and sophisticated use of Internet are young age, high income, and high level of education (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012).

Earlier studies (Johnson-Smaragdi, D'Haensen, Krotz, & Hasebrink, 1998; Adoni & Nossek, 2001) showed that traditional literacy in its different forms is a *sine qua non* for developing the competence and skills necessary for Internet use. Clearly, all these intellectual skills are a function of the cultural capital

acquired by individuals at an early age within the informal setting of the family (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). This capital is most evident in the case of literary, musical, and artistic education that require a lengthy learning period and constant exposure to books, music, and works of art. By contrast, television consumption is related to media literacy, but does not require basic literacy skills or a long period of apprenticeship. Furthermore, several studies have shown that television viewing is usually of greater duration among less educated people and is consequently perceived as narrowing gaps among individuals belonging to different social classes and age groups (Meyrowitz, 1985; Pronovost, 1998). Roe (2000) also found this to be true for young children, whose mothers' lower level of education correlated with their children's relatively high consumption of television.

In summary, different approaches to the study of diffusion, adoption, and use of various communicative practices in past communication research provided us with various points of view for reexamination of traditional media research concepts, such as communication as culture, the displacement hypothesis, uses and gratifications, self and networks, and communication flow and the public sphere, enabling us to explore their significance for new communicative practices. The intensity of one-to-many communicative practices can indicate the enduring strength of mass communications, while the prevalence of both synchronous and asynchronous many-to-many communicative practices has endless implications for networking, digital social spheres, and organized social action. Exploring the extent to which we can depict idiosyncratic patterns of media use in different countries and social groups, as well as the degree to which audiences share common communicative practices that cut across national borders, can provide an indicator of the dominance and universality of the Internet as a cultural forum.

Method

The study was based on a major cross-European audience research project conducted in the context of EU COST Action IS0906. Data were collected online in early 2013, in nine European countries (Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Poland, and Portugal), by local and international commercial firms, with quotas instituted to ensure that each sample is representative of the country's online population. With about 1,200 participants in each country, the overall sample size consisted of 10,742 European Internet users aged 14 years and over. As the sample involved Internet users from diverse countries (in terms of culture, geographic location, income, and Internet penetration), analysis provided a general picture of European audiences and their use of various communicative practices.

The current investigation was based on a specific part of the data that explored media use the day before responding to the survey. Participants were asked to think about the previous day and report how much time (in minutes) they spent using various media. This part of the questionnaire was split into two parts; the first related to traditional mass media (e.g., television, radio, newspapers) and differentiating between old media and digital/Internet-based use (via computer and cellular phone), while the second considered various Internet-based activities (e.g., using social networking services [SNSs], reading and writing entries in forums and chatrooms, and playing online games).

In the first phase of data analysis, each research team member separately classified the various media uses examined in the study into six communicative practices. As some media could involve more

than one practice (e.g., SNSs could be many-to-many as well as one-to-one if the chat option is selected, and forums and chatrooms could be both synchronous and asynchronous, depending on the frequency of posting), classification was based on the most dominant use. There was full agreement among the researchers with regard to 17 of the 23 media uses examined. Differences of opinion about the remainder were discussed and adjudicated. The final classification is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Six Communicative Practices.

	Highly Asynchronous	Highly Synchronous
One-to-one	E-mail, online errands	Instant messenger
One-to-many	Books (print, digital, audio), newspapers (print, online), audio and video players, Web 1.0/websites of interest, downloads	Radio (set, online, mobile), television (set, online, mobile)
Many-to-many	Web 2.0/SNSs, forums, and chatrooms	Online games

Note. SNS = social networking services.

Data were analyzed using SPSS v.20 software. Participants' reports on the time spent with various media were used to compute the intensity of use for each of the six communicative prototypes. We combined responses concerning the various practices and then normalized the combined measures to a (0–1) interval. As the range of reported time spent on each practice varied, such normalization allowed for reporting results as *index values* along a single, simple scale from zero to one, enabling comparison of all findings. The next step was identification of differences between subsegments of the European sample based on age, education, gender, and income. Cross-cultural differences were then examined for the sample as a whole and separately for teenagers. Analysis of variance, Fisher's least significant difference, and *t* tests were used to compare the mean index scores of each subsegment. Bonferroni corrections were applied to control for type 1 errors and Alfa inflation. Unless otherwise stated, all reported findings are significant at or above the .01 level.

Results

The Big Picture

To avoid unbalanced indexes with most cases concentrated at the lowest levels, extreme scores of each practice (the top 15% of the combined measures) were screened out of the analysis. Therefore, although the ranges of reported time spent on each practice often exceeded 10 hours, the ranges used in the analysis were one hour for both one-to-one practices, two hours for both types of many-to-many communication, six hours for asynchronous, and eight hours for synchronous one-to-many communication. The intensity with which the users engaged in each of the six prototypical forms of communication is reported in Figure 1. The findings display similar distributions of the various communicative practices among European audiences, with most participants (52%–65%) being relatively light users (index score lower than 0.5). Yet, each practice had its own distinctive characteristics.

Synchronous one-to-one (S11). Although S11 communication is probably the most dominant daily communicative practice, it was not reflected in the findings, because only one medium—instant messenger (such as Skype, MSN Messenger, and WhatsApp)—was examined, while time spent in face-to-face and phone interactions was omitted. Nevertheless, 41% of users had an index score of 0.5 or higher and the rate of participants with a score of 1 was the highest for all practices (15%).

Asynchronous one-to-one (A11). In this case, 48% of users had an index score of 0.5 or higher, but the time range was one hour only, possibly reflecting a decline in e-mail use in favor of other one-to-one and many-to-many practices. A11 also included online errands (e.g., shopping, banking, travel reservations, etc.), possibly suggesting that European audiences still prefer doing their errands offline. Alternatively, it may be that such errands are not performed on a daily basis (and the study related only to the day before the survey was conducted).

Synchronous one-to-many (S1M). With 48% of the users who had an index score of 0.5 or higher and the longest time range (eight hours), push broadcasting may still “be considered an integral component of everyday lives and cultural practices” (Jensen & Helles, 2011, p. 522). Whether consumed the old-fashioned way (TV set, radio set) or digitally (via computers and cell phones), this synchronous communication is used intensively by European audiences. Apparently, despite all the new media that liberate audiences from strict schedules, the fire of broadcasting has not died down.

Asynchronous one-to-many (A1M). Among other media, the A1M index included audio and video players, as well as downloading music, films, and podcasts. Such media offer an experience identical to that of push broadcasting. Furthermore, unlike their synchronous equivalents, A1M media offer users complete control of the time and pace of use and provide a much greater variety of content. These advantages may explain the high rate (45%) of users with an index score of 0.5 or higher and the extended time range (six hours)—only a little lower than the equivalent S1M values.

Synchronous many-to-many (SMM). The measure for SMM communication, like S11 practice, was based on one item only (online games) and thus should be cautiously treated and interpreted. Still,

according to the data, 42% of users scored 0.5 or above (i.e., reported one to two hours of use on the day before taking the survey). This suggests that most people who play online games use them in a moderate manner as casual recreation. Individuals who play for many hours, rendering the games a central communicative practice in their everyday lives, are still a minority among audiences and belong to the top 15% of users who were screened out of the analysis.

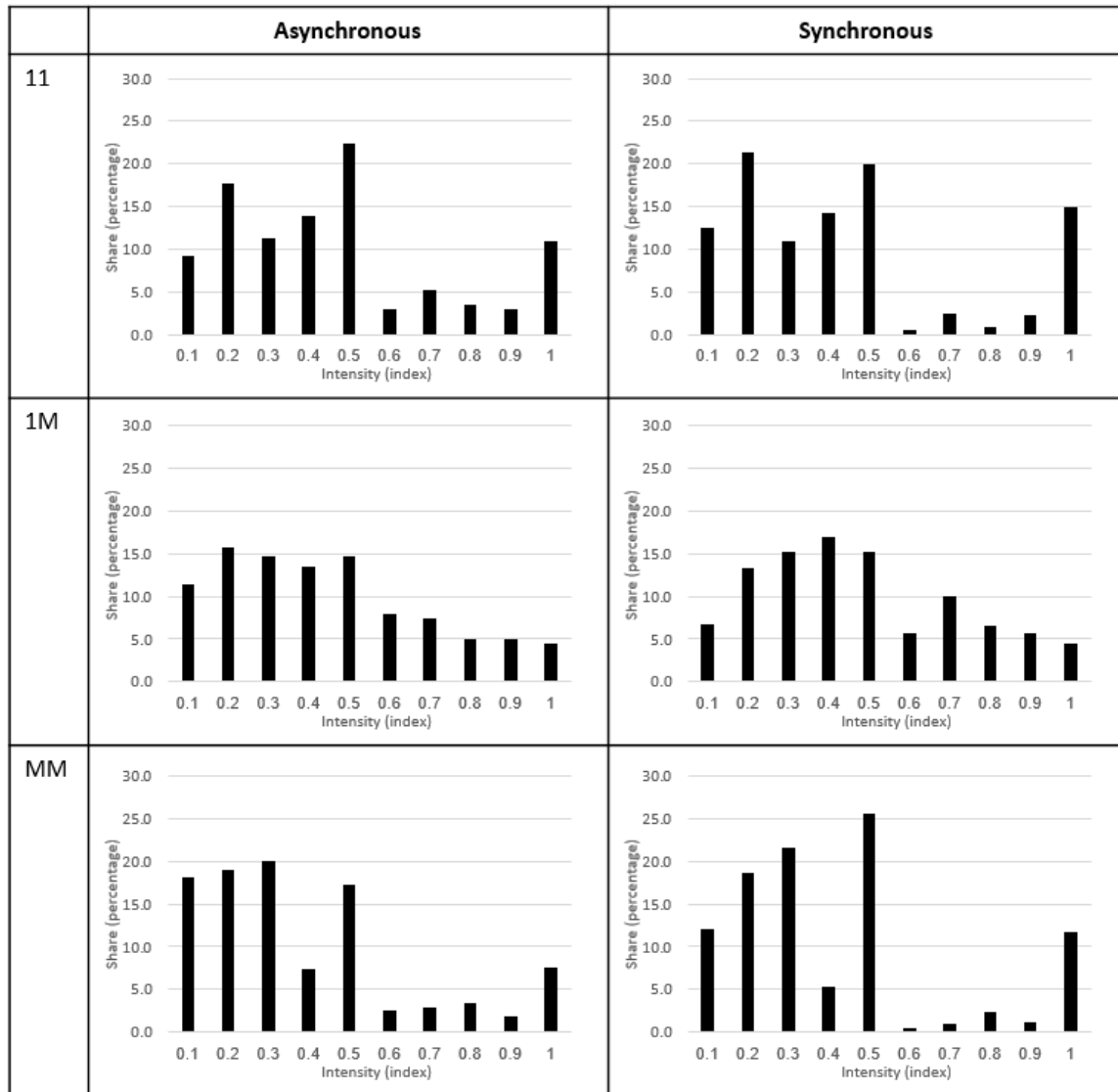


Figure 1. Communicative practice distribution.

Asynchronous many-to-many (AMM). Even though social media that offer AMM communication may be considered the most revolutionary contribution of new media, the intensity of their use was the lowest among all practices. Only 35% of users scored 0.5 or above. This finding shows that although many people have profiles in various SNSs, they are not necessarily heavy users. This finding may be explained by the effort and self-disclosure required for this type of practice. Some are willing to invest them, most do not. It should be recalled, however, that the time range of this practice was double that of its 11 equivalent. Hence heavy users of social media use them for far more time than their A11 counterparts.

Overall, the findings suggest that European Internet users engage in a wide range of communicative practices and are most inclined to engage in one-to-many practices. Furthermore, the intensity of many-to-many practices is higher than that of one-to-one practices, at least as captured by the measures in the present study, and the gap between synchronous and asynchronous one-to-many communication is not particularly wide.

Demographics and Communication

While the big picture provides a general overview of the intensity of media use by European audiences, various segments of these audiences may differ in the extent to which they take advantage of each communicative practice. Approaches to audience segmentation vary and may be based on sociodemographic characteristics (such as age, gender, education, and income), behavioral patterns (i.e., segmentation based on media use), and psychographic indicators (e.g., values, attitudes, preferences, and motivations). To examine the validity of Jensen and Helles' (2011) model in a broad intercultural setting, we decided to replicate their study with attention to the classic demographic categories of age, gender, education, and income. Unlike the original study, which applied some survey questions that did not allow for describing with confidence detailed variations for each of the six communicative prototypes in terms of demographics, the present study enabled further exploration of all six practices.

Age. Analysis indicated significant age differences in four of the six communicative practices (see Figure 2). The intensity of A11 and S1M practices increased with age and that of S11 and AMM decreased (S11 at only a .05 level). These findings highlight a significant age divide with regard to media practices, with the younger audience manifesting greater use of social media and messengers and the older audience displaying use of traditional synchronous mass media and older forms of new media, such as e-mail.

Education. Participants were split into four education groups: up to lower secondary, upper secondary, higher education, and academic. To isolate the effects of education from those of age, the comparison of the four groups only included participants more than 23 years of age. Significant differences among the groups were found in four communicative practices (see Figure 3). Analysis indicated less intensive use of S1M and SMM and more intensive use of A11 and A1M at the higher education levels. People with lower education thus tend to use synchronous media, while those with more years of schooling exhibit greater use of asynchronous communication.

Gender. Significant differences were noted between men and women in four communicative practices (see Figure 4). Analysis showed that men reported significantly more intense use of both A1M and

S1M and women significantly more intense use of S11 (only at the .05 level) and AMM than males. In other words, men reported greater use of mass media and women were more inclined to communicate with others via social media and messengers.

Income. Jensen and Helles (2011) suggested that income played only a limited role in explaining variations in their sample from Denmark. By contrast, the data in the present cross-national study exhibited significant differences among people at different income levels. In this case, as with education, we isolated the effects of income from those of age by including only participants more than 23 years of age. Significant differences among the income groups were found for four communicative practices, including A11, S1M, and both MMs (see Figure 5). As in the case of education, there was an overall decline in intensity of use as income levels rose, with one exception—A11.

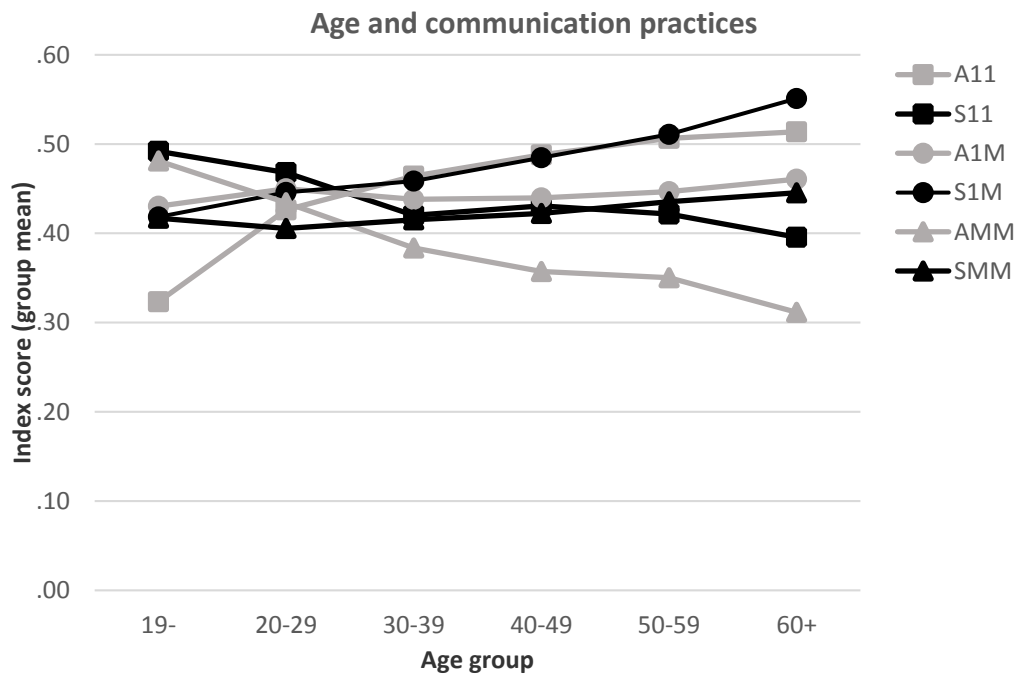


Figure 2. Age.

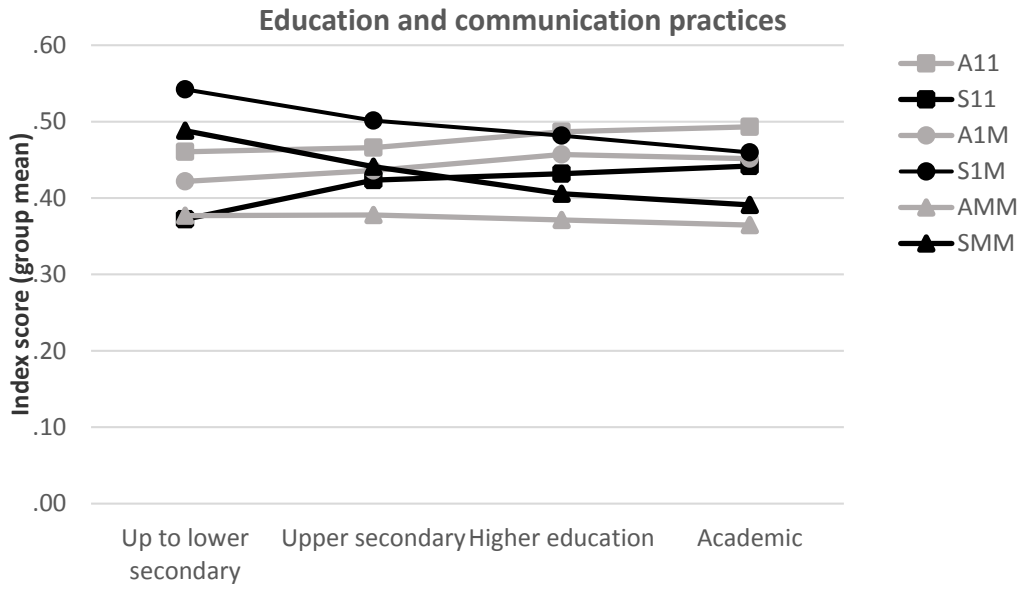


Figure 3. Education.



Figure 4. Gender.

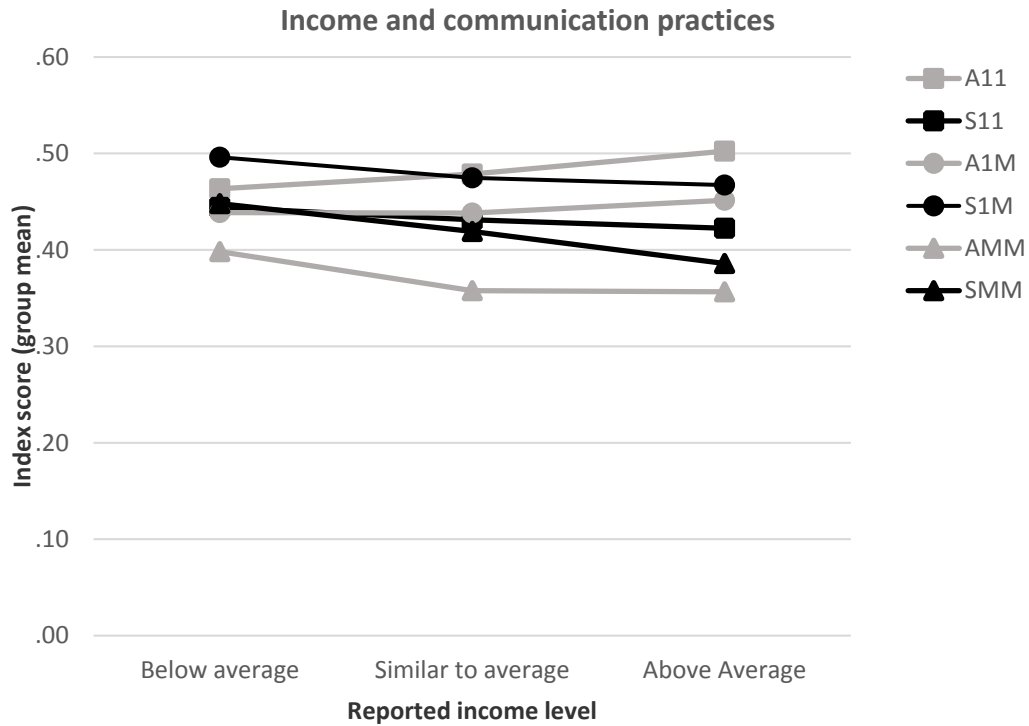


Figure 5. Income.

Cross-Cultural Differences in Media Practices

Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) analysis of various countries according to the characteristics elaborated above resulted in the following country-grouping models: Mediterranean or Pluralist (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain); North-Central Europe Democratic Corporatist (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland); and North Atlantic or Liberal (United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Ireland). Following this typology, the nine countries examined in this study were split into three groups: Mediterranean (Portugal, Italy, and Israel)—the first two according to the original typology and Israel according to the follow-up analysis beyond the Western world (Peri, 2012); North-Central Europe (Belgium, Denmark, Germany); and Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Croatia). The last group was not included in Hallin and Mancini’s original typology, but its members share the communality of being post-Soviet countries and relatively new democracies. According to Hallin and Mancini’s general observations (2012a, 2012b) and Dobek-Ostrowska’s specific analysis of the Polish system (2012), the Eastern and Central European countries’ media systems shifted from the communist model towards one that lies between the polarized pluralist model and the liberal model, although all maintain some communist era traits. This typology enabled us to link individual communicative practices and the larger social structure by

amalgamating groups of similar countries for assessment of idiosyncratic communicative practices in each group and the differences among them.

Analysis revealed significant differences among the groups for all communicative practices except A11 (Figure 6). Compared with Internet users from North-Central Europe and the Mediterranean, participants from Eastern Europe exhibited the most intense use of S11, A1M, and SMM. There were no significant differences between participants from North-Central Europe and the Mediterranean with regard to S11 and A1M, although the former did display a significantly higher intensity of SMM use. The findings also indicated that participants from North-Central Europe reported the highest intensity of use of S1M, followed by Eastern Europeans as lighter users, and the Mediterranean individuals as the lightest users. North-Central Europeans, however, reported lower intensity of AMM practice than the other two groups (with no significant differences between them). Briefly stated, North-Central Europeans were the most intense consumers of traditional broadcasting, Eastern Europeans the heaviest users of innovative practices, and Mediterranean people tended to report the lightest use of most media. These tendencies, however, may be due to the somewhat different kinds and qualities of samples that were delivered from different parts of Europe, and thus should be cautiously regarded.

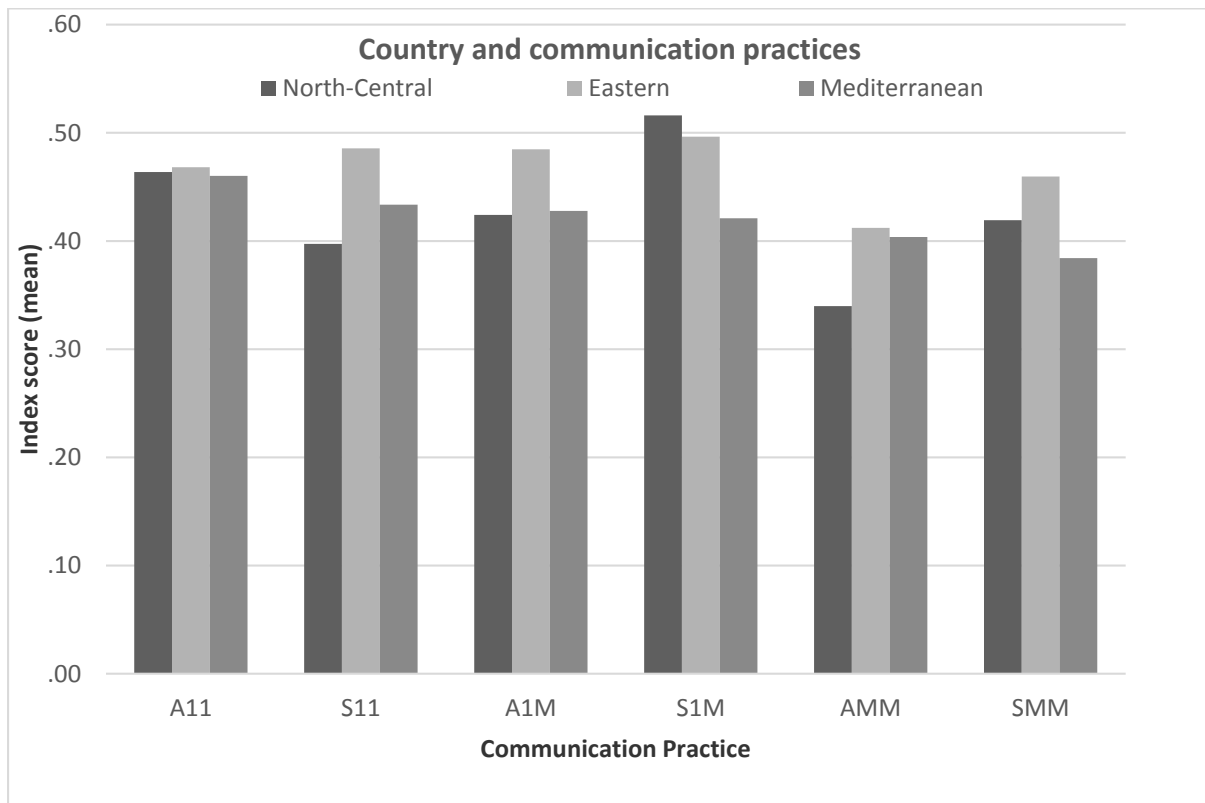


Figure 6. Cross-cultural comparison.

As young media audiences tend to be more innovative in adoption of new media and communicative practices (Kaye & Johnson, 2003; Zickuhr & Smith, 2012), we conducted a separate examination of cross-cultural differences in media practices among European teenagers (ages 14–19). Surprisingly, there were hardly any differences among youth from the three cultural groups. The sole significant difference (at $p < .05$ only) was that adolescents from the Mediterranean region reported lower intensity of S1M use (with no significant differences between the other two groups). Thus, the cross-cultural differences, which characterized the sample as a whole, proved to be cohort-related. Whereas the media use of Europeans aged 20 years and above seems to vary by culture, a new European generation may be emerging—one that is less affected by local cultures and belongs to a more global and networked culture.

Discussion

A panoramic picture of European audiences from nine different countries reveals that the Internet users among them engage in most of the examined communicative practices frequently and intensively. The findings clearly show that these audiences are still more inclined to engage in mass media practices (1M) than in those associated with innovative Internet-based applications (11 and MM)—results resembling those of Jensen and Helles (2011).

With regard to notions developed by the technological Toronto school (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1962), the present study lacks any conclusive evidence that the Internet is displacing television as a dominant medium. On the contrary, our interpretation of the findings leads to conclusions similar to those of functional theories (Himmelweit & Swift, 1983; Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973), indicating that audiences are in a process of constant flux, thus giving rise to a new division of labor among the media. Notwithstanding this observation, our findings also corroborate Castells' (1996, 2000) view that we are indeed part of the Internet Galaxy. The Internet is rapidly becoming a central metamedium, as reflected in the high intensity of MM practices and the flow of both synchronous and asynchronous messages (with a slight bias towards A1M).

The higher intensity of use of MM compared with 11 may suggest some degree of audience transformation resulting from changes in technological media. These new and significant modes of information sharing may lead to the emergence of a digital public sphere that appears to be less authoritarian, more egalitarian, and available to more social strata than its print media-based predecessor (Papacharissi, 2002). Nevertheless, according to critics of the digital era, the old media's ability to provide an open, accessible public sphere is hampered by commercial and political involvement, thereby impeding the emergence of a free and egalitarian digital public sphere that the new media might otherwise enable (Curran & Seaton, 2009; Fisher, 2010).

Some of our results differ sharply from those recorded by Jensen and Helles (2011), who noted little inclination to engage in MM practices and a much higher intensity of S1M than A1M use. There are several possible interpretations of these differences. First, slightly different measures were used, as elaborated above (*Method*). Furthermore, Denmark may not be representative of the larger European cultural setting. The most likely explanation, however, is the different data collection times. During the five-year period between data collection for the first study (2008) and the second (2013), the latter's findings

may represent a transition from 11 to MM communication and a slow shift from synchronous to asynchronous 1M communicative practices.

Our study confirms the persistence of an age-related digital divide, revealing differences among age groups as previous studies did (e.g., Zickuhr, 2010). Younger audiences reported greater use of social media and messengers, while older ones were more likely to use traditional, synchronous (S1M) mass media forms of communication, as well as better-established Internet practices (e.g., e-mail).

Again echoing the findings of earlier research (Jensen & Helles, 2011; Kaye & Johnson, 2003), our study indicated that individuals with higher education exhibit the competence to adopt innovative communicative practices and consequently use asynchronous communication more than do less educated persons. This observation conforms to our hypothesis that cultural capital, an unevenly distributed resource, is a *sine qua non* for the adoption of technological innovations. The study also corroborated earlier research (Adoni & Nosseck, 2001); the current study indicated that level of education, based on traditional literacy, is a basis for developing general competence and specific skills necessary in the more sophisticated (e.g., downloading content) and preference for traditional media, such as books.

The income variable, although strongly correlated with education, is not as powerful an indicator. The overall decline in intensity of use with the rise in income level (A11 being the only exception) may be explained by the types of occupations practiced by persons with higher income, which often involve frequent use of e-mail and long working hours that render errands a necessity and A1M an important alternative for S1M. Findings about income level are not in line with those of Jensen and Helles (2011), possibly because of the greater variance of income among European audiences than within the relatively affluent Danish audience.

Women in our study, as in other recent surveys (Duggan, 2013; Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2013), were more inclined than men to communicate with others via social media and messengers. This finding reveals the close connection between lifestyles and media practice. Women, who are apparently more community-oriented than men and maintain more day-to-day contacts with family and friends, adopt a communicative practice that responds to their psychosocial needs, thereby corroborating "uses and gratifications" conclusions (Katz et al., 1999; Rosengren et al., 1985).

The typology of media systems developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) proved to be most pertinent in analyzing data about the cross-cultural comparisons among the participating countries. Our findings showed that North-Central Europeans were the heaviest users of traditional broadcasting (S1M), while people from post-communist Eastern and Central Europe were the heaviest users of innovative practices (AMM). Media consumers from the Mediterranean countries tended to report the lightest use of most media.

Based on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) system classification, we posit that North-Central European countries' media systems are characterized by high professionalization, protection of freedom of speech, and a strong public service broadcasting tradition. Consequently, media consumers from these countries have more trust in their traditional mass media and use them more intensely. By contrast, Eastern and Central European countries participating in the study are postcommunist societies with relatively young

liberal media systems. Their audiences have not yet developed the necessary level of trust in their mass media and perhaps even perceive social media as some kind of alternative media and its communicative practices as a digital form of *samizdat*.

According to this logic, people from the Mediterranean countries with a politically oriented press, weaker level of professionalization, and stronger state intervention (in comparison to Northern/Central Europe) should be situated somewhere in the middle of this continuum. As noted above, however, they reported the lightest use levels for all communicative practices. We suggest therefore a different interpretation based mainly on lifestyle variables. Since our data were collected in February 2013, when weather in these regions was more temperate than in northern countries, people spent more time outside their homes and with their families. Perhaps this easygoing lifestyle is responsible for their lighter use of media. It is important to emphasize that this is only speculation, however. In future studies, we intend to explore cross-cultural differences in depth, with particular emphasis on interrelationships between different lifestyle patterns and various types of communicative actions.

Our data showed that teenagers, the new media generation in all the countries, are not affected by cross-cultural differences. On the contrary, they have more in common with their foreign peers than with adults in their own respective countries. We believe that we are witnessing the emergence of a new audience of young Europeans who share the same communicative practices, thereby possibly expressing an important component of their new European identity.

Finally, one of our goals in revisiting Jensen and Helles' 2011 study was validation of their model in a broader, cross-cultural context. Our findings proved the model's efficiency in providing both conceptual and operational frameworks for current audience research. Results showed that this model, based on elementary components of communication processes, can be applied to large and heterogeneous audiences to help reveal differences in their communicative practices and even enable us to gain a better understanding of their connection with macrodifferences in their media systems.

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