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# Is the Internet Homogenizing or Diversifying the News? External Pluralism in the U.S., Danish, and French Press

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#### Matthew Powers<sup>1</sup> and Rodney Benson<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

This study examines whether news is more or less homogeneous online than in print across agenda-setting news outlets in the United States, Denmark, and France. Examining similarities and differences in the genres, topics, and authors of news in each country's leading newspapers, it finds little evidence of greater online homogeneity in any country. U.S. news outlets are more differentiated online than in print, while French news outlets have similar levels of print and online differentiation. Online data for Denmark reveal no consistent pattern in the direction of either homogeneity or differentiation. These findings suggest that the differentiating effects of the online environment are strongest in countries (e.g., the United States) where media markets are being restructured to include more direct competition between agenda-setting news outlets at the national level. By contrast, countries (e.g., France and, to a lesser degree, Denmark) with high levels of print differentiation have similarly high levels online due to the path-dependent effects of their national media systems.

#### **Keywords**

journalism, comparative research, Internet, press systems, public sphere

Is the Internet homogenizing or diversifying the news across similar news outlets? Existing scholarship offers competing answers to this question. On one hand, some argue the financial malaise accompanying the Internet's rise has contributed

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to a situation in which a depleted journalistic workforce is expected to produce round-the-clock news across multiple platforms: This trend, joined with the ease in which the Internet facilitates constant journalistic monitoring of rival news organizations, creates strong incentives to compete by copying (Boczkowski 2010; Redden and Witschge 2010; Rosensteil 2005). On the other hand, some suggest digital technologies collapse space and time and bring previously dispersed news outlets directly into competition: At least some media organizations seem to be responding to this challenge by differentiating themselves either ideologically, topically, or stylistically (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001; Baum and Groelling 2008; Hallin and Mancini 2004).

In this article, we contribute to this debate by examining the similarities and differences in the genres, authors, and topics of news across agenda-setting newspapers (both print and online versions) in Denmark, France, and the United States. Our aims are fourfold. First, we provide a cross-national perspective to the debate about news homogeneity. Second, we assess homogeneity along two dimensions: as both the overall concentration of genres, authors, and topics in agenda-setting newspapers and as the degree to which individual news outlets differentiate their mixture of such elements from one another. Third, we introduce measures and methods for studying homogeneity online that may be useful to other researchers. Fourth, by using data collected from the months preceding the 2008 global financial crisis, we provide a historical baseline for future research on content homogeneity and differentiation.

Our cross-national comparison is informed by a media systems approach (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Media systems refer to the political, economic, professional, and regulatory forces that shape journalism in different countries. In Comparing Media Systems, Hallin and Mancini suggest three distinct models in Western Europe and North America: a "liberal" model, expressed most clearly in the United States and characterized by the relative dominance of market and commercial forces; a "democratic corporatist" model, seen in Denmark and other northern European countries and characterized by the coexistence of commercial logics and public service media; and a "polarized pluralist" model, seen in Mediterranean countries (including France) and characterized by low levels of commercialism and greater state involvement. In examining the mixture of genres, authors, and topics in representative media system countries, we seek to test whether structural variations across media systems help explain the degree of homogeneity/differentiation in news content and form within and across media systems. In so doing, we help build and refine theory examining the relationship between media systems and news content (Aalberg et al. 2010; Esser and Umbricht 2013; Humprecht and Büchel 2013; Wessler et al. 2008).

## Existing Perspectives on Homogeneity and Differentiation

Is online news more or less homogeneous than print across similar types of outlets? And to what degree does the online environment maintain or transform existing crossnational differences between media systems? The research literature suggests three

possibilities: more homogeneity online than in print, more differentiation online than in print, and print—online similarity (i.e., no substantial difference).

Those who see more homogeneity online than in print argue it is the result of commercial, professional, and technological factors. Commercial competition has intensified in recent years, leading news organizations to enact strategies designed to yield larger cost savings via workforce reductions and production synergies (Picard 2011). Pre-existing professional tendencies to monitor and imitate are amplified online, as journalists can see their competitors' news judgments in real time (Boczkowski 2010). Internet technologies force journalists to take on multiple tasks in a publishing environment that is transformed from a "news cycle" to a "news cyclone" (Klinenberg 2005: 54). Homogeneity between news outlets is greater online than in print as a result of these commercial, professional, and technological factors, which encourage monitoring and reliance on wire services and press releases (Boczkowski 2010; Redden and Witschge 2010; Rosensteil 2005).

The factors shaping homogeneity exist in all three countries in this study, but in an uneven fashion. A feature of liberal media systems is their tendency toward higher levels of commercialism than other media systems (Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2012; Hallin and Mancini 2004). This is especially true of U.S. media, which are among the world's most commercialized: Prior to the financial crisis, advertising accounted for 80 percent of total U.S. newspaper revenues compared with 57 percent in Denmark and 40 percent in France (Benson 2009; Harrie 2009). European counterparts, by contrast, are buffered by subsidies and other protective measures aimed at ensuring differentiation across news outlets. French subsidies rank among the highest in Europe (Benson 2009), substantially higher than Danish subsidies (Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011); American newspapers receive no direct subsidies (Starr 2004). Given existing research that shows how the strong presence of commercial forces and relative absence of state support creates a bias toward more homogeneous content (Aalberg et al. 2010; Curran et al. 2009; Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2012), U.S. newspapers might be assumed to be more homogeneous (both in print and online) than newspapers in Denmark and France, even as the literature predicts greater homogeneity online in all cases.

Others see the online environment encouraging a very different phenomenon, namely, more differentiation online as online publishing restructures media markets, bringing multiple outlets into competition with one another (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001; Baum and Groelling 2008; Prior 2007). Now that audiences can, and do, read news outside their local markets (Thurman 2007), news organizations—particularly agenda-setting national newspapers—find themselves competing in new ways. Economic research suggests that the competitive conditions of these restructured markets will lead to "product differentiation" with news outlets diversifying offerings to appeal to distinct audiences (Gal-Or and Dukes 2003; George and Waldfogel 2003). In discussing the advent of online news sites, Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) make precisely this argument about online news in the United States: "In an electronic market-place, we can imagine a series of truly national newspapers competing. Why shouldn't these come to occupy partisan positions (of the European sort)?" (p. 294).

According to this view, partisanship is one dimension of a broader trend toward differentiation in online environments that are not just about news but also "space[s] of opinion" (Jacobs and Townsley 2011). Here, too, the argument is especially claimed with respect to the United States, where media markets are being restructured most significantly. In Denmark and France, media markets were already centralized in a single city (Copenhagen and Paris) with newspapers competing head-to-head for audiences (Albert 2004; Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011). By contrast, U.S. markets for most of the twentieth century were—even for agenda-setting newspapers—regional or local, creating the conditions for what Hallin and Mancini (2004: 286) term "catch-allism," that is, the tendency of outlets with local monopolies to cater news to the widest possible audience. Because the market structures enabling the strategy of catch-all-ism diminish online, publishing strategies are similarly expected to shift.

Finally, it is possible that cross-medium differences may not exist in either direction—toward either greater homogeneity or differentiation. Instead, we might expect to see within-country similarities both in print and online as well as cross-national differences. Strands of cross-national and print versus online research do find print and online similarities stemming from shared organizational, professional, and cultural norms (see the overview in Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009). Boczkowski's (2004: 73–76) study of U.S. newsrooms found strong tendencies, particularly at elite newspapers like the New York Times, to recreate print norms in online settings. Finnemann and Thomasen (2005) studied Danish newspapers and online news sites, and report mostly print-to-online similarities in topical selections, news formats, and page layouts. Quandt's (2008) five-country study (which includes both the United States and France) finds hardly any cross-medium differences in topical reporting patterns, and reports enduring cross-national differences. Finally, Nielsen's (2013) six-country study (including the United States and France) finds cross-national structural differences in national media industries and within-country structural similarities for print and online news, suggesting similar patterns for news form and content.

Comparative research suggests that the degree of cross-outlet differentiation varies cross-nationally. The Danish and French political systems are home to more major political parties than the American system (eight, six, and two, respectively). While there has been a loosening of any direct interconnection between political parties and media outlets across Western Europe, the histories of such systems push "toward the politicization of the media" and a tendency of media outlets to be identified with general political currents (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 61). Indeed, existing comparative research consistently finds that the relative prevalence of opinion and deliberative content vis-à-vis strictly news content is greater in polarized pluralist and democratic corporatist systems than in liberal systems (Benson et al. 2012; Esser and Umbricht 2013; Sheafer and Wolfsfeld 2009). These differences may further be shaped by the state's use of subsidies, discussed above, to expand the range of available voices in the media system. Because the U.S. media have the lowest degree of political parallelism, homogeneity (both in print and online) can be expected to be most prevalent there, while differentiation will be more characteristic of both Denmark and France. In no case, though, would dramatic cross-medium differences be expected.

#### **Hypotheses**

Drawing on the above literatures, this article examines the degree of homogeneity and differentiation in the print and online versions of leading Danish, French, and U.S. newspapers. In looking at the "form" (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001) and content of news, we investigate the level of concentration of various genres, authors, and topics for a given sample of national newspapers as well as the degree of differentiation in the specific mixes between the newspapers in each country. In other words, rather than analyze internal pluralism (i.e., the diversity of form or content in a single news item or news outlet), our focus is on external pluralism (i.e., the diversity offered up by a larger collection of media outlets and the differentiation among those outlets; see Hallin and Mancini 2004: 29).

All hypotheses concern the following elements of news form and content that have been identified by scholars (Benson 2009, 2013; Esser and Umbricht 2013; Wessler et al. 2008) as distinguishing media systems: (a) journalistic genres, such as news, opinion, and deliberation; (b) authorship, whether by staff journalists, wire services, or non-journalists; and (c) topical foci, such as international, government, business, sports, and arts and entertainment.

**Hypothesis 1:** Because the online environment encourages an intensification of monitoring and imitation across outlets, we expect homogeneity to be greater online than in print in all national cases. Greater homogeneity is indicated by higher concentration in a national sample and lesser differentiation between news outlets in genres, types of authorship, and topical foci.

**Hypothesis 2:** Because online environments intensify competition by centralizing the market for online news at the national level, thus increasing incentives for differentiation, we expect homogeneity to be lesser online than in print in all national cases. Lesser homogeneity is indicated by a lesser concentration in a national sample and higher differentiation between news outlets in genres, types of authorship, and topical foci. Given that print markets are already nationalized to a certain extent in France and Denmark, the gap between print and online should be lesser in these countries than in the United States.

**Hypothesis 3:** Because media systems shape the conditions of news production, we expect the degree of homogeneity to differ systematically across countries both in print and online. In particular, we expect French and Danish news to be less homogeneous than U.S. news both in print and online due to more competitively structured centralized markets, higher degrees of political parallelism, and the presence of government subsidies intended to expand the range of debate and expression.

In sum, Hypothesis 3 posits within-nation similarities between print and online versions and continued cross-national differences both in print and online and is therefore in principle competing with Hypotheses 1 and 2, both of which posit differences between print and online editions. These latter hypotheses differ in their hypothesized

direction of difference and are therefore also partially competing with each other (partially because it is possible that some dimensions of news will converge while others will diverge).

#### Sampling and Coding Methods

This study examines leading newspapers in Denmark, France, and the United States. The countries selected differ in terms of political systems, market structures, and levels of commercialism; as such, we can examine the degree to which news homogeneity at the level of agenda-setting newspapers is shaped by system characteristics—or, in contrast, whether online platforms exert their own cross-national effects across systems. In Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classification, the United States accords with the liberal model, Denmark the democratic corporatist, and France the polarized pluralist (while sharing some tendencies with democratic corporatist systems). In selecting these countries, we thus build on and extend existing cross-national comparative research engaging with this media systems model (Benson et al. 2012; Curran et al. 2009; Esser and Umbricht 2013).

Research in both the United States and Western Europe shows that newspapers—despite numerous business challenges—continue to produce the majority of news content (Leurdijk et al. 2012; Pew Research Center 2010). We focus explicitly on a strategic sample of three national newspapers per country because existing research also suggests online competition has its greatest impact at the national level (Baum and Groelling 2008; Boczkowski 2010). While not representative of all outlets, three newspapers provide a reasonable entry-level view of system properties and allow for the collection of more detailed data than would a larger sample; similar numbers of newspapers per country are examined in Boczkowski (2010), Esser and Umbricht (2013), Humprecht and Büchel (2013), and Wessler et al. (2008).

Specific newspapers were selected for their agenda-setting positions within their respective national journalistic settings (Albert 2004; Finnemann and Thomasen 2005; Weaver et al. 2007): in Denmark, these outlets are *Berlingske Tidende, Jyllands-Posten*, and *Politiken*; in France, *Le Monde, Le Figaro*, and *Libération*; and in the United States, the *New York Times, Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. In selecting these newspapers, our aim is to facilitate a cross-national analysis of leading national newspapers that compete with one another for both audiences and journalistic prestige.<sup>1</sup>

For each newspaper, print front pages and online home pages (top two screen shots) were coded and analyzed (see Cooke 2005 and Van der Wurff and Lauf 2005 for similar methods). Given consistent findings of the prominence accorded to the front page by both journalists and their audiences (Hubé 2008; Weldon 2008), these pages are an appropriate setting to examine similarities or differences in news. It cannot be assumed, however, that similar patterns hold for other parts of newspapers, either print or online.

News homogeneity is measured and analyzed for three variables—genre, authorship, and topical focus. Our unit of analysis is the news "element." News packages (especially online) often contain multiple elements—such as topical labels,



Figure 1. Example of news elements.

- ① Link to section page: coded as "sports" topic, "newspaper" author, "news" genre.
- ② Story headline: coded as "sports" topic, "newspaper" author, "news" genre.
- 3 Story text: coded as "sports" topic, "newspaper" author, "news" genre.
- 4 Author byline: coded as "sports" topic, "newspaper" author, "other" genre.
- 5 Story headline: coded as "international" topic, "newspaper" author, "news" genre.
- 6 Q&A: coded as "sports" topic, "non-journalist" author, "deliberative" genre.
- Postmark Beijing (blog): coded as "international" topic, "newspaper" author, "opinion" genre.
- 8 Playback (blog): coded as "sports" topic, "newspaper" author, "opinion" genre.
- Scene (photos): coded as "sports" topic, "wire service" author, "news" genre.

headlines, images, texts, and links—each of which may have a different genre, author, or topical focus (see Figure 1 for an illustration of coding by element). After the completion of coding, specific genres were placed into broader "summative indices" relating to hypotheses (Cassidy 2005: 270): news (event articles, features news articles, news analyses, transcripts of court decisions or political speeches, databases, photos, and multimedia), opinion (signed opinion essays, official newspaper editorials, cartoons, and blog posts), deliberation (interview transcripts, polls, online chats, and forums), and other (advertising, newspaper title, internal marketing, byline, date, and time stamp).

Each element was also coded for author: journalist, wire service, non-journalist with an organizational affiliation (e.g., academics, civic organization leaders, government officials, etc.), or unaffiliated individual (typically an audience member writing comments). Finally, each element was coded for its topical focus—international, government and domestic politics, business, arts and entertainment, sports, and crime.

To assess system-level concentration and cross-outlet differentiation in news, this study utilizes two measures: the Hirschman–Herfindahl Index (HHI) and the Deviation Index (DI). In our study, the HHI measures the degree to which genres, authors, or topics are concentrated or dispersed within a country sample.<sup>2</sup> It is calculated for each news outlet by squaring the average percentage for each variable and summing the

total.<sup>3</sup> In the U.S.'s Los Angeles Times, for example, 91.0 percent of all print authors are journalists, 6.5 percent are wire copy, 2.5 percent are non-journalists, and 0 percent are unaffiliated. Squaring each percentage and summing the total provides a highly concentrated HHI score of 8,329.5. This score is then averaged with the average scores of the country's other two news outlets to create a national HHI score. The highest possible score is ten thousand and indicates total dominance by a single element type; the lower the score, the greater dispersion of elements across the country sample. We use the DI (Hellman 2001), an indicator of differentiation, to measure the deviation in the specific mixture of genres, topics, or authors between outlets in a country sample. The DI is calculated by subtracting the averages (in decimal form) of a given variable's categories (such as news, opinion, and deliberation for "genre") in one outlet from the corresponding averages in another outlet and then summing the differences; these calculations are performed for all three outlets in a country sample (e.g., New York Times vs. Washington Post, New York Times vs. Los Angeles Times, Washington Post vs. Los Angeles Times) and then averaged. The highest possible score is 2.0, while the lowest is 0 (indicating no deviation at all); the higher the score, the greater the deviation between news outlets.

To contextualize both indices, we also provide country-level data for each variable showing (1) the news outlet with the highest percentage of a given element, (2) the news outlet with the lowest percentage of the same element, and (3) the overall country average for the element. Where the HHI and DI provide indicators of system-level homogeneity and cross-outlet differentiation, these contextual data show which genres, authors, and topics are dominant in each country and particular news outlets, providing information crucial to analyzing and explaining the findings.

Data for all newspapers and all countries were collected on three weekdays from July through September 2008: Wednesday, July 23; Tuesday, August 12; and Friday, September 5.4 By spreading collection dates out over multiple summer months, the sample provides greater generalizability than would be possible with data collected in a single week (Barnhurst 2010; Riffe et al. 1993). In providing a snapshot of news content, we offer simultaneous observations of different platforms, not an over-time analysis of homogenization. Events occurring on sample days that might affect topical findings include the arrest of Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (July 23), the Beijing Summer Olympics (August 12), and the U.S. Republican Party national convention (September 5). Removal of these data from the sample, however, did not substantively change within-country or cross-national findings.

Three graduate student coders—each native to the country whose media they coded—captured snapshots of online editions at 8 A.M. (local times) to ensure temporal equivalence. A pretest among coders was performed to ensure coders understood the protocol; e-mail dialogues among coders resolved coding disagreements to ensure reliability. Using Krippendorf's alpha, overall reliability (determined by three sample tests taken from the U.S. data, constituting 10 percent of the overall data) between coders was .803. For authorship, average reliability was .805; for genre, .736; for topical focus, .855.

#### **Findings**

#### Genre

French and Danish print newspapers have lower HHI scores and thus mix genres more than their U.S. counterparts (7,017.8 and 7,886.0 vs. 9,403.6, respectively); deviation between print newspapers is also larger in France (0.446) and Denmark (0.286) than in the United States (0.073). These findings are consistent with expected media system differences. Online, however, U.S. newspapers mix genres as much or more than their European counterparts: the U.S. HHI concentration score for online newspapers falls dramatically to 6,170.1 versus HHI scores of 5,712.8 for France and 9,484.8 for Denmark. Cross-outlet differentiation (DI of 0.337) also increases online for U.S. newspapers as it decreases in France to 0.234 and in Denmark to 0.065. The online environment thus clearly correlates with higher external pluralism in genres in the United States but not in Denmark and only to a limited degree in France; print—online differences are also consistently greatest for U.S. newspapers (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Genre Concentration and Deviation between Outlets by Country: Print and Online.

	Print O		Onli	ne	Differ	Difference	
Country	HHI	DI	HHI	DI	HHI	DI	
United States France	9,403.6 7,017.8	0.073 0.446	6,170.1 5,712.8	0.337 0.234	-3,233.5 -1,305.0	+0.264 -0.212	
Denmark	7,886.0	0.286	9,484.8	0.065	+1,598.8	-0.212 -0.221	

Note. HHI measures concentration for the entire sample; lower scores indicate lesser concentration (greater mixing). DI measures differentiation across individual outlets; higher scores indicate greater differentiation. HHI = Hirschman-Herfindahl Index; DI = Deviation Index.

In print, U.S. newspapers focus on news genres and little else. The minimal deviation between outlets results from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, but not the *Los Angeles Times*, using below-the-fold "teasers" to opinion pieces. Online, U.S. newspapers offer a greater mix of genres, incorporating more opinion and deliberation. The average DI score increases as each U.S. newspaper differentiates itself by using greater amounts of different genres: opinion for the *Washington Post* (21.8 percent of genre elements), deliberation for the *New York Times* (3.7 percent), and news for the *Los Angeles Times* (47.8 percent; see Table 2).

In France, deviation across outlets is lower online than in print due to a slight convergence in relative emphasis on news and opinion and a more dramatic convergence in use of deliberation. In the print versions, *Le Monde* (14.1 percent) makes the greatest use of deliberative elements whereas *Libération* (1.6 percent) makes the least use; online, use of deliberation ranges more narrowly from 9.6 percent at *Libération* to 8.0 percent at *Le Figaro*. However, as indicated by minimal difference in the HHI scores

Country			Print		Online		
(n Print, Online)	Genre	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low
United States	News	76.6	78.9 <sub>WP</sub>	74.0 <sub>LAT</sub>	43.7	47.8 <sub>LAT</sub>	36.1 <sub>WP</sub>
(781, 1,281)	Opinion	2.8	4.6 <sub>WP</sub>	0 <sub>LAT</sub>	12.5	21.8 <sub>WP</sub>	7.8 <sub>NYT</sub>
	Deliberation	0	0	0	2.5	3.7 <sub>NYT</sub>	0.7 <sub>LAT</sub>
France	News	50.6	60.9 <sub>LIB</sub>	48.7 <sub>LM</sub>	44.2	49.4 <sub>LF</sub>	41.5 <sub>LIB</sub>
(498, 1,056)	Opinion	7.4	15.8 <sub>LF</sub>	O <sub>LIB</sub>	8.5	13.1 <sub>LM</sub>	2.5 <sub>LF</sub>
	Deliberation	8.8	14.1 <sub>LM</sub>	I.6 <sub>LIB</sub>	8.8	9.6 <sub>LIB</sub>	8.0 <sub>LF</sub>
Denmark	News	56.8	60.4 <sub>IP</sub>	51.1 <sub>POL</sub>	58.8	67.7 <sub>IP</sub>	51.8 <sub>BT</sub>
(241, 1,203)	Opinion	7.1	13.3 <sub>POL</sub>	O <sub>BT</sub>	0.3	0.8 <sub>BT</sub>	0 <sub>POL</sub>
	Deliberation	1.2	6.0 <sub>BT</sub>	O <sub>JP</sub>	1.0	1.9 <sub>BT</sub>	O <sub>JP</sub>

Table 2. Prevalence of Genres by Country: Print and Online.

Note. WP = Washington Post; LAT = Los Angeles Times; NYT = New York Times; LIB = Libération; LM = Le Monde; LF = Le Figaro; JP = Jyllands-Posten; POL = Politiken; BT = Berlingske Tidende. Percentages do not total 100 because non-editorial elements are not listed; see note 3.

from print to online, French newspapers in both mediums overall provide roughly comparable mixes of genres (about 50 percent news, 7–8 percent opinion, and 9 percent deliberation).

The Danish sample is the only country sample where genre concentration is greater online than in print. Moving from print to online, the reliance on news stays about the same (57–59 percent) but the use of opinion and deliberation drops to almost nothing. Cross-outlet deviation is also less online than in print as this shift away from non-news genres occurs almost uniformly across the three Danish newspapers.

#### Types of Authors

Both in print and online, French newspapers include the widest range of authors (HHI of 7,054.2 and 5,104.2, respectively), followed at some distance by Danish (8,781.4 and 6,315.6) and U.S. (9,012.1 and 8,173.9) newspapers. In all three countries, HHI concentration indexes are lower online than in print: In other words, the degree of mixing of types of authors is greater online. Deviation between newspapers, both in print and online, is also highest in France (0.407 and 0.372, respectively), followed by Denmark (0.159 and 0.197) and the United States (0.091 and 0.193). Within-country differentiation of outlets thus stays relatively constant for France and Denmark but is higher online than for print in the United States. Summarizing the level of difference between print and online, concentration changes most dramatically for France and Denmark while deviation between outlets rises most in the United States (see Table 3).

In all three countries, journalists are by far the dominant "author," even more so if one takes into account wire service copy as well as newspaper staff writers or

	Print		Onli	Online		Difference		
Country	HHI	DI	ННІ	DI	HHI	DI		
United States	9,012.1	0.091	8,173.9	0.193	-838.2	+0.102		
France	7,054.2	0.407	5,104.2	0.372	-1,950.0	-0.035		
Denmark	8,781.4	0.159	6,315.6	0.197	-2,465.8	+0.038		

Table 3. Author Concentration and Deviation between Outlets by Country: Print and Online.

Table 4. Prevalence of Authors by Country: Print and Online.

Country		Print			Online		
(n Print, Online)	Author	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low
United States	Journalist	95.0	97.6 <sub>WP</sub>	91.0 <sub>LAT</sub>	89.9	92.9 <sub>NYT</sub>	84.8 <sub>LAT</sub>
(722, 1,004)	Wire	4.2	6.5 <sub>LAT</sub>	$2.0_{WP}$	5.7	13.4 <sub>LAT</sub>	I.I <sub>NYT</sub>
	Non-Journ.	8.0	$2.5_{LAT}$	0 <sub>NYT</sub>	2.7	5.4 <sub>WP</sub>	0.3 <sub>LAT</sub>
	Unaffiliated	0	0	0	1.7	3.4 <sub>NYT</sub>	$0_{WP}$
France	Journalist	76.4	91.2 <sub>LIB</sub>	62.7 <sub>LM</sub>	66.3	79.7 <sub>LF</sub>	58.4 <sub>LIB</sub>
(423, 913)	Wire	9.5	12.7 <sub>LM</sub>	4.8 <sub>LF</sub>	15.2	20.2 <sub>LIB</sub>	10.0 <sub>LM</sub>
	Non-Journ.	5.7	8.2 <sub>LM</sub>	O <sub>LIB</sub>	3.8	6.4 <sub>LIB</sub>	$0.4_{LF}$
	Unaffiliated	8.5	16.4 <sub>LM</sub>	$0_{LF}$	14.7	22.8 <sub>LM</sub>	4.5 <sub>LF</sub>
Denmark	Journalist	93.1	97.6 <sub>BT</sub>	85.7 <sub>POL</sub>	76.3	81.0 <sub>IP</sub>	66.5 <sub>BT</sub>
(202, 1,124)	Wire	5.0	8.6 <sub>POL</sub>	2.4 <sub>BT</sub>	21.3	31.2 <sub>BT</sub>	16.5 <sub>IP</sub>
	Non-Journ.	2.0	5.7 <sub>POL</sub>	O <sub>BT</sub>	2.4	2.5 <sub>IP</sub>	2.2 <sub>POL</sub>
	Unaffiliated	0	0	0	0	o Î	0

Note. Non-Journ. = Organizationally-affiliated non-journalist author; Unaffiliated = unaffiliated individual author.

correspondents (see Table 4). The print-to-online difference in concentration of genres would be less if these two types of journalist authors were combined into a single category, given that decreases in staff-written content are partially offset by wire service increases.

In the United States, most of the print-to-online increase in outlet deviation is due to greater use of wire service copy by the *Los Angeles Times* (6.5 percent in print, 13.4 percent online) and a decrease by the *New York Times* (to just 1.1 percent online). If HHI is calculated to include journalists and wire service materials as a single category, it is still lower online than in print (9,145.3 vs. 9,810.9, respectively; figures not shown in tables) but extraordinarily high in both instances. The remaining print-to-online difference in authorship differentiation between outlets is linked to a greater use of organizationally affiliated non-journalist authors at the *Washington Post* (to 5.4 percent online) and of unaffiliated authors at the *New York Times* (to 3.4 percent online).

In general, for both print and online, Danish authorship patterns resemble U.S. newspapers more than French ones. Relatively lower authorship concentration at Danish online newspapers stems primarily from greater use of wire materials and lesser use of staff news. In print, a small level of deviation between outlets is accounted for in part by the opposition between *Politiken* and *Berlingske Tidende* in their use of non-journalist organizationally affiliated authors (5.7 percent of authored elements in the former and none in the latter); online, any deviation is wholly due to differences between outlets in the amount of wire service copy used, with *Berlingske Tidende* including twice as much as the other papers (31.2 percent vs. 17.8 at *Politiken* and 16.5 at *Jyllands-Posten*).

French newspapers, both print and online, incorporate substantially more non-journalist organizationally affiliated and unaffiliated individual authors than their U.S. and Danish counterparts. In print, total non-journalist authored materials account for 14.2 percent of authored elements (compared with 0.8 percent in the United States and 2.0 percent in Denmark); online, total non-journalist authored materials account for an even greater proportion of the French sample (18.5 percent of all authored elements, compared with 4.4 percent in the United States and 2.4 percent in Denmark). Average deviation between outlets is similar in French print and online editions: in both cases, deviation is largely organized around an opposition between *Le Figaro* on one side and *Le Monde* and *Libération* on the other. More than its competitors, *Le Figaro* highlights journalist-authored content (95.1 percent of all online elements, including both staff journalists and wire service copy; figures not shown in tables). Online versions of *Le Monde* and *Libération*, by contrast, place greater emphasis on non-journalist authored materials (26.9 percent of all *Le Monde* authored elements and 21.4 percent for *Libération*; figures not shown).

#### Topical Focus

Concentration of topics (HHI) is lower in France and the United States than in Denmark for print newspaper editions. At the same time, concentration scores are lower online than in print in France and Denmark, declining from 2,375.2 to 2,216.8 in France, and from 3,361.9 to 1,985.7 in Denmark, while remaining largely the same in the United States. In contrast, deviation between outlets is not consistently higher in the European countries than in the United States. For print editions, deviation is highest in Denmark (0.623), twice as high as in France (0.298) and the United States (0.289); online, deviation falls to 0.479 for Denmark, stays about the same at 0.377 for France, and rises to 0.495 for the United States. The print-to-online tendency toward greater deviation is thus highest in the United States (see Table 5).

In all three countries, the print-to-online difference in concentration of topics generally correlates with a decrease in international and government coverage (see Table 6). International topics fall from 22.6 to 15.8 percent in the United States, from 41.5 to 21.8 percent in Denmark, and from 31.0 to 21.7 percent in France; government topics decline from 20.0 to 15.9 percent in Denmark and slightly from 38.9 to 37.3 percent in the United States, while remaining steady in France (20.6 percent in print and 21.7

	Print		Onli	ne	Difference		
Country	HHI	DI	HHI	DI	ННІ	DI	
United States	2,745.0	0.289	2,841.8	0.495	+96.8	+0.206	
France	2,375.2	0.298	2,216.8	0.377	-158.4	+0.079	
Denmark	3,361.9	0.623	1,985.7	0.479	-1,376.2	-0.144	

Table 5. Topical Concentration and Deviation between Outlets by Country: Print and Online.

Table 6. Prevalence of Topics by Country: Print and Online.

Country (n Print,			Print			Online			
Online)	Topic	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low		
United States	International	22.6	28.4 <sub>LAT</sub>	17.3 <sub>WP</sub>	15.8	18.1 <sub>WP</sub>	13.3 <sub>LAT</sub>		
(730, 1,025)	Government	38.9	43.8 <sub>LAT</sub>	$32.7_{WP}$	37.3	48.4 <sub>WP</sub>	32.2 <sub>NYT</sub>		
	Business	5.2	6.0 <sub>WP</sub>	3.1 <sub>LAT</sub>	7.1	13.6 <sub>NYT</sub>	$2.2_{LAT}$		
	Arts	9.7	12.2 <sub>NYT</sub>	5.6 <sub>WP</sub>		27.2 <sub>LAT</sub>	5.5 <sub>WP</sub>		
	Sports	11.4	18.8 <sub>WP</sub>	6.2 <sub>LAT</sub>	10.2	14.5 <sub>LAT</sub>	6.5 <sub>WP</sub>		
	Crime	5.5	6.0 <sub>WP</sub>	4.6 <sub>LAT</sub>	2.7	4.2 <sub>WP</sub>	I.8 <sub>NYT</sub>		
France	International	31.0	38.1 <sub>LM</sub>	21.2 <sub>LIB</sub>	21.7	25.9 <sub>LM</sub>	14.4 <sub>LF</sub>		
(378, 780)	Government	20.6	25.0 <sub>LIB</sub>	18.0 <sub>LM</sub>	21.7	23.9 <sub>LIB</sub>	18.3 <sub>LM</sub>		
	Business	13.8	16.1 <sub>LF</sub>	11.6 <sub>LM</sub>	13.3	21.3 <sub>LF</sub>	5.5 <sub>LIB</sub>		
	Arts	15.3	19.7 <sub>LF</sub>	12.7 <sub>LM</sub>	15.1	16.7 <sub>LIB</sub>	11.6 <sub>LM</sub>		
	Sports	8.5	11.7 <sub>LF</sub>	6.3 <sub>LM</sub>	7.7	10.3 <sub>LM</sub>	5.5 <sub>LIB</sub>		
	Crime	0.5	0.7 <sub>LF</sub>	O <sub>LIB</sub>	2.6	3.6 <sub>LM</sub>	0.8 <sub>LF</sub>		
Denmark	International	41.5	53.4 <sub>JP</sub>	31.1 <sub>POL</sub>	21.8	34.7 <sub>BT</sub>	16.0 <sub>IP</sub>		
(205, 953)	Government	20.0	23.0 <sub>POL</sub>	17.0 <sub>IP</sub>	15.9	18.8 <sub>BT</sub>	13.6 <sub>IP</sub>		
	Business	6.3	12.5 <sub>IP</sub>	O <sub>POL</sub>	14.0	22.4 <sub>IP</sub>	5.8 <sub>BT</sub>		
	Arts	16.1	39.5 <sub>BT</sub>	9.5 <sub>POL</sub>	16.4	19.9 <sub>POL</sub>	13.8 <sub>IP</sub>		
	Sports	0.5	1.1 <sub>IP</sub>	O <sub>BT</sub>	17.3	24.6 <sub>POL</sub>	10.8 <sub>BT</sub>		
	Crime	4.4	12.2 <sub>POL</sub>	O <sub>JP</sub>	7.2	10.5 <sub>JP</sub>	4.7 <sub>BT</sub>		

Note: Totals may not add up to 100 percent because "Other" is not included.

percent online). Thus, any print-to-online increase in external pluralism of topics can be partially interpreted as a shift away from public affairs.

In the United States, deviation between the print editions is expressed in part by an opposition between the different types of soft topics used by the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Where the *Post* focuses more on sports (18.8 vs. 6.2 percent, respectively), the *Los Angeles Times* places more emphasis on arts and entertainment (11.9 vs. 5.6 percent, *Los Angeles Times* figure not shown in table). Online, deviation between U.S. newspapers increases as each outlet accentuates distinct topical foci: the

Washington Post places the greatest emphasis on government (48.4 percent), the New York Times highlights business (13.6 percent), and the Los Angeles Times focuses on arts and entertainment (27.2 percent).

Topic concentration and deviation levels remain relatively constant for French newspapers both in print and online, and there seems to be no single pattern of print differentiation among particular newspapers. Online, however, *Le Figaro* clearly focuses most on business (21.3 percent vs. 14.3 for *Le Monde* and 5.5 for *Libération*), while *Le Monde* and *Libération* favor international news topics (25.9 and 24.9 percent vs. 14.4 percent in *Le Figaro*). Similarly, Denmark's relatively high level of deviation between outlets is due to a complex pattern of differences between outlets. For print editions, *Politiken* is opposed to *Jyllands-Posten* in placing more emphasis on crime and less emphasis on international news and business, and to *Berlingske Tidende* in placing less emphasis on arts and entertainment. Online, deviation between outlets is organized around an opposition between *Berlingske Tidende* on one side and *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten* on the other. Whereas *Berlingske Tidende* emphasizes more hard news topics (government, international news), *Politiken* highlights more sports and arts/entertainment and *Jyllands-Posten* highlights more business and crime.

#### Conclusion

In print, French and Danish newspapers tend to be less homogeneous than U.S. newspapers, as indicated by HHI concentration scores for genres, authors, and topical foci. Deviation between print editions also tends to be higher for France and Denmark than for the United States. Online, U.S. news outlets exhibit as much—and in some cases more—overall diversity and cross-outlet deviation as their European counterparts. One exception is authorship: both in print and online, France clearly includes the most diverse mix of authors as well as the largest deviation between outlets. These findings lend support to Hypotheses 2 and 3, which emphasize the differentiating effects of the online environment and the path-dependent effects of national media systems. By contrast, a clear trend toward news homogeneity is not evident in any country in the shift from print to online, leading us to reject Hypothesis 1.

Our findings also support Hypothesis 2's specific claim that the Internet's capacity to "nationalize" media markets will increase external pluralism. The United States, with its pre-existing regionalist print tendency toward "catch-all-ism," most consistently exhibits print-to-online decreases in HHI scores (indicating increasing overall diversity) and increases in cross-outlet deviation. Conversely, the absence of any major Internet-led market restructuring in France and Denmark may help explain the smaller differences in cross-outlet deviation between print and online samples. Relatively greater cross-medium similarities in France and Denmark may also result from press subsidies that shield newspapers in these countries (especially in France) from intensified market pressures online.

At the same time, it is important to note that nationalized Internet media markets augment, rather than replace, the pre-existing print markets. While leading U.S. newspapers differentiate themselves online from their competitors, they do so in ways that

accentuate local urban cultures and dominant industries—thus explaining why, in relation to one another, arts and entertainment is highlighted most in Los Angeles, politics most in Washington, D.C., and business most in New York.<sup>5</sup> These findings may also be shaped by competition from news outlets and online pure players not included in this sample (e.g., *Politico* in Washington, D.C., the *Wall Street Journal* in New York).

Whereas the U.S. findings suggest how technology can reshape certain structural features of media systems (e.g., centralizing market competition), the French case shows how political and economic factors may promote similarities between print and online editions even in the face of technological change. Both in print and online, French newspapers tend to have relatively low HHI concentration scores and high deviation across outlets. The shift from print to online seems to have minimal effects: In two of the three variables examined (authorship and topic), deviation between French newspapers is more or less the same in print and online. France's history of political parallelism and news subsidies may promote news differentiation even in the midst of economic and technological upheavals; in general, a relatively higher level of state intervention may insulate French journalism from market pressures.

To a certain degree, French outlet deviation is organized around an opposition between *Le Figaro* on one hand, and *Le Monde* and *Libération* on the other. This opposition parallels the gap between the newspapers in terms of advertising reliance (70 percent of total revenues for *Le Figaro* derive from advertising, compared with 40 percent and 20 percent for *Le Monde* and *Libération*, respectively; Benson 2009). These findings accord with existing research that suggests media systems with diversely funded news outlets help ensure a substantial degree of external pluralism, in part because different funding structures seem to support different journalistic emphases (Benson 2013; Curran et al. 2009). It also supports a large body of comparative research that finds continuities in the French media despite technological change, and in contrast to the United States (Albert 2004; Benson 2013; Benson and Hallin 2007).

The Danish case presents a number of discrepancies. While print findings largely accord with Hypothesis 3, online data reveal no consistent patterns in support of either homogeneity or differentiation. Genres are more concentrated and exhibit less deviation between outlets online than in print; online authorship is less concentrated than in print and includes more deviation between outlets; topics are less concentrated online but deviation between outlets is smaller. The absence of any clear direction may stem from tensions in the democratic corporatist model, which straddles the greater state intervention typical of France and the high levels of commercialism more typical of the United States (Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011). Further research is needed to investigate the specific factors shaping Danish external pluralism, especially online.

This study's findings have implications for assessing the relationship between national media systems and democracy. The debate about homogeneity and differentiation is in important ways about whether online news environments have tendencies to enhance or reduce the media options available to citizens. Political economic analyses have long warned of the dangers of monopolistic media markets for news diversity (Baker 2007); the findings here confirm these warnings—the U.S. sample is the least diverse in print—even while showing that Internet technologies may help restructure

markets, at least at the national level, and offer much-needed competition. In this regard, our findings provide room for optimism about the capacity of competitive markets to foster a certain degree of form and content pluralism. It must be acknowledged, however, that differentiation in dimensions like authorship points to not only an increased online use of non-journalistic voices (and thus an expansion of the public sphere) but also an increased reliance on wire service copy (potentially standardizing and narrowing public discourse); similarly, online increases in topical diversity are often linked to a decline in international and governmental coverage.

Non-commercial constitutive political choices (Benson 2013; Starr 2004) also remain important in shaping the amount of differentiation in media systems, as the French case illustrates. No single factor, to be sure, single-handedly makes news more or less homogeneous or differentiated. For this very reason, to ensure a broad array of voices, topics, and forms of expression in the public sphere, competitive commercial markets may need to be coupled with government policies explicitly designed to promote forms of speech undersupplied by markets (Baker 2007).

Future research could expand on the analysis offered here in several ways. We hope that additional research can draw on this 2008 baseline data to better understand how homogeneity and differentiation change over time. Inclusion of additional legacy news outlets as well as online pure players could help tease out the degree to which homogeneity and differentiation exist across a broader range of news outlets; while our focus has been on national newspapers, local and regional media markets should also be examined (see, for example, Esser and Umbricht 2013). Finally, research should be expanded to include other countries, both within Hallin and Mancini's three models and beyond them.

While scholars have convincingly demonstrated online increases in homogeneity at the level of specific news articles (Boczkowski 2010; Redden and Witschge 2010), we show that many general aspects of news content and form may in fact be more differentiated across outlets online. Other research suggests substantially greater partisan or ideological differentiation across outlets online than in print (Baum and Groelling 2008). Still other research suggests that online news may include a wider range of sources (Humprecht and Büchel 2013). Capturing the specificity of each of these dimensions of homogeneity and differentiation and integrating them into a more comprehensive explanatory framework remains a key task for scholars of both online news and comparative media systems.

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#### **Notes**

- 1. For the United States, we selected the Los Angeles Times (as did Humprecht and Büchel 2013) and the Washington Post over the higher circulation Wall Street Journal and USA Today because the Times and the Post both maintain a more general interest profile (unlike the Journal, which caters to business audiences) and retain a higher level of journalistic prestige than USA Today (as measured by Pulitzer Prizes, of which the Washington Post had 47, the Los Angeles Times 41, and USA Today none).
- 2. The Hirschman–Herfindahl Index (HHI) can also be used to measure the "internal" pluralism of each media outlet (see Benson 2013; Entman 2006).
- 3. Because not all categories equal 100, percentages were recalculated to equal 100. For example, U.S. genre elements total 79.4 percent, and the remaining elements are article bylines, advertisements, and so on, and are not related to hypotheses and therefore removed for the analysis. These recalculations are done for HHI and DI scores for both genre and topic.
- 4. Detailed coding of all page one/home page news elements for three newspapers each in three countries necessitated a relatively small sample of days. Van der Wurff and Lauf's (2005) study, which coded at a similar level of detail, only encompassed a single day.
- 5. Of course, New York is also a center for arts and entertainment, which helps explain why the *New York Times*' online level for this topic was only slightly behind that of the *Los Angeles Times* (in print, it is actually slightly ahead of the *Los Angeles Times*). We did not code separately for types of culture, but if we had, the *New York Times* would probably have led the other two newspapers in its emphasis on "high" culture.

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