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Dale Southerton, Alan Warde, Shu-Li Cheng & Wendy Olsen

CRESC, The University of Manchester

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For further information:

Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC)
Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University,
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1908 654458 Fax: +44 (0)1908 654488

Email: cresc@manchester.ac.uk or cresc@open.ac.uk

Web: www.cresc.ac.uk

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Trajectories of time spent reading as a primary activity: a comparison of the Netherlands, Norway, France, UK and USA since the 1970s

**Dale Southerton, Alan Warde, Shu-Li Cheng & Wendy Olsen
(University of Manchester)**

Abstract

Focusing on reading printed material as a primary activity, and excluding that conducted for the purposes of work or education, this article analyses the trajectory of change within five countries (the Netherlands, Norway, France, UK and USA) between two points in time using time diary data. It examines four commonly held assumptions: that time spent reading printed materials for leisure is in decline; that book reading has declined to a greater extent than it has for magazines and newspapers; that reading has become more exclusive and the preserve of a group of highly educated and committed readers; and, that globalisation leads to increased cultural homogeneity of consumer practices. Employing descriptive statistics and regression analysis, all four assumptions are refuted. It is argued that comparative analysis is important for placing national trajectories in context and for revealing the nuances of what, at face value, could be interpreted as trends indicative of the spread of consumer culture. It is, for example, demonstrated that reading is increasingly a minority practice in the USA, but in European societies this is only the case with respect to magazine and newspaper readership in France. Generic national trajectories mask differential cultures of reading.

Keywords:

comparative analysis; time diary data; consumer culture; trajectories; globalisation; practice; reading; commitment. Title (Heading 1)

Trajectories of time spent reading as a primary activity: a comparison of the Netherlands, Norway, France, UK and USA since the 1970s¹

Introduction

Theoretical debate surrounding globalisation and the diffusion of consumer culture continues to hold the attention of social scientists. It is then surprising that few systematically empirical cross-national studies have been conducted which focus on practices of consumption. This article draws from a research project aiming to remedy, at least in part, this lack of empirical comparative investigation. It compared time diary and family expenditure survey data collected in one year during the early–mid 1970s and one year in the latter half of the 1990s, from five countries: the Netherlands, Norway, France, the UK and the USA. It compared the trajectories of change in time spent in sets of practices including reading, eating and travelling for each country and then compared those national trajectories. This article concentrates on reading printed materials for leisure.

Reading is a practice susceptible to pressures from the spread of global consumer culture – the emergence of other media sources (television, internet), the commodification of printed material (as ‘free’ publications, small-scale local publishers and the provision of local libraries diminish), and growth of international publishing houses. Reading is a practice positioned within global processes of economic and social change. It is also a practice amenable to time diary analysis because it is an essentially private activity (which is not to say that reading is not a collective practice – reading groups demonstrate that it is), and activity coding is consistent within and across national surveys collected at different time points. There are some inconsistencies across national time diary surveys with respect to the duration of time slots recorded (from 10 to 30 minute slots – although weights applied to the data help to overcome such inconsistencies), and for this reason each country is analysed separately and trajectories of change compared.

Beginning with a review of debates surrounding reading, section 2 highlights concern about the decline of reading (‘de-reading’) in contemporary capitalist societies, and particularly in the USA and Netherlands. Section 3 explains the methodological approach of the study and identifies four hypotheses to guide data analysis: that de-reading is evident in all countries studied; that declining time spent reading is greater with respect to book reading than for magazine and newspapers because of shifting media formats and expectations of media users; that a highly educated and distinct ‘reading class’ has emerged in each country; and, that these identified trajectories of change in each country reveal a practice increasingly homogenous across nations. Sections 4 and 5 present data which refute all four assumptions. In conclusion it is argued that comparative research is important for placing national trajectories of social practices into context. The data indicate few signs that a global consumer culture leads to convergence in the practice of reading and illustrates the continued salience of national institutional and cultural norms in the social construction of consumption.

2. Reading and de-reading

Reading is a practice of significant social, economic and cultural importance. Standards of literacy are critical for labour market efficiency (van Rees and Vipond, 2003) and therefore to the social and economic development of societies; and reading for the purpose of leisure is necessary to maintain or accentuate literacy standards. Culturally, reading for leisure is deemed important for igniting creativity and imagination through its capacity to expose the reader to difference experiences, understandings and ways of thinking. And, printed media

generates public awareness, which is a crucial mechanism in the democratic process. It is not surprising that concern is expressed when data implies that the practice of reading is in decline.

A study by the National Endowment of Arts (2004) compared reading in 1982, 1992 and 2002 in the USA and found a progressive decline of literature reading, especially amongst young adults. Knulst and Kraaykamp (1997, 1998) reveal a decline of leisure reading in the Netherlands, despite increased levels of education which would lead to an expectation of an increase of reading because the highly educated read more than the less educated. In both studies, heavy readers continued to read for the same amount of, and in some cases more, time than did heavy readers in earlier years of survey: the decline of reading is amongst casual readers who comprise the majority of populations in both countries.

Despite indications that reading is on the decline, other data suggests it to be a practice universally held in high esteem (Griswold et al. 2005). The extent of reported decline also varies across countries. Griswold et al. (2005) report on surveys which demonstrate that most people in the USA and Europe read during their leisure time and that, according to the General Social Survey (1998), 70% of American's reported that they had read printed material other than that required for the purposes of work or education in the previous 12 months. Furthermore, Gallup polls show that people believe they should read more than they currently do, and that Britons state they would read more if they had more leisure time, despite claiming that they read the same or more than they did in the past (Book Mark. Ltd., 2000: 9). Studies of reading amongst children in the USA (Roberts and Foehr, 2004) and UK (Hall and Coles, 1999) show that reading declines as children grow older, and both conclude that this is because the range of leisure activities available to children expands as they age, and schooling demands mean that much reading time is taken up with educational materials. Parents' education is also important. Roberts and Foehr confirm that American children of highly educated parents read more, while Robson (2003) shows that children in the UK read more if their parents are committed readers. In this context, it is not surprising that level of education is closely related to time devoted to reading across North American and European countries (Griswold et al, 2005).

A prominent explanation for the decline of reading, especially in the Netherlands, focuses on innovations in the delivery of media and communication technologies. In the late 20th century new media formats have emerged and represent challenges to the practice of reading by vying for the attention of potential participants. Television is cast as the major culprit. Knulst and Kraaykamp (1997) show a cohort effect on reading in the Netherlands – those generations raised before the advent of television read significantly more than those raised after. This is further supported by evidence from the USA, which demonstrates that children who had televisions in their bedrooms read less than those who did not (Roberts and Foehr, 2004).

The negative impact of television on reading is more than simply a consequence of temporal substitution. This is the argument put forward by American cultural critics such as Postman (1985, 1992), Hirsch (1987) and Bloom (1987). Television programme formulas are claimed to affect media expectations: such formulas present information in point form, based around spectacular fragments and dramatic highlights, all of which are not conducive to the printed media and especially not to books. Such arguments are also broadly consistent with theories regarding 'time-space compression' and the speeding up of everyday life. The growth of information and communication technologies and the rapid circulation of goods, services and media across the globe leads to an intensification of activities because spatial constraints to the timing of those activities have been compressed, and individuals' exposed to an ever-expanding plurality of lifestyles (Harvey, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Scheuerman 2001). In the context of temporal acceleration, spectacular fragments and 'point' information come to represent a more accessible formula for media engagement.

Knulst and van den Broek's (2003) explored the hypothesis that should media expectations centre on point information and spectacular fragments then the reading of literature and non-fiction books should demonstrate the greatest decline. In the Netherlands this has not been the case. De-reading is greatest in the adolescent books, comics and thrillers genre. Interestingly, older highly educated survey respondents favoured the literature and non-fiction genre; highly educated young adults preferred adolescent books, comics and thrillers; and, romantic novels were read mostly by less educated older women. Those that preferred literature spent more time reading newspapers than did other groups; those who read adolescent books, comics and thrillers spent more time reading magazines.

The argument that television does not simply substitute for reading printed materials because each media format attracts particular audiences is taken further by van Eijck and van Rees (2000, and also van Rees and van Eijck, 2003) extensive study of the relationship between reading and television in the Netherlands between 1975 and 1995. They identified a number of important factors that relate to the decline of newspaper and magazine readership in that country. First, there has been a significant increase in the number of television channels available to consumers. Although this not been translated into a broader range of content. Rather, the volume of programmes described as 'infotainment' (e.g. reality television and docudramas) has increased, and new channels emerged around specialised content (e.g. music channels). The result is that audiences have more scope to watch, almost exclusively, their favoured genres of programmes. A similar process can be identified in the printed media, with a proliferation of 'specialised' life-style magazines (for cooking, interior design, gardening, etc).

Having observed processes of cultural fragmentation in media content, van Eijck and van Rees (2000) set about identifying different audience categories. From these categories they described three groups in relation to the extent that television watching impacts on readership of magazines and newspapers. The first group referred to 'non-readers' and those with 'entertainment' oriented media preferences. The socio-demographic characteristics of this group were those with low education and, by 1995, younger age groups. For this group reading was in decline relative to television watching. The second group were described as 'info readers', characterised by the highly educated and, by 1995, those aged 35-50. This group, which diminished in size between 1975 and 1995, was marked by a strong dislike of private television channels and increasing use of 'quality' newspapers. The third group were 'omnivores' whose media preferences transcended print and broadcast media genres. This group consisted largely of men, (especially in 1975), older respondents, and in 1995 the highly educated; was relatively small but growing in size.

In the case of the Netherlands, while a decline of reading was apparent for the population, it was clear that such trends were not uniform across different segments of that population. A general drift towards media interests around entertainment being sated by television rather than newspapers and magazines was countered by a group of highly educated committed 'info readers' and cultural omnivores.

More recently, studies have shifted focus to the internet, based on the hypothesis that this is a new media to further rival peoples' time for reading printed material (Birketts, 1994). Research shows otherwise. Robinson and Cole (2002) demonstrate that in the USA internet users are more active in their use of other media, including reading books, newspapers and magazines, than are non-users. Gershuny (2003) reports similar findings in the UK, while De Haan and Huysmans (2002) indicate that Dutch internet users spend more time reading books than do non internet users. Griswold et al. (2005) suggest two reasons why this might be the case. First, internet use supports other practices including reading since it is a source of information about printed media, a means of purchase, and a medium through which book groups have emerged around particular authors and genres (Hartley, 2001). Second, and following van Eijck and Van Rees's Dutch study, a growing number of highly educated

cultural omnivores participate in a wider variety of cultural activities; those most likely to read are also more likely to use the internet.

Together these studies demonstrate that the decline of reading in the Netherlands and USA is not simply a matter of zero-sum substitutions between different media formats. Perhaps the more important trend revealed by these studies is the degree of commitment to the practice of reading across different social groups. Griswold et al. (2005) conclude their account of reading in the USA by suggesting that the distinction between most people engaging in 'matter-of-fact' reading as an ordinary part of everyday life and committed reading enthusiasts has widened. In the USA, a reading class who embrace 'literature, serious non-fiction, and the quality press as an esteemed, cultivated, supported practice of an educated elite' (ibid. 139) have emerged; or rather remain following the decline of committed reading amongst the rest of the population. This is conclusion that broadly supports the findings of van Eijck and van Rees's Dutch studies.

The evidence for de-reading in the Netherlands and USA appears clear, but the extent to which this trend is repeated in other countries is not. Accounts of globalisation are divided in their prognoses of the impacts on cultural activities. Some point to homogeneity and the convergence of practices toward some international common norm as social (institutional), economic and cultural structures become increasingly uniform across the globe (Sklair, 1992; Tenbruck, 1990). Whether the UK, Norway and France present similar trajectories of de-reading as those demonstrated in the Netherlands and USA presents an opportunity to empirically explore the extent of homogeneity within processes of cultural globalization.

A second focus of this article is to explore the degree to which trajectories of change are consistent in different forms of printed media. Are trajectories of change for reading magazines and newspapers similar to that of reading books? This raises a third set of questions – is reading stratified within countries and how has that stratification changed since the 1970s? Griswold et al's (2005) suggestion of a reading class and van Rees and van Eijck (2003) account of audience fragmentation implies that general trends of de-reading may leave a highly educated group committed readers of both magazines and newspapers and books. If this is the case in other countries then not only will the macro trend of de-reading be shown to repeat itself across space but the social organisation of the practice will follow similar process over time. If the detail of trajectories of change within countries leads to a similar 'picture' of the practice of reading across countries then accounts of cultural homogeneity at the hands of globalisation would appear convincing.

3. Time diary data and reading

Time diary surveys have had a rather enigmatic role in sociological analysis. On the one hand they offer a level of micro-measurement detail, almost equivalent to money in economics, because an activity can be calibrated in small units, typically minutes (Gershuny and Sullivan 1998). On the other hand there are many suspicions, not totally misplaced, about the validity and reliability of calculations based on people's recording and reporting of their time use which always threaten to invalidate deductions made from such apparently precise data. The main critique is that time diary data does not account for experiences of time or the meanings attributed to the activities that it measures (Adam 1988; Paolucci 1993). A second concern relates to the under-reporting of activities, especially in cases where more than one activity is being conducted by the respondent. Gershuny (2000) makes a robust defence of the Multi-National Time Use Survey (MTUS) data, demonstrating it to be as reliable as other survey data and that under or over-reporting and non-response rates are not significantly bias against particular social groups, especially when the MTUS weights are applied (as is the case in this study).

For the purposes of this article we require time diary surveys to be no more than comparatively crude instruments giving access to broad brush maps of the organization of daily life. The data tells us little neither about subjective experiences of reading nor about changing tastes and preferences in reading genres. Analyzing what people report doing rather than relying on self-reported tastes does, however, present more reliable indications of cultural activities, such as reading (van Rees et al., 1999; Lopez-Sintas and Garcia-Alvarez, 2002), than does attitude and cultural values data. As a source of comparative data, while not perfect, time diaries represent the most reliable source of data available for exploring, in micro-detail, participation within everyday activities. There are variations across national surveys, particularly with respect to sample size, sampling frame and time slots, which must be taken into account when analyzing the data. In this case, we analysed each country separately in order to isolate trajectories of reading and then compare those trajectories across countries. This renders the analysis less precise (and only indicative) with respect to comparisons of minutes across countries, but does ensure greater coherence of the data over time within each country.

Ten studies of individual's time use collected in five countries were used (see Appendix for details of each survey). The USA was selected on the basis of it being the country most readily associated with the global diffusion of consumer culture. The USA and Netherlands are also the two countries where clear evidence of de-reading exists. The other countries were selected as a consequence of data constraints in other European countries; these being the only three countries with suitable data. The year of study was selected on the basis of the earliest and latest years in each country where comparable data were available. In order to take account of over-sampling of specific sub-groups and non-response, we used weights computed by the MTUS and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to correct for the distributions of sex and age and to bring the sample in line with the national population. This was important to account for variations in the duration of time slots used to record activities across national surveys. These weights also adjust for seasonal and daily variations in the pattern of time use.²

It was only possible to analyse reading as a primary activity because the earlier studies do not record secondary activities. This warrants some caution in the interpretation of data. A UK survey published for World Book Day reported that 20% of respondents read while traveling (Telegraph, 2001), and such reading would, most likely, be recorded as a secondary activity in time diaries. This suggests a potential under-recording of reading and a distortion amongst social groups because some (for example, those in employment) are likely to spend more time traveling than others. Additionally, time diaries record duration rather than tempo of activities, which has implications for the interpretation of change. In the case of reading, longer durations devoted to the practice may be a consequence of people reading at a slower tempo when compared with readers in the past, rather than indicative of an increased volume of material being read. That said, regardless of the tempo of reading, increased duration of time is indicative of greater commitment to the practice. Reading of printed material is categorized for leisure purposes only and excludes all reading conducted in the course of work or education. It must also be noted that the category of 'book reading' is heterogeneous; it includes manuals, factual and fictional material printed in book format.

Descriptive statistics of mean minutes and participation rates recorded for reading all printed material, reading books and reading magazines and newspapers, were calculated in order to provide a broad overview of cross-national trends.³ Multiple regression analysis conducted on non-pooled data was then employed to analyse the socio-demographic basis of the amount of time devoted to the practice and its component forms. For the purpose of comparison demographic variables were limited to those contained in the less comprehensive 1970s datasets: employment status, gender, age, educational qualifications, single households and living as married, and the presence of children in households. Other variables such as income and occupational group were not recoverable, from all the surveys and were dropped.

Regression equations are particularly useful for estimating the relative importance of socio-demographic characteristics for the allocation of time; it can, for instance, identify whether changes in minutes devoted to an activity are associated with, say, gendered behaviour or ch

It was not possible to recover what genres of printed material were read by survey respondents since such data was not recorded in the time diaries. But, a focus on time spent reading does allow us to explore a set of hypotheses that will allow us to address the research questions (outlined in section 2) regarding cross-national trajectories of the practice. Decline of time spent reading evident across the five countries studied and consistent across socio-demographic groups. To confirm this hypothesis we would expect to see a reduction of mean minutes per day devoted to reading as a primary activity and of participation rates for the sample. Should older respondents spend the most time reading and have the highest participation rates in both years then it would appear that de-reading is likely to be generational and a consequence of shifting contexts of media use in the later twentieth ce

Second, magazine and newspaper readership has declined at a lesser rate than time spent reading books. If it is the case that de-reading is a consequence of the emergence of television and a general shift toward point information and spectacular fragments then book reading would reduce more so than magazines and newspapers. This is because book formats are less conducive to new media contexts, being more extensive and detailed in content and therefore requiring longer durations of time to be used. Magazines and newspapers, on the other hand, would be more amenable to point information and spectacular fragments and therefore less susceptible to de-reading.

Third, a highly educated reading class has emerged across the five countries. For Griswold et al. (2005) a 'reading class' refers to a minority group who are heavily committed to the practice. They argue that a fundamental cleavage is emerging in the USA between those 'who read and who do not' (ibid.: 138) such that 'a reading class will flourish even if overall reading by the general public declines' (ibid.: 139). The notion that a group of highly educated and committed readers remain despite media fragmentation is also identified by studies from the Netherlands, although the cultural omnivorousness of some committed readers would not imply a coherent 'class' of people (van Rees and van Eijck, 2003). There are two measures that would confirm such a hypothesis. First, a polarisation between a shrinking minority group of committed readers and a growing majority of non or casual readers would be evident. Second, committed readers would consist largely of the highly educated and/or older survey respondents. In this case, committed readers would form a distinct, and not necessarily a minority, social group. Should both measures be revealed then the emergence of a reading class would be confirmed. If one of the two measures are revealed then the evidence would be indicative of a group of committed readers.

Finally, the practice of reading for each country follow similar trajectories consistent with the hypotheses above. If each country presents a similar trajectory of change then theories of increasing cultural homogenisation would be supported.

4. Trajectories of the practice of reading

General patterns of the changing practice of reading for each country are revealed from analysis of mean minutes spent reading for the entire sample and for those who participated in the practice. Participation rates and regression analysis of the socio-demographic variables related to time spent reading by different groups indicates the extent that the practice is socially differentiated. We start by taking the Netherlands and USA, the two countries where patterns of de-reading are most evident from existing studies.

Netherlands

Consistent with previous studies (Knulst and van den Broek, 2003; van Eijck and van Rees, 2000), there has been a significant decline of time spent reading, the percentage of the population who participated, and those who did participate in 1995 did so for less time than did readers in 1975 (Table 1). It is, however, important to note that the Netherlands has a considerably higher participation rate than any other country.⁴ Regression analysis (Table 2) was also consistent with previous studies.⁵ Education was the most significant variable; the highly educated read much more than the less educated, and this had increased marginally between the years of survey. Employment status, gender, marital status and dependent children were not statistically significant variables

Table 1. Mean minutes and participation rates for all reading, book reading, magazine and newspaper reading, five countries, various dates, respondents aged 16+

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
Mean minutes, survey population <i>(book)</i> <i>(mags/papers)</i>	24 <i>(10)</i> <i>(14)</i>	25 <i>(18)</i> <i>(7)</i>	54 <i>(13)</i> <i>(41)</i>	42 <i>(12)</i> <i>(30)</i>	28 <i>(5)</i> <i>(23)</i>	39 <i>(9)</i> <i>(29)</i>	22 <i>(3)</i> <i>(20)</i>	27 <i>(7)</i> <i>(20)</i>	31 <i>(5)</i> <i>(25)</i>	22 <i>(7)</i> <i>(14)</i>
Mean minutes, participants only <i>(book)</i> <i>(mags/papers)</i>	54 <i>(60)</i> <i>(43)</i>	71 <i>(73)</i> <i>(48)</i>	56 <i>(27)</i> <i>(43)</i>	47 <i>(29)</i> <i>(35)</i>	48 <i>(56)</i> <i>(42)</i>	62 <i>(59)</i> <i>(52)</i>	34 <i>(21)</i> <i>(31)</i>	46 <i>(39)</i> <i>(39)</i>	77 <i>(95)</i> <i>(68)</i>	87 <i>(87)</i> <i>(75)</i>
Participation rate <i>(book)</i> <i>(mags/papers)</i>	44% <i>(16%)</i> <i>(33%)</i>	35% <i>(25%)</i> <i>(14%)</i>	97% <i>(49%)</i> <i>(95%)</i>	90% <i>(41%)</i> <i>(87%)</i>	60% <i>(10%)</i> <i>(55%)</i>	63% <i>(16%)</i> <i>(57%)</i>	66% <i>(13%)</i> <i>(64%)</i>	58% <i>(17%)</i> <i>(52%)</i>	40% <i>(5%)</i> <i>(37%)</i>	25% <i>(8%)</i> <i>(19%)</i>

(Weighted data)

USA

As expected, the USA also revealed a decline in the mean minutes devoted to reading across the survey population (Table 1), a continuation of trends throughout the post-war period (Robinson, 1980).⁶ Most striking however, was the declining participation rate of its population – a finding consistent with Griswold et al. (2005). Those that did read did so for a significant amount of time and this has risen between 1975 and 1998: fewer people read, but readers reported longer durations of time devoted to the practice in 1998 than did readers in 1975.⁷ Like for the Netherlands, regression analysis also indicates that high education is the only statistically significant variable for predicting long durations of time spent reading. That education is the only significant socio-demographic variable and that this is the case in both years is entirely consistent with other studies, and the data lends tentative support to Griswold et al's (2005) claims that a reading class (an increasingly marginal and relatively small group who devote a significant amount of time to reading) has emerged in the USA.

Table 2. Time spent reading by country by year. Respondents aged 16+. Multiple regression analysis.

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
Full-time	-10.7 (2.1)	-4.2 (0.9)	-0.9 (3.0)	-6.4 (2.2)	-12.8 (2.4)	-12.6 (2.7)	-8.2 (1.8)	-7.8 (1.2)	0.5 (4.1)	-11.6 (6.1)
Part-time	-4.8 (2.8)	1.3 (1.5)	n/a	-1.8 (2.4)	-5.1 (1.9)	-7.4 (3.0)	-4.6 (1.7)	-3.5 (1.3)	-3.0 (4.6)	-9.8 (8.1)
Retired	dropped	6.8 (2.1)	-2.0 (9.4)	5.6 (4.9)	dropped	dropped	23.2 (5.1)	11.0 (2.6)	3.8 (6.6)	-5.8 (16.0)
Unemployed (inactive)	8.9 (5.6)	7.9 (2.0)	25.0 (8.8)	1.5 (4.1)	dropped	2.3 (7.5)	19.5 (8.8)	6.6 (4.0)	3.3 (7.6)	7.7 (13.6)
Female (male)	-10.7 (1.6)	-2.4 (0.9)	1.3 (3.0)	-0.4 (1.9)	-14.5 (2.1)	6.4 (1.8)	-10.7 (1.8)	-3.3 (1.1)	2.4 (3.8)	6.4 (3.5)
Age	0.1 (0.5)	-0.1 (0.2)	0.3 (0.8)	1.2 (0.5)	0.2 (0.5)	0.7 (0.4)	0.3 (0.3)	0.3 (0.2)	0.1 (0.6)	-0.7 (1.0)
Age²	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)
2ndy educ	9.0 (1.3)	9.0 (1.0)	14.3 (3.9)	8.6 (2.1)	n/a	6.2 (2.3)	4.9 (1.8)	5.2 (1.3)	16.6 (3.7)	18.4 (4.8)
3ry educ (below 2ndy)	19.3 (2.5)	21.7 (1.3)	16.0 (4.0)	18.4 (2.3)	n/a	16.8 (2.3)	6.8 (1.9)	13.3 (1.3)	23.8 (4.0)	24.2 (4.5)
Single (married)	3.7 (1.8)	4.2 (1.1)	0.1 (4.0)	0.8 (2.1)	-0.3 (2.7)	-0.2 (2.4)	2.8 (2.9)	-0.4 (1.1)	2.1 (4.4)	1.0 (3.6)
Young kids	-7.5 (1.8)	-4.8 (1.0)	-3.6 (3.6)	0.5 (2.3)	-2.1 (2.4)	-7.1 (2.3)	-2.2 (2.3)	-5.9 (1.2)	-6.9 (3.7)	-2.9 (3.2)
Older kids (no kids)	-4.6 (1.6)	-1.3 (0.9)	-2.0 (4.3)	1.6 (2.2)	-3.4 (2.0)	-6.7 (2.9)	-3.8 (1.3)	-4.1 (1.0)	-5.1 (3.7)	-7.9 (5.8)
Constant	28.8 (8.9)	-0.3 (3.8)	29.7 (13.7)	-15.2 (8.3)	37.1 (10.0)	2.7 (7.8)	15.1 (7.1)	7.4 (3.8)	-3.8 (13.1)	6.0 (22.7)
R-squared	0.060***	0.105***	0.134***	0.258***	0.031***	0.162***	0.200***	0.163***	0.078***	0.107***
N	4633	15083	1189	3045	4291	3018	2620	8527	2405	1151

Note: numbers in brackets are standard errors.

France

Table 1 shows a marginal overall increase of time spent reading in France, but a declining participation rate from 44% in 1974 to 35% in 1998. Consequently, those respondents who read during the days surveyed read for longer durations of time in 1998 than they did in 1974. Regressions (Table 2) reveal that those in full time employment read less than any other employment group and this is consistent between 1974 and 1998. Women read less than men, although the gap narrows by 1998. Education is the most significant variable, the highly educated spent more time reading than those with the least education, and the difference was stable over the two years of study. Single person households read more than those married or living as married, having older children had a negative effect more so in 1974 but is not statistically significant in 1998, and having young children reduced time spent reading in both years.

Norway

Norway presents a significant increase in time spent reading, with more people participating and participants significantly increasing the amount of time they devote to the practice. Regressions show that being in full and, to a lesser extent, part time employment significantly reduces time spent reading. Women spent significantly less time reading in 1971 and significantly more time in 2000; the result of a 10% increase of women readers over the period compared with a decline of 3% of men. Education was important and the higher one's education the more time spent reading. The presence of children, especially young children, in a household significantly decreased time spent reading in 2000 but made little difference in 1971.

UK

The UK presents a trajectory of general reading patterns similar to that of France. There was a general increase of time spent reading, despite a marginal decline of participation rate from 66% to 58% (Table 1).⁸ Those who read spent more time doing so in 2000 than did those who read in 1975. Regressions (Table 2) reveal that those in full and part time employment read significantly less than economically inactive respondents and the reverse is true for the retired and unemployed. These differences remained consistent over the period. Women read less than men but the statistical significance diminished a little by 2000. Education was very significant for both years and, as was the case in Norway, having children had an increasingly negative effect on time spent reading.

Summary

Taking each country in turn and examining general trajectories of change for the practice of reading revealed few clear patterns. In the Netherlands and USA the expected trajectories of de-reading (declining mean minutes and participation rates) was confirmed. While inconsistencies in the way data was collected across countries makes direct comparison unreliable, the massive difference in participation rates between these two countries does imply that the process of de-reading is not the same in each country. While less Dutch and American people read during the late 1990s compared with the mid 1970s, it is clear that reading remains a widespread activity in the Netherlands and an increasingly minority activity in the USA. Yet, Dutch readers appear to devote less time to the activity in 1995 than they did in 1975, while the diminishing number of American readers spent more time. Processes of de-reading in these two countries are inconsistent.

In France, Norway and the UK, analysis indicates that mean minutes spent reading have increased over the period, although in France this is only marginal, and those who read also devoted more time to the practice in the latter years of survey. Only in Norway are there signs that more people are participating in the activity. Again, national trajectories that bear

similarities, such as rising mean minutes, mask national variations regarding the trajectories of participation rates.

Regression analysis for each country showed that level of education is the most significant socio-demographic variable influencing time spent reading, and this was the case in both years studied. Employment status and gender were significant, for both years, in France, Norway and the UK, as was the presence of children in households. In the Netherlands and USA, education remained the only statistically significant variable in both years of study. In this respect, the practice of reading is more socially differentiated in the three countries where time spent reading has increased. However, given that few socio-demographic variables become more or less significant in each country over the period suggests stability of the degree to which the practice is socially differentiated.

General trajectories of the practice of reading printed materials for each country provide no consistent evidence that this is a practice which has become increasingly homogeneous across countries. There may be some shared tendencies between across some countries, but positions in the 1970s were so varied that those tendencies still position the practice of reading very differently in individual nation states. The two countries in which the practice is least socially differentiated and where evidence of de-reading is strongest are the two countries at either extreme of the range of engagement in the practice. In both years and by some margin, the Netherlands has the highest mean minutes devoted to the practice and the highest participation rates of all countries studies; the USA has the lowest on both measures.

Less clear is whether these general tendencies mask important differences in the type of printed materials read in each country. Reading books is a symbolically different cultural activity from reading magazines and newspapers, also communicates different forms of literature. Any decline of magazine and newspaper reading suggest different processes (e.g. of media fragmentation) than would declining book reading (e.g. a shift toward media expectations of ‘point information’ and ‘spectacular highlights’).

4.1. Reading books

Table 1 shows that there have been small increases in the amount of time spent and proportion of participants reading books in all countries with the exception of the Netherlands, where despite declining percentages of participants the practice remains by far the most widely spread of all countries. Those who read books in the latter year of study did so for longer durations than did those who read books in the earlier year and this is consistent across all countries, except for the USA. There are no signs, therefore, that book reading is becoming an increasingly marginal activity.

Regression analysis (Table 3) reveals that the most educated spent more time reading books and in all countries the difference has become more statistically significant over the period. Secondly, in all countries women spend more time reading books than men and this has also become increasingly statistically significant. In France, Norway and the UK the gendered situation reverses between the 1970s and late 1990s – men spent more time reading books than did women in these countries in the 1970s but not in the late 1990s. Finally, France and the UK present the most social differentiation in relation to the practice of reading books: in both employment status has a significant impact on time spent reading; and, in France single households read books significantly more than non-single households, and those with young children read books less than did those without children.

Table 3. Time spent reading books by country by year. Respondents aged 16+. Multiple regression analysis.

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
Full-time	-5.7 (1.5)	-3.2 (0.8)	-1.4 (1.8)	-3.4 (1.5)	-2.6 (1.5)	-4.0 (1.7)	-2.3 (0.7)	-1.7 (0.7)	2.8 (2.3)	-4.2 (3.1)
Part-time	-2.7 (2.1)	-0.2 (1.4)	n/a	1.0 (2.1)	-1.5 (1.0)	-1.6 (1.8)	-1.6 (0.6)	-1.8 (0.7)	0.3 (2.0)	-5.4 (3.9)
Retired	dropped	2.6 (1.9)	-4.1 (3.9)	0.2 (3.1)	dropped	dropped	3.4 (1.5)	3.8 (1.5)	3.3 (3.5)	1.4 (8.6)
Unemployed (inactive)	5.5 (5.1)	6.0 (1.8)	13.7 (7.9)	2.1 (3.2)	dropped	8.4 (6.0)	4.9 (3.8)	4.5 (3.2)	3.7 (3.4)	-1.9 (6.4)
Female (male)	-2.9 (1.2)	2.5 (0.8)	3.5 (1.8)	3.2 (1.2)	-3.3 (1.4)	3.8 (1.1)	-1.3 (0.6)	2.0 (0.6)	2.4 (2.7)	5.4 (1.8)
Age	-0.6 (0.3)	0.0 (0.2)	-0.4 (0.3)	0.3 (0.4)	-0.4 (0.3)	0.4 (0.2)	0.1 (0.1)	0.0 (0.1)	-0.3(0.4)	-0.2 (0.5)
Age^2	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)
2ndy educ	5.6 (1.0)	8.3 (0.9)	4.6 (2.5)	3.2 (1.2)	n/a	2.8 (1.6)	1.7 (0.7)	1.7 (0.7)	4.9 (2.2)	4.9 (2.8)
3ry educ (below 2ndy)	11.3 (1.90)	20.8 (1.1)	5.7 (2.7)	9.0 (1.6)	n/a	5.9 (1.4)	1.7 (0.6)	3.0 (0.7)	3.6 (2.4)	7.0 (2.5)
Single (married)	4.4 (1.3)	4.4 (1.0)	1.6 (2.2)	3.6 (1.5)	-0.6 (1.5)	2.5 (1.4)	0.2 (0.9)	0.7 (0.6)	4.8 (3.2)	1.5 (2.0)
Young kids	-4.1 (1.3)	-3.2 (0.9)	-1.5 (2.0)	-0.1 (1.5)	-1.6 (1.4)	-3.3 (1.4)	-0.8 (0.6)	-1.0 (0.7)	-3.1 (2.2)	0.3 (1.7)
Older kids (no kids)	-1.7 (1.1)	-0.2 (0.8)	-3.5 (2.2)	-0.5 (1.5)	-1.1 (1.2)	-2.5 (1.7)	-0.7 (0.4)	0.0 (0.6)	-1.8 (2.1)	-2.4 (3.1)
Constant	25.5 (6.7)	-5.1 (3.4)	17.6 (6.6)	-5.6 (6.3)	16.9 (5.8)	-5.3 (5.0)	2.6 (1.8)	1.7 (2.2)	2.6 (7.9)	0.4 (12.0)
R-squared	0.043***	0.066***	0.049**	0.071***	0.006	0.028***	0.042***	0.029***	0.018	0.041***
N	4633	15083	1189	3045	4291	3018	2620	8527	2405	1151

Note: numbers in brackets are standard errors.

Table 4. Mean minutes and participation rates for book reading by gender, respondents aged 16+

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
Mean minutes, survey population										
Men	10	15	11	9	6	7	3	5	4	5
Women	9	20	15	14	5	12	2	8	6	10
Mean minutes, participants only										
Men	67	75	27	29	65	62	25	43	112	80
Women	55	71	27	29	47	57	17	37	87	90
Participation rate										
Men	15%	21%	42%	33%	10%	12%	12%	12%	4%	6%
Women	17%	28%	55%	49%	9%	20%	14%	20%	7%	11%

Given that the most significant shifts in book reading appear to be related to gender it is worth taking a closer look at this variable. By the latter year of study more women participated in book reading than men in all countries (see Table 4): it is women more so than men who have taken up this practice over the period of the study. Taking the means for participants only, women have also increased the amount of time devoted to reading books more than men in all countries – and in the USA there has been a remarkable decline of book reading by male participants.

Trajectories of book de-reading are apparent in the Netherlands where participant rates dropped between 1975 and 1995, although those that did read books did so for slightly more mean minutes in the latter year of study (Table 1). In the USA, the trajectory is one of marginally greater participation in book reading, but men who read did so for significantly less time than did male book readers in 1975. Of our two countries where de-reading is demonstrated, only in the Netherlands does this apply for book reading. The trajectory of the other countries, reveal participation rates and mean minutes for the survey population have increased over the period. Given that four of the five countries show no trajectories of book de-reading, claims that media use and expectations have shifted towards ‘formula’ not suited to book reading are misplaced. Given that age was not significant to time spent reading books there is no sign of the cohort effect highlighted by Knulst and Kraaykamp (1996). Nor is there evidence of an emerging smaller book-reading ‘class’ because participation rates increase. However, book reading does present cross-national similarities in that, with the exception of the Dutch and American men, it has become a more popular cultural practice, especially for women and the highly educated.

4.2. Reading magazines and newspapers

Table 1 shows that mean minutes devoted to reading magazines and newspapers and participation rates have declined in all countries except Norway. Decline is most dramatic in France and the USA where participation rates have reduced to the extent that only a small minority read magazines and newspapers. However, while participation rates decline, those that read magazines and newspapers did so for longer durations in the latter years of study in all countries, except the Netherlands. By contrast to book reading, the general trend across countries is towards declining magazine and newspaper readership despite participants reading for longer durations in the latter years of study.

Regression analysis (Table 5) indicates that reading magazines and newspapers is a more socially differentiated practice than reading books. Education remains highly significant, and in the UK has become more significant over the period studied. In France, a country where magazines and newspaper readership has become a minority activity, the significance of education disappears. With respect to gender, men spend more time reading magazine and newspapers in France and the UK in both years, in the Netherlands this only became the case in 1995, in Norway men read more than women in 1971 but the difference disappears by 2000, and in the USA gender is not significant in either year. As with book reading, the UK and France are the most socially differentiated, with full time employment remaining negatively correlated in both years, and in both countries living with children has a negative and increasingly statistical significance on time spent reading magazines and newspapers. There are also indications of an age effect in the Netherlands – older people are more likely to read magazines and newspapers in 1998 than younger people.

Table 5. Time spent reading magazines and papers by country by year. Respondents aged 16+. Multiple regression analysis.

	France		Netherlands		Norway		UK		USA	
	1974	1998	1975	1995	1975	2000	1975	2000	1975	1998
Full-time	-5.1 (1.2)	-1.0 (0.4)	0.5 (2.2)	-3.0 (1.7)	-10.2 (2.1)	-8.5 (2.1)	-6.0 (1.5)	-6.1 (1.0)	-2.3 (3.2)	-7.4 (4.7)
Part-time	-2.1 (1.8)	1.5 (0.6)	n/a	-2.9 (1.6)	-3.6 (1.7)	-5.8 (2.4)	-3.0 (1.6)	-1.7 (1.0)	-3.2 (4.0)	-4.4 (6.3)
Retired	dropped	4.2 (1.0)	2.1 (7.3)	5.5 (3.8)	dropped	dropped	19.8 (4.6)	7.2 (2.1)	0.5 (5.6)	-7.3 (9.0)
Unemployed (inactive)	3.4 (3.1)	1.9 (0.8)	11.3 (5.1)	-0.6 (2.8)	dropped	-6.1 (4.1)	14.6 (7.2)	2.1 (2.1)	-0.4 (5.6)	9.7 (10.5)
Female (male)	-7.8 (1.0)	-4.8 (0.4)	-2.2 (2.2)	-3.6 (1.5)	-11.2 (1.8)	2.6 (1.5)	-9.3 (1.6)	-5.3 (0.9)	0.0 (2.7)	1.0 (2.8)
Age	0.6 (0.3)	-0.1 (0.1)	0.7 (0.5)	0.9 (0.3)	0.6 (0.4)	0.3 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.2 (0.2)	0.4 (0.4)	-0.5 (0.6)
Age^2	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)
2ndy educ	3.4 (0.9)	0.7 (0.6)	9.7 (2.6)	5.5 (1.7)	n/a	3.4 (1.7)	3.2 (1.5)	3.5 (1.0)	11.8 (2.7)	13.5 (3.6)
3ry educ (below 2ndy)	7.9 (1.6)	0.9 (0.6)	10.3 (2.8)	9.3 (1.7)	n/a	10.9 (1.8)	5.1 (1.7)	10.3 (1.1)	20.2 (3.2)	17.2 (3.5)
Single (married)	-0.7 (1.2)	-0.3 (0.5)	-1.5 (3.1)	-2.8 (1.6)	0.3 (2.3)	-2.7 (1.9)	2.5 (2.6)	-1.2 (0.9)	-2.7 (2.9)	-0.5 (2.9)
Young kids	-3.4 (1.1)	-1.6 (0.4)	-2.1 (2.6)	0.6 (1.9)	-0.5 (2.0)	-3.7 (1.8)	-1.4 (1.9)	-4.9 (1.0)	-3.8 (2.8)	-3.3 (2.7)
Older kids (no kids)	-2.9 (1.0)	-1.1 (0.3)	1.5 (3.1)	2.1 (1.6)	-2.3 (1.6)	-4.2 (2.3)	-3.1 (1.1)	-4.1 (0.8)	-3.3 (2.8)	-5.5 (4.7)
Constant	3.3 (5.9)	4.8 (1.6)	12.1 (10.1)	-9.7 (5.5)	20.2 (8.4)	8.0 (5.9)	12.5 (6.6)	5.7 (3.0)	-6.4 (9.6)	5.6 (13.7)
R-squared	0.047***	0.087***	0.172***	0.259***	0.031***	0.168***	0.192***	0.162***	0.091***	0.082***
N	4633	15083	1189	3045	4291	3018	2620	8527	2405	1151

Note: numbers in brackets are standard errors

Summary

In all countries we see that people spend more time reading magazines and newspapers than books in the 1970s, but the gap narrows by the late 1990s with time spent reading books increasing for all countries except the Netherlands, and time spent reading magazines and newspapers declining in all countries except Norway. France represents the biggest shift where time spent reading books exceeds that of magazines and papers in 1998, a reversal of the 1974 situation.

The trajectories of each country suggest ‘de-reading’ of magazines and newspapers, but de-reading of books only in the Netherlands. It is not the case that books are less suited to shifting media expectations. The claim that the globalised media of television negatively effects engagement in printed material, and that this is illustrated by older generations who were not exposed to television in their formative years, is further undermined by the weak statistical significance of age in all countries except the Netherlands. It is only with respect to magazines and newspapers that we see de-reading and an age effect, despite this format of reading being the one most conducive to shifting media formats towards point information and dramatic highlights. Maybe it is for this reason that magazine and newspaper readership is in decline; other media substituting for magazines and newspapers while books continue to offer alternative, perhaps unique, media experience. This suggestion is supported by Mintel (2005) market research which reveals that survey respondents were twice as likely to cite television than newspapers as their primary source of news information.

Magazine and newspaper reading is also more socially differentiated across the countries – education, age and the presence of children in households affect this form of reading to a greater extent than book reading. For both forms of reading, education (with the exception of magazine and newspaper reading in France) becomes increasingly statistically significant. Gender is also consistently significant: men read magazines and newspapers more than women by the latter years; women read books more than men. While there are no clear cross-national trajectories, the socio-demographic make-up of reading appears to show some international commonalities.

The decline of magazine and newspaper reading and greater social differentiation of the practice seems to support van Eijck and van Rees’s (2000) identification of media fragmentation, with magazines targeting particular ‘lifestyle’ market segments. Whether this is enough to imply the emergence of a reading class – highly educated and committed reading practitioners is difficult to corroborate from this data. To explore whether the trajectories of each country leave a distinct group of highly educated and committed readers it is necessary to identify differing degrees of commitment to the practice.

5. Degrees of commitment to the practice of reading

Given that participation rates for reading have declined in all countries except Norway, and that readers read for longer on the later years of study in all countries except the Netherlands, it is instructive to consider what proportion of readers are most committed to the practice and whether those readers represent an emerging reading class. To achieve this it is helpful to distinguish between casual readers (those who read for less than 15 minutes per day), light readers (who read for between 15 and 60 minutes per day) and heavy readers (who read for over 60 minutes per day). We have defined these operationally as indicators of commitment to the practice of reading. Taking our two measures of a reading class, we would expect to see (first) a decline of time commitment to the practice for the majority of readers such that a polarisation between casual and heavy readers emerges, and (second) a group of heavy readers comprising the highly educated and/or of older generations.

Table 6 demonstrates that heavy readers represent minorities of samples in both years of study for all countries with the exception of the Netherlands, where the minority group was casual readers. Only the two countries in which de-reading is confirmed (Netherlands and USA) are there signs of an emerging reading class – in both countries the proportion of casual readers has increased relative to light and heavy readers. In Norway and the UK there has been a general shift towards greater commitment, while France reveals little change between the years of study.

The contrast between reading books and magazines and newspapers is again evident. There are more light and heavy book readers in the latter years of study for all countries except the Netherlands. While these results are only indicative, they do suggest that readers are increasingly committed to book reading as measured by time devoted to the practice. This implies that either a book reading class exists and is growing in size or that book reading has simply become more popular across the social stratum. This pattern is reversed for commitment to magazines and newspapers: in France, Netherlands and the USA there has been a marked increase of casual readers; little change in the UK; and, growing commitment in Norway. Overall, on the first measure of a reading class, tentative signs of a distinct magazine and newspaper reading class in France, the Netherlands and the USA are evident because the gap between casual and heavy readers widens and heavy readers become an increasingly small minority of the population. In the other two countries and for book reading we see no signs of polarisation between a minority group of heavy readers and a majority of casual readers.

Table 6. Proportion of casual, light and heavy readers by country by year, respondents aged 16+

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
All reading										
<15 minutes	64	66	12	32	56	42	62	59	62	74
15 – 59 minutes	24	21	58	47	33	37	31	27	21	13
60> minutes	11	13	30	21	11	21	7	14	17	13
Books										
<15 minutes	86	76	72	76	92	78	94	88	95	90
15 – 59 minutes	9	15	24	15	5	17	5	9	3	5
60> minutes	5	9	4	9	3	5	1	3	2	5
Magazines and newspapers										
<15 minutes	75	86	20	43	61	49	65	65	64	82
15 – 59 minutes	20	11	63	46	32	37	30	25	21	10
60> minutes	5	3	17	11	7	14	5	10	15	8

Griswold et al (2005) suggest that a reading class is a distinct group of committed readers comprised of the highly educated; Knulst and Kraaykamp (1997) imply that age is closely related to commitment to the practice; and, this analysis highlights strong gender differences in the two components of the practice. It is therefore appropriate to examine these three variables in relation to the likelihood of being a heavy reader. Logit regression analysis (Table 7) reveals that heavy book readers are less stratified than heavy magazine and newspaper readers. Heavy book readers are most likely to be older in all countries except the USA and this has become more significant over time. In the latter year of study the highly educated are more committed to book reading and gender is less significant than it was in the 1970s. Heavy magazine and newspaper readers tend to be older, highly educated, and in France and the UK men are more committed than women.

**Table 7. Log odds of being a heavy reader versus being a casual/light reader by country by year.
Respondents aged 16+. Logit regression analysis.**

	<i>France</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Norway</i>		<i>UK</i>		<i>USA</i>	
	<i>1974</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1998</i>
Books										
Female <i>(male)</i>	-0.5 (0.2)	0.1 (0.1)	0.5 (0.4)	0.2 (0.2)	-1.4 (0.4)	0.3 (0.2)	-2.3 (1.2)	0.3 (0.1)	0.3 (0.4)	0.8 (0.4)
Age	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)
2ndy educ	1.0 (0.2)	0.8 (0.1)	0.7 (0.6)	0.3 (0.3)	n/a	0.0 (0.3)	1.4 (0.8)	0.5 (0.2)	1.2 (0.5)	0.8 (0.8)
3ry educ <i>(below 2ndy)</i>	1.2 (0.2)	1.6 (0.1)	1.5 (0.5)	0.9 (0.3)	n/a	0.8 (0.2)	0.6 (1.1)	0.7 (0.2)	0.9 (0.5)	1.6 (0.8)
F-statistic	9.12***	44.44***	3.69***	7.46***	3.85**	4.71***	11.47***	9.80***	3.13**	7.02***
Mags/papers										
Female <i>(male)</i>	-0.8 (0.2)	-1.1 (0.1)	0.0 (0.3)	-0.4 (0.2)	-1.3 (0.2)	0.2 (0.1)	-1.1 (0.3)	-0.5 (0.1)	-0.3 (0.2)	0.2 (0.3)
Age	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.1 (0.0)	0.1 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)
2ndy educ	0.2 (0.2)	0.1 (0.2)	0.6 (0.3)	0.5 (0.2)	n/a	0.1 (0.2)	0.4 (0.3)	0.3 (0.1)	0.7 (0.2)	1.8 (0.8)
3ry educ <i>(below 2ndy)</i>	0.9 (0.2)	0.3 (0.2)	0.8 (0.3)	0.8 (0.2)	n/a	0.7 (0.1)	1.3 (0.3)	0.8 (0.1)	1.0 (0.2)	1.9 (0.8)
F-statistic	7.63***	27.18***	7.64***	22.52***	5.90***	23.50***	12.28***	57.52***	9.47***	5.20***
N	4632	12698	1161	3027	4106	3016	1834	8418	2355	1074

To some extent a reading class could be applied to all countries in both years with respect to book reading, because heavy book readers represent a small minority of survey populations, and members tend to be drawn from the highly educated and older generations of society. In terms of an emerging reading class that is polarised from a growing majority of non- and casual readers, only the USA demonstrates a clear trajectory, and this is largely confined to magazine and newspaper reading. Heavy magazine and newspaper readers in America are distinctive in that they represent a minority group comprised of older and highly educated members of society (affirming both measures of a reading class). The patterns are less clear in European countries. In the Netherlands, there has been an increase of casual readers at the expense of light and heavy readers. However, the distinction between heavy and light/casual groups is not strong and only tentative signs of a reading class exist because in 1975 light and heavy reading was widespread. In France, more people are committed to the practice of book reading in 1998 than was the case in 1974, and less are committed to magazine and newspaper reading. France therefore exhibits an emerging magazine and newspaper reading class, with commitment to book reading growing such that the pattern for all reading shows little overall change in the proportion of casual, light and heavy readers. The UK and Norway show no signs of an emerging reading class because of the increasing proportion of committed readers in all forms of the practice, despite heavy readers in all countries tending to be highly educated and drawn from older generations.

6. Conclusions

Cross-national comparative analysis is challenging theoretically and methodologically. Harmonising data so that social practices and socio-demographic variables can be compared is hard to achieve and time diary data represents one of a limited set of suitable resources available to social scientists because of its capacity to measure micro detail of cultural activities. This article has focused on similarity of trajectories and on the time-related social positioning of the practice of reading in each country studied. In doing so, it demonstrates the value of conducting comparative research by placing national trajectories in their international context. Arguably, concern regarding de-reading (as measured according to the duration of time allocated to the practice) is misplaced in all countries except the USA, where reductions of time spent reading leaves a small minority of its population engaging in the practice. De-reading in the Netherlands is evident, however this is a country with a very strong reading tradition and despite decline of time spent in the practice still is the country where reading remains most widespread. In France, the UK and Norway reading is on the rise, although in France and the UK this is book as opposed to magazine and newspaper reading.

That all countries have increased both time spent and the proportion of participants reading books over the period, with the exception of the Netherlands which still continues to have high mean minutes and participation rates, also undermines theories claiming that shifting media expectations are responsible for de-reading. Rather, reduction in reading is most applicable to magazine and newspapers, where all countries except Norway have witnessed declining participation and time spent in this practice. Perhaps, rather than alter media expectations, the kind of point information and dramatic highlights provided by other media sources rival and substitute for that found in many magazines and newspapers. This also supports van Eijck and van Rees's (2000) argument that fragmentation of magazine content around specialised lifestyle genres leads to an overall reduction of readership, and a greater market segmentation of readers. In this respect, emerging groups of committed magazine and newspaper readers is a response to the increasingly specialised (and marginalised) content of magazines.

Given that reading printed material is held in high esteem, it is important to find that time spent and the percentage of people participating in book reading is on the rise. This could be explained as an emerging reading class, a highly educated group of committed practitioners

who value book reading as a form of social distinction. Certainly, in all countries those heavily committed to reading books represent a small minority of the population and tend to be highly educated. However, with the exception of the Netherlands, the proportion of casual book readers has declined while the proportion of light and heavy readers increased. If a book reading class exists it is expanding, and while it remains populated by the highly educated it is less stratified than magazine and newspaper readership and, with the exception of the UK, has not become more stratified over time. Book reading is expanding but there is no polarisation between casual and heavy readers. Clearer signs of polarisation between casual and heavy magazine and newspaper readers are evident in France, the Netherlands and the USA. Heavy magazine and newspaper readers tend to be highly educated, elderly and male, which again supports the argument of cultural fragmentation in this type of reading material. De-reading and a distinct reading class appear to be emerging with respect to magazine and newspaper readership in these countries.

Finally, analysis of trajectories of the practice of reading in five countries show few signs of increasing cultural homogeneity at the hands of the diffusion of global cultures of consumption. In some respects, the trajectories of each country do reveal commonalities: book reading increases in those countries where it was low in terms of mean minutes and participation rates in the 1970s and declines in countries where it was high; there are signs of an emerging magazine and newspaper reading class in three of the five countries; women are more committed to book reading and men to magazine and newspaper reading. Yet, the trajectories in each country remain complex and varied. In France, magazine and newspaper reading has declined and book reading increased comparatively dramatically. Reading is becoming more widespread in Norway. The UK reveals a growth of book reading and decline of magazine and newspaper reading in the latter year, although those that did read magazines and newspapers remained committed to the practice. Reading was more socially stratified in France and the UK than in the other countries. On balance, processes of global consumer culture appear to have different impacts in different countries such that degrees and extent of change vary across social groups and components of any given practice within national contexts. Generic trends of the growing popularity of the minority practice of book reading and de-reading of magazine and newspapers mask the nuances of trajectories of reading within each country, such that it would be premature to imply tendencies toward cultural homogeneity of the practice.

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in this text are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the MTUS team or any agency which has contributed data to the MTUS archive.

² Details of the MTUS weights can be found at: <http://iserwww.essex.ac.uk/mtus/world5.5/chapter4.php>. An appendix detailing the original pre-weighted surveys, descriptions of sample populations and variable definitions is available from the authors using the correspondence address provided.

³ Given the broad application of this data to practices conducted by a large proportion of survey respondents, discrepancies of under and over recording as a consequence of ‘longer’ time slots for the allocation of activities within 1975 diaries should balance across the data.

⁴ One explanation as to why reading is so widespread in the Netherlands when compared with other countries is that it has a state ‘literacy policy’ with the objective of promoting ‘a flourishing literary life in the Netherlands’ (WVC, 1988: 6). This policy includes support of the book industry through the ‘book price’ scheme, extensive library provision and policies directed at promoting reading for leisure (Huysmans et al., 2005).

⁵ The regression outputs produced low R squared values, and this suggests that the explanatory variables used are limited in accounting for the variation of time spent reading. However, by using multiple regression analysis we can reveal differentiation in the amount of time spent reading by different social groups, and this allows for generalized comparison across those groups, across time (1970s and 2000), and across the five countries.

⁶ A decline of reading as recorded using time diaries is further supported by US book sales figures, which are reported to have fallen by 23 million between 2002 and 2003 – leaving total book sales at 22 billion in 2003 (Guardian, 2004).

⁷ The very long durations of time spent reading by participants is broadly consistent with similar time-use studies conducted in the USA (see, for example, Cole and Robinson, 2002).

⁸ A recent review of the UK publishing industry estimated the market to be worth £18.03 billion in 2003 (newspapers representing 43% of the market, magazines 36% and books 21%). The review shows that book sales have increased by 16% between 1999 and 2004 (Keynote, 2004), while Mintel (2005) report that newspaper sales fell 5% between 2000 and 2004.