

Convergent Television Audiences, Digital Inequalities, and Social Support in Getting Audiovisual Content

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Seeking help from others is one of the major strategies enabling online viewers to overcome their inability to access audiovisual content. Nevertheless, existing research on digital inequalities has given limited attention to help-seekers. Using a representative sample of Czech adults (N = 4,294), we examined how these viewers differed from successful self-reliants and those who remained on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide. The study rejects the assumption that help-seekers distinction can be attributed to socioeconomic differences. It concludes that the availability of helpers and attitudes toward social interactions are essential and that help-seekers are more likely women.

Keywords: digital inequality, digital divide, social support, audience research, convergence culture

Watching television content in digital, convergent media environments (see Jenkins, 2006) and stepping beyond the realm of linear television broadcasting may be both enriching and demanding. Compared with traditional linear television broadcasting, convergent viewership typically requires more effort and more active engagement (Mihelj, Leguina, & Downey, 2019; Robinson et al., 2015). In the early 2020s, this viewership typically involved various screens and devices, various content sources (both legal and illegal), and various interfaces drawing on distinct underlying logics and offering different affordances. Being an effective member of a convergent audience and handling these technological objects, apps, websites, settings, and menus require certain knowledge and specific skills—or, at least, garnering assistance from someone with these skills and knowledge who is ready to help.

Leisure activities, such as watching popular content online, are traditionally beyond the focus of the main body of research (Arora, 2012; Helsper, 2012; Marler, 2023). The utilitarian division of digital activities

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into beneficial and harmful (or, at best, useless) does not allow us to explore the potential of everyday activities and their often-irreplaceable role in human life (Arora, 2012). A great example of such awakening is a Chicago study of unstably housed people. In it, Marler (2023) focused specifically on digital leisure and revealed how crucial it could be in bonding relationships, fostering self-identity, and generally improving mental health.

Although Selwyn, Johnson, Nemorin, and Knight (2016) found that the area of digital leisure or entertainment is one in which people seek and get help, researchers generally subsume it under the use of ICT (e.g., Grošelj, Reisdorf, Dolničar, & Petrovčič, 2022) or neglect it altogether (e.g., Grošelj, Reisdorf, & Petrovčič, 2019). Thus, little is known about the role of social ties in helping with mundane online watching or about the typical characteristics of convergent viewers who seek help.

Therefore, our study aims to contribute to filling this gap. It tackles audience members who watch television content from online sources but who struggle with handling digital technologies and thus with participating in digital audiovisual media. The current study explores audience members' abilities or inabilities to access content and the avenues by which they seek help from others in gaining such access. We want to determine how members of the audience who seek such help differ from those who handle the technologies needed for online viewership and those who cannot get the content either way. Based on our results, we suggest that for a notable portion of current audiences, the potential to take part in convergence popular culture is affected not only by their access to technologies or their own repertoire of technological uses but also by their social contexts and their willingness and ability to interact with their social peers.

Convergent Viewership and the Digital Inequalities Perspective

The study builds on a discussion of digital inequalities (e.g., Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020; van Dijk, 2020) and stems from three general assumptions. The first is that leisure is a vital aspect of human experiences (Helsper, 2021; Marler, 2023; Mihelj et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2015), and watching audiovisual content is one of the most common leisure activities that provides several gratifications, including relaxation and fostering social ties or feelings of safety from engaging in routine practices (Macek & Zahrádka, 2016). The inability to reach the intended content can thus create a situation that either motivates viewers to solve it or leads to resignation from obtaining the content.

The second assumption is that different levels of digital skills and various repertoires of uses inevitably refer to different—and unequal—abilities to reach the intended content and, therefore, equally benefit from the new convergent situation in the convergent audiovisual market (Helsper, 2021; Jenkins, 2006; Ragnedda, 2020).

The third assumption is that the aforementioned search for help can be a functional and, with regard to the outcomes, full-fledged equivalent of digital skills or uses themselves (Asmar, van Audenhove, & Mariën, 2020; Dolničar, Grošelj, Filipovič Hrast, Vehovar, & Petrovčič, 2018; Grošelj et al., 2019) or a way to acquire these skills and learn consequent uses (Asmar et al., 2020; Bakardjieva, 2005; Hunsaker et al., 2019; Lin, Tang, & Kuo, 2012).

The normalization hypothesis (see Norris, 2001), based on the techno-optimistic expectation that digital technologies will provide a more equal footing for their users, is proving wrong. It is common for those

who are better socioeconomically situated to gain more from the potential of digital technologies (Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020; van Dijk, 2020). The dividing lines are age, gender, financial security, level of education, race, and nationality. Knowledge of digital technologies and the ability to use them are other sources of inequality. Moreover, we can say that socioeconomic status affects technology on multiple levels, as physical access (first level of digital divide) eases digital skills, which can potentially lead to different uses (second level of digital divide) and later to different tangible outcomes (third level of digital divide; Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020). The outcomes express the extent to which and in which areas people can benefit from their knowledge and capabilities (Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020) or, as put by van Dijk (2020), how they can participate in society.

However, unskilled users of digital technologies do not have to deal with their limitations alone and can also turn for help (Asmar et al., 2020; Courtois & Verdegem, 2016; Grošelj et al., 2022; Hunsaker et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2012; van Deursen, Courtois, & van Dijk, 2014). Therefore, regarding convergent viewership of audiovisual content, we distinguish two equally valid ways in which people eventually reach their goal: viewers either possess sufficient capabilities themselves to acquire the content they desire, or they compensate for their own lack of abilities through another person to whom they turn for help. We classify viewers who watch television content (also) by other means than via linear television broadcasting—that is, viewers we can consider convergent—into three groups depending on how they face a situation in which they cannot get a preferred film or series: (1) Self-reliants can cope with the situation on their own; (2) help-seekers seek assistance or advice from relatively more experienced users; and (3) digital underclass, a term we borrow from Massimo Ragnedda (2020), which refers to those the content did not reach.

While seeking help is a common strategy for overcoming the lack of one's own technological skills, existing research gives limited attention to help-seekers, so only a little is known about these online viewers and their specifics. Therefore, the help-seekers group is central to our research. Our intention is to take a closer analytical look at how the help-seekers group of film and TV show viewers differs from the self-reliants group and the digital underclass group.

In general, we assume that the sociodemographic differences typically tracked in digital divide research also play a role in its distinction. We expect that the explanatory capacity of sociodemographic differences will vary since the principle of homophily will apply. Courtois and Verdegem (2016) concluded that people who are generally disadvantaged and need help with digital technologies are more likely to find similarly deprived people in their surroundings. These socially similar people may, therefore, be willing to offer help, but with their own lack of skills, it will not lead to positive outcomes. Moreover, those who have nowhere to turn are among the most socially excluded (Asmar et al., 2020). Thus, we expect effective help with digital technologies to be as unequally available in society as digital skills or uses. At the same time, however, sociodemographic differences should distinguish help-seekers from the digital underclass. Research on digital inequalities shows that digital skills, uses, and their outcomes are positively linked to economic status and education and negatively to age and that they are better reachable for people from developed areas (typically from cities as opposed to rural regions), which provide easier access to better technological infrastructures (Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020; van Dijk, 2020). Importantly, digital skills alone do not directly anticipate what people do with digital technologies, which is also influenced by sociodemographic and economic differences (Zillien & Hargittai, 2009). Similarly, skills and usage do not anticipate particular outcomes or benefits since similarly disposed users can fulfill the potential of digital

technologies differently for various purposes (van Deursen & Helsper, 2018). We therefore expect digital underclass members to be socio-demographically less disposed of than other respondents.

H1: Help-seekers do not differ from self-reliants in their socioeconomic status while from digital underclass members they differ in higher socioeconomic status.

In developed countries, the differences in digital inequalities between men and women are gradually narrowing (Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020; van Dijk, 2020). However, we assume that gendered social roles remain instrumental. Men tend to be more reluctant to ask for help because they may perceive it as a weakness that threatens their masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). For help with digital technologies, women are more likely to find it in their surroundings than men (Helsper & van Deursen, 2017) and are more likely to turn to family and friends for assistance (Courtois & Verdegem, 2016; van Deursen et al., 2014).

H2: Help-seekers are more likely to be females than males.

In line with our assumption that help-seekers seek help when they lack the necessary abilities to handle digital technologies, we expect help-seekers to differ from self-reliants in a narrower scope of digital uses. We also assume that self-reliants' use of digital technologies is linked to their more open and positive attitudes toward technologies in general. Therefore, we expect that help-seekers also differ from them in lower openness to technological innovations in general (Rogers, Singhal, & Quinlan, 2014) and in lower technological self-efficacy (i.e., in their lower belief that they can understand and handle digital technologies; Helsper & Eynon, 2013; McDonald & Siegall, 1992).

H3: Help-seekers report lower levels of digital uses when compared with self-reliants and lower levels of technological innovativeness and technological self-efficacy when compared with self-reliants.

Although English proficiency in Czech society is continuously increasing, international comparisons show that the Czech Republic still lags behind most of Europe in this respect ("EF English Proficiency Index," 2021). English proficiency is often essential for accessing a range of audiovisual services, content sources, and online applications that are not localized. Therefore, we assume that English proficiency may be one of the obstacles to online access to audiovisual content.

H4: Help-seekers and digital underclass members report lower levels of English proficiency than self-reliants.

Finally, as Asmar et al. (2020) argued, the availability and activation of help with ICT are socially borne. On the one hand, one needs an abundant social network and, on the other hand, an ability to strategically exploit these resources. First, we assume that respondents with children have more potential sources of help at their disposal (Hunsaker et al., 2019). We expect a similar pattern with workers who can employ their colleagues. This kind of social resource is available to help-seekers and self-reliants (Asmar et al., 2020; van Deursen et al., 2014). However, it is important that it represents a different and more effective structure for helpers (Courtois & Verdegem, 2016). Second, we expect help-seekers to be more sociable—that is, to tend more to "affiliate with others and to prefer being with others to remaining alone" (Cheek & Buss, 1981, p. 300)—and to be more amicable (i.e., to be more likely to perceive contact with others as worth and pleasurable; Stewart & Bernhardt, 2010).

H5: Help-seekers have more often children and report higher levels of sociability and amicability when compared with self-reliants and digital underclass members.

H6: Help-seekers and self-reliants have more often a job when compared with digital underclass members.

Context of the Study

The Czech audience provides suitable terrain for this study. In the Czech media environment, traditional TV broadcasting as the prevailing source of audiovisual content has been supplemented and partially substituted by various online services and sources of content. In the EU-28, 72% of people aged 16–74 watched videos on the Internet in 2018, compared with 61% of Czechs (Eurostat, 2019).

The shift toward online viewing was linked not only to technological change but also to the consequent changes in the Czech audiovisual market. Compared with 2014, when convergent viewing meant downloading or streaming audiovisual content from nonauthorized sources (Macek & Zahrádka, 2016), the offer of official services available to Czech viewers has expanded. In 2016, Netflix entered the Czech market, and a year later, the Czechs were able to purchase HBO Go without cable television. They could also subscribe to other national video-on-demand (VOD) services, premium TVs, or catch-up services. Although in 2018, only 4.4% of Czechs prepaid VOD services (when compared with EU-27 with 23.02%), by 2020, the number had increased to 11.6% (and to 34.9% in EU-27; Eurostat, 2023). Our sample should, therefore, capture a wide spectrum of viewers' habits and abilities, allowing for contrasting the specific groups against each other.

Methods

Participants

In this study, we used data from a survey that was part of a research project focused on copying and downloading practices (GA18-19278S). Data were collected from November 18, 2019 to January 13, 2020. A professional survey agency collected the data by combining face-to-face interviewing (n = 1,531, 267 interviewers) and self-assisted online interviewing (n = 2,763). Eligible participants had to be 18+ years old. To reach a sample representative of the Czech adult population, we used quota sampling, considering basic demographic indicators of age, gender, education, and place of residence. For online interviewing, an algorithm taking into account quotas was used to randomly select participants from a panel of 54,000 potential interviewees. Face-to-face interviews were consequently sampled against quotas to reach participants who were unavailable for online interviews. The total sample consisted of 4,294 people. The survey complied with the ethical and legal standards of Masaryk University for survey research, and all respondents provided informed consent before the interviews.

The questionnaire focused on domestic watching of films and television shows. For our analysis, we used a subsample of 2,215 convergent viewers—that is, those who reported that they watched films and shows (also) by means other than linear television broadcasting. If respondents indicated in the previous part of the questionnaire that they had watched movies or TV shows, we asked them a question separately

for both types of production. If, in both cases, they stated that they watched a television broadcast only on a television screen, we dropped them from the analysis. In the resulting subsample, the younger Czechs are more represented, while the older Czechs are less represented. Furthermore, the number of nongraduates is lower in the subsample. We summarize the differences in Table 1 in more detail.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample.

Variable	Category	Total sample	Convergent viewers
		(<i>N</i> = 4,294)	(<i>n</i> = 2,215)
		%	%
Gender	Female	51.3	50.3
	Male	48.7	49.7
Age ^a	18–24	9.1	14.9
	25–34	16.4	22.3
	35–44	20.3	23.2
	45–54	16.1	15.3
	55–64	15.4	10.5
	65+	22.7	13.9
Education ^b	Lower secondary or lesser	11.5	11.9
	Upper secondary without graduation	34.8	30.0
	Upper secondary with graduation	34.7	37.1
	Academic tertiary	19.0	21.0
Type of settlement ^c	Inner city	53.9	54.2
	Suburb	22.3	23.9
	Country	23.8	21.9
	Missing	0.4	0.4
Parenthood ^c	Yes	72.3	63.4
	No	27.2	36.3
	Missing	0.4	0.3
Economic activity ^c	Part-time employee	6.8	7.1
	Full-time employee	44.2	49.2
	Self-employed worker	5.6	5.6
	Homemaker	6.7	8.3
	Unemployed	2.6	2.3
	Pensioner	27.5	16.8
	Student	5.2	9.4
	Missing	1.3	1.3

^a $M_1 = 47.83$ ($SD = 16.83$); $M_2 = 42.03$ ($SD = 16.11$)

^b According to the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 version: level 1 (100, 244, 253), level 2 (353), level 3 (344, 354, 454, 650, 550), level 4 (640, 740, 840)

^c Nonmandatory questions

Dependent Variable

To determine what strategy people choose to overcome the digital divide in cultural consumption, we used an adapted question from an earlier Ghent study, whose authors provided us with the original questionnaire (Courtois & Verdegem, 2016). We asked the participants a single-choice question: "Some viewers are often unable to get the film or series they want to watch. What do you do in a situation like this?" They were offered three possible answers: (1) "Usually, I just don't get to watch that movie or series." (n = 635, 28.7%), (2) "I usually ask someone for help" (n = 543, 24.5%), and (3) "I usually manage on my own" (n = 954, 43.1%). Eighty-three units were missing.

We understood the first option as a declaration of inability to use one's own or others' skills, and we referred to participants who had chosen this option as the digital underclass, as they did not employ any successful strategy to get the content they wanted and, as viewers, remained unsatisfied with their needs. In contrast to this group, participants selecting the other two options were considered successful in seeking and acquiring audiovisual content. Participants selecting the second option were referred to as help-seekers (as their solution is to seek help), and participants selecting the third option were referred to as self-reliants (as they could rely on their own skills).

Independent Variables

Sociodemographic Variables

From the sociodemographic data, we investigated the effects of all variables, which are presented in Table 1. We used age as an interval variable. To find out if the respondents were parents, we asked them, "Do you have kids? We are also concerned about children who are already adults or who have been entrusted to your care."

In addition to these data, we also measured respondents' concerns about whether they will be financially well off in the future. Respondents expressed these on a 5-point scale when assessing a statement: "I fear that I will be worse off financially in the future than I am now." The variable had the following distribution: strongly disagree (n = 182, 8.2%), somewhat disagree (n = 489, 22.1%), neither agree nor disagree (n = 819, 37.0%), somewhat agree (n = 538, 24.3%), and strongly agree (n = 187, 8.4%).

Physical Access to ICT

We asked participants multiple-choice questions about what electronic devices they owned or used. They had a total of 14 options to choose from. To use the data meaningfully in the analysis, we reduced it using latent class analysis and identified five latent classes referred to as basic access class (n = 451, 20.4%), PC champions class (n = 449, 20.3%), no desktop PC class (n = 534, 24.1%), no-computer class (n = 215, 9.7%), and bounty class (n = 566, 25.6%). We opted for a 5-class solution, although the 6-class

model had a slightly lower BIC.³ However, there was a drop in entropy for the 6-class model, and most importantly, the higher number of classes seemed to be hardly meaningful. The model fits for different LCA (Latent Class Analysis) solutions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of LCA Model Fitting (N = 4,294).

N classes	N parameters	Log-likelihood	BIC	Entropy R ²	Averaged max posterior probability
1	14	-27,725.96	55,569.03		
2	29	-26,177.72	52,598.03	.65	.90
3	44	-25,921.77	52,211.59	.72	.89
4	59	-25,670.24	51,834.02	.71	.84
5	74	-25,553.95	51,726.90	.69	.80
6	89	-25,483.08	51,710.64	.64	.76
7	104	-25,430.39	51,730.74	.64	.75

Members of the no-computer class did not own or use laptops, most did not have even desktop computers, and so only used mobile phones and television sets. In the basic access class, we include participants who only have or use a television set, mobile phone and/or laptop. We call this class basic access because most Czechs (with the exception of the no-computer class) possess this equipment. Other classes have additional devices compared with the basic access class, and they are always specific to something. While members of the PC champions are characterized by access to these devices, members of the no desktop PC class do not have or use desktop computers. The bounty class is characterized by members who own or use the broadest variety of various technological objects.

Digital Uses

We formulated five items and assessed digital use as a single factor. We asked the respondents how often they used five Internet features or services, specifically to (1) play a video on the Internet, (2) download a file from the Internet, (3) use a web search engine to find the exact phrase enclosed in quotation marks, (4) use special commands such as "site" or "filetype" in the web search engine, and (5) shop on the Internet. We provided six possible answers, starting with (1) I am not familiar, followed by (2) Never, and then ascending to (6) Every day. The digital uses variable is thus the factorial score of confirmatory factor analysis for ordinal data (CFI = .992,⁴ TLI = 0.979,⁵ RMSEA = .083⁶) allowing a residual correlation between (3) use a web search engine to find the exact phrase enclosed in quotation marks, and (4) use special commands such as "site" or "filetype" in the web search engine. The factorial score reached values from -1.99 to 1.73 (M = 0.01, SD = 0.01).

³ Bayesian information criterion

⁴ Comparative fit index

⁵ Tucker-Lewis index

⁶ Root mean square error of approximation

Individual Attitudes Toward ICT

Eleven items asked respondents to rate their feelings and experiences linked to using media technology and streaming platforms on a 5-point Likert scale (from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree). Factor analysis with oblimin rotation supported a two-factor solution. Internal technological efficacy included four items ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.02$, $\alpha = .85$) that assessed participants' belief that they could understand and, therefore, successfully handle media technologies. Innovativeness included three items ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.02$, $\alpha = .89$) that captured the level of openness to technological news and technological change. Both variables were calculated as averages across the items.

English Proficiency

English language proficiency was reported by respondents on a 7-point scale, where 1 referred to minimal skills and 7 to maximal skills. We adjusted the definition of language skills used by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The variable had the following distribution: None ($n = 441$, 19.9%), A1 ($n = 691$, 31.2%), A2 ($n = 400$, 18.1%), B1 ($n = 280$, 12.6%), B2 ($n = 276$, 12.5%), C ($n = 100$, 4.5%), and native speaker/bilingual ($n = 5$, 0.2%). Twenty-two units were missing. We merged the highest two categories together because the representation of native speakers was minimal. In the analysis, we used six categories, with a C level as the maximum.

Sociability and Amicability

As we focused on the use of help in the study, we thought it was important to determine if it was potentially available to participants (from children or from employment) and if they were personally inclined to use it. Therefore, we included two 5-point scales, one of sociability ("I'm one of those people who doesn't exactly flock to society"), and one of amicability ("I like to spend my free time with friends and acquaintances"). The frequencies of the variables are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Sociability and Amicability.

	Sociability ^a		Amicability	
	N	%	N	%
Very low	256	11.6	76	3.4
Lower	444	20.0	259	11.7
Medium	697	31.5	683	30.8
Higher	566	25.6	751	33.9
Very high	252	11.4	446	20.1

Procedure

To determine which variables explain the viewer's journey toward audiovisual content, we performed a multinomial logistic regression. In the model, we predicted the classification of viewers as digital underclass, help-seekers, and self-reliants. We sought to expand the binary perception of

mastery/nonmastery of technologies. We also chose a multinomial regression so that we did not lose the context of the whole sample, and so that we could distinguish the substantive significance of the conditions that contributed to the audience distribution. Therefore, we also presented standardized effect coefficients in the results in addition to odds ratios.

To build a regression model, we followed Hosmer, Lemeshow, and Sturdivant's (2013) seven-step purposeful selection strategy. When considering which variables to add or exclude, besides the log-likelihood ratio, we also assessed the Akaike information criterion. We opted for AIC⁷ over BIC because we had a rather larger sample size, and we did not expect to find the true model (see Vrieze, 2012). During the analysis, we excluded age, type of settlement, and physical access to ICT as insignificant. Also, among the economic activity variables, only full-time employment remained significant. On the other hand, we kept the sociability variable in the model, although it could have been omitted at first glance (AIC = 4,025.08, $-2LL = 3,933.08$, $p = .10$). It contributed to the coherence of the whole model—if excluded, the coefficients for the other variables changed significantly. We wanted to prevent bias in the effect estimates caused by the omitted variables (see Hosmer et al., 2013; Mood, 2010).

While controlling for interactions, we departed from the procedure in the sense that we included the age and physical access to ICT that were themselves found to be insignificant in the model (see Hilbe, 2009). We wanted to check whether the effect of one's own digital uses on getting a film or TV series was the same for viewers with different levels of education, economic stability, and physical access to ICT. We also allowed for the possibility that people with different English proficiency or technological self-efficacy may use their own repertoire of digital uses to varying degrees of success. Finally, we wanted to account for the different ages of children as sources of help. Since we did not have specific data about children, we used the interaction between parenthood and the age of the respondents. We assumed that older respondents would generally have older children.

In the end, the final model was identical to the main effects model. We found only one statistically significant interaction: technological internal efficacy with digital use. However, the improvement in the model was negligible (AIC = 4,023.96, $-2LL = 3,911.96$) so we decided on a model without interactions.

The main-effect model was significant, indicating a good fit with the data, goodness of fit χ^2 (4,094) = 4,109.20, $p = .43$; AIC = 4,027.54, $-2LL = 3,919.54$, model χ^2 (52) = 516.33, $p < .001$; $R^2_{MCF} = .12$; $R^2_N = .16$.⁸ The overall percentage of correctly predicted group membership was 53.5%. In the reference category of help-seekers, the model successfully predicted 33.8% membership. The effects of the individual variables are summarized in Table 4.

⁷ Akaike information criterion

⁸ Pseudo R^2 s were calculated in the Jamovi software, which uses the calculation core of R. For comparison we add values from SPSS: $R^2_{MCF} = .12$; $R^2_N = .25$. For reasons of calculation preference see Leppink (2019, pp. 93–95).

Results

Based on the results of the logistic regression (Table 4), we can partly hold hypothesis 1 about self-reliants' difference from members of the other two groups in terms of their socioeconomic status. As expected, help-seekers do not differ in their socioeconomic status, and only for comparison of concerns about their own future prosperity did we observe two significant but only negligible effects. Similarly insignificant are the effects of socioeconomic status differences between help-seekers and the digital underclass. Surprisingly, even the influence of age is observed as completely insignificant (moreover, the variable does not even increase the coherence of the whole model). An exception is tertiary education, which significantly increased the respondents' chances of successfully seeking help with finding films and series.

Hypothesis 2 about women's higher chances of successfully seeking help was supported. In both models, being a woman significantly increased the odds of membership in the group of help-seekers.

Hypothesis 3 can also be supported. Higher scores in digital use, internal technological efficacy, and innovativeness increase the chances of participants being self-reliant rather than help-seekers (on the other hand, these characteristics do not play a role in distinguishing self-reliants from the digital underclass).

Hypothesis 4, on the effect of English language proficiency, can be held only partially. It is only English proficiency from level B2 above that provides a higher chance for viewers to acquire content on their own rather than seeking help. However, the interpretation is complicated by the fact that we also observe a statistically significant difference between levels A1 and no proficiency, while levels A2 and B1 do not show any difference (in the model comparing self-reliants and digital underclass, the effect of language proficiency is more obvious).

Hypothesis 5 can only be partially supported. Parenthood increases the odds of successfully seeking help compared with both other scenarios, and sociability increases the odds of seeking help rather than being self-reliant. While amicability does not significantly affect group membership to help-seekers or the digital underclass, it increases the odds of being included among help-seekers rather than self-reliants and even (albeit with less effect) among the digital underclass rather than self-reliants.

Finally, hypothesis 6 has to be rejected because having a full-time job does not have any significant effect on membership in the group of help-seekers (the full-time job variable contributes to the coherence of the whole model, but only in a model that compares self-reliants to digital underclass).

Table 4. Logistic Regression Model Coefficients.

Predictor	Help seekers–Digital underclass					
	b (SE)	z	p	95% CI		
				min	OR	max
Intercept	1.18 (.64)					
Gender: male–female	0.50 (.13)	3.87	< .001	1.28	1.65	2.12
Parenthood	–0.47 (.15)	–3.13	.002	0.47	0.63	0.84

Concerns about own future prosperity: very low						
Lower	-0.60 (.28)	-2.15	.032	0.32	0.55	0.95
Medium	-0.12 (.27)	-0.46	.646	0.53	0.88	1.49
Higher	-0.07 (.27)	-0.27	.786	0.54	0.93	1.59
Very high	0.53 (.34)	1.58	.114	0.88	1.71	3.31
Full-time job						
	-0.28 (.13)	-2.22	.026	0.59	0.76	0.97
Education: lower secondary or lesser						
Upper secondary without graduation	0.26 (.22)	1.20	.230	0.85	1.30	2.01
Upper secondary with graduation	0.03 (.21)	1.42	.154	0.89	1.36	2.06
Academic tertiary	0.86 (.24)	3.55	< .001	1.47	2.37	3.83
English proficiency: none						
A1	-0.23 (.17)	-1.37	.172	0.57	0.80	1.10
A2	-0.61 (.20)	-2.98	.003	0.37	0.55	0.81
B1	-0.44 (.24)	-1.81	.070	0.4	0.64	1.04
B2	0.00 (.27)	0.02	.986	0.59	1.00	1.72
C	-0.23 (.39)	-0.58	.559	0.37	0.79	1.72
Digital uses	-0.03 (.12)	-0.22	.823	0.77	0.97	1.23
Technological internal efficacy	0.08 (.09)	0.98	.329	0.92	1.09	1.29
Innovatory	-0.02 (.07)	-0.28	.776	0.86	0.98	1.12
Amicability: very low						
Lower	-0.42 (.49)	-0.87	.386	0.25	0.66	1.70
Medium	-0.32 (.47)	-0.67	.500	0.29	0.73	1.83
Higher	-0.35 (.47)	-0.76	.449	0.28	0.70	1.75
Very high	-0.73 (.47)	-1.55	.122	0.19	0.48	1.21
Sociability: very low						
Lower	-0.51 (.24)	-2.19	.029	0.38	0.60	0.95
Medium	-0.62 (.23)	-2.65	.008	0.34	0.54	0.85
Higher	-0.08 (.25)	-3.17	.002	0.28	0.45	0.74
Very high	-0.91 (.29)	-3.17	.002	0.23	0.40	0.71

Help seekers–Self-reliants

Predictor	b (SE)	z	p	95% CI		
				min	OR	max
Intercept	-0.62 (.62)					
Gender: male–female	0.64 (.12)	5.17	< .001	1.49	1.90	2.43
Parenthood	-0.73 (.14)	-5.22	< .001	0.37	0.48	0.64
Concerns about own future prosperity: very low						
Lower	-0.69 (.25)	-2.73	.006	0.31	0.5	0.82
Medium	-0.34 (.25)	-1.38	.166	0.44	0.71	1.15
Higher	-0.51 (.26)	-2.00	.045	0.36	0.6	0.99

Very high	0.14 (.33)	0.43	.665	0.61	1.15	2.19
Full-time job	0.10 (.12)	0.80	.423	0.87	1.10	1.40
Education: lower secondary or lesser						
Upper secondary without graduation	0.36 (.21)	1.69	.090	0.94	1.44	2.19
Upper secondary with graduation	0.02 (.20)	0.98	.325	0.82	1.22	1.83
Academic tertiary	0.43 (.23)	1.85	.065	0.97	1.54	2.44
English proficiency: none						
A1	0.42 (.18)	2.32	.020	1.07	1.52	2.16
A2	0.25 (.21)	1.21	.226	0.86	1.28	1.92
B1	0.39 (.24)	1.63	.103	0.92	1.48	2.36
B2	1.01 (.27)	3.81	< .001	1.64	2.76	4.64
C	1.08 (.35)	3.06	.002	1.47	2.95	5.91
Digital uses	0.54 (.12)	4.62	< .001	1.37	1.72	2.17
Technological internal efficacy	0.42 (.09)	4.73	< .001	1.28	1.51	1.80
Innovatory	0.25 (.07)	3.73	< .001	1.12	1.28	1.45
Amicability: very low						
Lower	-1.28 (.46)	-2.81	.005	0.11	0.28	0.68
Medium	-1.00 (.44)	-2.29	.022	0.16	0.37	0.87
Higher	-1.31 (.43)	-3.02	.003	0.12	0.27	0.63
Very high	-1.81 (.44)	-4.14	< .001	0.07	0.16	0.39
Sociability: very low						
Lower	-0.29 (.24)	-1.20	.232	0.47	0.75	1.2
Medium	-0.31 (.24)	-1.32	.185	0.46	0.73	1.16
Higher	-0.47 (.25)	-1.85	.064	0.38	0.63	1.03
Very high	-0.46 (.28)	-1.65	.100	0.36	0.63	1.09

Digital underclass–Self-reliants

Predictor	b (SE)	z	p	95% CI		
				min	OR	max
Intercept	-1.66 (.55)					
Gender: male–female	-0.15 (.12)	-1.24	.213	0.69	0.87	1.09
Parenthood	-0.26 (.13)	-2.05	.041	0.60	0.77	0.99
Concerns about own future prosperity: very low						
Lower	-0.09 (.24)	-0.39	.697	0.57	0.91	1.46
Medium	-0.22 (.23)	-0.97	.334	0.52	0.80	1.25
Higher	-0.44 (.24)	-1.87	.062	0.41	0.65	1.02
Very high	-0.39 (.28)	-1.41	.159	0.39	0.68	1.17
Full-time job	0.38 (.12)	3.28	.001	1.16	1.46	1.83
Education: lower secondary or lesser						
Upper secondary without graduation	0.10 (.21)	0.46	.643	0.73	1.10	1.67

Upper secondary with graduation	-0.10 (.20)	-0.51	.611	0.61	0.90	1.34
Academic tertiary	-0.43 (.22)	-1.98	.048	0.42	0.65	1.00
English proficiency: none						
A1	0.65 (.17)	3.85	< .001	1.37	1.91	2.66
A2	0.86 (.20)	4.30	< .001	1.59	2.35	3.48
B1	0.83 (.22)	3.71	< .001	1.48	2.30	3.57
B2	1.01 (.23)	4.37	< .001	1.74	2.74	4.31
C	1.31 (.32)	4.11	< .001	1.99	3.71	6.95
Digital uses	0.57 (.11)	5.13	< .001	1.42	1.77	2.21
Technological internal efficacy	0.33 (.08)	4.02	< .001	1.19	1.39	1.64
Innovatory	0.26 (.06)	4.31	< .001	1.15	1.30	1.47
Amicability: very low						
Lower	-0.86 (.37)	-2.32	.020	0.20	0.42	0.88
Medium	-0.68 (.35)	-1.95	.052	0.25	0.51	1.00
Higher	-0.95 (.35)	-2.72	.007	0.19	0.39	0.77
Very high	-1.08 (.36)	-2.99	.003	0.17	0.34	0.69
Sociability: very low						
Lower	0.23 (.20)	1.15	.249	0.85	1.26	1.85
Medium	0.30 (.20)	1.54	.123	0.92	1.36	1.99
Higher	0.33 (.22)	1.50	.132	0.91	1.39	2.13
Very high	0.45 (.26)	1.77	.077	0.95	1.57	2.60

Discussion

This study aims to determine what audiences can benefit from a convergent culture and how viewers differ depending on which strategies they choose to acquire online audiovisual content. Specifically, we focused on those who successfully relied on someone's help to get the films or TV series, and we compared them extensively to audience members who reached the same goal by themselves and audience members who could not access the audiovisual content either way.

In general, we can say that convergent viewers who could obtain audiovisual content accounted for 43% of our sample. Roughly a quarter of the participants could not get audiovisual content, and roughly the same number got it through the help of others. Thus, we can say that a significant proportion of Czech convergent viewers are limited in relation to the possibilities offered by digital technologies for the consumption of audiovisual content. At the same time, getting help from others appears to be a widely used strategy for audiences to participate in the audiovisual market.

We assumed (H1) that the Matthew effect would manifest itself among convergent viewers, that is, that socioeconomically better positioned audience members would be able to get more from digital technologies and that this would apply to both self-reliants and help-seekers (see Courtois & Verdegem, 2016). Similarly, we assumed that help-seekers would be different from the third group, that is, the digital

underclass. We hold the first hypothesis only partially: Self-reliants and help-seekers are not socioeconomically different, but at the same time, they are not different from digital underclass members who cannot cope with problems preventing them from finding films and shows. Therefore, the study shows that the differences between groups lie not so much in their socioeconomic status, but rather in how they can use their own digital skills, the attitudes they have toward digital technologies, the availability of potential help, and the personal capacity to initiate and use such help.

First, we found that higher education, according to our model, paradoxically increased a participant's odds of being classified as a digital underclass rather than a help-seeker. However, this relationship did not apply to the comparison between the digital underclass and self-reliants. We can therefore assume that higher education generally increases the chances of successfully bridging the digital divide (see Helsper, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020; van Dijk, 2020), but if an educated person encounters their own limits, the status given by higher education alone will not help to overcome them. At the same time, it might be possible that these participants have entered the digital underclass group because, with their knowledge and skills, they encounter more complex problems that they find it difficult to find someone more capable of helping them.

Second, our research suggested that seeking help with digital technologies is a specific discipline that requires different characteristics and circumstances compared with relying on oneself. For one thing, it has been shown that women have a higher odds of being help-seekers. This meets our assumption (H2) that the ability to activate help is still significantly influenced by gender-attributed roles (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Moreover, given the method used, we can argue that the role of gender in our study is clear of possible self-underestimation by women (see Helsper & Eynon, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, the availability of potential helpers in the participant's social networks increased the chances of successfully seeking help. As expected (H5), parents had higher odds of being included among help-seekers than among self-reliants or the digital underclass. Furthermore, help-seekers differed from the digital underclass in higher sociability—that is, in a basal willingness or openness to social interactions. They also differ from self-reliants in higher amicability, that is, in a stronger tendency to experience friendly interactions as pleasurable. Since it is the self-reliants to whom more amicable help-seekers turn, it may be that not all help-seekers ask for help precisely or primarily to compensate for their own abilities. This means that, in some cases, the primary motive may be interaction with friends rather than the need to get help, so asking for help becomes a rather good excuse for such interaction (see Francis, Kadylak, Makki, Rikard, & Cotton, 2018). Bearing in mind that help with digital technologies is not an isolated activity but one that occurs in various social situations (Nordlund, Sekki, Korvela, & Silvonen, 2019)—for example, family visits—it seems plausible.

However, in the case of the availability of colleagues for full-time employees (H6), the analysis suggests that rather than indicating a greater richness of connections, the variable points to at least some socioeconomic homophily shared by help-seekers and self-reliants, which gives them an advantage over the digital underclass. On the other hand, we did not observe any effect of unemployment, although it usually positively correlates with digital exclusion (see Asmar et al., 2020; Helsper, 2021; van Dijk, 2020).

Finally, self-reliants are, in line with our assumptions, distinct by their wider repertoire of digital uses and higher levels of technological innovativeness and technological self-efficacy (H3), while help-seekers and the digital underclass do not differ from each other in this respect. This may point to an important aspect of distinguishing user motivation. For example, Asmar et al. (2020) encountered the motivation to learn to use digital technologies among several of their communication partners. However, this motivation was mostly framed negatively as a desire to avoid greater social or economic exclusion. It seems logical that people motivated in this way would not see digital leisure activities as essential. As such, interest in digital technologies may play a specific role in the context of this study.

This leads us to conclude that, in the case of convergent audiences, help with digital technologies can indeed effectively bridge the digital divide: Whereas self-reliants employ abilities and attitudes to technologies that others do not possess, help-seekers, unlike the digital underclass, can then make up for this shortcoming by employing help from others as a coping strategy.

Limitations

To reduce the participants' burden, we used one-item inventories to measure sociability and amicability, which limited the reliability of our findings. For the same reason, we measured social capital only indirectly. In operationalizing potential social ties, we did not include friends who might play an important role in providing help. Therefore, further research into help-seekers should consider social capital more profoundly. A more nuanced understanding of the problem may be provided by capturing the size or composition of a social network, enabling the distinction between bonding social capital based mainly on strong ties and bridging social capital based on weak ties (see Putnam, 2001).

The marginality of the differences in socioeconomic aspects and age may be related to the choice of subpopulation and the particular topic we tackle. On the one hand, we examined the online population and, specifically, convergent viewers, whom we can generally assume can handle ICT. Similarly, we dealt with online viewership of audiovisual content, which has been significantly influenced by the advent of streaming platforms. With them, the abilities necessary for acquiring one's own cultural consumption have been lowered because these services build on rather simple and user-friendly interfaces. Nevertheless, our results are similar to the findings from Belgium (van Deursen & Helsper, 2018), where, among other things, the researchers explored the role of various variables for achieving personal outcomes, among which cultural consumption in general would most likely be included (see Helsper, 2012). In that research, the initially strong effects of age and income were lost when included in a more complex model, and the effect of education was weakened (van Deursen & Helsper, 2018). The same applies even to other observed dimensions of outcomes (economic, social, and cultural). These prior findings suggest that the results of our study are therefore not necessarily specific to online viewership.

The data used for this study were collected just before the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is an obvious question as to what extent our findings would have possibly differed if the data had been collected during or after the pandemic. According to Eurostat, the number of Czech viewers watching online content increased from 52.3% in 2018 to 63.5% in 2020 and then, after the pandemic, to 72.6% in 2022 (Eurostat, 2023). This may suggest that the shift to online watching was relatively stable during and after

the pandemic; thus, we did not witness any major disruption in online watching adoption. However, this seemingly optimistic scenario deserves further exploration. As we mentioned, digital and social inequalities can reinforce each other. Thus, we need to ask who the people are who have come to enjoy culture in the online space during the pandemic. As Reisdorf (2023) points out, using the example of American prisoners, antipandemic measures have exacerbated their already marginalized position. Cultural consumption is just one example where economically disadvantaged prisoners, in even greater social isolation than usual, cannot afford to pay for online content. The aforementioned Eurostat data show that paid VOD services are the segment whose growth accelerated during the pandemic in the Czech Republic. In 2018, only 4.4% of the Czech population paid for online streaming: two years later, 11.6%, and in 2022, 24.27% (Eurostat, 2023). Were those who had become used to going to culture mainly offline able to compensate for their needs in the online world, and were those who depended on the help of others able to use this help effectively, even though interpersonal contact was made more difficult?

Conclusion

The results of our study can be summed up by saying that in relation to seeking help with the online acquisition of audiovisual content, socioeconomic differences do not have the influence we expected. This means that help-seekers need to be treated as a distinctive group of users who differ from others in their attitudes toward their social environment and in their specific user strategies and practices. The key from our point of view is that help seeking should not be seen exclusively as an alternative strategy but rather as a complementary strategy. First, the impact of amicability shows that there can be other motives for using others' help. Second, we examined users of digital technologies who are already part of a convergent culture and who still seek help and effectively use it. Therefore, this is not only the strategy of nonusers. Online audiences can therefore not be seen as a monolithic entity characterized by a certain amount and quality of knowledge and capabilities but as a structured subpopulation whose members differ in their practices precisely by their willingness or ability to use social ties to achieve their goals. Therefore, for further research on digital inequalities, we believe that it is necessary to explore whether users of digital technologies choose or prefer individual or social, context-oriented usage strategies, and whether there are differences among help-seekers in regard to the kind of help they want to receive.

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