



## Intercultural Communication Models Revisited: The Richard Lewis Model, The Generation Alpha, and Beyond

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the contemporary relevance of traditional intercultural communication frameworks, focusing on the Richard Lewis Model, in understanding the emerging cultural dynamics of Generation Alpha and future Generations. Developed in the 1990s, the Lewis Model categorizes national cultures into linear-active, multi-active, and reactive behavioural types, offering a practical and widely used tool for interpreting cross-cultural communication patterns. Despite its continued value in explaining communication tendencies grounded in stable national contexts, the model faces limitations when applied to Generation Alpha, whose cultural formation is profoundly shaped by digital immersion. Their communication behaviours further diverge from traditional cultural categories due to the influence of online ecosystems. While the Lewis Model retains relevance in contexts involving intergenerational interaction or institutions structured around pre-digital cultural paradigms, its explanatory power is limited when interpreting Gen Alpha's microcultures. These emerging cultural formations are transnational, dynamic, and often detached from the nation-based behavioural stereotypes foundational to the model. As such, this paper argues that future adaptations of the Lewis framework should integrate digital-native dimensions, to more accurately capture the intercultural realities of digital-era generations, and address the identified gap by critically reassessing the Richard Lewis Model through the lens of Generation Alpha while incorporating the conceptual contributions of the Mirror Model proposed by J. Huisman.*

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural Communication, Intercultural Models, Gen Alpha, R. Lewis Model, the Mirror Model

### Introduction

Cross-cultural communication models have long served as foundational analytical tools for understanding differences in values, behaviours, and interaction styles across national and organizational contexts. Since the late twentieth century, influential frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's cultural dilemmas, Erin Meyer's *Culture Map*, and Richard Lewis's cultural typology have shaped both academic inquiry and professional practice in international management, education, and global collaboration. Developed in an era characterized by comparatively stable national cultures, face-to-face interaction, and institutionally bounded learning environments, these models reflect social conditions that preceded widespread digitization and platform-mediated communication.

Hofstede's model conceptualizes culture through empirically derived dimensions such as individualism–collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, offering a comparative national lens grounded in large-scale organizational data. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner extend this approach by framing culture as a series of value-based dilemmas through which societies negotiate universalism versus particularism and achievement versus ascription. Building on these traditions, Erin Meyer translates cultural differences into pragmatic managerial axes, including low- versus high-context communication and egalitarian versus hierarchical leadership styles. Despite their conceptual and practical contributions, these frameworks share a common assumption: culture is predominantly shaped by nation-state socialization and remains relatively coherent and stable across generations.

Richard Lewis's Model of Cross-Cultural Communication diverges from dimension-based approaches by emphasizing observable communicative behaviour. By categorizing cultures as linear-active, multi-active, or reactive based on interaction styles, time orientation, and conversational flow, the model offers an intuitive and behaviourally grounded framework. Its practical appeal has led to widespread adoption in diplomacy, international negotiation, and corporate training. However, the Lewis Model remains deeply anchored in national cultural typologies and implicitly assumes continuity of communicative norms within national boundaries—an assumption increasingly challenged by contemporary sociotechnical conditions.



The emergence of digitally native generations, most notably Generation Alpha (born approximately from 2010 onwards), raises critical questions regarding the continued applicability of traditional intercultural frameworks. As the first generation socialized entirely within digital ecosystems, Generation Alpha's cultural formation is shaped less by national institutions and more by global platforms, algorithmic curation, peer-driven content creation, and participatory online communities. Their communicative practices evolve within gaming environments, social media platforms, and short-form video cultures, where meaning is compressed, symbolic, rapidly shifting, and often detached from geographic or national reference points. These conditions complicate the assumption that cultural behaviour can be reliably inferred from national affiliation alone.

While existing literature acknowledges the transformative impact of digitalization on communication, comparatively little attention has been paid to how generational change disrupts nation-based intercultural models, particularly those—such as the Lewis Model—that rely on behavioural typologies rooted in pre-digital social structures. This constitutes a notable gap within intercultural communication and international management research. The challenge is not merely one of updating examples, but of reconsidering whether nation-centric explanatory logics remain sufficient for interpreting communication in digitally mediated, transnational, and generationally fragmented contexts.

In response to this limitation, recent conceptual developments—such as the Mirror Model proposed by J. Huisman—seek to extend traditional intercultural frameworks by incorporating competencies that reflect the realities of digital-native generations. The Huisman Mirror Model complements the Lewis typology by introducing a corresponding set of dimensions focused on internal, adaptive, and future-oriented capacities, including self-reflection, digital communication, collaboration, creativity, and ethical citizenship. Rather than replacing nation-based models, this mirrored approach reinterprets intercultural communication as a dynamic interplay between externally observable cultural behaviours and internally developed competencies shaped by digital environments and globalized experiences.

This paper addresses the identified gap by critically reassessing the Richard Lewis Model through the lens of Generation Alpha while incorporating the conceptual contributions of the Huisman Mirror Model. It argues that although the Lewis framework retains relevance in intergenerational interactions and institutionally structured environments shaped by pre-digital norms, its explanatory power is limited when applied to platform-centric, algorithmically mediated microcultures. By foregrounding generational dynamics, digital mediation, and fluid identity formation—and by integrating the mirrored competency-based perspective proposed by J. Huisman. This study contributes to ongoing debates on the future of intercultural communication theory and proposes conceptual directions for extending the Lewis framework to better capture the realities of digital-era generations.

## **1. Reassessing the Richard Lewis Model in the Context of Gen Alpha**

The Richard Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication has been widely used to interpret intercultural interaction by categorizing national communication styles into linear-active, multi-active, and reactive cultural types (Lewis, 2006). Its behavioural emphasis and practitioner-oriented design have made it particularly influential in international business, diplomacy, and cross-border collaboration. However, the emergence of digitally native generations—most notably Generation Alpha—raises important questions regarding the model's contemporary explanatory power, particularly in increasingly digital, transnational, and generationally fragmented communication environments.

### ***1.1 Explanatory Capacity of the Lewis Model for Gen Alpha***

The Lewis Model retains limited but context-dependent relevance for understanding Generation Alpha's communication behaviours. In institutional and intergenerational settings—such as formal education systems, family structures, and traditional organizational environments—communication norms continue to reflect national cultural patterns transmitted by older generations (Hofstede et al., 2010). In these contexts, Lewis's behavioural typologies remain useful for interpreting expectations related to hierarchy, conversational rhythm, and interactional etiquette.

However, when applied to Generation Alpha's peer-based and digitally mediated communication, the model's explanatory scope is significantly constrained. Lewis's framework presupposes relatively stable national cultures and prioritizes face-to-face interaction, synchronous dialogue, and linear conversational flows (Lewis, 2006). By contrast, Generation Alpha's communication is predominantly asynchronous, multimodal, and shaped by platform affordances rather than national conventions (Boyd, 2014; Danesi, 2017). Consequently, while the Lewis Model can explain inherited and institutionalized communication behaviours, it is insufficient as a standalone framework for interpreting the communicative practices emerging among digital-native cohorts. communicative identity



among Generation Alpha is fluid and situational. Individuals frequently shift styles depending on platform, audience, and algorithmic context, resulting in communicative behaviours that cannot be consistently aligned with a single national-cultural profile (Jenkins, 2006; Boyd, 2014). These dynamics fundamentally challenge the nation-centric assumptions underpinning traditional intercultural models.

### ***1.2 Towards a Theoretical Extension of the Lewis Model: The Mirror Model***

Generation Alpha's communication behaviours are more strongly shaped by digital platform cultures than by national cultural affiliation. While national culture continues to influence communication within formal and institutional settings, digital platforms increasingly function as primary sites of communicative socialization. This suggests that intercultural frameworks privileging nation-based explanations without integrating digital and generational dynamics risk misrepresenting the communicative realities of emerging generations.

The Mirror Model proposed by J. Huisman can be understood as a contemporary extension and critical reframing of the Lewis cultural typology, which originally categorized national communication styles into linear-active, multi-active, and reactive orientations based primarily on observable behavioural and interactional norms (Lewis, 2006). While the Lewis model has been influential in intercultural communication studies, critics argue that its reliance on relatively stable national profiles does not fully capture the fluid, hybridized, and digitally mediated identities emerging in the 21st century (Holliday, 2011). Huisman's Mirror Model addresses this gap by introducing complementary dimensions that reflect the competencies and socio-cultural conditions shaping Generation Alpha, a cohort growing up in an environment characterized by digital connectivity, globalization, and rapid knowledge exchange. In this mirrored framework, traditional dimensions such as task orientation, emotional expressiveness, and listening styles are balanced by internal and reflexive capacities including followship, self-reflection, and ethical awareness, suggesting a shift from externally observable cultural patterns toward internalized, adaptive capabilities.

Followship, for instance, repositions individuals not only as leaders or communicators but as responsive participants within distributed networks, aligning with contemporary leadership theories that emphasize shared responsibility and collaborative agency (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Self-reflection becomes crucial in navigating complex identity constructions, particularly in digital environments where individuals continuously curate and renegotiate their presence (Turkle, 2015). Furthermore, digital communication competence is foregrounded as a core dimension, recognizing that intercultural interaction increasingly occurs through mediated platforms requiring multimodal literacy and sensitivity to algorithmic contexts (van Dijck, 2013). The inclusion of cultural and ethical citizenship reflects the growing importance of global responsibility, sustainability awareness, and digital ethics in shaping how individuals engage across cultural boundaries (Ribble, 2015). Creativity and critical thinking are positioned as central cognitive skills that enable individuals to move beyond cultural stereotypes and engage in innovative problem-solving, thus countering the deterministic implications often associated with static cultural models (Deardorff, 2006). Collaboration and life skills further emphasize adaptability, resilience, and interpersonal competence, highlighting that effective intercultural actors must operate within dynamic, interdisciplinary, and often virtual teams.

Importantly, the Mirror Model suggests not replacement but augmentation: the original Lewis Model remains a useful for understanding macro-level cultural tendencies, while the mirrored dimensions capture micro-level, developmental, and future-oriented competencies. This dual-layer approach aligns with calls in intercultural scholarship to move beyond essentialist frameworks toward more processual and competency-based models (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In this sense, Huisman's model reflects a paradigm shift from "culture as fixed profile" to "culture as evolving practice," acknowledging that generational change, technological integration, and global interdependence necessitate new analytical tools. By embedding skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and ethical engagement within the intercultural framework, the Mirror Model not only updates the Lewis paradigm but also reorients it toward education, youth development, and lifelong learning in a digitally interconnected world. Consequently, this approach provides a more holistic and future-relevant understanding of intercultural competence, particularly suited to Generation Alpha's lived realities and the demands of an increasingly complex global society.

## **2. Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper set out to reassess the contemporary relevance of the Richard Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication in light of the emergence of Generation Alpha as the first fully digital-native generation.



The analysis demonstrates that while the Lewis Model remains conceptually robust for interpreting communication in institutionalized and intergenerational contexts, its underlying nation-centric assumptions limit its explanatory power in digitally mediated environments.

One key contribution of this study lies in highlighting generational socialization as a critical but underdeveloped dimension in intercultural communication theory. Existing models—including those of Hofstede (2010), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012), Meyer (2014), and Lewis (2006)—implicitly assume cultural continuity across age cohorts. The findings presented here challenge this assumption by illustrating how Generation Alpha's communicative practices are shaped less by national cultural heritage and more by participation in global digital ecosystems. In this context, the Huisman Mirror Model provides a useful conceptual extension by explicitly incorporating generationally shaped competencies—such as self-reflection, digital communication, and collaboration—that are largely absent from traditional frameworks.

Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of platform cultures as emergent cultural units. Unlike national cultures, platform-based microcultures are fluid, transnational, and algorithmically shaped, producing communicative norms that evolve at a pace incompatible with static cultural typologies (Boyd, 2014; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). This insight extends prior discussions of digitalization in communication studies by explicitly situating platforms as cultural environments rather than neutral channels. Huisman's Mirror Model aligns with this perspective by recognizing digital platforms not only as contexts of communication but also as formative environments that shape competencies such as multimodal literacy, ethical awareness, and adaptive interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, the proposed extension of the Lewis Model—operationalized through the Huisman Mirror Model—offers a way forward that avoids both cultural determinism and technological reductionism. Rather than privileging either national culture or digital context, the mirror framework conceptualizes communication behaviour as the outcome of an interaction between external cultural patterns; captured by the Lewis typology and internal, adaptive competencies captured by Huisman's Mirror Model dimensions. This dual-layered approach preserves the strengths of Lewis's behavioural focus while addressing the realities of contemporary intercultural interaction, where individuals operate simultaneously within inherited cultural frameworks and rapidly evolving digital environments.

By proposing a conceptual extension in the form of the Huisman Mirror Model, this paper responds directly to calls for updated intercultural frameworks capable of addressing contemporary global communication realities. The mirror model complements the Lewis typology by integrating generational dynamics, platform-based microcultures, and digitally shaped competencies, thereby offering a more holistic and future-oriented analytical lens. It emphasizes that intercultural communication in the digital era must be understood not only through observable behavioural patterns but also through reflective, adaptive, and cognitively embedded capacities.

Further research could also integrate AI-mediated communication, including human–AI interaction and algorithmically scaffolded learning environments, as Generation Alpha's communicative landscape will increasingly involve non-human interlocutors. In this context, the Huisman Model provides a useful foundation for exploring how competencies such as critical thinking, ethical awareness, and adaptive communication evolve in hybrid human–machine environments.

Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration between intercultural communication, digital sociology, and human–computer interaction research will be essential to further develop and empirically validate integrated models such as the Lewis–Huisman framework. Such efforts will strengthen the theoretical and practical relevance of intercultural communication models in an increasingly complex, digital, and generationally dynamic world

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