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Convergence and Cross-Platform Content Production

Thorsten Quandt & Jane Singer

The buzzword 'convergence' has become a synonym for rapid developments in media technology, markets, production, content, and reception. The term broadly refers to the blending or merging of formerly distinct media technologies, mainly based on digitization processes, though the issues extend beyond those raised by the technology itself. Journalism researchers have primarily focused on 'newsroom convergence', particularly in relation to changes in work routines and organizational structures connected to the production of content across media platforms. A related, and more recent, focus of investigation has expanded the meaning of the term to include a convergence of the roles of journalists and audience members within a networked digital environment.

This chapter begins by defining convergence and outlining some of its overall effects within the newsroom. We then turn to several key branches of convergence research, involving newsroom roles and routines, journalistic content, and the contributions of online users. We consider technological, social, and ethical aspects of convergence, concluding with suggestions for ongoing exploration.

1. Behind the buzzword: Approaches to convergence

Over the past twenty years, modern societies around the globe have confronted far-reaching transformations. Many were linked to rapid developments in computer technology and communication networks affecting nearly all aspects of social life, including the economy, politics, science, and the arts. The organization of public communication has been undergoing an especially dramatic shift. The once-stable system of mainstream mass media faces competition from multi-faceted, constantly mutating information and entertainment sources, to which people connect through interactive technologies such as computers, mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and gaming consoles. The term 'convergence' -- which originally meant simply an increasing correspondence between two phenomena or entities, such as two media technologies, that might come together at some future point -- has been stretched to cover all these rapid developments in media technology, markets, production, content, and reception.

The variety of possible interpretations led to the conclusion that 'convergence is a dangerous word!' as early as the mid-1990s (Silverstone, 1995) -- and the discussion has not become much more focused since. 'Convergence' has been used to describe the blurring of boundaries between fixed and mobile communications; broadcast, telephone, mobile, and home networks; media, information, and communication; and most notably, telecommunications, media, and information technology. In its media context, the term has also been applied to corporate mergers, technological developments such

as the integration of video on the Internet, and marketing efforts involving cross-promotion of media partners.

Although differing in many aspects, all of the approaches to convergence incorporate the idea of a process, and most stress the technological basis of developments. This has led to the common misunderstanding that technology ‘drives’ media change, a technological determinism that ignores social factors. Social scientists have instead stressed the human aspects of technological development, for instance describing how people use and make sense of new tools. Journalism practitioners and journalism studies scholars have concentrated primarily on the production of content for multiple media platforms and the associated changes in work routines, skills, and newsroom culture. For those in the field of journalism, then, the term ‘convergence’ has a particular specialized and socially relevant meaning (Quinn, 2005a).

However, some variations exist here, as well. In the United States, ‘converged’ news organizations have been defined mainly as those in which newspaper staff members create content for television and vice versa, typically with both also contributing to an associated website. The partnerships have generally resulted in something less than full convergence, which ideally entails planning and producing stories based on use of each medium’s strengths. Instead, most involve cross-promotion of the partnered products but retain elements of competition among journalists in the different newsrooms (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2005). This basic type of cross-media production can be witnessed around the globe as a relatively cautious attempt to cope with technological change and associated user expectations. The question of how to do journalism in a networked digital environment has been especially important for large media companies, which often have material for various media platforms— for instance, television and print -- and are interested in developing synergistic strategies for using it. The simplest solution is to ‘shovel’ content from one platform to another.

A more common – and more sophisticated – convergence approach has been to produce parallel content for two media platforms, of which one is digital. With this cross-platform content production, journalists are moving away from creating stories for a single medium; instead, they are gathering information in a content pool and disseminating it in a variety of formats, including not only the Internet but, increasingly, portable devices such as cellular phones and PDAs (s. fig 1). Journalists thus must learn to communicate effectively using a more multi-faceted vocabulary of media technologies than they did in the past.

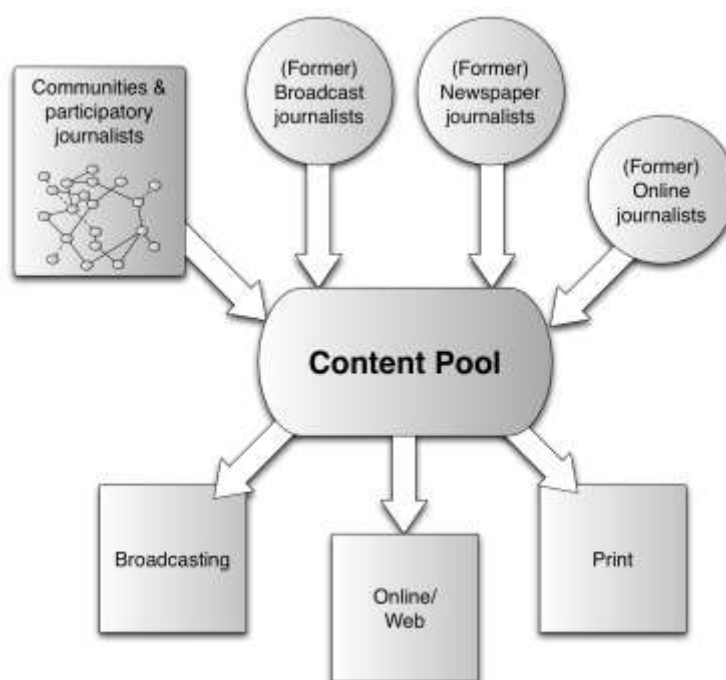


Fig. 1: Converged production via central content pool

Despite these substantial changes in the news production process, this model of convergence continues to depend on a central institution to collect and disseminate information. In many ways, this remains a ‘mass media’, top-down approach to publishing. However, convergence of media formats around an online delivery platform opens up the journalists’ work to the other core characteristic of the Internet: Not only is it based on digital information, and therefore capable of supporting multiple types of content, but it is, of course, a network – not just technologically but also in a social sense of connecting communicative agents, both individuals and institutionalized actors.

This latter change has far-reaching implications. Networks are not necessarily based on centralization; although they typically have central and peripheral parts, and are subject to power laws that affect information distribution, their structure is not hierarchical in the traditional sense (Monge & Contractor, 2003; Scott, 2000). Thus a ‘converged’ digital news product can also include information, in various formats, from users – people who in the past were a more or less passive audience for journalistic output. This broadening of the media space through user and community participation represents a form of convergence that is likely to be an even greater challenge to journalists than the one posed by the need to master new tools and techniques.

Because the Internet is both a technological and a social network, information can circulate from one communicator node to many others without the help of an institutional ‘mass medium’ (s. fig. 2). As a result, convergence between producers and consumers creates what Bruns (2005) calls ‘produsage’. This shift affects not just the way journalists go about their jobs but also the way they conceptualize those jobs and their roles within society. The nature of public communication also is subject to change, with the potential for greater inclusion of individuals and communities.

Some researchers envision a society in which institutionalized media have a diminishing role or even disappear altogether once every citizen in the network can obtain a personalized set of information from every possible source without the need for an institutionalized pre-selection authority called journalism. (Deuze, 2006a, 2006b; Jenkins, 2006; Nip, 2006; Haas, 2005; Hartley, 2000). Others question whether most people want such a radical model (Hanitzsch, 2006; Schönbach, 1997); after all, institutionalized forms of journalism guarantee a certain product quality, reduce the complexity

of social communication and the work necessary to create it, and offer society a shared meaning in the form of content that reaches mass audiences. Indeed, empirical signs of a very limited acceptance of participatory forms throughout many Western countries seem to support a critical position (Paulussen et al., 2007), as does a long-standing pattern of unfulfilled hopes that new media technologies will significantly expand participation in civic affairs (McQuail, 2000). Whether today's digital technologies will produce different social effects remains to be seen.

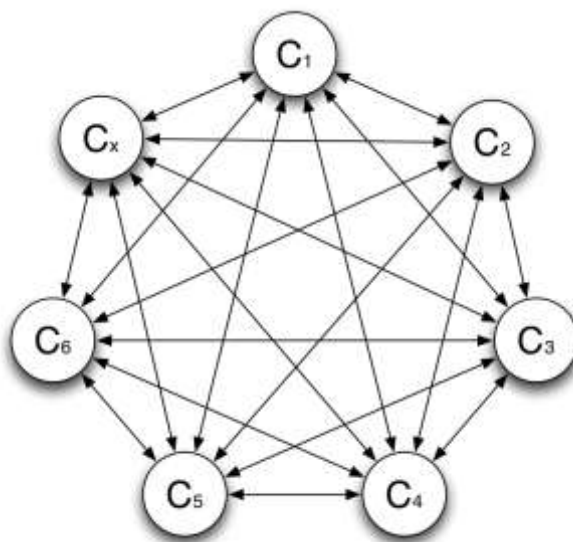


Fig. 2: Network communication

Regardless of what the future holds, the changes within journalism clearly are substantial, and recent developments that stress user input and the role of communities only increase the challenges. Scholarly investigation of journalistic convergence has therefore been multi-faceted. The following section looks more closely at research into three central aspects of convergence that directly affect journalists and journalism: its effects on newsroom roles and routines (2.1), as well as on the content that journalists create (2.2), and the implications of online users' participation in content production (2.3).

2. Convergence research: Studies and perspectives

Processes of media convergence are neither new nor exclusive to the Internet: Many leaps in media technologies over the years have led to integration of formerly distinct media products and functions. However, the pervasive nature of the current shift, as well as the maturation of journalism studies as a field of inquiry, mean that digital media have been scrutinized extensively and intensively throughout their development. For scholars, the result has been something of a paradigm shift, with rapidly evolving frames of reference and objects of observation. For journalists who until very recently produced content for a single media product that they alone controlled and to which they alone contributed, ongoing changes have meant new outlets, production structures, and work rules.

The impact of those changes has been both significant and variable. Indeed, convergence is best seen as what Boczkowski (2004) calls 'a contingent process in which actors may follow diverging paths as a result of various combinations of technological, local, and environmental factors' (p. 210). This section looks at scholarly research into these trends and factors. We begin with work that has explored the effects of cross-platform production on journalists' roles and routines.

2.1 Inside the newsroom: Roles and routines

Much of the scholarly examination of convergence has focused on its effects on the way journalists 'make news' (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Singer, 2004b). It builds on an extensive body of work in the sociology of news that has yielded insights into how journalists go about turning occurrences and, to a lesser extent, ideas and issues into a news product ready for dissemination to the public.

A related area of academic exploration has focused on journalists' societal roles, particularly in providing the information that citizens in a democracy need for effective self-government (Gans, 2003; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The gatekeeping role has perhaps been the one most explicitly affected by technological developments, as the Internet and associated digital technologies take control over at least some news gathering and selection routines out of journalists' hands. In a traditional media environment, the journalist selects a relatively limited number of stories for dissemination and rejects the rest, seeing to it that 'the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman, as the representative of his culture, believes to be true' (White 1950: 390). But in an environment in which anyone can publish virtually anything, the concept of discrete gates through which information must pass ceases to be a useful conceptualization of how 'news' reaches the public – and if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000). Related media roles, such as that of agenda setter, are similarly contested; the mass media audience has fragmented at the same time as the number of information providers has expanded exponentially. Moreover, the journalistic norms that have evolved to safeguard such roles, notably the fiercely guarded ethic of professional independence, are open to challenge in a participatory, networked information environment.

A number of studies of newsroom convergence have examined its effects on these roles and routines. The dominant methodologies have been ethnographic observations, typically in the form of case studies of selected news organizations, and questionnaires. One of the most consistent findings has been that many, though not all, journalists have approached convergence with considerable trepidation. A relatively early move toward convergence by the BBC in Britain was met with resentment and frustration from journalists who felt that their special skills were valued less highly than before and that the accompanying changes within the newsroom had unsettled 'professional status, traditional hierarchies, (and) career opportunities,' among other negative effects (Cottle & Ashton, 1999: 39). In Germany, early approaches to converging newsrooms reportedly led to professional and sometimes even personal differences between journalists with varying backgrounds. Some of the efforts to bundle the production for several media in one company or even an integrated newsroom resulted in severe organizational problems and subsequent economic failure; the 'electronic media' plans for the national German daily FAZ were one example (Quandt, 2005). In the United States, a national survey of newsroom managers and staffers in 2002 indicated journalists saw media companies, rather than either practitioners or the public, as the biggest beneficiaries of convergence (Huang et al., 2006).

There is a systemic reason for such problems with acceptance in the newsrooms: Convergence suggests a potential business model in which multi-skilled journalists produce more content for little or no increased cost to the organization (Quinn, 2005b). In general, journalists, trained to be skeptical, tend to distrust organizations where the benefits of required change are unclear (Killebrew, 2003) or even, to some, downright suspect.

It remains to be seen whether such critical or even oppositional perspectives represent merely initial, temporary skepticism or a lasting problem. In her case studies of converged newsrooms in the United States, Singer found that although some journalists were unhappy with specific aspects of convergence, they generally supported the idea and even believed converged operations could enhance their public service mission (Singer, 2004a; 2004b; 2006). Bressers and Meeds (2007),

focusing on the convergence of newspaper and online operations, suggest four areas that might help predict levels of integration: organizational and management issues, communication and attitudinal issues, physical proximity and equipment-sharing issues, and workflow and content issues. Taken together, these suggest a potentially significant shift in newsroom culture, and other scholarly investigation also has highlighted the importance of this change; the blending of cultural dynamics specific to individual media is seen as key to the success of convergence (Lawson-Borders, 2003).

Differing media routines, particularly those of print and broadcast journalists, have the potential to lead to problems including stereotyping, conflicts over staffing and time management, and difficulties related to news flow (Silcock & Keith, 2006). Singer (2004a) suggested that convergence was propelling print journalists, in particular, to undergo a process of resocialization, though many still thought of online and broadcast counterparts as distinctly separate and had little communication with them. Moreover, newsroom routines and structures did not translate seamlessly across platforms, and competitive tendencies could block even low-impact requests for cooperation or information sharing among convergence partners. A survey-based study by Filak (2004) indicated that print journalists saw their professional culture as superior to that of broadcast journalists – and broadcast journalists similarly saw their own culture as superior to that of print; moreover, these inter-group biases tended to be commonly held and believed by members of each news culture. He emphasized the need for news organizations seeking to converge their newsrooms to involve both groups in planning, in order to minimize the likelihood that the impetus is perceived as coming from an outgroup and thus rejected.

Scholars studying these and other complexities of managing this cultural change have argued that organizations must demonstrate their commitment to convergence as part of their mission and philosophy, making it simply part of the way they conduct business (Lawson-Borders, 2003). Clear communication from management that convergence is both supported and expected is essential (Quinn, 2005b). More specifically, Killebrew's (2003) overview of issues facing managers of converged newsrooms emphasized the need for thorough and specific staff training; a carefully designed action plan to foster understanding across all levels of the organization; and open, ongoing conversation to address any value discrepancies and dispel corporate myths.

Empirical studies have both underlined these needs and documented the not-infrequent failure to address them. A survey of U.S. newspaper executives highlighted the importance of inclusiveness of online staff at daily news planning sessions, as well as the use of a central news desk to handle stories for multiple platforms – something a majority of news operations do not yet actually have (Bressers, 2006; Bressers & Meeds, 2007). Singer (2004b) identified a perceived lack of training as a barrier to convergence, mainly because it fostered fear about the perceived complexity of the tools needed for cross-platform content production. Her studies also highlighted the importance of open interpersonal communication channels, particularly among journalists in partnered newsrooms, and described management attempts to alleviate concerns about motives and values by allowing journalists to define the extent of their own involvement – which tended to result in relatively low levels of participation in convergence activities, particularly in larger newsrooms.

One significant sticking point has involved compensation – or more accurately, the lack of it. Not surprisingly, news staffers who responded to Huang et al.'s (2006) national survey in the United States thought they should be paid for producing stories for different media platforms, but their newsroom bosses disagreed. Singer's case studies also indicated that resentment of what journalists saw as extra work for no extra pay affected both overall morale and openness to convergence in some newsrooms (Singer 2004b). Unions representing journalists have raised concerns about convergence in several countries, including the United States (Glaser, 2004) and Great Britain; in the

latter, the National Union of Journalists (2007) has negotiated ‘enabling agreements’ with media companies and issued convergence guidelines that address, among other issues, pay, time demands, and training.

2.2 Content Considerations: Multi format story telling

Another, related strand of research has sought to understand the effect of newsroom convergence on content, drawing primarily on a series of content analyses. Early research on the impact of the Internet as a ‘unified’ publication channel with multimedia capacities and interactivity potential implied that journalists would be free from the constraints of print and broadcasting, and thus able to invent new ways to tell stories that fully used the new medium’s potential (Heinonen, 1999; Hibbert, 1998; Kimber, 1997; Newhagen & Levy, 1998; Pavlik, 1999). However, when newsrooms actually began wrestling with convergence, concerns emerged about a decline in the quality of both reporting and disseminating the news due to time constraints, lack of adequate experience or training with new tools, and, ultimately, a decrease in staffing levels.

Attempts to empirically assess these concerns have yielded mixed results. Some findings support the fears. For instance, online journalists have to work in considerably shorter production cycles than their newspaper peers because of continuous deadlines and the pressure from competing news organizations for constantly updated news (Quandt, 2005). Because the fastest media outlet affects update cycles for the others, this ‘turbo journalism’ can influence news partners in converged environments. Furthermore, qualification levels in online journalism seem to be lower than in traditional print media, at least in some countries (Quandt et al., 2006)

A recent content analysis on both mainstream print and online publications of German media, along with a companion study of international websites in four countries, hinted at a very limited use of interactive or multimedia elements even in a ‘converged’ online environment. In the international comparison, only the BBC’s content included and unified film, audio, and print elements -- perhaps due to the existence of these files in the BBC content pool and not merely as a result of converged production. Furthermore, the online news products were limited in scope, focusing on national political news and influenced by national news specifics. These mainstream products did not fulfill the hopes that a converged technological platform would facilitate the disappearance of communicative limitations and cultural borders (Quandt, 2006). Similarly, an earlier study found that national boundaries and language zones were still structuring factors on the Internet (Halavais, 2000).

A content analysis by Huang et al. (2004) assessed the ‘quality’ of the *Tampa Tribune*, the newspaper partner in a pioneering U.S. convergence effort, across dimensions of enterprise, significance, fairness and balance, authoritativeness, and localization. The researchers found that three years into its convergence experiment, the paper had not suffered a loss of quality. However, *Tribune* journalists were not engaged in significant amounts of cross-platform reporting at the time of their study in 2003; rather, most of the convergence efforts involved sharing tips and information, as well as cross-promoting the television and online partner. Huang et al.’s national study (2006) indicated nearly 40 percent of U.S. journalists believed quality would decline – but the same number thought it would not. The researchers concluded that there was no reason to be concerned that future journalists trained on multiple media platforms would be jacks of all trades but masters of none or would produce worse reporting.

These findings echo those from several earlier studies of online content. For example, studies in the 1990s found that media organizations were not effectively exploiting opportunities to increase

interactivity (Schultz, 1999), nor were they significantly incorporating links, graphics or audio (Neuberger et al., 1998). The criticisms remained in studies conducted several years later, as well (Oblak, 2005; Rosenberry, 2005; for a longitudinal study with a more positive verdict, see Greer & Mensing, 2004).

However, some of this criticism is based on problematic assumptions. Much of the research on online content has focused on the sites' formal characteristics, asking questions about the nature and amount of technological interactivity or multimedia elements. The underlying premise of such an approach implies an optimal use of the options inherent in the technology: The more communicative channels and capacities are fully exploited, the 'better' the medium's use. Yet previous communication research has shown this assumption to be wrong. Media effects research indicates that media with a limited number of communication channels (such as newspapers) can be superior in many respects to multi-channel media (such as television). Similarly, media richness theory implies that the medium's communicative capacities must match tasks or communicative problems in order to be optimally effective, so maximizing the options is not necessarily the best approach (Daft & Lengel, 1984; 1986). These findings suggest that the somewhat limited use of 'converged' multimedia and interactive options in online journalism may be an economically and socially sensible choice, in line with market conditions and user expectations, rather than an indication of lagging development.

The discussion also neglects other developments of interest, such as the ways in which advances in media technologies might change the context of media use. For example, mobile Internet access could have an impact on the integration of media into everyday routines, influencing the reception of journalistic content. The so-called 'triple play' integration of telecommunications, broadband applications, and entertainment media can be extended to 'quadruple play' with the addition of mobile services. In addition, both hardware companies such as Apple and software companies such as Microsoft are trying to combine entertainment and media functions with computer applications in domestic networks, where a 'digital hub' seamlessly connects a range of devices and information sources – a revival of earlier 'smart home' ideas (Aldrich, 2003; Harper, 2003). This change of domestic environments and information channels will likely change the way users think about content.

Moreover, the availability of computer and network technology in the domestic space gives users another opportunity to produce and distribute content themselves. We look at the implications of this 'user generated content' in more detail next.

2.3 User Generated Content: The (hyper)active audience revisited

As described above, much of the literature on convergence has been focused on the newsroom, considering the people and the products associated with conventional journalism produced by mainstream news organizations. But the changes instigated by the shift to a networked digital media environment are more complex. A consideration of convergence would be incomplete without acknowledgement of the fact that not only are journalists producing content for multiple platforms, but users are, too – and some of that user-generated content is being disseminated through traditional media outlets. Journalists and media organizations migrating online must also deal with this fundamental change.

Growth of the Internet, along with advances both in broadband technology and user-friendly web production software, means more people have attained the tools to produce content with relative

ease. An early sign of this enhanced accessibility was the emergence of the weblog or blog. Blogs were initially regarded as a 'diary' format of no journalistic interest, but their larger implications and impact on public communication became apparent during crises, wars, and political contests in the early to mid-2000s. Bloggers began reporting directly from places where events occurred; they also contributed to political debates, both as information sources and public voices.

Discussion is ongoing about the overlap between blogs and journalism, and between bloggers and journalists (Bruns, 2005; Lowrey, 2006; Neuberger, Nuernbergk & Rischke, 2007; Nip, 2006). Findings on the relationship between blogs and journalism are widely inconsistent (Neuberger, Nuernbergk & Rischke, 2007). Bloggers are seen as sources for journalists and as competition; blogs are portrayed as everything from a complementary function to an irrelevant phenomenon to a danger due to the lack of quality control, the possibility of manipulation, and so on. However, there seems to be some consensus that blogs are distinct from professional journalism and that although they are unlikely to replace journalism, they are likely to alter it. Elements advanced by bloggers and of increasing importance for mainstream journalists include a conversational writing style, immediacy, and a direct connection to readers. Yet few bloggers seek to reach a mass audience or to be journalists themselves; their motivations tend to be more personal (Neuberger, Nuernbergk & Rischke, 2007). Little of the information they provide is exclusive; most of it comes from elsewhere on the Internet, commonly from mainstream media. Still, blogs can be influential and can even fulfill an agenda setting function for both journalists and members of the public (Haas, 2005).

In addition to blogs, other forms of collaborative or user-generated content have drawn increasing public and scholarly attention for their importance to journalism. The shift from institutionalized control over the publishing processes to user-driven offerings has been noted for some time, but it became a focal point of interest with the advent of the idea of 'Web 2.0' (O'Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 emphasizes social aspects in the latest generation of web applications, including social networking software and collaborative formats. This socio-technological convergence brings together an older tradition of participatory, activist media and Internet publishing, pushed both by the user's expectations and technological advances. Collaborative formats include Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr, and MySpace, which are not necessarily journalistic in nature, but also user-driven online news such as OhMyNews, Indymedia, and Wikinews. These social network news services offer much broader content than individual blogs.

By the mid-2000s, some mainstream media were beginning to include user generated content in their own online news sites, such as *jetzt.de* in Germany; others launched experimental platforms that were mostly or fully community based, such as *HasseltLokaal* in Belgium. However, as of this writing, the overall adoption of collaborative formats is generally low in the United States and many parts of Europe (Domingo et al. 2007).

Yet as outlined above, striking possibilities exist for a truly participatory media culture that breaks the publication monopoly of institutionalized media. All stages of the communicative process can be taken over by citizens, at least in principle. Access to information is much more open, and selection and filtering mechanisms are widely available. Processing, editing, and writing tools are inexpensive and easy to obtain, as are the hardware and software needed for publishing and distribution. Participation can happen during the news gathering and writing process, in the organization and display of news, in the coordination and control of the editorial processes, and in the technological delivery of information. As of the mid-2000s, most participation was occurring at the levels of news gathering and writing, but examples also had begun to appear of moderators or communities taking over coordination and control functions, for instance with the help of reputation systems.

Observers have wondered whether these trends toward socially converging media environments mean more democracy and public inclusion in the decision-making and communication processes (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). This question has to be tackled in the context of societal developments, and points beyond our discussion of changes inside journalism triggered by convergence.

3. Beyond the middle range: Social and ethical implications

The issues of adoption and implementation described above fall mostly within the theoretical 'middle range' (Merton, 1957: 5) of concepts grounded in data analysis and lying between minor working hypotheses and grand theoretical speculation. But many aspects of convergence, such as the generation of journalistic content for multiple media platforms and the incorporation of content created by people who are not journalists, raise broader issues. Convergence thus not only affects the inner workings of journalism; it also has an impact on other societal spheres -- including political, economic, and cultural ones -- that influence and are influenced by the existence and functions of journalism.

For example, like all Internet users, political and economic actors -- from candidates to corporations -- can bypass journalists in order to communicate directly with others in the network. Similarly, journalists have expanded and easier access to original source materials. This access can speed up the journalistic process and foster openness. However, it can also have negative effects; lazy journalists may simply copy and paste online information, and if 'googling' counts for fact-checking, the door is open for manipulation and an erosion of quality standards. Furthermore, economically driven downsizing of newsroom staff can lead to news production that is no longer based on original investigation.

These potential dangers hint at possible changes in journalistic ideologies, which can also be discussed in the context of the broader cultural sphere (Allan, 1999; Chalaby, 2000; Hanitzsch, 2007; Hartley, 1996). For instance, there is an ongoing discussion about copyright issues and intellectual property in converging information environments. Collaborative websites such as YouTube and Wikipedia contain material that has been copied from other sources; the large scale of these copyright breaches and the vast amounts of readily available free online content raise the possibility of a growing tolerance for copy and paste as a valid means of content production.

Indeed, political, economic, and cultural changes raise a host of ethical issues. We briefly turn to a few that involve journalistic ethics, which guide their relations to the broader society. While ethics can be 'a flag behind which to rally the journalistic troops in defense of commercial, audience-driven or managerial encroachments' as well as an emblem of legitimacy (Deuze, 2005: 458), the normative principles that guide practitioners remain important criteria for evaluating ongoing change.

Although all journalists emphasize public service as an overarching ethical norm and professional commitment, observers have expressed concerns about the potential of convergence to undermine this journalistic mission. Among the issues raised have been conflicts of interest created by new corporate partnerships (Davis & Craft, 2000), a blurring of boundaries between commercial and editorial operations (Williams, 2002), and an over-emphasis on cross-promotion rather than enhanced news coverage (Ketterer et al., 2004).

Journalists themselves do not necessarily share these concerns. Singer's case studies in 2003 indicated that many practitioners see newsroom convergence as facilitating the expression and even expansion of their public service role by enabling the audience to get news in multiple, complementary ways and to obtain a richer account informed by more resources. However, there

were doubters. Some journalists said reduced competition diminished their incentive to hustle to get a story; others feared a drift toward overly sensationalistic or entertainment-oriented news judgment and an excess amount of time or space devoted to promotional efforts rather than civically desirable information (Singer, 2006).

In addition to concerns associated with converged newsrooms, the transition to a converged information space – a network in which everyone has the ability to produce and disseminate content – also raises a number of ethical issues. Journalistic autonomy, particularly over determining the appropriateness of practitioners' behavior, is called into question in a media environment filled with people more than eager to serve as watchdogs on the watchdogs (Singer, 2007). Similarly, the nature of journalistic accountability shifts. A request that the public simply trust the journalist's claims to be accurate, complete, and even-handed in gathering and presenting the news shifts to an expectation, if not a demand, that the journalist use the capabilities of the network to provide evidence for those claims (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007). More broadly, the transition from a gatekeeping role to a place within a network entails a change in the rationale behind such journalistic norms as truth-telling and fairness. The ethical principles no longer can be based on a belief that without the journalist, the public will not receive truthful or unbiased information and thus will necessarily be misinformed. Rather, the ethical principles are vital because they form the foundations of social relationships – and a network is constituted of such relationships (Nel, Ward & Rawlinson, 2007; Singer, forthcoming).

4. Outlook: Technology, convergence and the future of journalism

The converging media environment thus poses a number of challenges and opportunities for journalism practitioners and scholars, who face both methodological and conceptual issues. For instance, the standard tool of content analysis becomes far more complicated not only because of the dynamic nature of the medium but also because of the inclusion of many more types of sources than in the past – including users as well as journalists. Network analysis offers fruitful avenues for exploration of all forms of digital communication (Tremayne, 2004) but to date has been used by relatively few journalism scholars. In general, new or significantly revised research methods will be needed to explore and understand the different forms of news and the sorts of sources providing it.

Major conceptual work also is needed. Journalism researchers will need to define new roles and new stages in the communication process to accommodate an expanded range of information collectors, editors, and disseminators. Scholars who focus on media audiences also must revise their thinking as lines separating information producers and consumers continue to blur. Some members of the audience will become increasingly involved in the news-making process, but others will continue to remain relatively passive consumers of information. In general, definitions of audiences that are simultaneously more inclusive and more finely tuned will need to be developed and tested.

Ongoing industry changes also affect journalism at a structural level in ways that need to be more clearly understood. Journalism organizations are reconfiguring or even reinventing themselves as multimedia companies with different patterns of information gathering and dissemination than in the past. At a broader level, the function or role of journalism in society is open to redefinition as practitioners wrestle with issues of identity and occupational turf (Lowrey, 2006) in the new media environment. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in tracing the implementation and effects of fundamental industry and ideological change.

Indeed, the concerns of journalism scholars are necessarily interwoven with those of practitioners. For instance, a world in which anyone can be a publisher necessarily raises the question of whether anyone can also be a journalist. Both practitioners and scholars thus are wrestling with distinctions between bloggers and journalists, between ‘citizen journalism’ and professional journalism, and between news aggregators such as Google News and mainstream media outlets that produce their own information packages. Even within the more narrow definition of ‘convergence,’ one that focuses on the technological and cultural changes taking place within established newsrooms, concerns have arisen about pressures on both time and resources necessary to produce quality content.

We suggest that journalism in the future is both distinct from other forms of digital content and integrated with those forms to a far greater extent than in either the past or the present. It will be distinct to the extent that journalists can adhere to professional norms such as a commitment to fairness and independence from faction (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001), as well as the extent to which media organizations can continue to provide the resources to support original information-gathering. Amid a cacophony of voices, mainstream news organizations still wield enormous power through both the collective capabilities of their staffs and their own economic heft within their communities – professional and commercial power that individuals simply do not possess and, as individuals, will not possess in the foreseeable future. Producing news across a range of platforms, as almost certainly will be required of journalists sooner rather than later, will enhance both the strength of the stories being told and the reach of those stories.

But in order for this to happen, journalism of the future also must integrate new formats and new voices to a far greater extent than is currently the case. Journalists in today’s converged newsrooms are only beginning to realize the opportunities of this multimedia environment, let alone to harness the capabilities inherent in the various technologies now available to them. In many places, they are still at the stage of learning how to use animation tools or edit video. A new generation of ‘digital native’ journalists who are fluent in the languages of multiple communication technologies will need to apply their skills and knowledge in ways that can match the needs of particular stories and particular media platforms.

More important, tomorrow’s journalists will need to integrate the voices and viewpoints of others within the network to a far greater extent than is currently the case. Journalists will never again control the flow of information in the way they once did; a media environment in which only a very few voices had an opportunity to be heard – and those only with the permission of a media gatekeeper -- is gone for good. Journalism in a network must acknowledge that they will retain power only to the extent that they share it; without facilitating the broad exchange, and not merely the delivery, of information, they will find themselves becoming increasingly irrelevant to the conversation taking place around them. The real power of convergence is in relinquishing the power of controlling information and fostering the power of sharing it.

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