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3.3. Ethnography of Newsroom Convergence

Jane B. Singer
University of Central Lancashire / University of Iowa

Newsroom convergence offers a case study for the value of the case study: It is an ideal subject to explore through ethnographic methods that can comfortably mix and match participant observations, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and subject surveys (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). This chapter examines why the topic so readily lends itself to an ethnographic approach, illustrates how researchers are using it to understand this profound change in newsroom culture, then looks more closely at one series of ethnographic studies. It concludes with a brief consideration of the ongoing utility of ethnography as newsroom products and practices continue to evolve.

"Newsroom convergence" is a problematic term, both because it has fallen out of favor in recent years and because it includes many different activities and workplace structures. It is used here to describe a change from single-platform journalism – creation of content for a newspaper or a television news program, for example – to cross-platform journalism involving more than one medium. In reality, news organizations may lie anywhere on a continuum from cross-promoting stories to planning and producing coverage keyed to the strengths of each medium (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2005). Virtually all news organizations in the developed world now provide content for a traditional media outlet and an affiliated website. A relatively small subset, the focus of much convergence research in the United States, are asking journalists to generate content for three media – typically, television, a newspaper, and a website. Organizations that own both print and broadcast or cable outlets in a market are behind many of these efforts; others involve partnerships between unaffiliated

newsrooms. Either way, journalists in the newly converged newsrooms previously competed for stories rather than cooperating to produce them.

More broadly, however, “convergence” is occurring even in newsrooms with no external partners at all. Given the rapid development of broadband and video technology, the addition of a website to the news mix makes nearly all journalists cross-platform storytellers. Television journalists must write text versions of stories they previously told with sounds and images. Print journalists must gather, edit, and incorporate audio and video material. Whether or not these television journalists contribute to a newspaper, or print journalists to a television news program, they must learn to communicate effectively using a more extended vocabulary of media technologies than before.

Such changes present many challenges for journalists – and interesting questions for scholars. The next section outlines why the ethnographic approach offers an opportune way to probe for answers by highlighting key attributes of this flexible and multifaceted method.

A Good Fit

Qualitative ethnographic methods, drawing on participant observations and in-depth interviews of working journalists, have been widely used to explore newsroom convergence. Surveys also have been common, and while some such studies are clearly not ethnographic, others are; quantitative data collected during ethnographic observation are included in the fieldwork concept that is central to the approach (Delamont, 2004).

This section looks at several hallmarks of ethnography and considers their fit with scholars’ desire to understand how convergence affects journalists’ practices and perceptions, in turn shaping an emerging identity of multimedia journalism (Deuze, 2004).

Ethnographers study the meanings of behavior, language, and interactions among members of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 1998). The centrality of culture is the heart of the ethnographic approach, particularly as applied to groups facing restructuration and a loss of traditions that may erode earlier certainties (Willis & Trondman, 2000).

This cultural focus of ethnography is crucial to the study of how journalists perceive and adapt to changes in the way they make news. Media managers and practitioners have declared their

occupational culture the hardest thing to change and “cultural resistance” the biggest hurdle to overcome (Thelen, 2002, p. 16). Convergence scholars have almost universally been concerned with how journalists are negotiating this challenging cultural transition (Jenkins, 2006)..

Technological change affects how journalists do their work; the content they produce; the structure of their work environments; and their relationships with sources, competitors, the public and one another (Pavlik, 2000). Although ethnographers largely neglected technological dimensions of newsroom culture in the Internet’s early years (Boczkowski, 2004a), recent case studies have explored how changing production modes and methods affect the quality of news reporting (Huang et al., 2004) and journalists’ perceptions of their public service role (Singer, 2006). Silcock and Keith (2006) focused on language issues related to efforts to converge print and broadcast news operations.

Ethnographic methods put the researcher in the middle of the topic under study: The researcher goes to the data rather than the other way around (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). The primary aim is “to describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996, p. 6).

Fieldwork has been central to the study of newsroom convergence, with researchers observing work flows and talking with journalists within their work environments. The News Center in Tampa, Florida -- where Media General invested \$40 million in the late 1990s to build a “temple of convergence” (Colon, 2000) housing print, broadcast, and online news operations – has been a particular place of academic pilgrimage. At least half a dozen ethnographies published in refereed journals have focused on convergence in Tampa either alone or in combination with a small number of other news organizations.

Research within converged newsrooms has produced a deep understanding of what the change has meant to those engaged with it. For instance, Boczkowski’s close observations and extensive interviews within three news organizations led to his insight that convergence is “a contingent process in which actors may follow diverging paths as a result of various combinations of technological, local, and environmental factors” (2004a, p. 210). Lawson-Borders (2003) amassed more than 36 hours of taped in-depth interviews during her fieldwork in converged newsrooms,

enabling her to develop a set of best practices for news organizations seeking to assess and implement the change.

Ethnographic studies are characterized by a need to remain open to elements that cannot be codified at the time of the study. This openness is necessary if researchers are to discover how the people they are studying understand and represent the world (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004).

Scholars rarely write about their own thought processes, so specific examples of ways in which this exploratory mind set has informed the study of newsroom convergence are elusive. However, the desire to convey subjective understanding of convergence is often referenced explicitly in abstracts and other authorial framing devices. Dupagne and Garrison (2006) frame their study as an attempt “to understand the meaning of this media convergence experiment, the changes in the newsroom culture, and the type of job skills necessary in a convergent newsroom” (p. 237). Silcock and Keith (2006) say their goal is to determine how convergence is defined by the journalists involved in it; Singer (2006) similarly describes a desire to understand journalists’ perceptions.

A number of convergence ethnographies also recommend quantitative follow-ups, indicating their initial work has sought to identify concepts to which more narrowly formulated approaches might subsequently be applied. Dupagne and Garrison (2006) call for a survey of journalists in converged newsrooms “to determine the perceived importance of traditional and convergence job skills” (p. 252). Lawson-Borders (2003) and Singer (2004a; 2006) both recommend longitudinal work involving qualitative and quantitative methods to track the evolution of convergence.

Ethnography typically involves in-depth investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just a single case rather than trying to represent general trends (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The purpose is to represent not the world but the case, a bounded and integrated system with identifiable patterns of behavior (Stake, 2005).

News organizations nicely fit this definition, and most of the published ethnographic work related to newsroom convergence draws on one to four cases. Changes in journalists’ behavior patterns have been of particular interest. Examples of single-case ethnographic studies include Cottle and Ashton’s (1999) exploration of early moves toward convergence at the BBC; Dupagne and

Garrison's (2006) consideration of the *Tampa Tribune*; and Meier's (2007) work at an Austrian news agency. Other convergence studies have looked at two (Silcock & Keith, 2006), three (Lawson-Borders, 2003; Boczkowski, 2004a, 2004b), or four (Singer, 2004a; 2004b; 2006) news organizations.

The BBC study offers a good example of the detail that close examination of a single case can provide. Observation, interviews, and document analysis highlighted complex changes in professional status and skills, newsroom hierarchies, career opportunities, and traditional medium demarcations (Cottle & Ashton, 1999). Importantly, the newsroom fieldwork helped undermine the simplistic notion of technological determinism by incorporating issues of culture, environment, and situated experience, themes taken up subsequently by other researchers in this area, notably Boczkowski (2004a, 2004b).

Ethnographic approaches are useful for understanding "debates among organizational stakeholders about the most efficient, effective, equitable, and humane means of achieving their various goals" (Miller, Dingwall, & Murphy, 2004, p. 337). They are especially useful in exploring issues of process and explaining how outcomes are or are not achieved.

For journalists, motives behind convergence have been a central topic of debate. Many have seen it as part of a long-term corporate goal to cut costs related to the expensive news-gathering process. Newsroom executives have denied this motive, and indeed a lot of money has been spent on convergence – yet newsroom layoffs continue apace, and new hires are expected to possess multimedia skills. Few journalists are being directly compensated for additional work needed to create cross-platform content; instead, despite concerns of individuals and union leaders (Glaser, 2004; National Union of Journalists, 2007) convergence-related tasks have been positioned as a new component of an existing job. Ethnographies have helped foreground the opposing views surrounding these issues. For instance, while one editor attributed an increase in published wire stories to greater reader interest in international news (Huang et al., 2004), a reporter described the bottom line of convergence as "fewer reporters, less real news gathering" (Friend & Singer, 2007: p. 216).

An ethnographic approach also has enabled diverse views to emerge about the core journalistic value of public service -- and highlighted management's strategy of positioning convergence as a way to better serve an audience seeking news on demand from multiple sources. It thus has offered insights into stakeholder negotiations over a deeply contested issue: the stability of

underlying principles amid significant structural and social change. "If [convergence] is about economic efficiency, then it isn't ever going to take hold in the newsrooms. If it's about quality journalism and doing things better with more tools, then it will," one manager said (Singer, 2006, p. 40). Interviews with journalists indicated most had bought this argument that convergence facilitated expression and even expansion of their public service role; relatively few expressed concern about the potential for news monopolization (Singer, 2006).

Finally, *ethnography and journalism bear a close relationship*, most obviously through their shared information-gathering methods of observation and interview but also in more complex ways. Denzin (1997) argues that ethnography involves storytelling that calls into question the nature and use of fact and fiction, issues with which journalists have long wrestled. Allen (1994) explores the idea of "media anthropology" as a way for journalists to communicate richer and more holistic narratives to their audiences, a capability facilitated by expanded media platforms.

The richness of interview data from ethnographic studies of newsroom convergence confirms that the method is one with which journalists are especially comfortable. Having spent careers fine-tuning their ear for a good quote, they know well how to deliver one. Could there be a pithier summation of the culture clashes between journalists in print and television newsrooms than this: "They've got the blow-dryers, we've got the investigative reporters" (Singer, 2004b, p. 844)? Or this description of the difficulty of negotiating culture-specific linguistics, offered by a television news producer who became a newspaper editor: "You can be the slot. It's a noun. It's a verb. It's an adjective. It's everything. And I have no idea what the hell it means. I know it's the cheese on the copy desk. Beyond that, I have no idea" (Silcock & Keith, 2006, p. 616). Or this insight into the life of a multimedia journalist and the potential toll on reporting: "You're filing for TV, you're filing for the radio, maybe 24-hour news want(s) to talk to you. When the bloody hell do you sit in the court and actually cover the case" (Cottle & Ashton, 1999, pp. 36-37).

As the examples suggest, ethnographic studies typically accommodate a narrative writing style that foregrounds individuals and their views in ways that are far more difficult with quantitative methods – much as interpretive or analytical journalism accommodates an authorial stance that goes beyond the detached objectivity of straight news reporting. Unbounded storytelling spaces afforded

by the Internet also give journalists greatly expanded options to tell stories in meaningful ways. Indeed, as instant information becomes ubiquitous and as journalists are called on to more richly contextualize the news -- to shift from gatekeepers to sense-makers -- new outlets for ethnographic interpretation arise. It is hard to think of a topic for which the needs and interests of researcher and research subject so thoroughly overlap and inform one another.

Uses of Ethnographic Methods to Study Newsroom Convergence

This section offers an overview of research into newsroom convergence over the past decade, much of it cited earlier but revisited here with a focus on methodological value. First are several key studies that have relied on qualitative fieldwork. They are followed by a quick look at surveys and content analyses, then by additional work that has combined traditional ethnographic methods with quantitative data collection.

Qualitative Ethnographies

A number of newsroom convergence studies have drawn exclusively on traditional ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. Those summarized here are notable for their demonstration of the strengths of the method.

One of the earliest explorations of journalists' responses to the transition from a traditional, single-platform newsroom to one that demanded creation of content for multiple outlets was an ethnographic study of the BBC Newscentre in Bristol, published in 1999. It highlighted the ways in which news production technologies are culturally shaped by -- and embedded within -- corporate and professional contexts and practices. The researchers' assessment was that the transition caused additional pressures and frustrations for BBC journalists but overall had little effect on news output. Rather, journalists' existing approaches to news, derived from traditional newsroom culture and their socialization within it, were driving their actions in the new environment. "Despite the professional turmoil generated by the pressures and new working practices of multi-skilled, multi-media production, the news appears pretty much business as usual" (Cottle & Ashton, 1999, p. 41).

A few years later, Lawson-Borders (2003) focused on negotiations among organizational stakeholders in converging newsrooms. Drawing on literature from innovation management and

diffusion of innovations theory, she used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis from news organizations in Chicago, Dallas, and Tampa to develop a seven-pronged framework of “best practices.” She highlighted the value of allowing elements to emerge from the research rather than predefining the relevant concepts; her categories of best practice, from an emphasis on cooperation to the centrality of the audience member, stemmed from the data rather than being imposed in advance.

Boczkowski’s (2004a, 2004b) work highlighted the value of intensive study of a small number of cases. In selecting news organizations in Texas, New Jersey, and New York, he sought cases that differed in important ways in their approaches to multimedia and interactivity, the dimensions of particular interest. He immersed himself in these newsrooms, spending four to five months on each case and racking up 700 hours of observation, 142 interviews with subjects representing various hierarchical levels and occupational roles, and analysis of a wide range of documents. The resulting publications (Boczkowski, 2004a, 2004b) show how occupational and organizational environments affect journalistic products and processes in unique ways: Terms such as “convergence” are linguistic shorthand for a great many activities that affect, and are affected by, specific individuals.

Silcock and Keith (2006), studying converged newsrooms in Tampa and Phoenix, were concerned with issues of culture in general and language in particular. They sought to understand not only what convergence means to journalists involved in it but also how participants negotiate the difficulties of communicating without a shared cultural vocabulary. Using a snowball sampling technique to select newsroom informants who could provide information-rich data, they found the journalists, in effect, compromised: They adopted a few words of each other’s jargon without necessarily understanding the terms fully. Like Boczkowski, and as suggested by Dailey and his colleagues (2005), they found considerable variation within the umbrella concept of convergence, stemming from cultural differences at individual organizations (Silcock & Keith, 2006).

Quantitative Studies of Newsroom Convergence

Quantitative work complements the ethnographic studies of primary interest here. For example, Ketterer and his colleagues (2004) used a content analysis to examine the effects of convergence on the content of previously competitive print and broadcast media outlets in Oklahoma City. They found that despite corporate claims and branding efforts, there was little real cooperation

between the two organizations. Nor was there evidence that the partners were meeting their stated goal of increasing in-depth news coverage.

Several U.S. surveys have addressed the cultural issues of newsroom convergence with which straight ethnographies are chiefly concerned. The widely cited “convergence continuum” -- which posits a range of activities from simple cross-promotion to full convergence, the stage at which partners draw on the strengths of each medium to cooperate in planning, gathering, and disseminating the news – was based on surveys of newspaper editors and television news directors (Demo, Spillman, & Dailey, 2004/2005). A survey of newspaper executives by Bressers and Meeds (2007), focusing on the convergence of print and online operations, highlighted the importance of including online staffers at daily news planning sessions, as well as use of a central news desk (which few news operations actually had) to handle stories for multiple platforms (Bressers, 2006).

In another national survey, Huang and his colleagues (2006) found that nearly 40 percent of U.S. journalists believed convergence would lead to declining quality – but the same number thought it would not. Filak (2004) found that print journalists saw their professional culture as superior to that of broadcast journalists – and broadcast journalists similarly saw their own culture as superior. He emphasized the need for both groups to be involved in convergence planning to minimize likelihood of its rejection on cultural grounds.

Triangulation: Blending Approaches within an Ethnographic Framework

Triangulation is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning and identify different ways of seeing a phenomenon. A number of convergence studies have triangulated methods to enrich the understanding of this complex change.

An early study focused on journalists before they got to the newsroom: Three Brigham Young University educators used their school’s efforts at curriculum revision to prepare students for multi-platform careers as a holistic case study, drawing on their own experiences, student interviews and questionnaires, and associated documents. The converged curriculum was met with mixed reactions; while some students liked it, other sentiments ranged from “confused” to “miserable” (Hammond, Petersen, & Thomsen, 2000, p. 24).

Huang and another set of colleagues (2004) combined a content analysis with an in-depth interview in a case study of the quality of journalism following newsroom convergence at the

pioneering *Tampa Tribune*. They found that three years into its convergence experiment, the paper had not lost quality – but also that *Tribune* journalists were not engaged in significant amounts of cross-platform reporting. Most of the convergence efforts involved sharing tips and information, as well as cross-promoting news partners.

European scholars also are drawing on multiple methods to understand newsroom convergence. The centerpiece of Meier's study of convergence and innovation in three central European countries was a case study of the Austria Presse Agentur in Vienna that combined in-depth interviews of a dozen editorial staffers with an online survey. He found interactions between reconfigurations of the physical work space and changes in both the speed and quality of journalists' work (Meier, 2007). In the first stage of their newsroom convergence project, a group of 25 Spanish scholars used interviews with editors to complement data from media and corporate websites. They plan to conduct ethnographic observations and consider the content contributions of both professional journalists and audience members (Domingo, 2007).

All three of my published convergence studies were based on triangulated data, drawn from newsroom observation, in-depth interviews, and a questionnaire distributed to interview participants. The following section considers how this multifaceted approach contributed to interpreting and understanding the issues of interest.

Theoretical Configurations

So far, this discussion of newsroom convergence has paid little attention to the ways in which ethnographic data can contribute to theory-based understanding of the phenomenon. While ethnographic work need not be concerned explicitly with theoretical development, instead focusing on description and explanation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), it can be of value in exploring broader concepts. Incorporation of the sort of quantitative approach usually associated with empirical theory testing is helpful in this endeavor. Triangulation not only helps guard against seeing what's not there, a potential bias of any single-method approach, but also facilitates seeing what *is* there by enabling the researcher to go back and forth between distinct but complementary data sets.

In the winter of 2003, with support from the University of Iowa and the Kappa Tau Alpha journalism honor society, I spent a week in each of four newsrooms – in Dallas; Tampa; Sarasota,

Florida; and Lawrence, Kansas. Each newsroom differed from the others in its approach to convergence and its organizational structure (Singer, 2004a; 2004b; 2006). In addition to participant observations, I interviewed 120 journalists and newsroom executives; I also obtained 90 completed from interviewees who were working journalists. The questionnaire covered the perceived impact of convergence on careers, work routines, public service, and the profession of journalism. Room for open-ended comments allowed subjects to highlight points important to them, frequently reiterating or supplementing themes from their interviews.

The triangulated data suggested three broad themes of conceptual interest. First, the portrait of convergence that the journalists painted through their words and questionnaire responses offered almost textbook illustrations of key elements in diffusion of innovations theory as outlined by Rogers (2003). These included characteristics of the innovation itself (the idea of convergence as well as procedural, structural, and cultural changes within the newsrooms), the communication channels that journalists were using to negotiate the change, and the social structures facilitating or hindering it (Singer, 2004a).

Journalists described a number of relative advantages of convergence over traditional approaches to news-gathering and dissemination, including perceived benefits for their news organizations, their own careers and their audiences. However, each set of data also indicated concern related to other innovation attributes such as compatibility (notably ongoing culture clashes and competitive issues) and complexity (expressed largely in terms of a desire for more training).

Other triangulated findings supported the importance of interpersonal communication channels to successful newsroom convergence, as diffusion theory would suggest; provided tentative evidence for a theoretically predictable adopter curve and for the presence of well-integrated newsroom opinion leaders; and indicated identifiable effects of physical, management, and social structures, again as suggested by diffusion theory (Singer, 2004a). In general, the application of diffusion of innovations theory suggested probable success for newsroom convergence efforts; indeed, since the studies were conducted, cross-platform content production has become routine.

The qualitative and quantitative data were not merely complementary; together, they enabled me to see theorized components more easily than I could by using either interviews or questionnaires alone. For example, a number of journalists discussed the importance of working one-

on-one with colleagues in partnered newsrooms; “proximity breeds collegiality, not contempt,” one news manager said (Singer, 2004a, p. 13). But it was the questionnaire data that drove home the importance of this perceived compatibility for successful convergence. Of 54 items, the statement generating the highest level of agreement was “I enjoy working with people who have professional strengths different from my own” – not a single respondent disagreed! Not far behind was “I have gained respect for the people in other parts of the news operation as a result of convergence.” This surprising finding was one I might have overlooked in the interview data alone had the questionnaire not highlighted its importance.

Because diffusion of innovations theory has been applied to a great many changes, its components provide a useful pattern against which a new innovation can be compared. A different framework, drawn from the sociology of news literature, suggested that something else also was going on: As the social system in which they worked changed, print journalists were being resocialized. That is, their perceptions were shifting so that they no longer saw themselves exclusively as “newspaper people” but as members of a broader category that encompassed former “others” who worked in television or online media (Singer, 2004b).

However, there was considerable ambivalence about this shift, and one of the greatest contributions of the combined quantitative and qualitative data was to tease out the mixed feelings. For example, the questionnaire statement generating the second-highest level of agreement was “The quality of the story is more important than the technology used to tell it.” But subjects were individually unsure and collectively divided on whether convergence produced more or less quality. They also had mixed feelings about competition and fast-paced information delivery. And while almost all said in their interviews that they wanted more training with new story-telling tools and techniques, they were generally neutral on the statement “The need to produce stories in multiple formats stresses me out.” One converged reporter said he was at first scared he would say something stupid on television, but now “my heart rate barely picks up. My biggest fear is that my lips are chapped” (Singer, 2004b, p. 849).

Such mixed results, foregrounded by the use of multiple methods, underscored the fact that a change this significant is difficult for those in the middle of it, who must wrestle not only with the

shift itself but also with their own reactions and perceptions. In other words, triangulation highlighted issues of culture, as experienced by participants, that are of integral concern to ethnographers.

A third published work focused on the normative concept of journalism as a form of public service and the ways in which journalists saw convergence affecting that norm. Although all journalists emphasize public service, demands of different formats result in different pressures for news workers; convergence challenges the “us” and “them” view taken by practitioners in a particular media domain (Singer, 2006).

In the two publications discussed above, I started with a theory (diffusion) or conceptual framework (resocialization) and interrogated the data for relevant insights. For this third piece, I conducted a more structured discourse analysis of the interview data, extracting references to various aspects of public service and grouping the material into normative categories such as “accuracy” and “independence.” Questionnaire responses supplemented this analysis by offering various articulations of categorical concepts, as well as more general deconstructions of public service. Examples of the latter include such statements as “My company is better able to serve our audience because of our decision to converge news operations” (most journalists agreed) and “My company converged newsrooms in order to do a better job providing information to various audience” (journalists agreed again, though less strongly).

Although the published article focused on interview data, the questionnaires served as a crucial safeguard against the potential danger that findings will reflect the method of inquiry in misleading ways. The analysis suggested that within these newsrooms, convergence had failed to raise serious concerns about its fundamental compatibility with the core journalistic norm of public service. Although journalists worried about counterparts in partnered media doing things in different and potentially problematic ways, most supported convergence as an appropriate activity for a news organization committed to public service (Singer, 2006).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has used newsroom convergence as a case study for the value of ethnographic research, broadly defined to incorporate not only traditional qualitative methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews but also quantitative approaches such as subject questionnaires.

It has highlighted core attributes of ethnographic work and shown how researchers have drawn on those attributes to study this multifaceted change in professional culture and practitioners' perceptions about it.

The changes are ongoing. Not only does nearly every media outlet now have an online presence, but industry data suggest that more journalists are creating cross-platform content than was the case even a few years ago, when most of the academic work cited here was conducted. News organizations as venerable (and tradition-bound) as *The New York Times* have combined their print and online news operations. Most major newspapers offer blogs by journalists on their websites. Forty percent of recent hires report that their jobs include writing and editing for the web, with the numbers who are designing and building web pages also rising (Becker, Vlad, & McLean, 2007). "The pace of change has accelerated," the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007) confirms. Moreover, "the transformation facing journalism is epochal, as momentous as the invention of television or the telegraph, perhaps on the order of the printing press itself."

Ethnography will continue to be an optimal method for exploring the nature and effects of this enormous cultural transition for journalists and journalism. It is ideally suited to understanding not just causes or effects, not just products or practices, but also the processes that underlie them, the perceptions that drive and are driven by them, and the people who have always been at the heart of the journalistic enterprise, whatever its iteration. Importantly, those people are not just journalists but also members of the public, "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006). The idea of convergence needs conceptual expansion to include the mingling of the roles and the products of journalists and non-journalists within an open, networked digital environment (Domingo, 2007; Quandt & Singer, forthcoming). As that network becomes an increasingly dominant communications medium, the need to understand the fluid interactions and interconnections it generates will steadily increase. The questions asked will be cultural ones in every sense of the word, and ethnographers will play a central role in addressing them – and asking interesting new ones.

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