



THE CONVERGENCE OF ROMANIAN MEDIA – BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION

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Abstract

Since the beginning of post-communist transformation in 1989, the media landscape in Romania has faced substantial changes. At the same time with entry of media multinationals, a completely renewed media system has emerged, characterized by a diversity of channels, formats, and contents. In time, not only the media themselves, but also the patterns of media use among audiences, their habits and expectations, have gone through a process of radical change. This is due to entry in digital age that apart from elimination of old barriers of time and space, brought for media new opportunities and threats afforded by what is called "convergence". Based on reviews of communication literature, the present paper intends to offer an answer to the following research questions: What means media convergence and what types of convergence could we find in media studies? Before an overview of various contexts and dimensions of media convergence, the article provides a short history of the concept as well as definitions of convergence in different areas. Finally, some conclusions were drawn.

Key words:

Communication,
media
convergence,
digital media

JEL Codes:

L82, M37

1. Defining the convergence

The concept of convergence is used in a number of academic fields and has different definitions in literature. The term "convergence" comes originally from the world of science and mathematics and means "coming together". According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it was primarily used in 1713 by William Derham in his work *Physico-Theology* entitled "Or, a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, From His Works of Creation". He used the term "convergence and divergence of the rays" in relating with speed of sound. Speaking about convergence, other researchers have noted that the term has been developed in the field of exact and natural sciences. By the middle of the 20th century, the term was also being applied to political science (convergence of U.S. and Soviet systems, convergence of EU regions) and economics (convergence of national economies into a global economy) (Gordon, 2003).

The definitions of convergence in different areas are somewhat similar to each other. In medicine convergence denotes the process of coming together or the state of having come together toward a common point (The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary). Within the field of biology, convergence describes "the development of similar structures in unrelated organisms as a result of lining in similar ecological conditions; [...] distinct groups of animals

have independently adapted in a similar way to life" (John Templeton Foundation, 2012; Hine, 2005). In oceanography, convergence deals with a horizontal inflow of water into an area. In medicine, convergence denotes the pointing inwards of the eyes, which occurs when viewing an object at close range (Appelgren, 2004).

In a financial reporting context, convergence is the process of harmonising accounting standards issued by different regulatory bodies. One example might be the convergence of International Accounting Standards (IAS) and Romanian Accounting Standards. In mathematics, convergence is "the property, for a variable quantity, of having a limit". We may speak of the convergence of an infinite sequence, an infinite series, an infinite product, a continued fraction, an integral and so on" (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1979). The term is used in many other natural or social sciences: meteorology, geology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, management and so on.

From a marketing perspective convergence is the strategy of putting together disparate or separate products and services to come up with a new value offer to meet the needs of the target market. In the field of journalism, convergence is "the practice of sharing and cross-promoting content from a variety of media,

some interactive, through newsroom collaboration and partnerships” (Brooks et al, 2013).

All these definitions reflect that convergence is an equivocal term: the same word can mean different things to different people, depending on time, application, and context. For this reason, we will call the convergence as being a “conceptual divergence”.

2. Media convergence

In electronic age, some new tools of communication become prominent because is reaching an increasingly mass audience. It is called ‘new media’ and includes smartphones, e-readers, tablets and others. With the development of technology on different platforms such as television, Internet and mobile communication and with the introduction of new media, the consumption of online content has grown exponentially because audiences have had both a bigger choice of media and an easier life due to media technologies. In digital era, people can see what’s happening at any corner of the

world, and can get information where they want it and when they want it. In this rapidly changing environment, if media organizations want to survive, they are required to re-evaluate their strategies.

One of these strategies is media convergence. In the context that traditional media are declining while the competition for online media is increasing, companies are moving to a holistic approach to branding and delivering content to various platforms such as televisions, Internet, mobile devices, social media sites, print and other channels for retaining and attracting new customers.

But what really means media convergence? The concept “media convergence” was introduced back around 1980 by Nicholas Negroponte that presented a convergence model based on three overlapping circles. His three circles were labelled "Broadcast and Motion Picture Industry," "Computer Industry" and "Print and Publishing Industry" (as shown in figure no. 1).

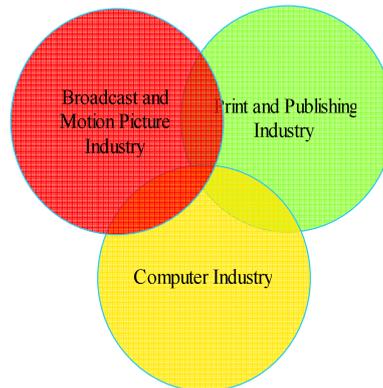


Figure 1. Negroponte's model of convergence
Source: Fidler, R., (1997)

Negroponte predicted that the overlap between the "Broadcast and Motion Picture Industry," "Computer Industry" and "Print and Publishing Industry" would become almost total in 20 years (Gordon, 2003), which

means that three media industries come together as a single entity (as shown in figure no. 2). Later, Fidler (1997) confirmed this theory naming it “Mediamorphosis

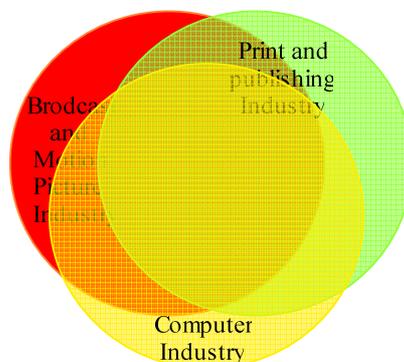


Figure 2. Negroponte's predicted model of convergence

Another media researcher that contributed to propagation of the term and the problems connected with the issue of convergence was Ithiel de Sola Pool. He defined convergence of modes as “blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone, and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, radio and television. A single physical means – be it wires, cables or airwaves – may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways. Conversely, a service that was provided in the past by any one medium – be it broadcasting, the press or telephony – can now be provided in several different physical ways. So the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding” (Appelgren, 2009).

Since then, many academics and practitioners expanded their researches on convergence in general and have focused on media convergence in particular. Numerous books, chapters, and articles have been written on the topic of media convergence. They vary in size and quality from the scholarly to the popular press. As Mike Wirth (2006) points out, “One of the challenges of studying media convergence is that the concept is so broad that it has multiple meanings”.

So, the concept of convergence is not a new one and a range of different views exist on what its implications are for society and for economic activity. According to European Commission (1997), in the context of media, the term convergence eludes precise definition, but it is most commonly expressed as: “the ability of different network platforms to carry essentially similar kinds of services, or the coming together of consumer devices such as the telephone, television and personal computer”.

3. Type of media convergence

Today we are living in the Information Society, which is characterized by the following phenomena: technological innovation and diffusion; occupational change; economic value; information flows; the expansion of symbols and signs (Webster 2002). In this society, where more than ever the concept of convergence became a reality, different sectors, in particular the telecommunications, mass media and information technology (IT) sectors, use the same technologies. Evidence of such convergence has been mounting in recent years with the emergence of the Internet and with the increasing capability of existing networks to carry both telecommunications and broadcasting services.

In scientific literature related to media, the term of “convergence” is used in different ways with different meanings. We can speak about the convergence in media technology, convergence in media organizations, ownership convergence, tactical convergence and structural convergence.

Jenkins (2001) identified five different media convergence processes: Technological Convergence (the digitization of all media content); Economic Convergence (the horizontal integration of the entertainment industry); Social or Organic Convergence: (consumers’ multitasking strategies for navigating the new information environment); Cultural Convergence (that encourages transmedia storytelling, the development of content across multiple channels); Global Convergence: (the cultural hybridity that results from the international circulation of media content...reflect[ing] the experience of being a citizen of the “global village”).

Gordon (2003) identified at least five forms of convergence in media firms: ownership, tactics, structure, information gathering, and storytelling. He found that media convergence is most prevalent in its ownership and tactical forms and the progression from ownership and tactical convergence to information gathering and storytelling convergence is slow.

In the field of media technology, the concept of convergence has for decades frequently been used to describe concentrating courses of events in terms of processes becoming more alike or as a common denotation for a change toward a certain goal (Appelgren, 2004).

In media terms, the convergence of programming content is equivalent to a phenomenon that defines the tendency of a limited number of companies on a specific market to opt for uniformity in the range of provided services with the purpose of targeting a similar middle ground and maximizing sales (Craufurd, 2004). In other words is about the simultaneous broadcasting of same type of content, at the same time on different platforms.

According to Jenkins (2006), media convergence is an on-going process, which should not be viewed as a displacement of the old media, but rather as interaction between different media forms and platforms, industries, content and audiences.

Since 2006, in Romania, the largest media groups began to provide same information on different platforms or media’ vehicles due to digital storage of messages. The phenomenon is related to the Internet but also other types of new media. Publications such as “Gazeta Sporturilor”, in their trying to reach a widest

audience, were experimenting with computer applications and created *gsp.ro* website but other extensions such as *sgptv.ro*, *tv.gsp.ro*, *pariori.ro*, *travel.gsp.ro*, *blogsport.gsp.ro* and communities of supporters as *Stelisti.ro*, *Dinamovisti.ro* or *Violamania.ro*. Also, *Gazeta Sporturilor* has a radio station and a television program. A glossy extension of the newspaper, the “Champions” magazine was launched in 2006 and has national coverage. All these Internet services together with old media, allow journalists to update the news feed in real time, oppose to the daily or weekly delivery of newspapers. This means that separate divisions such as television, the Internet, print and radio have merged together. This is just an example how the dominant actors in media industry are trying to repositioning themselves in order to control the whole media process from content inception to delivering to individual audience segments. Another important aspect in media convergence is the centralization of resources, especially human ones but also technological. This means that instead of having different reporters for every medium, media can use the same reporters and staff to produce the content for television, Internet or others mediums. The same reporter can write and produce a story for a printed medium, read a version of it on television, discuss it on radio and publish it (along with the other components) on the Internet.

In terms of technological convergence, today we can remember about services of telephony companies that have become increasingly complex: Internet-fixed-mobile-TV packages, in various combinations, have become common almost everywhere, and with technological advancements that made computers more affordable, a new wave of convergence efforts began. In other words, unlike previous years, is produced, transmitted and is sold everything under one roof.

In our opinion, the generic equation of media convergence can be written as:

Media convergence = unique way of storage + multiple platforms for dissemination + centralized resources

One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether or not media convergence is beneficial for the society and the industry itself. In other words, whether or not, media convergence presents more opportunities than challenges for both creative industries and society. One of the areas of particular concern when examining positive and negative consequences of media convergence is audience.

Deuze (2008) believes that media convergence generates not only convergence of industries and techniques, but also the convergence of the audience. Converged operation provides multiple tools for storytelling, allowing consumers to select level of interactivity while self-directing content delivery and can increase both the quality of its product and the satisfaction of customer which leads to a larger audience.

On the other hand, media convergence brings many challenges. Audiences complain about information overload and they can be overwhelmed and find it difficult. Jenkins (2006) noted that media convergence encourages audience to participate in the process of content creation, but requires extended access to modern technologies, familiarity with the new forms of media, as well as developing certain skills. As a result, certain segments of the audience such as those with low income, lower level of education, elders or disabled people cannot be reached and they are unable to take full advantage of new media and fully participate in the new media culture.

Another consequence of media convergence is fragmentation of audiences on the basis of their age or living patterns that has resulted in the search for contents that fit audience special interest. People from different age groups relate to media content and media platforms differently. In previous studies, Bolin and Westlund (2009) have identified three generations in news media consumption: the radio/print generation (born in the 1930s) and the TV generation (born in the 1950s) and the mobile technology/Internet generation (born in the 1980s). Additionally, the work-in-process includes even younger media users, born in the 1990s and labelled as “digital generation” (Herring, 2008) who has experienced the “broadband society” (Colombo & Fortunati, 2010) since birth.

This means that the power to decide what is seen, read, or heard is increasingly in the hands of the consumer.

4. Conclusions

For communication scholars, convergence is a fairly elastic term that has come to mean different things depending on time, application, and context.

A common understanding in contemporary media studies is that convergence of media systems and homogenization of journalism becomes a worldwide trend, as a result of significant shifts in marketplace realities. The huge waves of publications, conferences and discussions have been interested in the problem of media convergence. But despite this fact, there is currently no standard definition of the media

convergence concept. In our opinion, the media convergence involve a unique way of storage that can be used for dissemination of the same content across multiple platforms such as televisions, internet, mobile devices, social media sites, print and other channels and that have centralized resources both technological and human.

Finally, we conclude that central to any discussion on media convergence is the term digital media itself, because it provides the context and example through which media convergence occurs. In future, as a consequence of media digitalization, we think that the distinction between mass communication and interpersonal communication could be obsolete.

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