

Media Convergence: Different Views and Perspectives

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Abstract

Convergence is the hot topic among the media researchers as well as media practitioners. The concept denotes restructuring the business model of media organizations to cope up the new challenges coming up by technological advancement, intense competition and changing consumer preferences. However, there is no general definition available that can explain the concept accepted by all. Some researchers describe convergence as a way to protect media organization place in the market, while others suggest convergence as a new and different way to deliver news and information to the consumers. The difference of meanings is the difference of context. Present article discusses the various definitions, types and models of convergence. Article is based on literature review and one of the conclusions is that convergence is a process not an end result. A continues interplay of different factors are affecting the process of convergence. Therefore, it can not be applied in a similar manner in all media organizations. It varies from country to country and organization to organization.

Keywords: Convergence, Media, Media Researches, Media Organisations, Media Industry.

1. Introduction

Convergence is a buzz word in media industry. Any development of present media industry is considered as a result of convergence. But no universal definition is available for this multidimensional concept- 'convergence.' The definition of convergence varies from context to context. Different researchers and academicians define it in different manner. Some describe it as a result of technological progress and advancement of modern society, whereas others look at it as an ongoing process and a managerial tactic to cope up with the challenges and take the advantage of the opportunities produced by the growing media and communication technologies.

To understand the present dynamics of media industry and the future of journalism, it is necessary to understand different meanings and aspects of this multidimensional concept.

2. Meaning of Convergence in Different Context and The Concept of Media Convergence

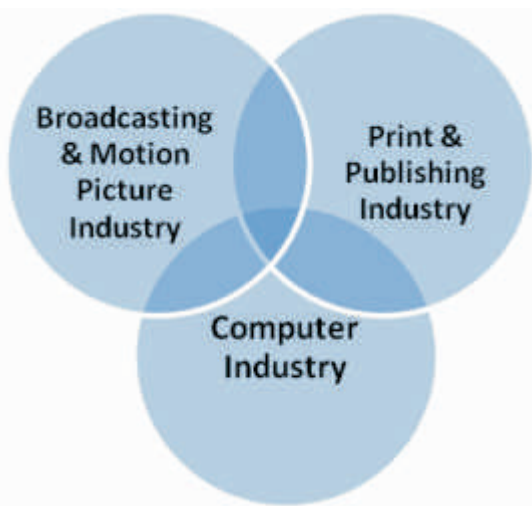
The dictionary meaning of this Latin word is - the occurrence of two or more things coming together. The word convergence is very popular in science and mathematics. In mathematics, convergence describes limiting behaviour, particularly of an

infinite sequence or series, toward some limit. The biological definition of convergence describes how similar biological structures have been developing from separate source of Origin (Charles Darwin used the term in his book *Origin of Species* in 1866). During cold war, this term was also used in political science with regard to the adoption of United States or Soviet system. In economics, this term explains converge of national economy into global economy. In the field of technology, convergence is used to describe as trend where some technologies having distinct functionalities evolve to technologies that overlap, i.e. multiple products come together to form one product, with the advantages of each initial component.

In 1970s and 1980s when computer technology started developing and computer networking took birth, a new meaning was added to this word: media convergence. Digital revolution has changed the entire scenario of information and communication system. Increased PC penetration, use of optical fibre, broadband and satellite communication has made the present era in an Information Age. Few years ago the word electronic super highway was in fashion in every discussion about the future of media. Now it is replaced by another term convergence where computer dominated digital world blur the boundaries of traditional media. In theory media convergence explains that every mass medium eventually merges to the point where they are indistinguishable to each other, creating a new medium from the synthesis due to advent of new communication technologies.

It is not known who first used the concept of convergence in the field of media technology. According to Rich Gordon it was Sola Pool who used this term as 'the convergence of modes' in his book *Technology of Freedom* in the year 1983. But the concept of convergence in media research was evolved before by a researcher of Massachusetts Institute of Technology; named Nicholas Negroponte predicting that broadcast and motion picture industry, print and publishing industry and computer industry would come together as a single entity by 2000. Negroponte presented this thought in a model of three intersecting circles and the common intersecting area indeed representing the convergence.

Fig. 1 : Negroponte's model of three intersecting circles



In his book *'Being Digital'* (1995) Negroponte describe that convergence start with "bits" or the digital DNA of information.

Another person who visualized a more integrated future of computing, telecommunication and the services based on these technologies was John Sculley. He was the CEO of Apple Computers and in his presentation on vision of Apple in the future, he showed two graphs representing years 1980 and 2000. In 1980s graph he showed seven independent boxes for seven discrete industries- media, publishing, information vendors, computers, consumer electronics, telecommunications, office equipments and distributors. For the year 2000 the graph was labelled as convergence and seven overlapping elapse were shown. Intersections of different overlapping elapses were labelled with some new terms like virtual reality, interactive TV, etc.

3. Different Perspectives on Media Convergence

The initial definitions of media convergege, over emphasized the technological aspect of media convergence. The idea that all media will be meld into one super medium and news, information and entertainment will be provided through one box, is not accepted by several media researchers and academicians. In his article, *'The Myth of Convergence'*, A. Michael Noll argued that "indeed, all modalities of media have become "0s" and "1s" of digital. Just because media are digital does not mean that media have converged." Further he adds that "... the future will be determined by the confluence of a number of factors, such as technology, consumer needs, business culture, regulatory policy and finance".

Henry Jenkins disagrees in his article *'Convergence? I Diverge'*, that multiple media will coalesce into one super medium. He says that we must distinguish among media, genres and delivery technologies. Genres and delivery technologies come and go but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment system. He looks towards convergence in a different way. For him convergence is not an end result of technology but is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audiences. Jenkins describes five types of convergences processes- Technological Convergence, Economic Convergence, Social or Organic Convergence, Cultural Convergence and Global Convergence. Technological convergence is digitalization of all media contents. Economic convergence is the integration of the entertainment industry. Social and Organic convergence explains the multitasking strategies of the consumer for navigating the new information environment. Cultural convergence deals with the explosion of new forms of creativity at the intersections of various technologies, industries and consumers. Finally the Global convergence, explains the cultural hybridity that results from the international circulation of media content.

In the same line Roger Silverstone says in his article *'Convergence is a Dangerous Word'* that the term is used to describe several things. It is used to describe facilitated technological convergence, a fusion of video, telecommunication and computer technology. It has been used to describe a parallel convergence in industrial structure and in the lattice of ownership and control. It has been used to describe a

consequential convergence in pattern of use as consumers and users interactively move from machine to machine. And it is used to describe a kind of cultural and textual convergence in which both fact and fantasy lose their distinctiveness.

Like Jenkins convergence is now looked into a larger canvas in media studies. Convergence now is being studied in different manners and in different contexts. Changes in newsroom, media structure, journalistic skills and media education are the different areas which are studied by the academics and professionals in the light of convergence. In fact, when one says convergence is a process rather than effect then it is important to distinguish what area of media convergence is being discussed. This single word has many meanings, which make it more confusing, but it shows the importance of this word in describing the present transformation of media industry and the vision of future. Different meaning can be understood by typology of media convergence.

4. Typology of Media Convergence

Media convergence can be divided in two broad categories- first Convergence in Media Technology and, second Convergence in Media Organizations. The analysis of the types of media convergence is mostly based on the Rich Gordon's classification.

4.1 Convergence in Media Technology

Convergence in media technology can be defined with two trends: the ability of different network platforms (broadcast, satellite, cable, telecommunications) to carry similar kinds of services and the merging of consumer devices such as telephone, television and PCs. Convergence affects the two step process at the heart of any media based industry: content creation and transport (distribution). The first step entails selecting, packaging and encoding content in a medium. The second step involves transporting content to its destination and then decoding it for use. In most instances, it is second step that define the particular media market which influences the form taken by the content in the first step.

European Commission Green paper on convergence (1996) defines convergence in similar manner:

- 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.

Commission says that latter expression of convergence is more popular in press because the consumer can easily understand it and it reflects the competition among telecommunication, broadcasting and computer industries to capture the future market. But report says that despite this popular image any convergence of consumer devices is today much less real than network convergence.

Rich Gordon also discussed convergence in three manners- content creation, content distribution and content consumption. An example of this technology convergence is Internet Protocol (IP). Content can be created using computers and stored in digital form. Through IP based transport system, this content can be

delivered across any physical infrastructure and therefore to any other devices.

4.2 Convergence in media organization

As mentioned earlier convergence is not just a technological phenomenon. Technology is half the story, the other half is business which is the driving force behind the convergence. In a competitive market place where each participant is eyeing the largest chunk of the pie, convergence is a media management strategy to increase present competitive strength and to reduce the uncertainty of the future. Here, we discuss the types of convergence that media companies are practicing in their organizational framework. Convergence in media organization can be understood by the following sub headings.

4.2.1 Convergence of Ownership

Convergence of media ownership means ownership on multiple content or distribution system. Company that own newspaper, television, internet and other media properties. The Times group, Living Media group, TV18 group, Sahara group etc., are the few examples of convergence of ownership from Indian media market. Convergence of ownership has been a debatable issue for a long time because it increases media monopoly and media conglomerates. One important point about ownership convergence is that it does not necessarily require shared editorial decision making or other kinds of collaboration across distribution platforms. But ownership convergence increased cross- promotion, content sharing and synergies.

4.2.2 Convergence of Strategies

Convergence of strategies implies a variety of activities and tactics used by the media companies which were not seen before. Rich Gordon mention that just as ownership convergence does not necessarily imply collaboration on tactics, tactical convergence does not require common ownership. Under separate ownership, companies are collaborating and working together in partnership. The DNA, a daily English newspaper, published from Mumbai, is a good example of convergence of strategies, where Dainik Bhaskar, a Hindi daily and Zee group, a television company, are the partners.

Another form of convergence of strategies is cross-promotion. It would drive newspaper readers to watch TV and TV viewers to read the newspaper. The TV journalist writes column in newspaper and newspaper journalist appears in TV programs. In more aggressive marketing, especially those where a single company owned both outlets, a common result is "talkback" appearances by print journalist on the air to talk about stories they are covering.

One other form of tactical convergence described by the Rich Gordon is the effort to sell advertising packages encompassing multiple platforms. But he cautions that to sell multiplatform advertising found even greater challenges than their counterparts involved in multiplatform news coverage. It may happen that the revenue from multiplatform advertising is lesser than total advertising revenue from separate medium because advertiser would insist for lesser price for package advertising. Still big companies are looking towards package advertising.

4.2.3 Convergence of Structure

Convergence of structure is also known as newsroom convergence. Newsroom convergence is related to the job description of the journalist and the organizational structure. A key question for the multiplatform media houses is whether there could be a separate multiple newsrooms for different media or should there be a single integrated newsroom. In a segregated media industry, any form of media has an independent existence because of their different requirements. But in a multiplatform media house an integrated newsroom has several advantages. In a converged newsroom, digital data in any form (text, audio and video) can be stored in one place and used in different platforms. Several studies and models are presented by the media researchers and professionals on newsroom convergences. In a converged work space where journalist can move freely between print, television, radio and internet outlets, interact with each other, work together on news stories and share content. This type of convergence promotes synergy.

Newsroom convergence also redefines job descriptions. A photographer for print may be asked to work on the photographs for net and also shoot video and prepare a multimedia package. A newspaper editor can be made responsible for TV operation. A new job profile can also be created like content editor, knowledge manager, coordination editor, etc.

4.2.4 Convergence of Journalist Skills

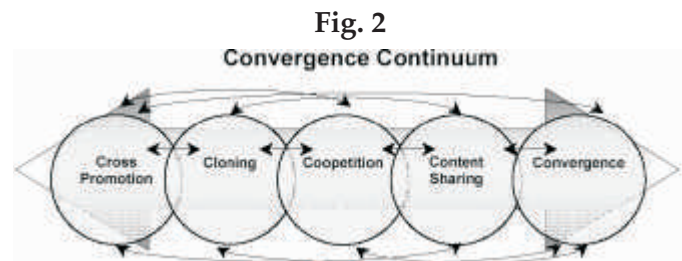
One form of media convergence is the skill of journalist. Traditional way of journalistic skill which emphasized on expertise in print, radio or TV is becoming out of fashion. Now multiplatform media companies are feeling that there is no need to send three different people to cover the same event. So a journalist is required to report the event, take still photographs, shoot video and take sound bit and prepare a full package that can be used across the media. A new term has emerged in the field of journalism called Backpack Journalist. A journalist carrying a mobile workstation on his back and return from a news event with multiple type of content.

5. Full Versus Partial Media Convergence

Some academicians and media researchers do not agree that convergence is just about co-operation (sharing of resources) or partnership or cross-promotion or content sharing. They distinguish partial and full convergence. Like Stephen Quinn emphasised that "full media convergence involves a radical change in approach and mindset by both managers and journalist. It involves a shared desk, where the key people, the multimedia editors, assess each news event on its merits and assign the most appropriate staff for the story." Killebrew describes two types of full convergence models. In first model emphasis remains on the platforms but each news staff shares equally among the platforms to ensure that each platform receives appropriate information on stories to post in its form. In second model emphasis is on journalists. In that, reporters file stories in multiplatform method, rewriting the stories to fit the particular stylistic need of each media. Further, Killebrew explains, if the flow of sharing information is not on equal basis and other platforms are used just to reach secondary audience that would not normally be reached by primary platforms or other platforms are used for promotional rather than substantive purposes, the organization is in the stage of partial convergence.

6. Some Models of Media Convergence

Some models of convergence are presented by media scholars. A model given by Dailey, Demo and Spillman is called "The Convergence Continuum". This model is based on behavioural approach towards convergence as the authors believe that there is no standardized definition of convergence and lack of a common instrument which can measure the convergence efforts, the model offers operational definition of the various levels on this model and proposes a common standard of measurement. Model used cross-media alliances as a framework. On the basis of the degree of interaction, cooperation and content sharing, the model decides five level of convergence by 5 Cs – cross promotion, cloning, competition, content sharing, and full convergence.



In his graphical representation of model Dailey et al. showed 5 overlapping circles. Each circle represents a level of convergence which is defined by a set of behaviours expected to be performed by the staff members at the partnering news outlets. When partnership moves towards right in next level it must be in continuum. It means all of the interaction and cooperation expected at the previous level will remain with new behaviour. The overlapping part shows some sharing of behaviour during transition from one level on the continuum.

According to this model cross promotion is the stage where partners only promote each other through their respective channels i.e. publishing or broadcasting partner's logos, allow reporters or commentators from one medium to appear in the another medium to promote their project, etc., cloning is the stage where they republish partner's content with some changes or re-editing. At the competition level, partners reflect both cooperative and competitive characteristics. Content sharing is the level where greater degree of interaction and cooperation shown between the staff members of the partners. They share their content with each other, work together on special project and investigation, exchange material to each other and repackage it for their channel. Full convergence level is the highest level of cooperation and interaction among the partners. The partners share a central news-desk. The assignments given to the team, comprised of members from each outlet. Story distributed and presented in each outlet as per their strength so that it can reach to the audience in a most meaningful manner.

Critics says that Dailey et. al., presented this model in a linear form. It means any form of convergence that is not full convergence is just a stage in the process. Convergence cannot be a linear process otherwise it will leave some part of the organization untouched (David Domingo et al). So this model is applicable only for convergence of newsroom. This model is also not helpful in comparison of the effect of the convergence, since

convergence is not measurable unless target variables are introduced.

David Domingo et. al., presented another behavioural model of convergence. This model believes that convergence is a polysemous concept, but one thing is common in various descriptions is blurring of the limits between different media, professional skills and roles. The model articulates convergence into four dimensions that cover different phases of the communication process: Integrated production, Multi-skilled professionals, Multiplatform delivery and Active audience. Each dimension measured by some parameters. Integrated production is related to reorganization of newsroom, redefinition of professional roles, technological innovation and new news formats. The parameters for integrated production are collaboration- if independent newsroom collaborates more or less often; coordination - more interaction through coordination desk of separate news rooms and integration- one news room that produce content for different outlets.

Multiskilled professionals analyze the redefinition of professional roles and skills of the reporters and editors. The parameters for multiskilling are: media multiskilling- journalists produce content for different media; issue multiskilling- professionals report on news related to different thematic areas; technical multiskilling- reporters are responsible for performing most of all production tasks

Multiplatform delivery is related to convergence of distribution of content. The key parameter to analyze this dimension is how multiplatform delivery is managed. Completely automatic repurposing content from one medium to others, repurposing of content by journalist and coordinated production of content for multiple media by journalist are the three different categories.

Active audience explains the convergence between producers and audiences. Parameter for this citizen journalism is user's contribution in form of comments, stories, photos and videos.

Next model is given by Lawson and Borders. They believe that convergence is both a concept and a process. They define a convergence as the wedding of technology and content delivery by a computer.

They characterize convergence as the realm of possibilities, when cooperation occurs between print and broadcast for the delivery of multimedia content through the use of computers and the internet. In their model computer and internet, is the core at which intersection of data can arrive from numerous platforms. One of the consequences of this convergence is interactivity that means old traditional one way communication system modified into two way communication.

Apart from technological aspect, Lawson- Borders model also presents seven observed elements which are practiced by the media organization to operationalize convergence into their business. These seven elements beginning from letter C are: communication, commitment, cooperation, compensation, culture, competition, and customer. All the seven elements are very relevant in the debate of media convergence but three elements make this model different from others. These are compensation, culture and customer. Compensation is a big

issue for the journalist working across platforms. Culture explains the adjustment of journalist in a converged media organization. There are different culture, languages, production methods and practices for journalist working in print, broadcast and electronic media. Customer describes the changing relationship between media and customer (reader, audience, viewer, or user?). In traditional media theories like gatekeeper theory, it was journalist, editor and reporters who determine the flow of information. But in a converged media it is the customers who decide when and what they select to access. Convergence blurred the boundaries between producer and customer. Customers not only consume the content, they also produce the content which is accessible to millions of the people.

7. Factors Driving Convergence

Driving factors behind convergence can be classified in three groups- (i) changing preferences and lifestyle of the consumers, (ii) market fragmentation and (iii) technology.

People's information seeking behaviour has been changing dramatically in this new century. News and information is all around: on mobile phones, newspapers, magazines, PDA (portable data assistant), television, radio, internet, kiosks, interactive and cable TV, video screens for airlines and railway stations. At the same time concept of news is also changing. Consumers are demanding more personalised, more service oriented and less institutionalised news. This is the demand side drive that leads to cross-sector demand.

Market fragmentation is another important factor. Web and new media increased the competition for advertisements. Media companies are competing within and across media sectors for share of increasingly fragmented audiences. Media companies are competing directly for audiences and indirectly for share of ad pie. Media convergence makes it possible to reach larger audiences for a company and can grab larger share of the advertising pie as possible. Multiplatform business model introduce the concept of 'co-opertition.' This term is an amalgam of competition and co-operation. Term explains co-operation among the organizations to increase the size of pie and competition in cutting it up.

Technology is the third major factor. Digital technology allows various media forms to be united in a common format. Digitalization also leads to an increase in transmission speeds and capacity. Technology convergence is bringing together the functions of formally quite different media applications.

8. Discussion and Conclions

The above discussion suggests that the concept of convergence have several meanings. Differences in meanings are actually different perspectives and context of convergence. In nearly every country, mono-media companies are transforming into multi-media companies. Media companies embrace multiplatform for a variety of reasons and produces multiple forms of convergence. Convergence is a continuous ongoing process. Researcher describes that it is not a single process but several processes are occurring at different fields simultaneously. On the basis of that, researchers presented several models of convergence. cross-promotion, cooperation,

content sharing are some of the similar concepts that are used to explain these models. Some media researchers describe convergence as an end result and talk about full convergence. Full convergence exists when partners share a central news desk. It is the author's belief that convergence is a process not an end result. The process can be strategically planned. It is influenced by the development of technology, changing consumer preferences or trends in society and market forces. The perception and background of the people making decisions in media organizations also play a key role. Therefore, no media group around the world produce the same form of convergence and in that line a range of business models are available.

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