

INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ON JOURNALISM - WORKING MODEL “DIGITAL CLOUT”

Asif Khan

*Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of Convergent Journalism, School of Media Studies,
Central University of Kashmir, J&K, India.*

Abstract *In the world of journalism and new age media, the essence of convergence is on and in constant use. As technology continues to make inroads into the field of journalism, it becomes rather quintessential to understand the impact of such technology on this profession. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the emergence of process of convergence through various connecting technology driven processes, delineated in the form of a model. The model is based on premise that in today's world of journalism, the process of 'convergence and its effect' is absolutely inevitable. This irrevocability of convergence in the profession of journalism or media needs to be understood taking into consideration the influence of the term 'Digital-Clout' – which basically involves media convergence, online medium impact, organizational set up and professional/job transformation. While Internet being central force in this clout; assumes vital role in this model. The paper proposes and elaborates this concept in the shape of model- Digital Clout - Convergence-Effect Model.*

Keywords: *Journalism, Convergent Journalism, Digital Technology, Digital Clout*

INTRODUCTION

The world of journalism has seen it all. From the early times, with the technical gadgetry making inroads into the profession of journalism, one might have assumed that each invention may kill the essence of the other it replaces; for instance, with the invention of TV people thought as a medium of communication, Radio shall die. While TV was proving to be more effective and impactful given its ability to couple both video and audio, Radio survived - still exists and is as impactful as ever. Likewise, there have been so many other inventions in the shape of different technological devices, which easily got into the use and endured time and its trepidations. It amazes one's mind to imagine the emergence, use and advent of technology in this profession at regular intervals of time. Undoubtedly, technological intervention has proven quite beneficial for this profession. Communication technology has got strong, swift and robust. With every new invention like computer, wireless, cable, satellite, Internet with access, service, network, application devices- traditional media vehicles faced uncertainty although for shorter span of time but with integrated capability of new devices a refurbished form of media/journalism has emerged. In such a case inter media compatibility has remained the key. Habermas once aptly remarked, “Journalism has survived the trepidations of time, technological processes, and undergone refurbishing from time to time.”

As evident from various recent studies, the profession of Journalism has faced threatening phases given the advent of convergence driven by the fusion of new web-based technology. As we have witnessed, newspapers in print form are dying quite early in various parts of the world but at the same time are reinventing itself through various other digital formats and devices. These devices provide platforms for various socially engaging applications providing a digital ecosystem – a converged media ecosystem.

The rise of new media technology has changed the time frame within which journalism/media operates now. It has drastically changed overall operations, revenues, and consumers i.e. audiences. Journalism has responded well to the evolutionary changes brought about by the technology by adopting more efficient production processes, through convergence of media. There has been a conspicuous change in the content, narrative structure, organizational structure, company level mergers, use/consumption at the consumer level as well. These changes have undoubtedly revolutionized journalism. It has made numerous platforms available to us like broadsheets, tabloids, blogs, twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, mobile phone applications etc. all driven by the power of a centralized edifice known as Internet. This can be also termed as collaborative journalistic process where participation of readers is hyper active more than ever before. This revolutionary as well as evolutionary impact of convergence on the profession of Journalism can be succinctly understood in the following model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media theorists, thinkers like Marshall McLuhan, Kittler, Steigler and Castells, have enriched our understanding of the new media, Convergence, role of technology and the ways in which they are involved in our lives. “McLuhan’s insistence on the primacy of the media is suggestive of the importance of the media from social, political and economic life; so much so that McLuhan held that the media determine the kind of life we lead.” (Siapera, 2017).

In his book, “Understanding New Media”, author Eugenia Siapera while taking reference from Steigler’s statement says, “The dynamism of this relationship implies an unpredictable outcome or, better, a lack of determination when it comes to the shape of the things to come.” The emphasis is that technology and humanity are co-evolving: technology is what makes us human, and in turn, we make technology. This dynamic relationship implies that we cannot predict the direction of future technology, but this does not mean that we cannot steer technology in ways commensurable with political principles, such as those of democracy and its quest for equality and justice (Siapera, 2017).

Moreover, the milieu has created many more avenues and opportunities for creativity and has promoted better understanding of convergence of media as “The circulation of media content - across completely different media systems, competing media companies, and national borders - depends heavily on consumers active participation” (Jenkins, 2006).

Further, Jacobs (2018) in her book on convergence also mentions that convergence requires coordination and cooperation instead of constant competition among print, broadcast and online media. It essentially means to change what may be termed as culture of news. She further adds that it (culture of news) actually does not easily change and many studies have shown that institutions along with the staff are fairly resistant to any such change.

While the definition may vary and it continues to be in constant flux when “Convergence identity crisis has not stopped newspapers, broadcasters, and online groups from rushing to develop multimedia staffs to produce converged content” (Dailey, 2003). As per their discussion, the greatest power to media convergence is the “digital technology that has allowed journalists to produce news across several multimedia platforms at increasing speed”. Their study pointed out “there is a lack of common, behavior-based definition of convergence efforts and a lack of a common instrument for measuring convergence efforts.” These researchers are attributed to have developed the model named as “convergence continuum,” bringing together five C’s that are Cross-Promotion, Cloning, Cooperation, Content sharing, and convergence. Likewise, there are many other

studies that reveal that the emergence of new technology, gadgets and machines, termed as media convergence, has had indelible impact on the profession of journalism.

RECOMMENDATION: INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ON JOURNALISM- WORKING MODEL “DIGITAL CLOUD”

Figure 1 shows the Convergence effect model. As per the model suggested, the process covers ‘convergence and its effect’ as an interdependent process in which inter-reliance between parameters like media convergence, online media impact, organizational set up (new workflow) and professional/job transformation exists with Internet being the central force of the cloud - Digital Cloud.

This model suggests that the process of convergence gives rise to various interdependent effects like a new workflow in the newsrooms, social media milieu, online presence of media and structural changes in the news organizations. The newsrooms we see now are multimedia, multiplatform now. While new desks are added, the work of a journalist certainly sees a shift from the routine. Designing, developing and editing content for the web is important now. The newsroom is fully integrated set up with many platforms like graphics, web, video, photo and social media desk. As a result of which media practitioners mandatorily must acquire skills so as to be compatible with the effects of convergence. This new trend of journalism is driven by the centralized power in the form of Internet Technology. Internet has undeniably powered the advent of convergence and held the entire structure intact of new media.



Fig. 1: Digital Cloud- Convergence-Effect Model

(A) Internet Technology- The magic of 20th century

The dominant feature of this model is the advent of Internet. Internet by many authors has been termed as a radical innovation, given its proliferation and influence on technology. Latzer (2009) points out that "Radical innovations are those, which are seen as disrupting the previous state of affairs, introducing a discontinuity, as they often do not have a predecessor."

The relationship between the Internet and journalism is quite compound and Internet features as a catalyst. This new media has brought about various changes like time, money, and social as well as cultural changes. The Internet has promulgated a new era of news which bears a direct relationship with its multi-varied audiences. The case is such that there seems to be no intermediary between people and information, for example Journalism – it is no longer needed to bring in the new or packets of information as the same is easily available to people 'Just a click away'. Hall (2001) (as cited in Siapera, 2017) puts it like, "we have entered the phase of disintermediation – we no longer need journalism to mediate between us, the people, and politics or other events as they are reported directly by those involved and seen by people in an equally direct and immediate manner."

Bardoel (2002) also maintains that Internet has led to development of a different and new kind of journalism. He says that online journalism shall make more effective use of attributes of Internet that may lead to renewal of Journalism and the different interactivity features and levels can change the face of new era of Journalism. To add to this debate, J. Pavlik (2001) says, "Internet restructures journalism across four dimensions. First, it changes the contents of journalism; second the skills necessary for Journalists; third, the structure of news organizations and newsrooms; and finally, the relationship between all its publics, including the people, its sources, politicians and so on."

Most of the studies in media convergence till now clearly converge on the fact that Internet constitutes a radical innovation, alongside digitalization and the invention of computers. On the result side, this has led to the introduction of radical changes, major re-structuring, new economic processes and training.

(B) Organizational Change – Structures Refurbished

Another important parameter in the Digital clout model is that of structural changes in a news organization. This could be understood as a distinguished feature of journalism now. There have been quite subtle changes in the traditional structures we have in Journalism/Newspaper offices. Many studies reveal changes that have been witnessed in the work routine and connected workflow of the journalists. Multimedia use has rather forced journalists to shift to another realm. The process of news gathering, packaging and dissemination on various platforms using different formats has eventually compelled the organizations to set up

separate production arrangement to cater to multi-platform windows. Correspondingly this has hugely impacted the way Journalists work and think about audiences.

The effect of convergence has in a way coalesced traditional news and information like broadcast, which could be on radio and TV, print through newspapers and magazines and all of these have a space online as well. This essentially means that the "New Journalist" has to necessarily adapt to these changes and be able to produce content across these platforms. Today's concept of audience is 'fast and furious' and the structures that are changing as well typically require the journalist to be flexible, insightful and critically thinking. Jacobs (2018), comments that, "It is about getting tomorrow's journalists thinking in multiple media, since that is how their public already thinks."

(C) Media Convergence

Past three decades have seen tremendous fundamental vicissitudes that occurred in every sphere of media. For example, there has been a rapid expansion of media since 90's due to satellite, cable, internet, mobile phones etc. Consequently, there have been changes in media/journalism practices and way they produce content. It is of course evident from use of multiple platforms in an integrated media environment.

This is created a new production of packages from Television, Radio and Web- integrated into each other. Now reported from all these media channels who previously existed separately are seen now working together; they cooperate and report across media boundaries. There is specifically an increase in the number of journalists who work for all the media channels be it newspapers, online media, TV, mobile or Radio. This has been possible because all the possible output channels or processes are typically converging into one another.

The audience today has availability of systems that work on the principle of Convergence of media. TV footage can be viewed on TV as well as web and mobile phones. Similarly, radio sound or podcasts can be listened on web as well as mobile. This means content generated is capable of travelling across media boundaries and the development is evident in the backdrop of convergence. Convergence is an all-inclusive term which engages social, cultural and technological techniques and processes.

The concept of convergence is now quiet repeatedly used in industry as well as academics. It typically denotes among so many other definitions, the restructuring of organizations, along with new use of gadgets, which work on the principle of multitasking and Napsterization. There is a different sense of progress now in media processing, formats, packaging, distribution and its consumption by audiences. It has opened a myriad of options for media owners culminating in aggressive market competition accompanied by cooperation through cross promotion. Studies have aptly described

development of convergence as mixing or melting together of all technologies of media, accessible information system, and telecommunications and further suggest a social, cultural and economic convergence.

Also, many other researchers strived to further work upon the definition of convergence. For instance, Grant (2009) gave a survey of many definitions of convergence. Out of all available definitions it can easily be inferred that convergence is an inter-textual form of content transmission using digital tools.

Criado and Kraeplin (2009) in their study have provided an applied explanation of convergence prevalent in Journalism industry today and define convergence process as, "Print, broadcast, and online news staffs forging partnerships in which journalists work and distribute content across several news platforms."

Further, Saltzis and Dickinson (2008) contend that, "To ensure competitiveness and cost effectiveness, media organizations may follow four strategies. First, they move towards the organizational and technological integration of newsrooms; sometimes this entails the actual merging of different departments, and more often than not a few redundancies of staff journalists to be superfluous. Second, they hire and use journalists or specialists that have knowledge and skills across all media; again this may signal more job losses especially for those that specialized in only one medium. Third, the application of flexible and user-friendly technology at all levels of production; this clearly makes the production process more efficient. Lastly, media organizations actively pursue the extension of their services in the new media; they seek to find ways to grow and to use more platforms."

(D) Multi-Skilling - Professional Transformation

As per the model, the important aspect of the new face of journalism in today's time speaks of a journalist to be an absolute multi-skilled worker. Today a journalist essentially needs to develop a range of skills compatible with all formats of available media. The journalist is required to learn the skills of all those formats accessible and learn adaptive, integrated software knowledge, which drives these respective media formats.

Today, a journalist may be required to work for different media, television, newspapers, and the web, social media, and of course record, edit and process their own footage. Today a journalist broadly is required and expected to master following software and showcase his/her skills in order to be proficient in working in a fully integrated newsroom environment:

- Multimedia (graphics, photo, video)
- Sound editing (Pro-tools, Sound Forge)
- Adobe Flash, Animations (graphics)

- Video editing (FCP, Premiere, Apple Pro)
- Digital Narratives (stories with info-graphics)
- Visual Graphics (digital stories)

While new age journalism is facing challenges from technology and convergence, surely, there can be a cultural limitation or a certain situation in which journalists' can try and resist the change. This can be termed as one of the implications of the process of convergence. But there is no looking back as the whole face of journalism is changing. Though journalists face the predicament but since time waits for none and the only choice journalists have is a Hobson's choice and they must accept the change for good.

REFERENCES

- Bardoel, J. (2002). The internet, journalism and public communication policies. *International Communication Gazette*, 64(5), 501–511. doi:10.1177/17480485020640050801
- Kraeplin, C., & Criado, C. (2009). The state of convergence journalism revisited: Newspapers take the lead. In A. Grant & J. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Understanding media convergence* (pp. 18–30). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Dailey, L., Demo, L., & Spillman, M. (2003). The convergence continuum: A model for studying collaboration between media newsrooms. Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, USA: Paper submitted to the *Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, Kansas City, Missouri, July- August, 2003
- Grant, A. E., & Wilkinson, J. S. (2009). *Understanding media convergence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press
- Jacobs, R. (2018). Convergence journalism: Writing and reporting across the news media by Janet Kolodzy. *Electronic News*, 1(3), 189–189. doi:10.1080/19312430701455166
- Latzer, M. (2009). ICT innovations: Radical & Disruptive? Vague Concepts – Delicate Choices – Conflicting Results. *New Media & Society*, 11(4), 599–619.
- Pavlik, J. V. (2001). *New media technology and the information superhighway*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Saltzis, K., & Dickinson, R. (2008). Inside the changing newsroom: Journalists' responses to media convergence. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, 60(3), 216–228. doi:10.1108/00012530810879097
- Siapera, E. (2017). *Understanding new media*. London: Sage Publications.