Convergence as a Factor in the Formation of Innovative Journalism in Kazakhstan

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Abstract: The development of information and communication technologies in the formation of a new technical and economic paradigm has changed the structure of the modern media landscape. The article shows the change in media consumption in Kazakhstan as a result of technological development and popularization of the Internet. The reflection of this change is a convergence, which becomes synonymous with backbone transformations in the media sphere. The central place of convergence problems in modern discussions about the future transformation of the information and communication sphere is explained by the multiplicity and multi-dimensional interpretation of this term. Convergence seems to be a process that can completely change not only media and communication systems but also various related industries in the coming decades.

Keywords: Media convergence, innovative journalism, information society, new media, media consumption

Introduction

The scientific and technological revolution, the intensive development of electronic computers, the rapid spread of new means of communication have been reflected in all the media. The ability to use new information and communication technologies has contributed to the creation of an extensive information industry and new media culture, and the Internet has played a fundamental role in shaping the image of modern media. Thus, today we are not just talking about online journalism, but also about the various processes that take place in the space of the Internet environment. Such notions as convergence, convergent journalism, convergent media, and media convergence came into common use. Media professionals have many more opportunities to express their creativity and solve many tasks more efficiently and quickly using the Internet space and convergent media (Stolaki & Economides, 2018; Doty et al., 2020).

The world computer network has become a new means of transmitting text, sound, and visual information in real-time. And it has determined the interactive and

multimedia nature of communications, not typical of traditional media. It has brought together all the primary forms of media-related activities, including collection, processing, transfer, and storage of information. Bulatova and Beisenkulov (2018) have found along with the rapid expansion of new media in Kazakhstan; traditional mass media continue to develop, increasingly intersecting and converting to a convergent form. However, in many respects, the country's traditional media are still the main source of information due to deep-rooted traditions and the state of the modern media system. Applying the model of ethnographic research, the authors analyze the use of social media by Kazakh journalists.

Numerous online publications have provided users with extensive interactive features. Interactivity as their main difference from print media has made realizable the main desire of the user: to receive and send messages, to be both the consumer of information, and an active participant in the communication process. The journalistic profession has been enriched by numerous aspects related to information system technologies: the speed of information acquisition, multi-channel communications, the universality of information that must be accepted on all existing digital platforms and languages. Thus, there is a need to consider the challenges and opportunities of journalism in the context of convergence from classical to universal.

Literature Review

The notion of convergence has come to journalism science from related fields of knowledge. In the 1950s, philosophers and sociologists began to use the concept of convergence in the social and political sciences. In the 1940s, the German economist Walter Eucken (1989) first put forward the concept of the convergent nature of human development. In the next decade this theory was continued in the works of Walt Rostow (1991), the American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1960), the famous American sociologist John K. Galbraith (1967), the Dutch economist, Nobel Prize winner Jan Tinbergen (1962), the French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Maroky, 1981).

In the book *Convergence of cultures*, Alexander Chuchin-Rusov (1997) notes that the term "convergence" was used in the social sciences as a concept reflecting the convergence of opposite socio-political systems as a key vector of development of modern society.

In linguistics science, convergence (from Lat. Converge—approaching, converging) means the convergence or coincidence of two or more linguistic entities.

One of the variants of the theory of convergence belongs to academician Andrey Sakharov (1989). In the late 1960s, he considered the converging between capitalist countries and so-called real socialist countries, which were accompanied by democratization, demilitarization, social and scientific and technological progress, the only alternative to the death of humanity. The hypothesis of social and political convergence initiated subsequent conceptions and ideas about the information society and its further rethinking.

The first to anticipate the evolution of media as a result of the introduction of electronic communications into public life in the mid-twentieth century was Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan (1964). Impressed by the growing popularity of radio and television, the theorist suggested that in the future, the power of these technologies would be so total and ubiquitous that they would freely take over our

consciousness and the world as a whole. As a result, there will be a unique opportunity to create centers everywhere and to translate things into any format (it is noteworthy that today we call this phenomenon such a concept as "digitalization"). McLuhan shows how the Earth has "shrunk" to the size of a "village" (the time of implosion has come). It is now possible to deliver messages instantly and interactively from anywhere in the world to anyone else. In this regard, more and more high-quality software products began to appear. It is noteworthy that the stated definition is, to some extent, similar to the meaning of the word "media convergence," which is also relevant to the phenomena of convergence and integration.

American mass communication specialist Henry Jenkins (2006) writes that when talking about convergence, it is worth distinguishing at least five values. The first type is technological, which means the digitization of content produced by mass media. This is followed by economic convergence, which is understood as a merger of different areas in the entertainment industry (film, television, video games, and books). The third type of convergence Jenkins calls social convergence, which refers to the formation of consumer's multitasking strategies, which arise due to the simultaneous performance of several actions: watching TV, checking e-mails, etc. The penultimate type is the cultural convergence that emerges at the moment when new forms of creativity explode at the moment when technologies of different media, industries, and consumers intersect. Global convergence is the fifth type; it's connected to cultural hybridization, which is the result of the international circulation of media content (texts, music, video).

Today the term "convergence" is understood as system backbone changes in the structure, functioning, and other spheres of media activity. The most precise idea of convergence, close to media convergence, was expressed by American sociologist and publicist Daniel Bell (1976) in his work "Social Framework of the Information Society." He compared two forms of communication already known to humanity. The first was mail, newspapers, magazines, and books, i.e., the means that were printed on paper and distributed by physical transport. The second was the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, where coded messages or speech were transmitted by radio signals or by cable from person to person. "Technologies that once existed in different applications are now erasing these differences, so that information consumers have many alternative means at their disposal" (Bell, 1976, p. 336). The scientist goes on to suggest that "The major social change of the next two decades will come in the third major infrastructure, as the merging technologies of telephone, computer, facsimile, cable television, and videodiscs lead to a vast reorganization in the modes of communication between persons; the transmission of data; the reduction if not the elimination of paper in transactions and exchanges; new modes of transmitting news, entertainment, and knowledge; and the reorganization of learning that may follow the expansion of computer-assisted instruction and the spread of videodiscs" (Bell, 1976, p. 337).

Convergent media, along with the traditional functions of informing, influencing, and entertaining, have a communicative and value-added function, a forum function, and a social-organizational and social-creative function. The characteristics of multimedia, online news, and multi-channels, as noted by Victor Helemendic (2013), allow for continuous updating of information, transmitting it in real-time. Besides, "convergence on the Internet platform gives the user maximum

freedom to select information, profile content "for themselves," and increase the ability to express their opinions and participate in media content creation" (Helemendic, 2013, p. 113). Alexander Kalmykov (2009, p. 42) draws attention to the role of information consumers and journalists and reveals some specific features of this interaction in mass media, noting, "The MCTs are focused on establishing subject-to-subject relations between the participants of communication. A reader of an Internet newspaper becomes, in fact, both a writer and a publisher, even if he has just looked at the front page" (Kalmykov, 2009, p. 42).

The definition of convergent journalism assumes the notion of a convergent editorial office. In the modern information space, a convergent editorial office is a structure engaged in production and creative activities aimed at creating a media product that can be distributed through various communication channels (television, radio, newspaper) and consist of units of information of multiple types (audio, video files, text). Ekaterina Baranova (2013) gives the following definition: "Convergent editorial office is an association of employees from previously different media (print edition, broadcast resources) on one editorial office and one media." The considered notion is identified with the idea of a multimedia editorial office and is similar to the term "integrated editorial office." According to Ye. A. Baranova, an integrated editorial office is "an association in one physical space of journalists and editors who prepare a print and an Internet version of an edition (an association of an Internet department and a newspaper editorial office)." The convergent editorial office is distinguished from an integrated editorial office by the power of communication and mutual influence between teams preparing material for different platforms. In a convergent editorial office, this connection is more expressed and plays a significant role in the organization of employees' work.

Usually, the convergent editorial office uses content management systems in its work. These are peculiar templates, utilizing which editors add data forms for different types of content, perform organizational, administrative, and archiving functions. The significant positive feature of the system is the presence of the service of semi-automatic modeling, which is extremely popular when arguing cross-media journalism. The convergent editors are specialists who have an in-depth knowledge of information acquisition and processing technologies. In addition to specialized CMS systems, they actively use so-called ticker systems based on satellite or network communication, which allow direct access to the messages of news agencies. At the same time, editors monitor and check the information on the Internet. Studies claim that convergent journalism is making inroads and paving ways for citizen journalism or participatory journalism. Citizens are actively participating in the process of production, distribution, and consumption of news content in this new form of journalism. This has become possible because of technological improvements and their acceptance as well. Even citizens in rural India are no exception to it (Biswal, 2019). Therefore, the convergent journalism is becoming multi-dimensional and keep on generating multiple perspectives and promoting numerous scientific studies in the future.

The digital form of presentation of the information which became possible with the development of computer technics has completely changed the nature of media. It has forced a scientific and practical society to put in circulation to

comprehend and comment on the phenomenon of convergence. It concerns not only the socialization of the Internet as a digital media environment. The "figure" has touched on absolutely all processes, from the collection and processing of materials at the preparatory editorial stage, printing, television presence to the blogosphere and social networks. Each of these processes relies on industry-specific digital segments. For example, periodicals are characterized by such production stages based on digital integration:

(i) Information-gathering phase: recording interviews or comments on digital recorders, taking pictures of events with digital cameras;

(ii) Information preparation stage: development of illustrative photographic material in programs of raster computer graphics, creation of graphic elements (including - infographics) in specialized software products and applications of vector graphics, set of texts in text computer editors;

(iii) Editing stage: making changes in the journalistic material in the corresponding program editor;

(iv) Layout stage: preparation of a media product layout for delivery to a printing house in one of the computer layout systems; and

(v) Printing phase: color separation and replication in digital printing.

No less number of digital stages passes the information on television and radio. This includes the recording of materials, their processing, and preparation for air with the help of specialized software, animation of programs by design effects created in computer editors, and digital broadcasting.

Regardless of the narrow production specialization, all media have a standard digital segment—the Internet stage, or placement of information on the resource site.

It should be noted that the term "convergence" is also associated with the notion of "media convergence." Belarusian researcher of media linguistics Victor Ivchenkov (as cited in Duskayeva, 2018, p. 15), believes that media convergence is a merger of traditional and new media based on the Internet, which leads to the emergence of multimedia products and helps synchronize the delivery of information throughout the world, reducing the cost of production and transmission of data. The main objective of media convergence journalism is to present an information product (media product) that combines different types and forms of information presentation to better and more effectively meet the information needs of the population. Thus, in our opinion, media convergence should be understood as mutually beneficial cooperation between specific organizations: newspapers, channels, radio, etc. Media convergence is more understood as a set of technical processes: combining video, audio in the whole set of technological manifestations with the Internet platform to create a media product.

This study aims to reflect ideas about the global systemic transformation of the information and communication sector of public activity in the context of the media landscape transformation associated with the spread of convergence. Achievement of the set goal assumes solving the tasks: (i) definition of "convergence" in different fields of science; (ii) identifying different approaches to studying convergence; (iii) analysis of empirical indicators of Kazakhstan's media consumption on the World Wide Web for 2018-2019.

Methodology

This article focuses on the phenomenon of convergence, where traditional media enter the World Wide Web and thus change the media landscape. With this phenomenon comes a new personal experience of the individual, namely the transformation of that individual into a new consumer, producer, and consumer through convergence. We used content analysis based on the demand for Kazakhstan's media resources on the World Wide Web for 2018-2019. This includes information about the number of users from the global network, moving to Kazakhstan websites, as well as recording the leading social networks, search engines, and other information external (for Kazakhstan) sources that these users visit. The information is recorded on one hundred ninety Kazakhstan websites and allows aggregating data on each user from external sources in a certain period. The present work considers 32 sources of external transitions, including Android, Facebook, Google, GoogleAPis, LentaInform, Mediametrics, News. Google, News.Yandex, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, Vkontakte, Yandex, Zen.Yandex and others.

For more detailed analysis, we used YouScan, a social media monitoring service specializing in social media analytics. This allowed the application of automatic spam filtering Tags were generated using keywords and word exceptions by topic type.

Monitoring and analytics were conducted in world social networks, blogs, forums, sites with reviews, online media. Message languages under consideration were based on Cyrillic and Latin alphabet. To identify the user and advertising content, YouScan "Auto categories" functions were used. The data were collected by text and images.

Results and Discussion

Media convergence has changed the face of the modern media industry. This was facilitated by a potent concentration, which resulted in the introduction of new patterns of speech. For instance, NBC, CBS have been leading in the U.S.A. for a long time on the television communication market, which was even called the "Big Three." Still, in the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, they had to compete hard with cable TV companies and new media giants. Moreover, this competition was often in favor of the latter. Since the 1990s, the dominance gradually shifted to new players—Fox, Warner Brothers, Paramount Communications, whose policies were more flexible and easily adapted to the needs of the mass audience and specific viewers.

Some forecasts assume that media convergence is the process that will completely change not only the media system but also all industries directly or indirectly related to them.

Fiction writer Bruce Sterling (1995) had the Dead Media project. His website explains the main idea: "The centralized dinosaur media of one to many, which dominated and hummed throughout the twentieth century, is poorly adapted to the postmodern technological environment.

Then, the forecasts go on: traditional media are dying out, and their place is gradually taken by new interactive forms of communication with equal relations of information producer and consumer. Of course, such formulations are incredibly controversial, especially in the context of media convergence, when traditional media are actively adapting to new media conditions.

Now we can wholly or partially observe the deep transformations accompanying the media system in the information and communication infrastructure. As a result of the introduction of ICT in the daily work cycle, we are witnessing structural changes in the media communication system due to the generic expansion of media; changes in the parameters of professionalization of journalists and the emergence of the association of so-called free journalists "freelancers"; redistribution of the role and importance of central and regional publications.

The process of media convergence in journalism and publishing has contributed to the emergence of media platforms as new channels for information dissemination. Their difference from traditional press, television, and radio is the multimedia of the final Information product. Such media platforms include the Internet platform, mobile platform, e-paper, and kindle-platforms (software products produced especially for e-books). The emergence of new distribution channels has led to the availability and promotion of the latter. Currently, many leading printed publications in Kazakhstan have their websites on the Internet and produce electronic versions of their publications for computers and mobile devices, sometimes similar to printed originals, and sometimes having several significant differences in comparison with them.

Another achievement of the media convergence process is multimedia as an essential feature of software products released on media platforms. Multimedia is a feature of materials created by the convergent edition, so these two concepts have a close connection with each other. Multimedia is also expressed in the interactivity of the software product, i.e., the user's ability to interact with the information provided. Such interaction can be shown in a search engine built into the program, designed for more convenient site navigation, information filtering, and quick selection of necessary information. A multimedia product has advantages over traditional forms of presentation of information, which has replaced in many areas of the media with the development of computer technology and access to the Internet for the public. When, within the framework of classical formats, information was presented unilaterally (or only as text, or merely as audio, or merely as video, etc.), the characteristic features of multimedia can offer it multilaterally, combining in the most appropriate ratios different types of information. Such a presentation of the material is complete and exhaustive and has a more substantial emotional impact on the person who is a consumer of information. Multimedia products can absorb all the advantages of traditional forms and channels of information distribution. It can have the visibility of television materials, graphic proof, detail, and depth of the problem of text, radio speed. Due to such complexity, the multimedia product can be called universal. Therefore, now it is prevalent and forms the basis of business strategies of many companies that play the role of media.

Competent use of opportunities offered by multimedia technologies gives material with a printed analog, additional depth, and expressiveness. In contrast, a multimedia product, which is entirely original, allows the presentation of information in a way that would be impossible in traditional communication channels. The share of different types of information in a multimedia product depends on the tasks that it is set. Convergent editorial staff in the process of working on the material may emphasize the text, images, or video, depending on the nature of the information and genre of the final information product.

Media Watch 11 (3)

The analysis of media consumption in Kazakhstan in 2018 and 2019 shows that a sustainable "consumer society" of media content has been formed in Kazakhstan. According to the "Mediametrics Kazakhstan" news analysts' portal (mediametrics.kz), more than 40,000 news stories are generated per month in Kazakhstan with a monthly consumption audience of 11 million views. Table 1 below shows the overall figures for the Central Asian countries that form the media space in the region. As can be seen from the Table, Kyrgyzstan generates about 12,000 news items, Uzbekistan about 6,000 and just over 1,000 Tajikistan.

Table 1. Data on Central Asian countries (Sabirov, 2019)

Country	Amount of news	Amount of visits
Kazakhstan	43,304	10,288,099
Kyrgyzstan	11,951	729,405
Uzbekistan	5,987	503,661
Tajikistan	1,113	8,118

Source: Mediametrics Kazakhstan

For example, in 2018, 509,600 news items were produced in Kazakhstan, with 136,037,166 Internet users visiting Kazakhstan news from the global network.

The average figures for Kazakhstan are about 40 thousand news items per month and about 10-11 million visits (Figures 1 and 2). Characteristic peaks in July 2018 and January 2019 are associated with two tragic events in Almaty and Karaganda.
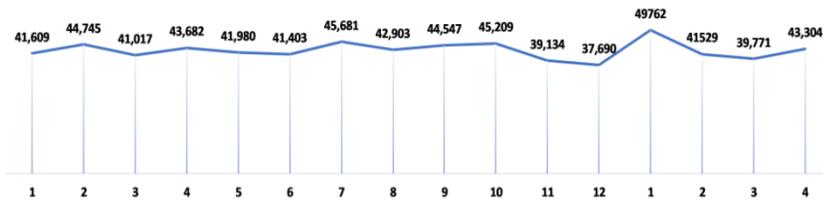

Figure 1. Number of news articles from January 2018 to April 2019
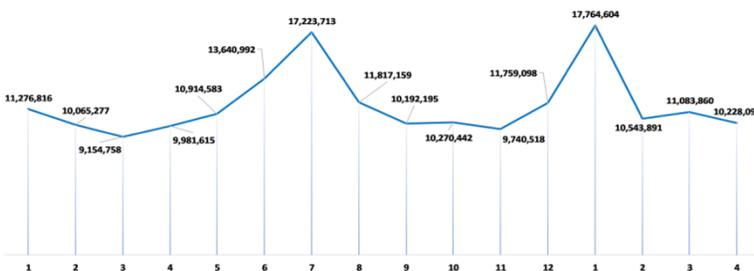Source: Mediametrics Kazakhstan

Figure 2. Number of visits to news items from January 2018 to April 2019
Source: Mediametrics Kazakhstan

A more in-depth analysis of statistical data shows that the first 2,000 news items form more than 95% of visits, and in some months, the top 100 news items attract about 40% of users.

A long-known myth is the popularity of social network Facebook in Kazakhstan. This myth can quickly be dispelled if we consider the share of media consumption in the country. On average, the percentage in media consumption of social network Facebook is less than 5%. In comparison, the main component for the Kazakhstan media market is the Google search engine, with a share of more than 80%. Social media in Kazakhstan today act more as a means of communication for people than a platform for sharing media content. Also, well-known messengers such as Whatsapp and Telegram compete with social networks in communication. Unfortunately, the politicization of Facebook in Kazakhstan is extremely high and sometimes borders with dangerous tension.

The primary providers of information are usually the Internet portals tengrinews.kz and zakon.kz, with a total share of more than 80% of user migrations from external sources.

There is no doubt that the active development of the information environment in Kazakhstan led to growing media convergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) industry and media systems, where traditional and new media information flows are merged. As far back as 15 years ago, there was no point in talking about media consumption in the country, because Kazakhstan people were not much interested in national news and were mostly more in demand for Russian-language content on Russian websites. However, since 2010 the active construction of Kazakhstan media online space started. During this period, new media begin to be created, news agencies appear, and the first pool of young domestic opinion leaders in the information field is being formed. Today Kazakhstan's average Internet user starts his working day with local news and thus demonstrates his participation in media consumption. On the other hand, the Kazakhstan media market is under pressure both from foreign media agencies and from the repeatedly changing political agenda.

Conclusion

The creation of a convergent version of an information product allows the user to choose a more convenient way to obtain information in the shortest possible time. The availability of the Internet and mobile devices practically makes a modern person a permanent subject of the information space.

In today's information market, a company that refuses to present its product on several platforms risks losing the competition and losing a huge part of the audience. Convergence is the way many editors exist and a means of attracting attention to their material. A large part of the population prefers the global network as the main source of information. We have to assume that traditional forms, such as television, radio, and journalism, and companies in today's market need to transit to mobile and Internet spaces in order not to lose part of the earlier audience and attract the attention of new ones.

Information products created by the convergent edition may consist of the relations of interaction, addition, or repetition of each other. Still, modern technologies, which initially contributed to the process of convergence, allow covering

a large area of information space with minimal resource and time costs. This is because the same material, the result of the creative and productive activities of journalists, editors, proofreaders, designers, and programmers, can be replicated on several different platforms, meet different needs, achieve different goals, and reach different audiences.

The role of editorial office organization and behavior strategy in the market has increased due to the release of publications to the Internet. Special attention is paid to the selection of materials and feedback from readers. Feedback existed even before the universal availability of the Global Network, within the traditional channels of communication. Its example can be letters sent to the editorial office and live calls on television. Still, it was not until the 20th century that the reaction of users to journalistic content received such a valid form of expression. Mainly, feedback is provided through comments on the website and questions to the authors or the editorial office. There is an actual practice of using user-generated content as material for publication.

Media convergence is a process of integration, merging of different media on the Internet platform into one communication product, through which it is possible to obtain and further store various information about an event, situation, and other more fully and comprehensively. The intensifying media convergence processes have resulted in the transformation of media consumption in Kazakhstan. Convergence and media convergence have become a phenomenon in the modern information environment at many levels—from the integration of information and communication technologies to business technologies and consumers, end-users, and corporate application technologies.

New models of creating and delivering information from the user to the most considerable information resource ensure instant publication of materials in new media and social networks. The development of Kazakhstan's digital market influences the quality of content and its delivery, business and advertising promotion, marketing, and telecommunications, as well as the interaction between government and society.

Over the past two years, there has been a growing popularity of online media, which has made a massive breakthrough in terms of attracting users. Only regional new media now occupy 48% of the total number of media resources. Websites of the country's regions show extraordinary growth and popularity among users. Media consumption shows an interest in local news materials. The growth of content in the state language is undoubted. In some days and weeks, materials in the Kazakh language are steadily leading among the most popular news.

On the cusp of the 20th and 21st centuries, all quantitative and qualitative changes in journalism and media companies worldwide are somehow related to the occurrence of information overload, the formation of multi-platform, and the emergence of multiple channels. (Vartanova, 2013)

Today's media users can choose from tens of thousands of audio and video channels, in different languages and any format, mostly for free. The "digital environment" offers a constantly multiplying, even redundant choice, which also becomes a new challenge to a modern-time user.

Nowadays, media professionals are facing a tough situation (as a branch, journalism no longer has a monopoly on access to information and its dissemination);

they should focus on radically new skills. The key competencies, skills, and abilities of the future are all those that are closely associated with the media and communication environment. It refers to critical thinking and creativity, a sense of management and coordination skills, emotional intelligence, and cognitive flexibility.

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