



The digital revolution and media convergence

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Convergence, Digitalization, Popularization, Telecommunication.

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ABSTRACT *Digital convergence, phenomenon involving the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks, and media content. It brings together the three 'Cs'-computing, communication, and content-and is a direct consequence of the digitization of media content and the popularization of the Internet. Media convergence transforms established industries, services, and work practices and enables entirely new forms of content to emerge.*

The growth of digital technology in the 1990s resulted in changes in the way information is stored and transmitted. In particular, it led to the translation of all information, regardless of format, into a universal computer language. The new media all share this common format. Most importantly, digitalisation resulted in the realization that different ways of presenting a variety of types of information-texts, video, photographs, voices, movies, music- could all be combined into a single delivery system or media. This is known as technological convergence.

Definition: according to Pavlik (2004), "Media convergence is the coming together of computing, telecommunication and media in a digital environment."

Drawing on the definitions of media convergence outlined above, it can be argued that one of the ways of understanding media convergence is in terms of interaction between old and new forms of media. This concept can be explained more clearly using the example of television industry and its development over the years. The idea of transition from analogue media to digital media stands at the core of media convergence debate. The term 'analogue' is used to describe something 'that resembles something else' (Dewdney and Ride, 2006).

Meikle's four dimensions of convergence:

- **Technological:** the combination of computing, communication and content around networked digital media platform.
- **Industrial:** the engagement of established media institutions in the media space and the rise of digitally based companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft and others as significant media content providers.
- **Social:** the rise of social network media such as Facebook and the growth of user generated content.
- **Textual:** the re-use and remixing of media into what has been termed a 'transmedia' model where stories and media content (sound, images and written text) are dispersed across multiple media platform.

Digitalization allows information to be delivered across a range of media platforms; what were once separate and unconnected technologies (eg. Mobile phones and TVs) are now part of a converging media landscape that blurs the lines about how we use these technologies (Boyle, 2005). However, it is important to understand that technological convergence has also produced economic and social convergence. Media and telecommunication industries that had previously produced separate and distinct systems of communication, such as the telephone, TV programmes or computers, began to make alliances with each other because digitalization reduced the boundaries between media sectors. This cross fertilization of ideas and resources underpinned by digitalization produced new forms of multimedia or converged media delivery systems. The 4G mobile phone is an excellent example of this. Media

convergence involves both a change in the way media are produced and a change in the way media are consumed. Convergence is, therefore, both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer driven process (Jenkins, 2008).

Compression: digital technologies enable the compression of signals. This has led to a proliferation of radio and TV channels because it means that many signals can be sent through the same cable, telephone line. This has resulted in the development of new markets organized around the concept of narrowcasting the transmission of particular types of media content to even individualized consumers.

Interconnectivity: the new media are interactive media that are responsive in real time to user input through clicking on links or selecting menu items with a mouse. Jenkins suggests that interactivity and convergence have produced a participatory culture. In other words, media producers and consumers no longer occupy separate roles they are now participants who interact with each other according to a new set of that are constantly evolving. He also suggests that interactivity has produced a collective intelligence because consuming new media tends to be a collective process.

The internet provides us the main means through which people can interact with each other in a participatory culture and build collective intelligence. They can engage in online discussions or play online live games with each other. They may simply be interested in networking with others through sites such as Twitter, Face book, Whatsapp. Some of this interactivity will be creative- for e.g., people may wish to convey their thoughts, feelings and opinions through the setting up of their own websites or the online diaries known as blogs. They may produce their own films and music and post these on sites such as YouTube.

Boyle (2005) similar trends in television media because we have now evolved from a system of supply -LED television, available free to the whole population, to demand LED TV, organized around the idea that the viewers should decide what they want to watch and when. The development of the Sky+ and free view are good examples of how consumers of new media are encouraged to take an active role in the construction of their own television schedules. He notes that new media are often associated with young people. Some sociologists have consequently suggested that there now exists a generational divide in that there is no doubt that the media experience of young people growing up in the society today is markedly different from that of previous generations in terms of access to and familiarity with a wider range of media.

The key difference in young people's use of media today is that the new media is also a 'now' media- it is significantly different from previous media because of its immediacy and accessibility. Consequently, the ways in which young people access and seek out

entertainment and news differ from previous generations. It has been suggested that the poor are excluded from the information superhighway because they lack the material resources to be able to plug into this new media revolution- in other words; they are a digital under class use of new media technology. Gender wise men are more likely than women to use e-mail or chat rooms.

According to the World Bank survey in 2012, about three- quarters of the world's population now have access to a mobile phone. There are now six billion subscriptions in use worldwide, of which nearly five billion are in developing countries.

An e-commerce revolution: Moreover, the internet had led to a revolution in e-commerce in recent years. E-retailers such as Amazon, Paytm, Snap deal, jabong, etc., have had great economic success and have actually undermined high street sales. Most major commercial companies now have their own websites. It is claimed that this e-commerce trend has also resulted in more choice for consumers, because it increases competition, leads to lower prices and puts consumers in control, as they can compare prices for a huge of products and services.

Revitalizing democracy: it is argued that new media technologies offer opportunities to ordinary people to acquire the education and information required to play an active role in democratic societies and to make politicians more accountable to the people. The internet, in particular, has been highlighted in this respect because it is a public sphere that anybody can access, usually at little or no cost. Sociologists have suggested that the internet can revitalize democracy because it gives a voice to those who would otherwise go unheard. It can turn ordinary citizens into 'citizen journalists' who can join together and take action that may lead social change.

Side effects on 'new' of media:

Cultural pessimists are particularly critical of the globalization of the media, which they argue has led to the 'Disneyfication' of culture because it is claimed that this global culture is overwhelmingly an American entertainment culture, focussed on reality television, celebrity gossip and consumerism. Kellner (1999) suggests that this global media culture is about sameness and that it erases individuality, specificity and difference, which is dumbing down real and authentic local cultures. It is argued by sociologists, politicians and cultural commentators that the new media, particularly the internet, are in need of state regulation. All points of view are represented on the internet but it is argued that easy access to pornography and homophobic, racist and terrorism inciting sites is taking free speech too far.

Consequences of this trend can be viewed as both positive and negative. On the one hand, it may cause the decline in the diversity of material offered and result in a tendency that voices of those lacking economic power will not be taken into account (Branston 2008). On the other hand, it is argued that market driven media owned and controlled by big media corporations 'can actually improve the value of the service, the flexibility of topics and the competence of the contributors' as well as enable technological developments, change the elitism of media professionals and create new general awareness (Grant, 2009).

Conclusion: Convergence induced changes in communications and the digital creative economy is driven by the interplay of technical, economic, political and socio-cultural factors. A co-evolutionary approach takes growing complexity and interplay into account. It compensates for a general weakness of the narrow convergence concept, which is strong in the analysis of the old converging parts but weak in the explanation of the emerging new. Convergence can be understood as an innovation-driven, co-evolutionary process in a complex environment. It is a process of structural change with a wide range of implications for content and

creativity. Concepts of convergence provide the big picture but also allow for detailed analysis throughout the digital creative economy.

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