Media Convergence and Journalism Practice in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract
Media convergence has ushered in salient modifications to the functions and operation of journalists, and the journalism profession at large. Although media convergence is, to a large extent, beneficial to media organizations and their users, it challenges the operations of journalist and their functions. The history of media evolution has constantly shown that the introduction of new technology into the media landscape does not signal an end to the prevailing journalistic practices, rather it fosters the evolution and adaptation of the existing media while contributing to the development of the successor. The research utilized the qualitative research method and made use of the explorative approach, with secondary data, to ascertain the issues and challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria in the age of media convergence. Findings revealed time pressure, professional competencies, the question of quality, internal competition, the rise of user-created content, poor remuneration and the welfare of the Journalist as major convergence challenges facing journalism in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, concluded that technology has come to merge the different roles of the journalist and media institutions to create multimedia outlets for news gathering, processing and dissemination. Hence, the need for journalists to be versatile in their operations, adhere to the journalistic code of ethics and professional conduct and be properly motivated by their employers to drive optimal performance.

Keywords: Media, convergence, media convergence, journalism, challenges.

Introduction

Despite significant infrastructure issues, Nigerian journalism has continued to expand at a rapid pace in line with worldwide trends (Akpan et al., 2022). This shift in the media world, which is mostly based on the usage of technologies, has had a profound impact on the practice of mass communication in today's society…. And spurred by the necessity for media convergence in a digitalized world, the usage of digital computers has altered the seeming "old media" (Akpan et al. 2022)

Media convergence which is also known as "mediamorphosis" is a term used to describe the dynamics and increasing inter-reliance or interdependence among various mass media forms and organizations. Citing Shade (2003), Ufot (2016) presents media convergence as the artful combination of texts, images and time-based media (sound and motion video) on a single digital platform, delivered for interactive use by consumers - typically via the web. The implication is that both media professionals and the audience are now tied or glued to digital information technologies. Convergence, according to

Saltzis (2007) has brought about radical and fundamental changes to the media landscape that are not simply technological. At the structural level, boundaries between the traditional methods of communication and the new ways of communication are becoming less evident and the relationships between different media platforms are now characterized by increasing cooperation, compatibility and connectivity. In line with this, Saltzis (2007) asserts that the processes of digitalization and convergence appear to be irreversible yet unpredictable. The changes occurring at different levels have raised questions about the way traditional media organizations will adapt to the new environment or whether they would even survive at all.

At the level of news production, the current media landscape seems to suggest that convergence is more of a case of evolution than revolution. This is because as the media industries are converging and traditional news organizations expand into new media, their production processes must meet new demands. Newsrooms and journalists are moving from the era of single-media to multi-media reporting. New integrated newsrooms are conceived for exactly this reason, to share resources and to manage a multimedia production process. These developments affect the organization of newsrooms and the working practices of journalists in profound ways. Multiskilling, for instance, is a trend with increasing acceptance in new media which demands the journalist to be versatile; coping with a wide range of responsibilities to get jobs done.

Friedman & Friedman (2008) note that if there is one factor that can be considered to be driving the new media, it is the concept of convergence. In recent decades, technology has converged in a way that is more amazing than functional. This is mostly owing to widespread digitization and the internet, which may be considered a convergence of digitization and telephoning in and of itself.   Citing Cottle (1999), Saltzis (2007) asserts that the increasing demands on journalists create a more pressured working environment, which ultimately hurts journalistic standards. Media convergence has been adopted by many people across the globe because of its pervasive nature, this presents a dilemma to journalists in Nigeria. For media organizations to have a formidable communication structure, they have to embrace media convergence on the one hand, and they also have to deal with issues and challenges that come with integrating media convergence in their journalism practice, on the other hand. Despite new media policies in organizations, there is a problem with the inability of organizations to control the use of new media technologies.

Media convergence can revolutionize journalism practice in such an unprecedented manner, and it can also be a destructive, disruptive and distracting tool to change the reputation of any media organization. Therefore, there exist the challenges of measuring the role of media convergence in the communication activities of journalists and also the difficulty in identifying and balancing the overall impact of media convergence on journalism practice in Nigeria. Given the foregoing, the following questions are raised: what exactly does convergence hold for journalists in large-scale news organizations? How has this changed their working practices? Are journalists being overloaded with job functions? Are job definitions changing too? These are some of the numerous questions begging for answers in the course of this study.

Research Objectives
1. To find out the emerging trends in journalism practices made possible by media convergence in Nigeria.
2. To find out how media convergence has impacted the working practices of journalists in Nigeria.
3. To make recommendations in line with global best practices to ensure ethical and professional journalistic practices in Nigeria, in the age of media convergence.

Theoretical Framework
This article has as its theoretical framework the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Technology Determinism Theory. Everett Roger's (1995) 'Diffusion of Innovation Theory' offers a useful perspective to understanding how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through

culture. This theory focuses on conscious exposure, adoption, and performance of new ideas, practice and the process by which these new ideas are shared with others. However, diffusion theorists have argued that the proliferation of technological innovations and their adoption by different individuals or societies is assessed by how the innovation itself is diffused and appreciated by the users. The emergence of media convergence has exposed media organizations, journalists and users to a variety of media technology options. In perspective, the diffusion theory explains how technology is received, managed, adopted and implemented by the intended users.

According to Lawson-Borders (2003: 94) cited in Ufot (2016), the adoption of new media innovations is more than just a concept. It is a process by which media companies in the age of convergence are faced with the task of developing a new set of practices that will be relevant to successfully merge the various media forms and products which are delivered for interactive usage by the consumers. Today, all the devices used for communication are continuously being blended into one massive media conglomerate; such that, with just a mobile phone, a computer system and the internet, one can comfortably access the media, irrespective of the form and location. Thus, the fierce competition made possible by the advent of media convergence has made it necessary for all big media organizations to establish their stakes on the internet.

In his book The *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of typographic man*, published in 1962, Marshall McLuhan proposed the "technological determinism theory", according to technological determinism, as we go from one technological age to the next, media technology impacts how we as people in a society think, feel, behave, and how society functions (McLuhan, 1962). This indicates that technology has a significant impact on humanity. According to Thomas Hauer, proponents of technological determinism say that technical growth influences and shapes society. It must conform to new technology and advances and adapt to them. The negative repercussions of technical advancement are the product of people's improper use of technology, not the nature of technology itself. Toffer saw technology as the driving force behind all developments that have a negative influence on all aspects of human life (Hauer, 2017). Many studies have proven that technology determinism theory underpins much of modern media and journalistic practice (Wasserman; 2001, Chari, 2013). Technology is viewed as the primary engine of social change in the theoretical framework.

Research Methodology

The study utilized the qualitative research technique; collecting, analyzing and interpreting literature put forward by different scholars on media convergence and its related topics from textbooks, libraries, journals and the internet. The researcher adopted the exploratory approach to understand the numerous trends and changes in journalism practice made possible by media convergence as well as make recommendations in line with global best practices.

Literature Review

In the last decade, the development of the internet as a news media, digitalization in audiovisual media and the declining circulation of traditional media persuaded both academics and professionals that convergence could be the saviour of journalism in the 21st century (Domingo et al. 2007). However, empirical research dealing with actual convergence projects suggests that there is no single solution when putting this idea to work; there are so many definitions of the concept as newsrooms exploring it (Silcock & Keith, 2006). The professional culture, of different media backgrounds, business promotions, and the attitude of individual journalists; several factors have a decision role in shaping the evolution and fate of convergence projects (Singer, 2004; Boczkowski & Ferris, 2005; Winenberg, 2005). The common ground for any process labelled as journalism convergence is the blurring of the limits between different media professional skills, formats, and production strategies (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Silcock & Keilth, 2006).

The Concept of Convergence
The word convergence is still a source of contention with communication critic Lev Manovich (2001), claiming that the 'old' medium of communication may be understood as a confluence of written text (titles and credits), photography, animation, and audio recording. He also pointed out the growing number of incompatible electronic products as a counterpoint to techno-utopian claims of convergence. The status of convergence is only one of many contentions statements about new media's revolutionary manners.

The term convergence has been in use in a diverse academic field. The definitions of convergence in other fields than the media are somewhat similar to each other. For instance, in the Swedish National Encyclopedia (NE), cited by Appelgren (2004), there are several definitions of convergence. Within the field of mathematics, convergence denotes a move towards a certain value in a series of values. 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. The biological definition of convergence describes how similar biological structures have been developing from separate sources of origin.

Convergence as a Concept in the Media
According to Appelgren (2004), the first introduction of media convergence into media research occurred earlier in 1979, when Nicholas Negroponte presented a convergence model based on three intersecting circles. These circles illustrated how three media industries can come together as a single entity. From the presentation of those circles, the media convergence debate has continued. Media convergence according to Phree (2011) is an economic strategy in which communications companies seek financial benefit by making the various media properties they own work together. He further asserts that this strategy is a product of three elements:
 i. Corporate Concentration whereby few large companies own more media properties.
 ii. Digitalization whereby media content produced in a universal computer language can be easily adapted for use in any medium.
 iii. Government Deregulation which has increasingly allowed media conglomerates to own different kinds of mass media (e.g, television and radio stations and newspapers) in the same market, and which has also permitted content carriage companies (e.g, cable TV suppliers) to own content producers (e.g, speciality TV channels).

Types of Media Convergence
i. **Economic Convergence:** In this type of media convergence, several media organizations decide to legally come together either as mergers or by acquisition, to dominate the market share in the industry. However, (McQuail 2005, P. 137, 552) in Talabi (2009) assert that the most widely noted potential consequence for the media institution is the convergence between all existing media forms in terms of their organization, distribution, reception and regulation.

ii. **Digital Convergence:** Here, media organizations are linked or intersected via integrated digital technologies to achieve a well-integrated conglomerate and by extension, enhance multimedia information sharing and open access. Citing the 1997 European Commission, Talabi (2009), notes that there is a general agreement that convergence occurs at the technological level. Hence, digital technology allows both traditional and modern communication services to be provided over different networks. Therefore, it is trite to say that digital technology underpins convergence. A good example of this is the internet which incorporates radio, film and television; and then distributing them through push technology. This implies that by a push of a button or a click of a mouse, one can listen, watch or read information from the Internet.

However, the introduction of digital technology has changed the way different media sectors operate. In different countries around the world, the application of digital technologies is

at a different pace and with different scopes. In Nigeria for instance, telecommunications and the press are under the same ministry called the Ministry of Information and Communication, because of digitalization, yet, they are regulated differently (Talabi, 2009). The internet, today has evolved to become a reality medium of communication because of the convergence of different technologies.

iii. **Newsroom Convergence:** In newsroom convergence, journalists from different media (TV, radio, newspaper and social media) share the same workspace rather than do the work in separate buildings. In the year 2000, staff of the media conglomerate, Media General Inc. in Tampa Tribune, WFLA TV and TBO.com, all moved to a $ 40 million building, whilst working together. This feature led to cross-platform cooperation which encouraged high-quality standards of media communication, as well as enabled cost-effectiveness (Brewer, 2020).

iv. **Newsgathering Convergence:** Newsgathering convergence makes it possible for reporters on the field to work together. In its simplest form, news crews can share the same vehicle to report events around the city or share the same bus to a disaster scene. A TV newscaster might borrow one of the newspaper graphics. A TV reporter might cover an event for broadcast, and then write a longer story for the website. With training, print reporters learn to deliver TV news reports; photojournalists take photos and video and conduct interviews. In other words, journalists can multitask in multimedia, whether it's on one story produced by a team of TV, print and online staffers; or one reporter preparing variations of one story for several different media.

v. **Content Convergence:** Content convergence refers to an organizational effort to ensure context created in any part of the organization can be found and reused by any other part of the organization. According to Porter (2019), we are fast approaching a convergence of content. Content is the foundation on which customer expenses are built, be it text, imaging, video or audio… context production is at the heart of every business. Content convergence in media brings the "three CS" – computing, communication, and content. It is a direct consequence of the digitalization of media content and the popularization of the Internet (Flew, 2013).

Media Convergence Trends and Journalism Practice

According to Phree (2011), the notable feature of convergence is the blurring of the limits between different media professional skills, formats and production strategies. Deuze (2004) adds another similar trend which is the blurring between the roles of the producer and consumer. However, media convergence has been analytically structured into four dimensions that cover the different phases of the communication process viz:

i. Integrated production - Content
ii. Multi-skilled professionals - Source
iii. Multiplatform delivery - Medium
iv. Active audience – Receiver (Domingo; et al. 2007)

Phree (2011) also opines that any of the above dimensions of convergence can be developed in the media on its own, but in many cases, they are part of the same convergent project, which is to pass messages through a particular platform. For example, Channels Television media practitioners use smartphones which combine numerous technologies which used to be available on separate devices: a computer, a watch, an alarm clock, a GPs, and a newspaper among others to cover and report new stories. These numerous technologies are now available in the palm of journalists.

Integrated Production

As noted by Domingo et al (2007), the most relevant signs of convergence in this dimension are usually found in the reorganization of newsrooms, although this is closely linked to the redefinition of professional roles, technological innovation and the development of new news formats and languages. This occurs when independent newsrooms collaborate more or less often and use other developed forms of integration, through the coordination desks of separated newsrooms or by the integration of all the

journalists into one newsroom that produces content for different outlets at the same time. This practice ideally fosters a more efficient production that would use every medium`s strength to offer the most useful information at every given time.

Multi-skilled Professionals

Journalistic convergence can also be analyzed from the standpoint of the redefinition of professional roles and skills of reporters and editors. Scholars suggest that current trends can be summarized in the idea of flexibility. The ideal multi-skilled journalist would be able to produce news for any medium using any technological tool required. He can adapt the stories to the language of each medium and develop the whole production process. According to Domingo et al (2007), multiskilling trends can be analyzed using the following parameters:

1. Media multiskilling: where journalists produce content for different media.
2. Issue multiskilling: where professionals report on news related to different thematic areas.
3. Technical multiskilling: in which reporters are responsible for performing most of all of the production tasks.
4. Multi-skilled journalists are found in British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) regional

Multiplatform Delivery

Distribution of content has been the dimension of convergence that more visibly has developed in recent years, even though journalism research has seldom paid attention to the implications of this trend (Domingo et al, 2007). The maturity of the internet and mobile communications, as well as the data-enabled digital television systems, have broadened the range of options available for citizens to access the news. Digitalization, again, has facilitated the development of multiplatform delivery strategies aimed at making news distribution as efficient as possible using the work of one reporter on an issue as the common source for all the other versions of the story in the different outlets of the media. There also seems to be a virtuous circle accelerating the development of multiplatform delivery technologies. This is because all the actors seem to benefit—telecommunication companies and software developers use these new content services as a way of finding new revenue opportunities; the media utilizes it as a valuable means of reaching out to a massive audience and also being able to increase the visibility of their content; and in turn, the users will be attracted to the media due to the ease of access to news platforms, every time, anywhere (Domingo et al, 2007).

Active Audience

Citing Jenkins (2004), Doming et al (2007) note that current media trends do not only seem to blur the differences between media bodies, but it also blurs the distance between producers and the audience. The origin of this redefinition of the relationship between journalists and the citizens as noted by Livingstone (1999) cited in Domingo et al (2007) can be found in the qualitative changes in the audience habits and attitudes namely, fragmentation, specialization and active participation. Digital distribution technologies, therefore, allow for the customization of content and make easier the production of news that is highly targeted for a specific audience.

However, Deuze (2005) cited in Domingo et al (2007) avers that it is not the first time in history that citizens have produced content asides from the ones produced by professional news media. But then, as soon as the internet popularized free, easy and effective media tools, journalists began to ignore these rather marginal citizen media initiatives. However, not only has user-generated content production rocketed in the last few years, but it has slowly become a culture of dialogue and collective deliberation. For instance, it has now become a trend for radio stations to engage in dialogue and collective deliberation through call-in programmes for various discourses on issues of great importance.

Challenges of Media Convergence Faced by Journalists in Nigeria

Convergence has ushered in salient modifications to the functioning and operation of journalists, and the journalism profession at large. Although convergence is to a large extent beneficial to media organizations and their users, it challenges the operations of journalists and their functions. The Journalist is today faced with an increased workload due to the development of multiple platforms and news programs. Cross-media cooperation and production create more work for the journalist, as does the proliferation of various news programmes which are continuously in demand for news content on each platform.

The following challenges of media convergence encountered by journalists were observed by Erdal (2007). They are discussed thus:

a. Time Pressure

Time, as Erdal (2007) notes, is the most frequently mentioned structural constraint in the era of media convergence. Whereas the management of media organizations wants more cross-media cooperation and production, reporters in their daily work complain of not having the required time. Erdal (2007) further buttresses the fact that a television reporter could in the past relate to a fixed deadline for a news programme, but today, the increased number of televised news broadcasts as combined with the very high demands of the radio media, social media and news publishing companies, points towards the increment of the journalists' workload. The journalist will always have a news story waiting to be produced and published, a phenomenon referred to as the news cyclone.

b. Professional Competences and the Question of Quality

The constraints of convergence are also found in the fact that different media platforms demand different professional skills from journalists. As Erdal (2007) notes, there is no general agreement among news professionals as to whether convergence benefits or harms the quality of news journalism. Some advocates of convergence journalism are of the view that convergence and cross-media work benefits journalists and media organizations, whereas, on the other hand, journalists are often reported to be worried about their status as professionals, and the quality of their work due to the nature of their job description and the versatility attached to it. For instance, a journalist can work from any media platform at once but would not master any of them. And even if there was to be a professional journalist, he would not be able to work for several platforms at the same time, because most reporters who work for both television and radio are put on some form of rotational work schedule.

c. Internal Competition

Another bump in the road towards convergence has to do with journalistic ambition. Cooperation across media platforms as Erdal (2007) notes, is closely linked to competition. There is a marked difference between what is regarded as common news, i.e. news that is shared by all media, and exclusive stories. One example of the first may be an accident or a robbery. The main aim of the former is to publish the news fast and get it out across all media platforms before anyone else does. So, we see that when the news story is a product of extensive research, the media platform that publishes the news first will get more importance.

When developing investigative stories, editors discuss whether they should be aired first on radio or television. In the case of disagreement, the golden rule is that the medium where the reporter in question works has the rights to the story. Medium identity is given more weight than institutional identity, something that is reflected in the view of the editor.

d. Rise of User-created Content

An important shift in the media associated with convergence as noted by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) Report (2012), is the rise of user-created content, and a shift in media users, ranging from the audience to the participants. Charles Lead beater and Paul Miller have referred to such

trends as the "pro-am revolution" where the tools of content creation become cheaper and simpler to use, thereby blurring distinctions between amateur and experts

However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in ALRC Report (2012) identified user-created content as a significant disruptive force that creates both opportunities and challenges for established market participants and their strategies. The introduction of citizen journalism into online journalism has made it a reality for everyone to become a content creator, owner and actor, instead of being a mere passive user. The unprofessional activities of these citizen journalists, who often lack basic training on the code of ethics and professional conduct of journalism, have debased conventional journalism as well as the information journalists send into public domains.

The internet as a new creative outlet has altered the economics of information production, increased the democratization of media production and led to changes in communication and social relationships (sometimes referred to as the rise or return of the amateurs). Changes in the way users produce, distribute, access and re-use information; knowledge and entertainment potentially give rise to increased user autonomy, increased participation and increased diversity.

Poor Remuneration and Welfare of the Journalist:
Media convergence while exposing the media organizations to wider opportunities of making profit and the users to more comfortable ways of getting information, places so much pressure on the journalist. Today, the journalist is expected to be versatile while carrying out his duty; he is expected to write for the TV, Radio and even the internet (for broadcast), same is achievable in print media organizations. To function efficiently in the age of convergence, the journalist needs to be properly motivated with bonuses, pay raises, timely payment of salaries and frequent rewards for accomplishing tasks. This motivation has to cover both the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of the journalist. However, in many media organizations today, we still witness situations where the journalist who is expected to be at the top of his performance is being owed salaries for months, talk less of promotion, pay raises or incentives to boost performance. This outcome does not only affect the morale of the journalist but also puts his integrity into question.

Other challenges of media convergence facing journalists in Nigeria, according to Ntuk, Essien and Akarika (2022), are as follows:

(i)   *Poor Funding:* Unfortunately, most media organizations are not properly funded, particularly in the acquisition of new ICTs equipment. This was why Ikpe (2006) questioned if some Nigerian organizations will be able to withstand the cost of acquisition and upkeep of ICTs. Indeed, in this era of media convergence, insufficient funding has played a significant role in poor journalistic practice in Nigeria.

(ii)   *Lack of Expertise:* In this era of media convergence occasioned by new media technologies, journalism practice involves knowledge in both the practice and application of new media technology. Early practitioners included people from other disciplines who are not core journalists as such do not necessarily have a fair knowledge of how new media technologies are used.

Conclusion
Technology has merged different roles of the journalist and media institutions to create multimedia outlets for news gathering, processing and dissemination. Many media organizations have converged their operation online to provide the audience with news online in real time around the clock. Journalists and their media organizations are now constantly challenged by technology to innovate and renovate their systems to meet the changing taste of the audience they serve.

In conclusion, media convergence has emerged as a possible source of new prospects for journalism practice by allowing journalists to improve and add aesthetic appeal to their profession. Without question, media convergence has come to stay, and they are a valuable tool for journalism practice.

Recommendations

a. Motivating the journalist for optimal performance in the age of convergence should not be a subject to be debated; this is because the journalist is today required to be versatile, mastering almost every aspect of his profession. Motivation is one of the forces that lead to performance; when the journalist's need is well taken care of, it, in turn, influences his behaviour leading to satisfaction.

b. More so, with the rise of user-generated content made possible by citizen journalists publishing on the web, the traditional journalist is no longer the sole purveyor of information, He is now faced with not only the challenge of being versatile in carrying out his duty, but also maintaining his credibility in the eyes of the public. Hence, He must employ a code of ethics and professional conduct while rushing to report the breaking story of the hour. He must be factual, accurate, balanced and fair in his reportage while utilizing the various technologies at his disposal.

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