

# Emergence of Media Convergence and Its Impact on Communication Education: An Analytical Study

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## ABSTRACT

*Journalism initiatives are becoming medium-agnostic travelling across print, cyber, television, radio and mobile. Digital and PR through paid, owned and earned media are all coming together to create a 360-degree integrated approach. The focus will be on synergistic effect and bringing optimal results. Also, for effective public affairs the integration of all of the tools of modern communications is of utmost importance. Agencies that use the full array of modern communications tools—earned media, targeted digital advertising, social media engagement and content - will succeed in influencing policy outcomes or achieve marketing goals in 2016 and beyond. The success of Narendra Modi in 2014 general elections, and the initial success of Modi Govt. and AAP coming to power in Delhi are also pointers to the same. This paper tries to explore how convergence in media is evolving, and how it is impacting communication education.*

## Keywords

Convergence, communication, media, education, network

## OBJECTIVE & RATIONALE

This paper tries to explore how convergence in media is evolving, and how it is impacting communication education.

This paper is also expected to be a good contribution to the understanding of media education and make it more relevant to its practice in the industry and the academics, making communication education more productive and less arm-chair degree-earning pursuit.

## MEDIA CONVERGENCE

### Meaning

Convergence: In general, the process of coming together or the state of having come together toward a common point.

Media convergence is a theory, and subsequently a practice, in communications where every mass or niche medium eventually merges with one another to the point where they are indistinguishable to each other, creating a new medium from the synthesis, due to the advent of new communication technologies. With the advent of new medium over the internet and the mobile, media convergence is now an increasing reality in India media and entertainment.

### Challenges in convergence

While the industry at large is excited about media convergence, it also has its share of concerns. The most unanimous one being **lack of adequate bandwidth**. The bandwidth cost is too high and has to be brought down drastically. The other challenge is **educating consumers** to use the various new media. The industry will not grow unless the consumer is educated and aware of the available technologies and their usage.

Apart from reaching consumers at various touch-points through convergence of media, companies are also looking at it as a media to cater to individual needs of a consumer. And, for this, the need of the hour is to **generate adequate content**. Content availability has not kept pace with the changing consumers. Content generators have to generate enough to cater to individual tastes.

Another perspective to the challenges is the industry one – where companies need to be more and more competitive in their marketing and product strategies. For this, they need to constantly innovate newer products and therefore, reallocate an increasing amount of resources to research and development. As more companies compete, the gestation period for newer products is also decreasing with each product life cycle.

Finally, the lack of multi-skilled professionals in the newer arenas of business makes it difficult for the company's old guard to let go of draconian or obsolete practices. This ultimately leads to turf wars over domain control.

### Market and Technology convergence

By plotting time against portability and interactivity and at the same time, selected parameters that might be called the benchmark of technology progress namely moving image, computing, voice communication and games, we can get a historical perspective as well as deduce where the combined technologies are headed.

However, in this case of mapping, the word convergence is never intended to suggest replacement (i.e. not everything is moving to one entity or point). All of the elements on the charts are still in existence and apart from VHS and DVD will be around for a good while. We also see 'divergence' of media forms as it morphs across a sea of devices that continue to grow, layer upon layer.

All technology makers and marketers would like to know what the next will be. In the portable domain will we always have separate phone and serious gaming device? We are already seeing the merging of the phone, organizer and media player (4GB phones are already in the market) – given you can dock these portable devices to the larger screen, carry all your content and that they can receive high definition TV, do we need fixed devices at all?

### Convergence of Understanding, Practicing and Innovating

Increasingly, one can observe a definitive trend in the convergence of understanding, practicing and innovating in the competitive market place where each participant is eyeing the largest chunk of the market pie. Understanding the needs of the consumer has taken on a new importance with extreme segmentation and fragmentation in the marketplace. Identifying this need and innovating a new product or a service to fill this gap in the need has gained prime importance, more so akin for the companies. From high value-high involvement products like home loans and automobiles to low value-low involvement products like detergent powders and toothpastes to soft drinks, companies are increasingly spending big money to understand the patterns and motivations of the consumer for selecting, purchasing and using a certain brand. Even more important, the brand associations that the consumer makes about a certain brand can make or break the brand equity of a company's product and the difference between success and failure of the product in the market. A constant drive to innovate and come out with better products is reflected in the ever-increasing amounts of R&D spends of the companies. For example, high technology products like Nokia's mobile handsets are made based on a constant feedback on usage and

understanding of mobile phones by the customers leading to higher levels of innovation and user-friendliness in the next handset made by Nokia.

A new concept on the horizon is **co-creating value**. This happens between consumer and manufacturer. The manufacturer actively seeks the cooperation of the consumer for creating newer products. For example, Id software, one of the biggest and most popular game manufacturers, roped in the maker of what they believed to be the best fan site of their highly popular game DOOM. For the new DOOM III game, they made him a consultant for level design and game play.

### Convergence of Creativity/Design with Technology and Business Sense

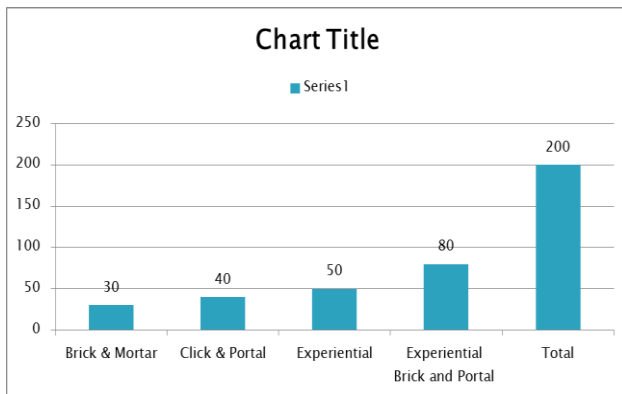
It wasn't a long time ago when even the top copy smiths of advertising like Neil French used to write copy for ads and fit them in typesets for printing. Nowadays even a copywriter in a small agency in a small town will type out the copy quickly on the computer and the graphic designer will fit it into the ad's layout and send out the soft copy to the newspaper for printing. Technology innovation from typewriters to computers has made this shift possible. A school student with a typical Pentium desktop computer, has at his disposal, more computing power than NASA had when it sent the first man on the moon. The great enabler in this case, technology, is progressing with such rapid pace that the latest, most cutting-edge technology is rendered almost outdated with a few months of its release.

Creative visualisers using advanced software like Adobe Photoshop and CorelDraw are daily creating breathtaking graphical masterpieces that would have taken a Leonardo da Vinci months, if not years, to create. Convergence in the technological standards like image formats (jpegs, gifs, etc.), audio-video formats (mpeg, avi, etc.), audio formats (mp3, wma, etc.), and so on, combined with interoperability and compatibility to use, share and transfer this data (USB, flash drives, DVDs and other optical storage) has created a powerful technology-design combo that professionals across the world are using in physical form as well as virtual form (cyberspace – internet). Add to this, the keen entrepreneurial mind of a businessman and you have technology monoliths like the Times Group and others like AOL-Warner, Sony and Apple amongst many others who dominate the commercial landscape. Convergence is changing the way people live their lives on a daily basis.

### ANALYSIS

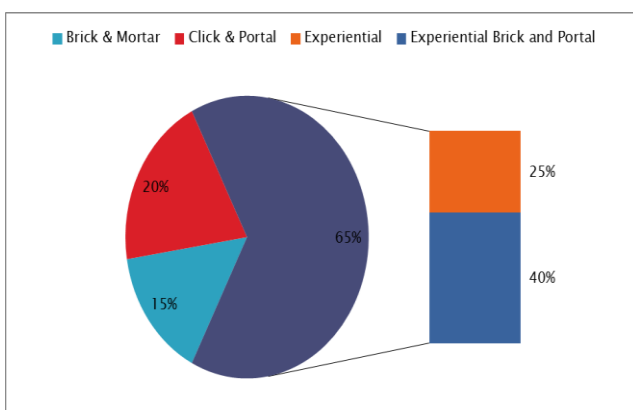
Convergence of Classroom (Brick & Mortar) with Internet (Click & Portal) and Learning by Doing (Experiential): Experiential Brick and Portal.

Chart/ Illustration 1



Traditional classroom model has been in an evolutionary phase ever since technology innovations have made networking possible. Satellite communications like VSAT have enabled hundreds of thousands of students across the world to virtually attend lectures. University Grants Commission (UGC) has empowered students in India because of this education and technology convergence. In professional courses, the emphasis has always been on practical knowledge rather than just theoretical inputs. The value addition to the professional skills development is far more when students are exposed to theories and their practical applications. Added to this is the new dimension of internet learning. Numerous universities, colleges and institutes, especially in Western Europe and North America are now offering degree courses through the internet. This dissolves all cultural, geographical and social barriers for people who cannot afford the time and/or money to attend full time courses in foreign countries. The effective combination of these three models of learning- traditional classrooms, internet and practical experiences, have become necessary for students of today to become successful professionals of tomorrow.

Chart/Illustration 2



### Convergence in Media consumption & Media buying

There was a time when we had simple choices to make – like choosing one newspaper from the 3 or 4 available, one radio station, one television station that broadcasted only in the evenings, couple of magazines from half a dozen available and so on. As the market kept segmenting and fragmenting, we now have thousands of radio stations to choose from with WorldSpace, Star TV itself telecasts more than half a dozen channels round the clock, there are more than a couple of dozen newspapers to choose from, hundreds of magazines to choose from and the story does not end there. With the advent of newer technologies, we now have newer channels of communications like mobile, internet and direct-to-home television along with exponential storage capabilities on optical media like CDs and DVDs. Today, a typical consumer is bombarded with more than 1,000 messages per day. Marketers are finding newer ways and means to target the consumers. Innovative ways are tried almost every year and their success means the success of the product in the market.

Another example of convergence in media consumption is the way in which consumers actively hunt for information. 3G/4G mobile handsets are equipped for high speed internet connections and the user opts to use it in a variety of ways; like checking the online navigation to watch out for traffic jams, weather forecasts, locating the nearest fuel station, hospital or even a restaurant, everything is possible with the mobile handset. It also backs up as a personal information manager (PIM), a music player, camera and portable gaming device.

### Convergence in Media Ownership

A massive diversification of media, thanks to the Internet, materialized by millions of websites, fora, blogs and wikis is taking place. That evolution, often labelled citizen journalism or citizen media, makes it possible for practically everybody to be a media creator, owner and actor, instead of a passive user.

Some of the largest international media conglomerates include American Media Inc., Bell Globemedia, Bertelsmann, Canwest Global, NBC Universal, Hearst Corporation, Lagardère Media, Liberty Media, News Corporation, Grupo PRISA, Rogers Communications, Sony, Time Warner, The Times Group (distinct from Times Newspapers of News Corporation), Viacom (owned by National Amusements), CBS Corp (also owned by National Amusements), The Walt Disney Company.

### Convergence in the interests of dual markets

As more and more companies across industries look at multiple media platforms, especially the digital media, it is also emerging as a revenue-earning model for most of them. Says Kaizad Pardiwala, Vice-President, OgilvyOne (Mumbai), "Indian Idol got more than 55 million votes via SMS between November 2004 and March 2005. At Rs 3 per SMS, that is Rs 16.5 crore. The telecom companies made Rs 11.5 crore and Sony about Rs 5 crore. Also, e-commerce is growing rapidly in India and a host of companies are setting up online shops across portals. In fact, e-commerce, which shows an approximately 100 per cent growth year on year from 2003-2006, is estimated to grow by approximately 95 per cent in 2007."

There has also been a shift in terms of media's target consumers. Traditionally, the primary market was the target of media companies. The primary market included television viewers, radio listeners, website surfers, newspaper and magazine readers. While the secondary market includes the marketers, the competing companies and other media as well. There has been a convergence in these two groups as now they both are targeted equally by the media companies.

### Horizontal to Vertical Media Convergence

Not just horizontal media convergence across all vehicles of media and functions of communication, but there is the need for vertical media convergence knowledge and practice too within each media vehicle and communication function.

For example, anyone who has specialized in one media vehicle (print, digital, radio, television, book publishing, et al), needs to have an strong overview of the creative or content aspects along with production, distribution and business or management aspects of the same media vehicle. One cannot be a radio station head without, for example, integrating the functions of radio content programming, radio content production, broadcast technologies, radio branding and activation, & radio sales and revenue.

Same vertical media convergence is with respect to communication functions. Say within advertising, one who is to lead the business tomorrow, must have a reasonably strong understanding of new business development, strategic account management in advertising, market and advertising research, media investments (buying and selling), creative and production aspects, & technology and software necessary for the work.

Such horizontal media convergence at the base, and vertical convergence at the top can only lead to the Communication Leader with one niche specialization or strength over time.

We are entering in an era of Jack of all trades, yet Master of ONE. And to have such skills evolved, media education needs a thorough revision and evolution to the next paradigm.

### MEDIA EDUCATION: NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

The world today is in the midst of one of the most dramatic technological revolutions in history. It is effecting changes in everything ranging from the ways we work, communicate commerce and spend our leisure time. The technological revolution which is underway centers on computer, information, communication, and multimedia technologies and may be seen to be the beginnings of a knowledge or information society. In such a society education has a central role in every aspect of life. The proliferation of communication-information technologies poses tremendous challenges. It compels educators to rethink their basic tenets and to deploy the media in creative and productive ways. It forces them to restructure ways of learning-teaching to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes that we are now experiencing.

As a consequence of information super highway and communication technologies the media and communication education have undergone almost unbelievable changes. The old lines between disciplines are becoming obsolete. The work of professional communicators is undergoing dramatic change. Resultantly there are likely to be very few belonging to one discipline who might be conversant with all forms of media in the days to come. With such metamorphosis of the professions underway it is a real challenge to prepare students for successful professional careers in the era of convergence and connectivity of the variety of media.

### MEDIA AND EDUCATION

In an era characterized by convergence of technologies the need for skilled media professionals who understand the foundation, both ethical and practical, from which they need to work, becomes even more critical. But without adequate training in new media skills the goal will remain unachievable. This crisis in media requires to be addressed in the class room where young professionals are molded and sculpted. But to meet the needs of the fast growing

media industry an ongoing training is vital to ensure that those working in the field too grow and develop. This entails broadening, updating and upgrading the core component of the media education at various levels.

What media students today need is nothing short of a leading-edge education suited to the needs of networked globalised industry. This would involve greater accent on fundamental concepts, values and skills needed to prepare them for communication careers commensurate with unprecedented changes. They need be fully equipped to understand the whole of communication scenario, be able to solve problems and imbibe the ethical and legal implication of media and communication which will let them be comfortable with innovation and working in concert with their peers. The object of the new media education is to prepare students for leadership roles in their professions and in their communities.

With a view to achieving the object of quality media education, the institute of Mass Communications are in dire need of to reconfiguring and updating their curriculum to produce graduates who are prepared for future leadership roles in the media and communication industries and who are able to communicate across disciplines and in multiple media formats. This for providing students with strong core content in critical thinking, research and analysis, information gathering, writing, graphics and design, and law and ethics and the latest media technology and skills.

The media education departments must offer to their students fully computerized reporting and editing classes, and create totally digital classroom and laboratory systems. They must orient themselves to revise their journalism curriculum and always be ready to undergo continual adjustments in response to changes in the profession. Far from print and broadcast sequences running separate as is the case today, students in the two sequences need to plan news coverage together, work together in the labs. Tomorrow, it is quite likely that the sequences might disappear and students will be required to work seamlessly on stories for print, electronic media and the Internet – or whatever systems will exist in the future.

Same is the case for students of marketing communications who need to integrate the different tools of branding and marketing: advertising, public relations,

event management, digital marketing, direct marketing, etc, before specializing in one functional area.

For entertainment media students, it is significant to integrate skills for the entire entertainment industry: from television to cinema, from radio to digital entertainment, from events to musicals, etc.

## CONCLUSION

- ▶ Convergence of traditional (Brick & Mortar) with Internet (Click & Portal) and Learning by Doing (Experiential): Experiential Brick and Portal
- ▶ Traditional classroom model has been in an evolutionary phase ever since technology innovations have made networking possible.
- ▶ In professional courses, the emphasis has always been on practical knowledge rather than just theoretical inputs.
- ▶ The value addition to the professional skills development is far more when students are exposed to theories and their practical applications.
- ▶ Added to this is the new dimension of internet learning. Numerous universities, colleges and institutes are now offering degree courses through the internet.
- ▶ This dissolves all cultural, geographical and social barriers for people who cannot afford the time and/or money to attend full time courses in foreign countries.
- ▶ The effective combination of these three models of learning- traditional classrooms, internet and practical experiences, have become necessary for students of today to become successful professionals of tomorrow.

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