

# MODELS OF BUSINESS CONVERGENCE IN THE INFORMATION INDUSTRY:

A mapping of cases in Brazil and Spain<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Acceleration of trends such as ownership concentration, and cross-media partnerships and initiatives, encourage media companies to explore convergence in news production routines in order to thrive in a very competitive arena. Since 2006, journalistic convergence has been the main topic of global conferences and meetings of media editors. This paper analyzes the contextual factors for news production convergence in Brazilian and Spanish media corporations and presents some of the models of journalistic convergence in its business dimension. For Spanish examples, the article specially focuses its attention on Catalan media.

**Key-words:** journalistic convergence; cross-media strategies; Brazil; Spain.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years the concept of convergence has been popularised by communication professionals and academics. However, it is not a new term – in fact, it was first used in this field almost three decades ago. The polysemic and dynamic nature of the word has led to multiple approaches from diverse perspectives. There are as many ways of understanding it as there are projects underway. The definitions originating from the professional world, which tend to focus on specific aspects – such as the configuration of newsrooms and production processes –, are widely divergent from the definitions in the academic world, which are usually broader.

Recent work by Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip reviews the literature on convergence in detail (Salaverría, García Avilés, and Masip, 2008). For this article, we assume the conceptual scope put

forward by these writers:

Media convergence is a multidimensional process that, facilitated by the generalised implantation of digital telecommunications technologies, affects the technological, business, professional and publishing environment of the mass media. This promotes an integration of previously dispersed tools, spaces, working methods and languages, with the result that journalists produce content that is distributed through numerous platforms, using the languages corresponding to each of these. (Salaverría, García Avilés, and Masip, 2008).

Convergence has been the focus of a large portion of the latest international professional meetings, and since 2006 it has been the main topic of the *World Editors Forum*. Their slogan for 2008, for example, was "The integrated newsroom: why, how and when." *Newsroom Barometer's* 2008 publication revealed that 86% of editors surveyed (700 worldwide) believe that digital and print newsrooms will merge within a short time, 83% think that journalists will have to produce content for all media soon, and 70% of those who still maintain consumer levels plan to integrate their newsrooms within a few years (Chainon, 2008).

Business managers believe that convergence is a guaranteed solution for putting the print media back on their feet. However, their vision of convergence actions needs to move on from that of a desperate measure to save the press. In the US, powerful television groups such as *Media General* (Florida) *Tribune Group* (Chicago) or *Bello Corporations* (Dallas), have introduced the most notable convergence practices. In Europe, some of the most relevant initiatives have been implemented in public audiovisual corporations: the *BBC* in the UK, *SVT* in Sweden, *NRK* in Norway and *DR* in Denmark.

In no small part, convergence is a reaction to the tumultuous situation the industry has been facing for over a decade. The audience of the traditional media, especially the press, is declining. The circulation of daily newspapers in the US decreases each year by about 5%, and the number of readers is also dropping. In 2007, 86 copies of Spanish newspapers were sold per thousand inhabitants, 17 less than in 2000 (La difusión ..., 2008). In Brazil, at least until now, the newspaper business displays positive figures. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (*Instituto Verificador de Circulação IVC*), the average daily circulation in 2008 increased by 5.0% compared to 2007, when it increased by 11.8% from the previous year. These figures imply that the circulation of the 105 newspapers audited by the IVC reached 4.3 million copies, raising the

estimate made by the National Association of Newspapers (Associação Nacional de Jornais. ANJ) for the total average daily circulation of Brazilian newspapers to 8.5 million.

In parallel, people's habits are changing. The Internet has now surpassed the printed media as a source of news for North Americans and among the under-30s it is in first place, together with television (Pew Research Center, 2008). In fact, 15% of traffic received by news websites comes from Google (Andrews, 2007), which underlines the limited appeal of headlines for thousands of users.

Audiences are fragmented, individuals hear the latest news through mobile devices and consume more information, but for a shorter period of time. Revenue from advertising decreases, while there is increased competition to retain it. The current recession threatens P&L accounts, especially in digital media, which, with few exceptions, are not profitable.

### **Digitisation and concentration**

It is impossible to single out just one reason why a growing number of media are opting for this strategy. However, the process would not have been triggered if the right conditions had not existed, structured in two core areas: digitisation and new business structures.

In the eighties, agencies and newspapers, magazines, television and radio, which operated with analogue technology, coexisted in harmony but independently. The next decade brought the digitisation of businesses, and with it convergence came into play. Printed, audiovisual and cyber media began to cooperate in order to lower the cost of production processes and benefit separately from the advantages of each medium. At that time, analogue and digital technologies still coexisted. This situation changed dramatically in the new millennium, with the absolute supremacy of the digital environment, the explosion of the Internet and the proliferation of new platforms.

At that time, a process of business concentration and media diversification was also set in motion. The monomedia philosophy switched to multimedia. Prisa, a pioneer in Spain, is a paradigmatic case, but virtually all groups in Spain have followed the same path: RCS Mediagroup and Recoletos, Godó, Planeta, Mediapro, *Vocento*, etc. In Brazil, the redefinition of information companies' multimedia strategies can be illustrated through the cases of *Grupo Estado*, RBS, *O Globo*, *O Dia*, *A Tarde*, Rede *Gazeta*, *Gazeta do Povo*, Sistema Jornal do Comercio de Comunicação, etc.

However, the move of businesses towards media diversification is not limited to large-scale groups. Some writers suggest that since 2005 and especially since 2008, local communication in Catalonia cannot be understood “without reference to the local multimedia groups” (Guimerà et. al., in press). In their view, one of the features of this sector in the last two decades has been the progressive growth of forms of concentration which have given rise to private conglomerates who manage multiple media in one area or various regions, and who have made local content disseminated through multiple media the core of their business. Similar trends can be found at Spanish scale, in this sense, *Vocento* is one of the most significant examples.

One of the best examples is *Grupo Segre*. It was created from the foundations of *Prensa Leridana*, the company who publish the newspaper which gives its name to the group and who took an important step in the nineties with *Segre Radio*. In addition, in 2008, they increased their FM frequencies from two to three. The group started in the world of analogue television in 2001, and grew to become one of the major operators in the region, following the public tender for Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) in which they won four concessions, which allowed them to cover the whole province of Lleida. *Segre* is also active in the free press – since 2006 they have a local edition of the daily paper *ADN*.

In turn, local media groups in Brazil are also undertaking media diversification, especially audiovisual media, mobile platforms, and the variety of product formats for the Web platform, with the creation of news agencies, portals, Web TV, etc.

Group *A Tarde* (Salvador/Bahia) is one of the regional media which has undergone significant change since 2006, aimed at consolidating and expanding their diverse and complementary media outlets for the distribution of local content in order to meet the diverse needs of the audience. Until 2006, *A Tarde* was just the name of the most traditional newspaper in the province of Bahia, but through the new strategy it has become Group *A Tarde*, and today owns the newspaper *A Tarde*, *Rádio A Tarde FM*, *Portal A Tarde On Line*, *Web TV A Tarde On Line*, *Revista Muito*, *Agência de Notícias A Tarde* and *A Tarde Mobile*. The group also intends to move into digital TV.

### **Business solutions**

In a complicated economic situation, but with a favourable business structure in place and firmly-established technological innovations, the right conditions exist for the industry to confront an uncertain future

and find new business models, very often through convergence. Multiple strategies have been developed and have generally avoided maximalist positions where convergence is seen as a linear process culminating in full integration, which is viewed as the optimal scenario. We describe below the different forms of convergence, following the dynamic model proposed by Dailey, Demo and Spillman (2005). However, we reject the incremental concept contained in the model and the idea of editorial integration as the objective to be achieved. This is one of the possible aims of convergence, but it is not the only one nor is it ideal.

- **Cross-Promotion.** The simplest forms of cooperation between newsrooms take the form of cross-promotion, i.e. the use of words or visual elements to promote content produced by other media, usually in the same group. Some writers argue that this is the only form of convergence that actually works (Ketterer, et. al., 2004). This form of cooperation, which is very common, does not involve the creation of new content. For example, a newspaper may invite its readers – usually at the bottom of a news story – to obtain further information on the media's website (e.g. *ADN* and [www.ADN.es](http://www.ADN.es) or *O Globo* and [www.oglobo.com.br](http://www.oglobo.com.br)), or during a television or radio newscast, listeners may be directed to a printed newspaper (for example, in *Grupo Segre*).

Another possibility is the linking of media used by *Rede Globo's* newscasts in Brazil. The viewer is always recommended to refer to the website of the TV newscast to obtain more information on a story, or to take part in discussions with experts, etc. *A Tarde* are also already experimenting with *QR Code* in their newspaper. The bidimensional code allows the reader to supplement the information in the daily newspaper with the content produced by other media outlets in the group (photo galleries, audio, video, surveys, or text) which can be stored on a mobile phone.

- **Cloning.** The option of copying materials produced by another medium is also very simple. On this occasion, the main beneficiary tends to be the cyber newspaper, which feeds off other media content - usually printed or audiovisual - generated by the same group. The formula is not new; electronic media started out this way. However, nowadays the selection of information is more careful, and is particularly aimed at recycling multimedia pieces generated by other newsrooms. At this level, like the previous one, existing news stories are included without any reworking. This can be seen in cyber newspapers such as [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com), which reproduces videos from the *Cuatro* or *CNN+* news services, or sound files recorded by *Cadena Ser*. In smaller companies,

such as *Grupo Segre* which we have mentioned above or *Diari de Tarragona* something similar occurs. In the case of *Segre*, cloning of content incorporates a new element, whereby the printed newspaper has been developed in e-paper format. On the other hand, the radio station *RAC1* shows a different example. One of their star programmes, the morning show “El Món a *RAC1*” includes opinion slots (usually by journalists from the written media owned by the same group) which are then made available to the audience on the programme’s website, both in audio format (podcasting and radio on demand) and in text (a transcript of the piece).

In Brazil, the cloning of media content from the same group in cyber newspapers is one of the most widely used practices. Often the content is not reworked in any way. However, some benchmark media such as [www.estadao.com.br](http://www.estadao.com.br) and [www.oglobo.com.br](http://www.oglobo.com.br) use content from other media which has been adapted for hypertext and includes, for example, additional interactive and multimedia features. The majority of Brazilian cyber media offer the possibility of reading the full digital version of the printed newspaper using *digital flip* technology.

Another case is that of the G1 news portal ([www.g1.com.br](http://www.g1.com.br)), which belongs to *Organizações Globo*, Brazil’s largest communications conglomerate, which publishes content produced by several media newsrooms under the Globo umbrella, mainly videos from *TV Globo*, the cable *TV Globonews*, and *Radio CBN* news programmes, etc. The same occurs with the *Portal Clic RBS* ([www.clicrbs.com.br](http://www.clicrbs.com.br) of the Rede Brasil Sul/Rio Grande do Sul), which publishes information, service and entertainment content from newspapers, cyber newspapers and other media and cyber media of the group. As well as reproducing content, these newspaper websites also generate their own information, which tends to give greater emphasis to the specific resources and features generated by digital media, such as multimedia specials with video and audio streaming, interactive computer graphics, spaces for user participation, etc.

- **Coopetition.** Some information industry managers who previously expressed complete reservation regarding convergence now merely show caution with regard to strategy and timeframes. Virtually all of them sense that they will inevitably have to go through the phase of convergence, although they have not yet resolved how and when, and to what extent. For the moment, the less intrepid have settled for taking advantage of events of great news interest (elections, the Olympics, natural disasters, major accidents, etc.) to initiate moderate convergence

actions, such as the collaboration of journalists from different media, coverage by a single reporter for two (or more) platforms, etc. This recently has been illustrated by the *Catalan Corporation of Audiovisual Media (CCMA)* on the occasion of the last US presidential elections, and for certain film festivals (Domingo, Masip and Micó, 2008).

This kind of practice is referred to in English as *coopetition*, it is used when two media cooperate through the sharing of information or in other elements of the business, while continuing to compete, or at least producing their own original material. This strategy is adopted by media which do not share a market niche. For instance, the channel 8TV carried out an interesting project, albeit short-lived, in which the Godó television network invited reporters from the group's newspapers (*La Vanguardia* and *Mundo Deportivo*) to their nightly newscast to give their opinion on one of the day's news stories; this was then expanded on in the daily newspaper the following day. This is a more fully-developed practice than cross-promotion, in that the guest editor creates a piece for another medium.

Coopetition has not yet been greatly developed by the Brazilian information companies. Cross-promotion and cooperation between different media in the same group are the standard practices and tend to be used on the occasion of major events or for specific coordinated coverage. However, coopetition can be observed in some activities. One example is the cooperative arrangement between *A Tarde* and *TV Bandeirantes* (Grupo Bandeirantes) by which *Portal A Tarde On Line* ([www.atarde.com.br](http://www.atarde.com.br)) uses the news material generated by *TV Bandeirantes*. *Grupo A Tarde* has also worked in partnership with *TVE-Bahia* (educational television) to cover specific events such as the carnival.

- **Multiplatform Distribution.** With the new digital philosophy, the number of processes, practices and common procedures shared by the press, television, radio and the Internet increase dramatically, and on the basis of these synergies, the integration of newsrooms or workplaces is openly discussed. Furthermore, with regard to dissemination, the new system enables the consolidation of cross-media, i.e. the utilisation of content across multiple platforms, a crossover in which the work produced for each has a positive effect on the products of the others. The advantages are numerous: shared resources, reduced costs, decreased reporting time – the creation of new productions can be automated, for example, for mobile devices – and profitability improves, given that journalists can dedicate the time they save to other tasks. It also allows the transfer of audience (and advertisers) between media, the strengthening

of the brand and the generation of *Extra* revenue (for example, with new chargeable services). Nevertheless, hierarchically, the traditional media are still ahead of the new media (web, mobile telephone, etc.).

The audience are normally shown the same brands (*TV3* or *3/24* and [www.3cat24.com](http://www.3cat24.com); or *El Periódico* and [www.elperiodico.cat](http://www.elperiodico.cat); *O Estado de S. Paulo* and [www.estadao.com.br](http://www.estadao.com.br); *A Tarde* and [www.atarde.com.br](http://www.atarde.com.br); *A Gazeta* and [www.Gazetaonline.com.br](http://www.Gazetaonline.com.br); *O Globo* and [www.oglobo.com.br](http://www.oglobo.com.br) or *Zero Hora* and [www.zerohora.com.br](http://www.zerohora.com.br), etc) as opposed to various media within a single group. At advanced levels, the distribution of content across platforms involves considerable organisational complexity, and there is also likely to be friction between newsrooms.

In 2007, the *CCMA* announced the start of a “confluence” process. The former director of *Canals Informatius*, Jaume Masdeu, stressed that the term “convergence” had been “overused” (Masdeu, 2008), and for that reason, they preferred to speak of “confluence.” Terminology aside, the reasons given for the realignment were: adaptation to new patterns of consumption of information, due to the transition from mass audiences to fragmented audiences and multi-platform users, the opportunity to relaunch the corporation’s news portal ([www.3cat24.cat](http://www.3cat24.cat)), the use of resources, i.e. efficiency, which would consist of “the sharing of information and media, and coordinating the publication of the product” (Masdeu, 2008: 86). This justification combines the commitment to a new way of working (“confluence”) with the aim of increasing work returns while reducing costs (a logical and legitimate ambition in any company, public or private).

Of the objectives that were announced, only the news portal [www.3cat24.cat](http://www.3cat24.cat) was achieved. *CCMA* aim for it to become the leading Catalan-language portal, like their television and radio. The basis of the Web is the intensive use of audiovisuals together with initiatives to boost user participation. In practice, the editors produce the multimedia news with the materials that are used by their colleagues from the other platforms, and the work also ends up being distributed by mobile (MMS, SMS, WAP), PDA, RSS, Twitter or widgets. To ensure good coordination and consistency in journalistic coverage, the cybermedia newsroom was moved to the headquarters of the radio station *Catalunya Ràdio*. In addition, a journalist from the portal [www.3cat24.cat](http://www.3cat24.cat) participates in the network’s daily editorial boards. Another Internet journalist works permanently at *Televisió de Catalunya*’s headquarters and takes part in the weekly planning meetings of the news channel *3/24*.

Despite the very cautious nature of *CCMA*’s plan, the initial results

of research still being completed point to the corporation's journalists' scepticism regarding the process, which by and large they see as "ill-defined". Some of those interviewed for the study expressed fear of the possible impact this change may have on their employment conditions and salaries, whereas others argue that television and radio have different cultures, processes and paces (Domingo, Micó and Masip, 2008), a complaint also detected in previous research (Killebrew, 2003 Singer, 2004; Silcock and Keith, 2006).

Multiplatform distribution is becoming increasingly common in big media and also in smaller ones, such as *Grupo Segre* or *El 9 Nou*, both small but firmly established in their territories. *Segre*, for instance, led the way in Catalonia and in Spain in the introduction of e-paper. Through this new medium they offer the same information as the printed newspaper, with the addition of multimedia content produced for the group's website, radio station or television channel.

In September 2008, Group *O Globo's* announced its convergence through integration actions aimed at multiplatform distribution. With the slogan "*Muito além do jornal a role*", the group presented its strategy for the media managed by Infoglobo (*O Globo*, *Extra*, *Diário de São Paulo* and their respective websites, the main site being [www.oglobo.com.br](http://www.oglobo.com.br)). The business strategy was built around the three central concepts of multiplatform information, multibrand and multigeography, as well as the decision to develop the user-interactive areas. The cooperation between the three newspapers actually started in 1999, but the new strategy, which has implemented convergence actions in 2008, aims to improve the coordinated production process with the creation of what is referred to internally as the "publishing platform"<sup>2</sup>.

The editors of the website [OGlobo.com.br](http://OGlobo.com.br) have taken part in the *O Globo* newspaper meetings on a daily basis since September 2007, to ensure that integration of the coverage takes place in a way that avoids wastage and so that the two media are in fact complementary. *O Globo's* print and Web newsrooms are still physically distant; in fact they are located at different sites. The physical merger of the two departments is currently being studied with the aim of increasing production synergies. In total, nearly 520 journalists work for the daily newspapers Infoglobo, *Agência O Globo* and [globo.com.br](http://globo.com.br). Of these, around 50 are based at the site.

Multiplatform distribution includes print, Web, e-mail, mobile, RSS, podcast, Twitter and widgets. At RBS, the group began their convergence strategy with the *Zero Hora* publication and the planned integration of

the print and Web editorial departments. Martha Gleich (editor of *www.zerohora.com.br*) and Director of the group's online newspapers) and Marcelo Rech (editor of *Zero Hora* and all the group's newspapers) stress that the journalists<sup>3</sup> have responded very positively to the integration, and that, unlike many other professionals world-wide, they were eager to integrate (Editors Weblog, 2007, 2008). According to the two editors, at *ZH* nobody is working harder than before and, instead of imposing multimedia training, incentives are being offered to multiskilled journalists, who also have promotion opportunities.

- **Integrated Newsrooms.** As noted above, the digitisation of the media has changed the essence and substance of all the stages of production and consumption: the search for information, preparation of the material, publishing of the work, user-interaction, etc. The media themselves have been transformed by the confluence of the audiovisual, information technology and telecommunications industries (Zaragoza, 2002). Furthermore, the productive structures of the companies involved in these changes often favour the conversion of the former independent newsrooms to integrated newsrooms with editorial coordination.

The idea of convergence is mostly associated with the integration of newsrooms. However, this is a fairly simplistic view, given that the merging of workplaces is not always the best solution. The greatest level of coordination between newsrooms exists when two initially independent units end up joining together in all respects. However, there are several stages before reaching this point, involving various levels of collaboration, such as when newsrooms are independent but coordinated through a "multimedia committee" with representatives from each medium. The public radio and television body in the Basque Country, *Eusakal Irrati Telebista (EITB)* works this way, and a building has been constructed to be shared by television, radio and Internet journalists. Group *Segre* has a coordinating committee which decides on the assignment of the information and platforms.

Through shared content and multiplatform distribution, *Vocento* has made convergence the group's overall strategy. A multimedia committee has been created for *Hoy. Diario de Extremadura* which incorporates all the group's platforms in the Spanish autonomous community of Extremadura: the printed newspaper, the Web (*www.hoy.es*), radio (*Punto Radio Extremadura*) and television (*Telefrontera*). This ensures that news coverage provided by the various media is complementary. A distinctive form of collaboration exists between *La verdad de Murcia* and *www.laverdad.es*, and *Vocento's* radio and television stations in the community

of Murcia, *Punto Radio* and *Punto TV*. The director of the newspaper acts as coordinator for the convergence between the two newsrooms: firstly the print and Internet media and secondly the audiovisual media. In this case, the media involved belong to different groups (Garcia Avilés and Carvajal, 2008).

In Brasil, in 2006 *Grupo A Tarde* began redesigning its newsroom to adapt to the new integrated situation. In the new layout, printed media and online journalists were assigned to editorial islands, with a large table or “*mesão*” in the middle of the room for the editors-coordinators of the main departments - print, online, web TV, art and photography - to meet. The role of coordinator of integrated journalism production was created (held by the journalist Mariana Carneiro), which is aimed at providing guidance, motivation and mediation in convergence initiatives, mediating the dialogue between the group’s media. According to figures from January 2009, provided by Mariana Carneiro, 90 of the 180 journalists working in the newsroom are involved in the production of multimedia content. This process is managed by the *Sistema Centralizado de Produção Integrada*, a tool created by the group’s IT department, through which journalists are paid a variable salary according to the work that each produces for a different medium in a given month.

When two originally separate newsrooms are integrated in a single workplace, the maximum level of convergence is reached. Until recently, the best-known example in Spain was the free newspaper *20 Minutos*, which merged its printed and digital newspaper newsrooms. At that time, the editor of the paper put forward business reasons to justify the remodelling – putting an end to the duplication of work and efficient staff management – and journalistic reasons – offering better products in any medium (Escolar, 2006). However, at the beginning of 2009 the company changed plans and separated the newsrooms.

*El Mundo* is also moving in the same direction. Since September 2007, the editors of the Communication, Science and Sport sections work indistinguishably for print and online publications. Also, 50 staff from the *Novotécnica* group, which includes *La Voz de Almería*, *Cadena Ser Almería* and *Localia TV Almería*, perform their work in a single newsroom. 70% of the journalists are multimedia, i.e. they can produce work for all three platforms (Garcia Avilés and Carvajal, 2008).

### **The multiskilled journalist**

The dominant models of journalistic convergence in Catalonia and in Spain as a whole also coincide with findings regarding Brazil’s information

companies: cooperation between professionals from several newsrooms, and multimedia processing of news. One of the clearest examples of the latter is provided by the *Agència Catalana de Notícies (ACN)*. Since its launch in 1999, the organisation has advocated multiskilled journalists who report on events of interest using writing, photographs and other audiovisual resources (Gordillo and Nogué, 2008). In the Brazilian cases, the demand for multiskilled journalists is growing and multimedia training carried out by the groups has increased the number of staff producing audio, video and interactive computer graphics as well as text.

At *O Globo*, the reporters of the printed publication have moved on to producing video and audio, but more elaborate multimedia productions are the domain of the website's zany specialised team. As described above, in *A Tarde*, journalists are encouraged to create multimedia content and half of them already do – *Zero Hora* offers incentives to those who want to produce multimedia news. At *Grupo Estado*, specialised journalists from *Agência Estado* and the newspapers *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Jornal da Tarde* discuss current affairs in *Rádio Eldorado* and, in turn, *Portal Estadão* broadcasts the contents of *Estado TV*.

Even now it is difficult to find single newsrooms supplying various platforms, such as print, web, television, radio, etc. with information. At best, the communications offices of some organisations work this way, such as F.C. Barcelona.

In presenting their model, *ACN's* management offer an economic explanation similar to the one we have seen in the *CCMA*. The Internet has enabled them to build a virtual network in order, in the words of the Director and a Deputy Director of the agency, to reach potential customers "minimising production costs" (Gordillo and Nogué, 2008: 52). The investment in infrastructure required for the classic transmission of teletype would have made it impossible to establish a new agency in the area especially aimed at local media. However, with its own operating model, the company managed to take root, and within a few years, has grown considerably. Furthermore, from the outset *ACN* supported the figure of the multimedia journalist, a choice that led their peers from other media to observe with bewilderment, until they got used to it, or until some of them followed suit, especially in the smaller companies.

This convergence as a principle coexists with what might be called "divergence as a system" since the agency has a decentralised structure, with a head office in Girona, a local office in Barcelona and most editors doing telework. The fifty or so journalists employed in Catalonia communicate via mobile phone, email and instant messaging

or chat. So, in an era of concentration in which group directors are considering whether a possible single newsroom (for their newspaper, cyber newspaper, radio, television, etc.) would help them to cut costs, this virtual newsroom makes a powerful impact. Therefore, we insist that to analyse the current situation in terms of confrontation is a big mistake. The market shows that each environment, each group, etc. requires a different solution. There are no universal remedies, or at least nobody has found them so far. We must carefully examine each case. However, this does not mean that there are no models that can be used as an inspiration for other companies. The traditional agencies *ANSA* (Italy) and *LUSA* (Portugal) have already expressed interest in the “*ACN* model” with which they have established “collaborative links” (Nogué and Gordillo, 2008: 59).

### **Arguments for and against**

For companies, convergence in all its forms is a valid survival strategy in the current changing environment marked by uncertainty. Its advantages, *a priori*, are manifold. Some have already been discussed in this document; cost reduction, more efficient production, loyal audiences that circulate among the media of the same group, diversification of business risk, etc.

Convergence also allows the group to increase advertising revenue through, for example, package deals for slots on multiple platforms. For example, the manager of Badalona Comunicació, Joan Montornès, interprets that this system “allows you to design commercial strategies (...) that work. Advertisers appreciate us offering them exposure in three media in the same package, that can reach different audiences and at an affordable price” (Montornès, 2007: 12).

Advocates of the multimedia journalist argue that the professional component is emphasised to the detriment of the financial component. They maintain that the multiskilled journalist has more control over the work, which achieves greater unity and internal consistency in the information, since there is a single author. They also contend that technology gives the professional more scope and freedom to deal with any current event of interest.

However, critics disagree. In their view, convergence leads to the standardisation of discourse and the consequent loss of pluralism. Furthermore, when the specific nature of each medium’s language is not respected and immediacy takes precedence over analysis, quality also suffers. They also argue that the multiskilled reporter would be the perfect

justification for reducing staff numbers. The professionals' increased workload forces them to spend less time on each piece. As a result, the news is superficial or incomplete. Lastly, opponents of convergence are critical of the lack of professional and financial recognition of the *Extra* workload arising from the new assignments and the increase in working hours.

A National Union of Journalists' study states that the working hours of a quarter of British editors have changed following the introduction of digital media in their companies; 75% of respondents claim to work more since the newsrooms have been integrated (NUJ, 2007).

The merger of newsrooms must also overcome the problem of different collective labour agreements and wage scales. Journalists with a less favourable situation - usually those in digital media - are the main supporters of integration, while those who have better conditions fear the company will standardise salaries at a lower level (Domingo, Micó and Masip, 2008).

The editor of the digital edition of the *Financial Times*, Paul Maidment, points out: "The only way for companies to value editors of the printed and the digital newspapers on the same level is for them to share the same working conditions and remuneration system" (Cited by Garcia Aviles, 2006: 37).

Sometimes the success of these initiatives depends on the management's tactics in deploying them and their ability to involve the journalists. It is possible for employees to perceive the process as an opportunity that will facilitate their work in the new media environment, and not as an economic measure designed to reduce the workforce and minimise costs.

The multimedia *BBC* journalist Ben Hammersley claimed at a conference in Barcelona at the Universitat Ramon Llull that companies confuse convergence with the fact that the reporter can perform any task at any time, i.e. they equate the process with a way of obtaining the same information productivity (or even more) with fewer staff (and therefore less cost). The problem lies here. Despite his experience, Hammersley believes it is impossible to produce good journalism work in more than two media simultaneously, especially if one of them is television, which, according to him, requires greater dedication. The professional has multiple multimedia tools at their disposal, but should not use all of them simultaneously, but rather at every moment they need to know how to choose the most suitable one to tell their story.

## Conclusions

For an innovation like this to take off, we need to transform the business model and encourage a new journalistic model based on information quality and the development of imaginative ways to generate income. Despite its more conservative position, this solution is not always present in the classically-structured media. In any case, the solution is incompatible with a reduction in staffing – although at times some companies would have to be streamlined – and with the quest for short-term results. Obviously, this approach is difficult to accommodate in a recession like the current one.

The *Newsroom Barometer* survey mentioned above provides a significant and disturbing fact: the increase in integrated newsrooms, of multimedia journalists or external services will not inevitably improve the quality of news productions. Reports from some Spanish media groups confirm this. To face up to the crisis, *Vocento* plans, among other measures, to integrate radio and television, close media offices and eliminate more than a thousand jobs (Plan..., 2008).

In the smaller media organisations, both the spread of the multiskilled journalist figure and the introduction of integrated newsrooms often result from a need which is rationalised as a virtue. For that reason, the need may end up guaranteeing the viability of a project, while eroding the quality of the products.

The Director of *Canal Blau*, Xavier Abelló resolves: “Despite the technical problems (...) posed by certain synergies [the multiskilled reporter], these practices can greatly facilitate the existence of audiovisual media in some medium-sized or small cities (...). Perhaps a text which is taken advantage of in the two media won’t make use of all the potential offered by television, but on the other hand it will facilitate the economic viability of an audiovisual project in a medium-sized or small city (Abelló, 2007: 14). To sum up, some convergence business strategies allow some medium-sized or small media companies to survive, but sometimes that

## | NOTES

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- its program of R+D projects (ref.: SEJ2006-14828-C06).
- 2 According to Sonia Soares, Executive Editor of the website [www.oglobo.com.br](http://www.oglobo.com.br) and Raquel Almeida, manager of the digital platforms of the *O Globo* newspaper. The professionals were interviewed by e-mail, and responded on 17 February 2009.
  - 3 In total, the newsroom has 240 staff. Of these, between 70 and 80 work both for the printed publication and the online edition at least once a week, and of those, 34 work almost entirely for the online edition.

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