

# CONVERGENCE AS A RENOVATION/CONSERVATION TOOL FOR JOURNALISM IN GALICIA:

## strategies and uncertainties

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**ABSTRACT** - This paper offers a theoretical reflection on the concept of convergence in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, in Spain. In this geographic area, marked by its respect for journalistic tradition (especially referring to the press) and its inertia, it is possible to distinguish two different attitudes (actually conflicting) with regard to the convergence phenomenon. Conservation strategies coexist, therefore, (focusing mainly on the business aspect of the convergent phenomenon) with renovation strategies (creation of new spaces on the web, great commitment to the possibilities offered by new technologies and social networks). We are presenting an analytical study of the coexistence of these two interpretations of convergence (marketing and technological, respectively) in the communication ecosystem of Galicia. We can recognize the beginning of a dialectic tension between the discourses of renovation and conservation which at present coexist in harmony. It is assumed that the information industry in Galicia will eventually choose the path that guarantees the survival of its media.

**Keywords:** Convergence. Cybermedia. Journalism 3.0. Social Media.

### A CONVERGÊNCIA COMO INSTRUMENTO DE RENOVAÇÃO/ CONSERVAÇÃO DO JORNALISMO EM GALÍCIA estratégias e indefinições

**RESUMO** - Este artigo faz uma reflexão teórica sobre o conceito de convergência na Comunidade Autónoma da Galícia, na Espanha. Nesta área geográfica, caracterizada pelo seu respeito à tradição jornalística (principalmente ligada à imprensa) e sua inércia, é possível distinguir duas atitudes diferentes (conflitantes mesmo) com o fenômeno de convergência. Coexistem, portanto, estratégias de conservação (concentrando-se principalmente no lado do negócio do fenômeno convergente) com estratégias de renovação (criação de novos espaços na web, grande aposta nas possibilidades das novas tecnologias e das redes sociais). Apresentamos um estudo analítico sobre a coexistência dessas duas interpretações da convergência (mercadológica e tecnológica, respectivamente) no ecossistema comunicativo da Galícia. Podemos detectar o início de uma tensão dialética entre os discursos de renovação e conservação que atualmente convivem em harmonia. Supõe-se que, com o passar do tempo, a indústria de informação da Galícia opte para a rota que garanta a sobrevivência dos seus meios de comunicação.

**Palavras-chave:** Convergência. Cibermeios. Jornalismo 3.0. Social Media.

### CONVERGENCE AS A NATURAL PHENOMENON

Convergence results from the convergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and marks and defines the communication trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century media. We are seeing a transformation in real time, a new way of doing journalism is being created, since the construction of messages appears to be characterized by *multimedia communications, hypertext and interactivity* (DÍAZ NOCI, 2001, p. 25).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Internet was in its early stages and it was a world accessible only to the initiated, with very low levels of penetration and far away from the countries around us. As the years went by, our society has become a *network society* (CASTELLS, 2000) in which information has become an instrument of power within a global economy based on knowledge. This led to the fundamental importance of the media, great cultivators and gatekeepers in the dissemination of information.

Technological convergence has meant a real revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century society, and the media were also affected with respect to their structures and contents. Not only were old news production models changed (PATERSON; DOMINGO, 2008; TREMAYNE, WEISS; ALVES, 2007), but the media has also opened its “doors” to contents produced by the user, encouraging and allowing the inclusion of comments, photos, videos, blogs and even articles done by readers (for examples and implications of this undisputed fact, see DOMINGO *et al.*, 2008; HERMIDA; THURMAN, 2008; THURMAN, 2008).

The research group *Infotendencias* (formed by researchers and professors of Cyberjournalism from twelve Spanish universities) was formally created in 2002 on the occasion of the coordinated project entitled, “The impact of the Internet on the media in Spain”, funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology of Spain from 2002 to 2005. This project was the first general study of the press in Spain upon the completion of 10 years of digital media activities in our country. It has also included the definition of the *cybermedia* concept and its essential characteristics, as well as analyzing the transformations produced by cybermedia in other media.

This first project, which intended to produce the first general mapping of cybermedia in Spain, took the opportunity to also shed light on the recent history, the editorial orientation and challenges for the future of these digital media. The result of this endeavor is reflected in the collective book entitled *Cibermedios. El impacto de Internet en*

*los medios de comunicación en España* (Cybermedia. The impact of the Internet on media in Spain) (SALAVERRÍA, 2005).

This paper is the result of further work developed in a research project coordinated and funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain between 2006 and 2009. It is a logical extension of the macro research that started in 2002 when the national collaborative network *Infotendencias* was formed. More than 30 researchers from 12 different universities were involved in this research, divided into four subgroups, specializing in significant thematic areas.

The objective of this most recent project was to carry out a comprehensive and systematic study on the characteristics, processes and consequences of convergence in the media in Spain. This research was focused specifically on four proverbial aspects of convergence: *technologies*, *contents*, *media* and *enterprise*. Thus, we provide Spanish media with well-founded empirical references on the risks and benefits of convergence processes. Finally, we are developing an ambitious coordinated project entitled “Evolución de los cibermedios españoles en el marco de la convergencia” (Evolution of Spanish cybermedia under the framework of convergence) in which we will study the innovative convergence phenomenon (in its various aspects) and how it affected the media.

Simultaneously, the *Novos Medios* research group has carried out several studies of Galician cybermedia and their adaptation to the new reality formed by the explosion of the Internet and the arrival of new forms of social communication. Thus, we are carrying out various projects included in the research funded by the Regional Autonomous Government of Galicia (*Xunta de Galicia*) entitled “Tendencias na converxencia dos medios de comunicación de Galicia” (Media convergence trends in Galicia).

The *Novos Medios* research group develops its research activity with a dual focus. On one hand, the study on the Spanish level, and on the other, we can concentrate on the Galician area on a complementary way. We believe that it is quite useful to contrast and enhance data obtained in the region of Galicia with data obtained in the national research. Since 2006, we have achieved coherence between national (and international) research and the study of a very close reality such as that in Galicia. This provides us with a small laboratory where we can apply the know-how and the results of the general research in order to understand the evolutionary processes of the Galician community. And, in the near future, the data will enable us to predict future scenarios and

circumstances and provide ideas for Galician media and thus achieve strong, autonomous and competitive communication in the complex industry of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In this way, both studies and approaches are complementary and are part of a strategy that was started by the research group in 2006 and that will continue to be developed in the future. In the Galician case, it is more interesting than ever to continue this study after the brilliant arrival in recent months of a good number of media in the Internet with innovative business models.

Studies developed by *Infotendencias* (at the national level) and by the *Novos Medios* research group (of Galician cybermedia) are the result of the inalienable need to analyze a new field in Communication studies, with the cybermedia as the tip of the iceberg.

Juan Varela speaks of “Journalism 3.0”, as the epitome and logical consequence of the introduction of new technologies in journalistic activity. Journalism 3.0 is connected to both a spirit of non-conformism with the powers that be and a spirit bordering on the political and social activism which has characterized the new American journalism of the 1960s. Journalism 3.0 includes some resources of the main revolts of the last century against the traditional concept of information, and mainly, the author’s position, subjectivity and its use, and the questioning of the dogma of objectivity.

According to Varela, the era of journalism 3.0 is the era of participatory journalism. In the author’s opinion, citizen journalism or participatory journalism would be version 3.0 of digital journalism:

**Journalism 1.0** is that which transcends traditional analog content to cyberspace.

**Journalism 2.0** is content creation from and to the web.

**Journalism 3.0** socializes this content and the very media (VARELA, 2005).

At this point, we undoubtedly realize that the communication industry is undergoing large transformations at the global and local levels. The economic downturn that began in 2009 and 2010 has led to a sharp decline in business volume (with significant losses in revenues from advertising and decrease in circulation, especially in the print media) and considerable staff cuts.

In a context of liberalization and progressive deregulation, the integration of Spain into the European Union and the speed with

which the process of technological, economic and communicative internationalization has moved forward have significantly marked the path of these changes, little planned and almost exclusively subject to the laws of the market. In the case of Galicia, this process was also affected by the progressive decentralization of the Spanish State and the consolidation of the autonomous regions, with the consequent transfer of cultural and communication jurisdictions.

The emergence of the Internet was a milestone in communication and has opened new prospects for the communications industry, which has found in digitalization a path to radical change, both in the media map and also in its relation with users. The modernization of the technological infrastructure system, especially in the field of telecommunications (cable, satellite) and the growth and positioning of large media groups with local and global strategies has led to successive changes in the media landscape, with prominent groups reinforced thanks to new acquisitions and with different processes of concentration underway, which are continuing today and at high speed. On another level, small groups are trying to find their own space in this new scenario.

In this context, the possibilities opened by convergence, with a better use of resources and greater integration of the different areas of production and distribution of basic products, as well as the emergence of new professional profiles, appear as an option to which many companies seem to want to adhere. The number of channels for user participation in the preparation of information products is growing, the supply is becoming increasingly atomized, new actors appear... A new panorama is therefore formed which should concentrate all our attention as researchers in the field of communication and media.

### **Different attitudes concerning the converging phenomenon**

As noted above, a great change occurred in the communications sector over the last 15 years within Spain. After the introduction of the first cybermedia in 1994<sup>1</sup>, traditional media have been affected in many aspects which characterized them for decades. Currently, media organizations show the direct, immediate consequences of the impact of digital technology on their contents and production processes. They face the challenge of adopting (and adapting) new models of multi-platform editorial management that modify substantially the content supplying process, journalists' professional profile and information management processes.

However, a large part of the traditional media (especially print

media) has hesitated in updating and adapting its thinking for the new landscape. This reactionary attitude has some significance and importance in places where journalism is fundamentally connected to the press and written communications industry in the hands of families that own the media. This is the case of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, which we consider very important due to the particularities of its information industry, historically characterized by a traditional concept of the profession and the resistance to the adoption of innovations. Another important weakness of the Galician companies is with respect to the information guideline, hardly equidistant from the different actors involved in Galician society, especially from public authorities and large economic groups (CAMPOS; LÓPEZ, 2000, p. 24).

It is very interesting to study the movements that take place in a geographically defined area such as the Galician one and in an industry that exists under the long shadow of economic and technological transformations that have characterized the evolution of the hypersector in recent times (particularly in the last 25 years). These developments in the creation of communication infrastructures (Internet, cable networks, etc.), with the consequent expansion of the media and information dissemination and distribution channels, are produced worldwide (especially in the more economically developed countries) and have an important impact on local areas, as in the case of Galicia. This new infrastructure, without a definitive response to the creation of proximity contents and to the worldwide support of regional biodiversity, represents the “pipe-lines” for the unidirectional penetration of external contents and a potential form of erosion of local identities (DÍAZ NOSTY, 2007, p. 414). That is the reason for the proverbial importance of local media industries. And the responses offered by them in the current converging and technological context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We have mentioned above that we are in the middle of a process of adaptation to an ecosystem of changes which has undermined the unidirectional traditional discourse of the mass media. We are now in a new scenario in which readers can abandon their traditionally passive role and become consumers as well as information users and producers. With hypertextual narration a complete redefinition of the elements present in the communication chain is assumed. Digital technology emulates a dialogue in which the users are constantly involved, not only when you choose the aspects covered, but also acting on the limits of the text.

That is why we believe it is very interesting to analyze how the media in Galicia will react to the changes produced by convergence. As

noted above, the Galician communication industry is a conservative context and deeply connected to the more traditional concept of the profession. We see clearly that the converging phenomenon is an entire reality that affects the media globally. Nonetheless, it is also a process that necessarily meets specific local conditions. It is in the local areas where convergence acquires vital importance for the communication order of the future world.

The communication scenario at the beginning of the second decade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium is marked by the process of the disappearance of the analogical world in order to deify the digital space, which is based on telecommunication convergence, information technologies and content industries. Transformations in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs) announced a new era, which was welcomed positively by “techno-one-worlders” and negatively by critics who fear control of the media. There are only a few people who seek, through a reformist position, a serene reflection in order to take advantage of technological innovations and build a more just society. But what nobody can deny is the magnitude of the technological revolution that guides the knowledge and information society.

In Galicia, there was also a clear distinction between preachers of the apocalypse and those integrated into the new scenario, between *technophiles* and *technophobes*; that is, between the more traditional sectors and the more progressive ones (that introduce and foster the citizens’ participation in journalism and use social networks). In an economically conservative society such as the Galician one, it is logical for convergence to be conceived by the corporative media as a process with a basically entrepreneurial role. The main topic of discussion and debate (Byzantine) is the establishment of a profitable **business model** for network journalism.

The convergence phenomenon is not a unique phenomenon, but it is defined by the diversity of interpretations that give rise to new information and communication technologies and their influence on the field of media companies. Thus it is possible to develop marketing, technological, socioeconomic, etc. approaches. Scientific literature on the convergence phenomenon appears to be largely focused on three different areas: the business side (economic concentration processes, for example), the professional side (especially connected with displacements in the journalistic profession and professional culture) and finally, the contents side (hybridization of formats, multimedia content creation). Although convergence has produced serious changes in the three areas

mentioned above, most media companies tend to relate this process to journalism's survival, strictly speaking, as a professional activity.

That is why, although the convergence process is a polyhedral phenomenon, with many edges, economic (or marketing) and technological interpretations are understood as prevalent in certain areas. In the case of Galicia, as we shall see below, the most traditional sectors interpret the convergence process as a strictly economic phenomenon for business survival. On the other hand, new strategies and models have recently appeared in Galicia that give priority attention to the technological side of convergence in search of a more egalitarian relationship between information users and producers.

Within Galician media, it is possible now to clearly identify two dissenting attitudes or strategies with regard to the convergence phenomenon. These are as follows:

1. **Conservation strategies.** These attitudes are mainly directed to a concept of convergence that basically takes on an entrepreneurial role. Concentration processes and strategic movements are designed to cut costs through newsroom convergence. These strategies are characterized by sacrificing technological innovation in order to perpetuate their strategies and concepts.
2. **Renovation strategies.** There is a second option (more related to the changes produced by technological convergence) that does not hesitate in providing both room for innovative experiences and new spaces on the web. These strategies wager strongly on social networks and new technologies. Their ideology is based on the search for new models closely related to "sensibility 3.0": support for participation of users (not only in economic terms, with *crowdfunding*, but also in the preparation of information, through contents distribution).

### **Analysis of examples of both attitudes**

In this position, we will study two attitudes mentioned in the previous section, but with respect to the Galician area. As already noted above, the Galician communication ecosystem is characterized by two aspects: business weakness (with serious initial deficits that are perpetuated as time goes by) and family ownership. Accordingly, two trends (conflicting directions) are easily identified with reference to convergence.

## 1. Traditional media and convergence

The media in Galicia have been characterized by the development of conservation strategies (especially in times of crisis or recession, as at present). Galician media have a reactionary and traditionalist concept of the profession and of the information society. This position is partially due to sponsorship policies carried out by the regional governments. Not in vain, a large part of the revenue of these media (especially of the print media) stems from agreements signed with the Autonomous Community Government of Galicia (*Xunta de Galicia*) in return for institutional publicity and various sinecures. Some Galician newspapers only survive thanks to contributions of public funds by the regional governments. That is the reason why there is little or no belligerence with the power of these media.

Survival is the evident goal of these media; converging phenomena are viewed with concern and skepticism by their creators. The incorporation of mechanisms for the participation of readers or new ways to produce contents happens in dribs and drabs. When they occur, they are a hypocritical adaptation to new technologies and forced by the circumstances. These media are certainly afraid of losing their primacy in the information discourse. Let us not forget that the practice of excluding the public from the communication process, restricting its participation, is related to the historical forms of the media (AZNAR, 2005, p. 213).

As a corollary of the research work carried out during the project entitled “Tendencias na converxencia dos medios de comunicación en Galicia” (trends in the convergence of the media in Galicia), the *Novos Medios* research group launched a book with the same name in which converging strategies and attitudes of eleven Galician cybermedia (the most representative ones) in recent years<sup>2</sup> were analyzed. The overall analysis of the Galician cybermedia leads to the conclusion that, in general terms, digital publications follow the traditional patterns of information processing, and consequently ignore the possibilities offered by the Internet. In addition, they display structural shortcomings that burden hypertextual resources available on the web.

As stated in the report,

this research offers a view of the media industry’s reshaping in Galicia that follows the guidelines of what we understand as convergence. They are integration processes, determined by aspects of the economic scene (especially the crisis) and strategic needs (in order to continue with diversification and make better use of available resources). Accordingly, they pay great attention to a better coordination of different business areas (CALVO *et al.*, 2012, p. 310).

Therefore, we conclude that Galician cybermedia (closely related to print media: most of them have a print version prior to the digital one) and their advisors understand the converging phenomenon in its strictly commercial and marketing aspect and leave on a second level the transformations in professional profiles, the relationship with users and the public or the hybridization of information formats.

## 2. New experiences of recent creation

Recently, only when the economic recession in Spain and in Europe has intensified, the emphasis on new and renovated information models became stronger. Contrary to the concept of the more traditional media, the new Galician cybermedia (paradoxically, arising from the crisis) are characterized by an emphasis on social networks and by fostering the participation of users/readers in the information process.

Galicia was always one of the autonomous regions with the largest percentage of newspapers per capita in all of Spain. However, over the last two years, six media companies which improve the Galician language have disappeared. In 2011, over a one-month period, two publications have disappeared: *Xornal de Galicia* and *Galicia Hoxe*. *Xornal de Galicia* was the only newspaper entirely written in Galician. *Galicia Hoxe* was a journalistic project with progressive orientation sponsored by the entrepreneur Jacinto Rey in December 2008 which gave great importance to the information produced in Galician.

These two publications were the most recent ones in a long list which contains historic publications such as *A Nosa Terra*, a century-old weekly, the first public medium and vehicle of expression for Galician nationalism. It was followed by other influential publications such as *Vieiros*, the first large web portal in Galicia that started in the late 1990s and was a Galician information reference on the network; they also terminated *GZ Nación*, a digital newspaper launched during the leftist government very close to nationalism or *A Peneira*, the great regional newspaper in Galicia.

Ultimately, the aggravation of the economic crisis and the rise to power of the Popular Party in Galicia suffocated the print media in Galician (historically linked to leftist political movements). Until 2012, the list of disappearing media has increased every month.

So far this year, it is possible to identify four new communication initiatives entirely developed in Galician. At the end of 2011, the fortnightly newspaper *Diagonal* presented its Galician version [<http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/-En-Galego-.html>] thanks to a translation

team made up of *Diagonal* contributors aiming to consolidate a Galician digital space.

Aside from this initiative, three innovative journalistic experiences in the Galician language emerged at the beginning of 2012. They are *Praza pública* [<http://praza.com/>], *Dioivo* [<http://www.dioivo.eu/>] and *Sermos Galiza* [<http://sermosgaliza.com/>]. While each of these media has different autonomous characteristics, everything starts from a wave that attained great force in Galicia. With the worsening economic crisis and the gradual disappearance of communication spaces in Galician, there has been a revival of the “Galicianist” critical awareness. These three media have come to light thanks to financing such as *crowdfunding* strategies. Besides the collective funding, they share the emphasis on social networks and the participation of readers in information production. It is not by chance that they have a large network of contributors and an interminable list of thematic *blogs*. Although it is a local strategy, it is not far from being the model created by *The Huffington Post*, typified by the viral marketing, the presence in the social networks and the collaboration of users/readers.

### Conclusions

Currently, nobody can deny the fact that the revolution produced with the brilliant arrival of social networks (and before, of the ICTs) affects all areas of society. As essential part of human society, journalism is also affected by the huge transformations caused by the Internet. These are changes not only in terms of business concentration, but they also affect the professional role of the journalist, information production, distribution channels, etc.

It is possible that traditional mass media, based on a unidirectional concept (from one to many) of the communication process, are on a path to extinction. In today's society, the new information and communication technologies are conducive to the existence of a potential bidirectionality in which users/readers can themselves become producers of information and content.

In this paper, we try to determine the extent of the converging phenomenon in a traditional setting that is little involved in journalistic experimentation. That is why we chose the media in Galicia, a scenario in which the information industries have been historically characterized by their stagnation, by their lack of acceptance of innovations and by their attempts to maintain the *status quo* at any cost. The Galician case is of particular interest because this reactionary collective view now has

to contend with the emergence of the social networks and new forms of interaction and communication.

As noted above, Galician media is defined by its traditional character, poor in innovations and developments. Mainstream media were forced to change due to the serious economic crisis (linked to an alarming decrease in advertising revenue) and one of the measures taken was newsroom integration (confluence of cybermedia and print version newsrooms). The emphasis on integration, instead of being a conviction of information entrepreneurs, is a response for the need to reduce expenses. It is important to remember that since 2009, the advertising revenues of the Galician media have been gradually reduced (currently, there is a decline of more than 30% in turnover) and their expansion and diversification plans have been slowed down, especially in the area of terrestrial digital television. The crisis has made the large communication corporations in Galicia paradoxically focused on the survival of their print media, leaving aside new business opportunities offered by the Internet. If they chose figures or phenomena found in the convergence of technologies (such as, for example, the multimedia or multitask journalist who produces information for newspapers, for cybermedia and even for television), it was not by conviction, but because in this way they can economize on costs and human resources and minimize losses.

We identify two trends (applicable worldwide to other more or less distant geographic realities) that we call “conservation strategies” and “renovation strategies”. Actually, the former strategies are the ones that have historically defined the communication panorama of the Autonomous Region of Galicia. The latter trend is very recent and is the result of the combination of an economic recession that is strangling the media and the possibilities offered by the innovative social networks to journalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The lack of definition of the profession and the desperate search for a profitable business model led to the birth of new experiences. Galician media have historically relied on institutional subsidies and support. Now, with the economic crisis, initiatives for the renovation of journalism seem to be emerging. Perhaps, this is one of the positive aspects of the economic crisis that is affecting Europe with particular virulence.

In a society in turmoil, in which we can already talk about digital technologies and journalism 3.0, two paths appear before us. The choice seems to be inevitable: renovate or die; however, the print media certainly refuse to die and make room for new products that have emerged with the Internet. As expounded by Bill Keller (former director of *The New York*

*Times*), will newspapers be dinosaurs? But dinosaurs lived on the earth for millions of years...

## NOTES

- 1 In September 1994, an information website started to be published on the Spanish Internet, the official State bulletin, considered by some authors (ARMAÑANZAS ET AL., 1996, pp. 128-131) to be the first Spanish cybermedia. However, Javier Díaz Noci and Koldo Meso have identified a Valencian cultural magazine, *El Temps*, as predecessor of the official State bulletin at an unspecified date in the summer of that same year (DÍAZ NOCI; MESO AYERDI, 1999, p. 20). In this case, the pioneer of the Spanish Internet environment condition would be to this publication which, let us recall, as a cultural magazine, lacks daily updating.
- 2 The main criterion for the choice of the eleven cybermedia as study subjects is their representativeness based on audience, ideological orientation and public interest. This choice does not only result from the fact that they are the cybermedia with wider audience, but they also represent different political currents and feelings prevalent in Galicia. In addition, three of the eleven cybermedia are published in the Galician language. These were the cybermedia analyzed: *Elcorreogallego.es*, *Emuga.es*, *Farodevigo.es*, *Galiciadiario.com*, *Elidealgallego.es*, *Anosaterra.com*, *Elprogreso.es*, *Laregion.es*, *Vieiros.com*, *Lavozdeg Galicia.es* and *Xornal.com*. We carried out a twelve-day analysis of front-page news during three weeks and later we carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information and of its structures, formal components and contents. Aside from that, in a complementary way, we held thorough interviews with the chief editors of the eleven cybermedia in order to identify prejudices and analyze experiences, strategies and difficulties with respect to the convergence process in Galician media.

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