

BOOK REVIEW

Convergent Journalism

STEPHEN QUINN

London: Peter Lang, 2005, 256 pgs.

REVIEWED BY **Carla Schwingel**

At a time when in Brazil there is much discussion regarding the technological standard for digital television, which will make possible, in addition to better quality, greater diffusion and perhaps democratization in the transmission and reception of informative content, Stephen Quinn launches “Convergent Journalism – The Fundamentals of Multimedia Reporting”. London, Peter Lang, 2005, presenting a panorama of how some companies in the United States, Europe and Oceania are working with the phenomenon of technological convergence for the production of journalistic content. Regulation is the key factor in the emergence of the phenomenon, the author states. Structured in nine chapters, the book investigates the significance of the term for the area of Communication and the reasons that are leading journalistic production toward an “inevitable” convergence. Based on analyses of successful newsroom cases, Quinn presents business models and systematizes possible paths for incorporating news production into different platforms in daily journalistic practice.

A consistent résumé as journalist and professor, with more than ten books published and with training and activity in England, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates, has enabled him to undertake, without any misgivings, a kind of “great reporting” with a view toward interpreting the management of information in the newsrooms based on technological evolution and the requirements resulting from the journalistic production process. The experiences analyzed appear to confirm what Digital Journalism researchers have been asserting and indicating as trends in their works for some years now: the breakdown of the barriers between newsrooms, the competence needed for the new technologies, the knowledge of the

media, the work routines and, mainly, a differentiated mental structure, predisposition or mentality on the part of journalists in order to work both with the new technological apparatus as well as with a multimedia narrative.

Right away in the first chapter, Quinn utilizes the emergence of convergence to open the discussion regarding the need for delimiting the concept of this phenomenon, also called multi-platform publication or integrated journalism, according to the author. For Quinn, what characterizes convergence is the fact that the communication media are producing jointly information for different media and platforms. Chronologically, the first experience occurred in the United States in 2002, with a group in Florida composed of the Tampa Tribune, Orlando Sentinel, Sarasota Herald-Tribune and Florida Today, and not with the merger of AOL with Time Warner which happened in 2000, as might be thought, since the author indicates that he is not discussing the convergence of large corporations but rather of newsrooms. Accordingly, Quinn goes in search of a definition, having in mind the assertions of Professor Lawrence Pryor of the Anneberg School at the University of Southern California and of Martha Stone, director of Newplex, a pioneering case at the University of South Carolina, that the concept both strengthens the area of study as well as helps what is being carried out in practice.

After presenting some differentiated definitions of convergence both by researchers as well as by area professionals and emphasizing the difficulty in arriving at a consensus, Quinn goes on to analyze what Richard Gordon, from Northwestern University in Chicago, identifies as convergence in the United States. Having in mind the company perspective and the new structures of the newsrooms, Gordon systematizes five distinct types of convergence: of the company itself, which occurs with different media belonging to the same company; tactical, with media from different companies; structural, when companies reorganize the newsrooms and introduce new activities; accumulated information, when they seek reporters with varied professional abilities; and narrative, which occurs at the level of the journalistic work, made possible by the combination of the computer with portable devices for distribution of information and with the interactive potential of the Internet and television.

Quinn makes use of the work of academicians from the State University of Ball to present the idea of continual convergence for journalistic practice, in which it is no longer important to ask whether an

operation is being convergent or not, but rather the level of convergence at which it is being performed. These researchers identify five levels for the phenomenon: promotion-crusade, cloning, cooperation, associated content and total convergence. Quinn maintains, then, that for multimedia coverage, cooperation in the work is fundamental and that communication is the key factor for the process in the newsrooms, since a reporter needs to be sufficiently flexible to know when and how to ask for help for telling a story better. For this reason he always comes back to indicating the importance of a predisposition, of a multimedia mentality on the part of the journalists, as well as the alteration of the relations between reporters, editors and owners of the communication media, as the main aspects of his comprehension of convergence.

If businessmen or investors would like to exploit the phenomenon from the cost reduction aspect, this is not the most recommended book, since the author deconstructs the myth that convergent technologies lead to a reduction of staff and costs. On the contrary, he demonstrates that the process needs technological investment as well as training and diversification of professional people. This aspect, according to Quinn, presents a potential dichotomy between the business view of convergence (with multi-platforms for publication and with tools that make possible higher productivity and better marketing positioning) and journalists' aspiration that convergence offers possibilities of doing better work, with more friendly digital tools and that it is representative of a production model which also reflects the present moment in Journalism and in contemporary society.

Throughout the book Quinn presents a discussion of the social, technological and legal factors that are contributing to or affecting the process in Journalism. The time for reading the news, the diversity of information, the audience fragmentation, the growing number of people who access the Internet in the entire world, the relatively low cost of portable devices for receiving and transmitting data are discussed and commented on. It is at this time, on asserting that regulation is one of the main factors that make possible the evolution of convergence, that the adoption of technological standards and the definition of rules for communication companies show their real importance. Based on the work of James Gentry, from the University of Kansas, who lists factors such as organizational strategy, leadership, culture of innovation, coordinated structure, ownership, shared information and values, production process, technological systems, joint databases, partnerships,

cultural flexibility, location of the work team and labor laws, Quinn discusses them as facilitators or inhibitors of the convergence process. A company's positioning with respect to each one of these aspects can limit or facilitate integration of the media and, in this way, assist or not in the applicability of Journalism's social role. The author also presents the report of Brazilian journalist Ruth de Aquino, then editorial strategy director of IFRA (an association of European newspapers and editors), regarding the evolution of the phenomenon in Europe which only serves to confirm the factors pointed out by the American study.

In addition to these aspects, Quinn deals with the "business models for convergence", the specificities of multimedia narrative, the limits of technological determinism in the phenomenon of convergence, the management of knowledge in the newsrooms, the changes provoked by technology in professional practice and, lastly, attempts to furnish a procedural model for undertaking the alteration from a unimedia system of working to a multimedia one. Quinn emphasizes that the management of knowledge requires a mentality open to the culture of the newsrooms. And on interviewing professional people from projects such as Newplex, from the University of South Carolina, in Columbia, and from the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, a newspaper in Florida, phrases such as "convergence isn't a strategy for cutting costs; it's a strategy for growth" and "it doesn't mean doing more with less, but rather doing more with more" are highlighted. Shared cost, extent of the audience (with the added value of the business model being capable of identifying readers) and placement in the same geographic location are the factors indicated as contextual of convergence by the professional people from Fairfax, the largest Australian communication group. Based on the Swedish experience of Citygate, there is the highlighting of the importance of local content for the phenomenon of convergence. For the director of the Turum Sandromat group in Finland, journalistic production needs to accompany the social utilization that the customers (the readers, television viewers) are making of the digital technologies.

For Professor Rosental Alves from the University of Texas, responsible for the first Brazilian newspaper entirely on the Internet, in 1995 in Brazil, Quinn's book contains a useful panoramic view of the efforts that newsrooms are making to move from monomedia production systems to multimedia production systems. One of Quinn's most important proposals is the creation of a 'multimedia mentality' which facilitates this transition to a convergent newsroom. "This is a descriptive work

which offers a panoramic view of the phenomenon of convergence in journalism, mainly in the United States, and in some countries in Europe and Asia. Written in accessible language and in a didactic style, it offers a collection of basic knowledge with respect to the significance of the phenomenon of convergence in journalism and as to how large corporations are adapting journalistic processes to the new technological and market realities”, states Professor Elias Machado from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, one of the main researchers in this area in Brazil. Professor Lawrence Pryor from the University of Southern California, one of Quinn’s sources, analyzes the work emphasizing its contribution to the definition of the concept of convergence: “he has written a valuable book for journalists. I have been wary of the term “convergence” because it is defined in so many ways, some having little to do with journalism. But he deals with the topic intelligently, in ways that are helpful to students seeking to prepare themselves for a more complex newsroom environment. It also gives guidance to journalism educators as we deal with curriculum changes to keep our courses updated. It’s also a good book for anyone who is interested in seeing where journalism is heading in the 21st Century”.

One fragile point in the work is that once again a book which proposes to carry out a worldwide coverage of a phenomenon disregards the development of this process in Latin America, in Africa and specifically in Brazil, that possesses journalistic organizations and groups of researchers specialized in digital journalism on an international level. The only allusion occurs in the first chapter, when the author refers to communication groups that are leaders in the process of convergence in South America, based on information published in 2001 by the International Association of Newspaper Marketing. The article indicates O Globo, O Estado de São Paulo and the RBS Group as the three most advanced in terms of technological integration in Brazil, a reality that very probably has changed in five years. This type of lack of information regarding the African, Latin American and Brazilian realities reflects the difficulty that researchers from the Anglo-American matrix have in establishing a dialogue with other academic traditions, especially with those whose bibliography is not in English. This is a limitation which, at a time of globalization of markets and knowledge, should be pointed out so that it could be overcome, we hope, in the near future. With information resulting from his own work as professor and from other academic research, Quinn has developed a book of great usefulness for

journalism scholars in this beginning of the millennium, showing in a didactic way how the companies studied and the managers of these organizations are adopting convergence in the production process of journalistic content.

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