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On: 04 March 2014, At: 00:03

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journalism Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjop20>

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Published online: 28 Feb 2014.

To cite this article: José A. García-Avilés, Andy Kaltenbrunner & Klaus Meier (2014): Media Convergence Revisited, Journalism Practice, DOI: [10.1080/17512786.2014.885678](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.885678)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.885678>

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MEDIA CONVERGENCE REVISITED

Lessons learned on newsroom integration in Austria, Germany and Spain

José A. García-Avilés, Andy Kaltenbrunner, and Klaus Meier

Newsrooms are in a makeover process, reflecting the complex changes taking place in the market, along with a shift towards the digital domain within the media value creation chains. Our comparative study monitors convergence and integration processes in newsrooms in Spain (El Mundo), Germany (Die Welt) and Austria (Der Standard). Five years ago, we established three typical newsroom models and a convergence matrix for analysis and comparison: Full Integration, Cross-Media and Coordination of Isolated Platforms. The models and matrix have now been confirmed—and enriched with new details and descriptors regarding newsroom organization, workflows and change management. At the same time, audience participation is becoming a key strategic question in all newsroom models, whereas the traditional logic and rhythms of daily newspaper production are losing ground.

KEYWORDS journalism; media convergence; newsroom integration; print and digital

Introduction: Media Convergence as a Multifaceted Process

Research on convergence which focuses on the field of journalism has increased notably in recent years (Erdal 2011; Infotendencias Group 2012; Kaltenbrunner and Meier 2013). While there is no unanimously accepted definition of convergence (Gordon 2003), it is regarded as a phenomenon which influences the media system, shaping the different dimensions of communication: technological, professional, structural and operational (Erdal 2007). Technological convergence implies that almost any digital device with a display—smartphone, tablet, video console, etc.—enables the sharing of almost any kind of content, with broad cultural and trans-media implications (Jenkins 2006). Professional convergence tends to focus on the changes in organization, professional practices and content production in media houses (Killebrew 2005).

Many media houses worldwide have adopted a multi-platform approach to content production and distribution. In fact, the process of digitization has obliged news corporations to migrate from a production model which was constrained by the medium of reception—the newspaper, the transistor radio, the television set—to another model which is relatively independent of this factor (Appelgren 2004). Working environments are changing: editorial teams are being merged together in accordance with the type of content they produce. Advocates of cross-media argue that coordinated reporting may enhance the quality of coverage and optimize the use of human resources in newsrooms, as each outlet provides the information that best suits it—whereas citizens receive the best coverage at any time or place (Meier 2007). However, as some critics argue, convergence has brought about operational cost cutting which has had a negative impact on the quality of the media product (Fagerjord and Storsul 2007).

Journalism Practice, 2014

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.885678>

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Models of Newsroom Convergence

New models of editorial organization erode the single medium autonomy: cross-border cooperation between newsroom departments, programmes and channels is becoming the working standard. As Erdal (2011) shows, cross-media production enables coordinated reporting of events via several outlets (press, broadcast, internet, tablets, cell phones, etc.). The production might take place at a single *integrated newsroom* or involve *collaboration among newsrooms* from various media. The concept can also apply to other media products systematically designed for different media formats (Westlund 2011).

The first newsroom-wide tests of cross-media production began in the late twentieth century, as media companies adopted digital technologies, developing a closer relationship between the production of content for print or broadcast and their online counterparts (Boczkowski 2004).

Cases of media convergence occur with varying degrees of complexity, depending on the different cultures, companies and countries that are involved (Boczkowski and Ferris 2005). Some authors propose using a matrix based on a large number of descriptors designed to measure the stage of newsroom convergence, as we did for our previous newsroom studies: our matrix analysed the focus of the project, editorial management, journalists' practices and work organization (García Avilés et al. 2009). In this way, it is possible to distinguish models of convergence ranging from full integration to the coordination of isolated platforms, including different cross-media strategies.

Companies should not regard convergence merely as a cost-saving strategy. Rather, convergence may allow growth, resulting in improved quality and better coordinated content in the outlets of a media group, fostering loyalty among audiences (Quinn 2005). However, several scholars point out the risks to news quality and media diversity if the convergence process is only driven by cost reduction. Newsroom integration may diminish the diversity of approaches which the separate outlets take towards a community, may ignore intrinsic differences among media formats that contribute to a heterogeneous journalistic discourse, and may lead to immediacy prevailing over analysis (Singer 2004). Multi-skilling appears to be more common in integrated newsrooms, where journalists produce content for multiple platforms (Wallace 2013; Van den Bulck and Tambuyzer 2013).

While newsroom convergence has become more prevalent, de-convergence processes have also emerged. As the case of the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* shows, the lack of a solid business model, along with cultural resistance from reporters, forced the return to a separation between the print and online newsrooms (Tameling and Broersma 2013).

Methodology

Our research focuses on professional practices in three media organizations undergoing newsroom convergence in Austria, Germany and Spain. The case study method was chosen as a valid tool for analysing a complex phenomenon in its own context. This type of qualitative method relies on sources such as direct observation, interviews, written records and other documents to validate its conclusions. Case studies

have frequently been used as a methodological tool to examine the implications of newsroom convergence (Erdal 2011; Infotendencias Group 2012).

This analysis is built on our 2008 study of the development of newsroom convergence in six media houses (García Avilés et al. 2009). We now decided to restrict our analysis to the most significant company for each country: *El Mundo* (Spain), *Die Welt* (Germany) and *Der Standard* (Austria). Data for each case study were gathered from interviews with editors and journalists as well as from direct newsroom observation over several days—accompanied by background interviews and observations of change processes in the media corporations and newsrooms across more than a year. Teams of two or three international researchers conducted face-to-face, open-ended interviews with 11 selected professionals. Field notes were made on site and relevant documents were collected, providing data on issues such as website traffic, revenue streams and advertising rates.

Our initial hypothesis stated that the three models of newsroom convergence established in our 2008 research had undergone significant changes. Thus, study cases were analysed and compared according to the following research questions:

- How has each model of newsroom convergence evolved in the last five years?
- How do journalists adapt to the requirements of the convergence strategy?
- What are the new issues that arise in the context of multiplatform production?
- Which essential areas and descriptors have to be identified in order to analyse the latest convergence developments?

Newsroom Integration at *El Mundo*, Madrid

The integration process was initiated in *El Mundo's* newsroom in July 2007, and was gradually implemented in all sections by the end of 2009. The process began when the print and online sections Science, Communication, Info-graphics and Sports were merged, to produce content across media boundaries. Newspaper journalists showed a greater reticence towards working for the Web, because of the traditional importance given to the print edition in terms of prestige. An assistant editor says that this attitude changed as print journalists realized the importance of the website in reaching a broader audience, achieving more visibility and receiving instant feedback.

El Mundo's newsroom integration blurred the lines between print and online operations, since newspaper journalists are now expected to work on online projects. Multi-skilled journalists gather information using multiple tools (such as audiovisual recording, photography, database mining) and combine multiple-format elements into a story or adapt the materials to different outlets. Multi-skilling may give reporters more control over the final products, but can, on the other hand, overload them with technical procedures. Editors say there is no difference any more between online and print journalists.

A deputy editor argues that the integrated newsroom has not drastically changed the principles of the editorial process. Instead, integration has changed staffers' perceptions of the process: they are now thinking in terms of the content's suitability for a medium. All print and online sections are integrated. There is a central "breaking news" desk, where all the information is centralized for rerouting to the various sections.

Setting the news priorities at any given time, that same central hub issues all decisions on breaking news and the home page.

The science editor emphasizes the sizeable overlap between these integrated teams, where reporters and production staff sit side-by-side and produce stories both for print and the online medium.

The differences between print journalists and their Web counterparts in terms of their labour contracts have also disappeared: they all belong to the same company now and are subject to similar remuneration agreements. Print and online journalists have been grouped together by area of specialization such as health, education, politics or media and technology, into so-called sections, which can upload their articles autonomously, straight on to the website.

It has not been just the younger staff who showed enthusiasm in adapting to integration; according to an assistant editor, “those who have been the best exponents of different styles of journalism have been some of the more experienced journalists and correspondents”. The picture desk is now fully integrated as a multimedia department made up of 30 professionals and photographers trained in video. “Training is very important. Journalists have received courses on video shooting and editing, on camera appearance and speech elocution”, he says.

The advantages of open-plan office space were also considered. Offices had traditionally been associated with hierarchy: the more important the person who occupies it, the larger the office. But, tradition notwithstanding, the fast world of platform integration needs to provide for easy, frequent, informal interactions among the staff. By tearing down many walls, *El Mundo*'s managers opted for transparency and cooperation, thus eliminating any insular mentality and pushing the company away from traditional comfort zones.

Digital to Print: The *Welt-Morgenpost-Abendblatt* Group, Berlin/Hamburg

Three dailies (*Welt*, *Welt kompakt* and *Berliner Morgenpost*), a weekly (*Welt am Sonntag*) and their associated online publications have been centrally coordinated from an integrated editorial department since as early as 2006. True to the motto “online first”, the online department uploaded all articles on to the Web as soon as they were completed.

The scope of products offered has subsequently undergone significant diversification: a compact print edition of *Welt am Sonntag* has been published since February 2011; in October 2012 the daily *Hamburger Abendblatt* was integrated into the editorial structure of the group; in June 2013 the regional newspapers *Morgenpost* and *Abendblatt* were sold to another news company, the *Funke* Gruppe—effective from January 2014. “Digital” has replaced “online” over the past three years, with an independent mobile browser range rounded off by various apps for smartphones, tablets and internet-enabled TVs. The editorial staff in Berlin and Hamburg consists of approximately 550 journalists. In December 2013, some 120 journalists moved into a large central newsroom focusing on digital production in its centre; furthermore, a novel Content Management System was set up in 2012, which the Chief Editor calls all journalists’ “virtual newsroom”: “Now we all sit in the newsroom, so to speak, and everyone can see who is working on what and, above all, we can cooperate.”

The motto “online first” gave way in 2012/13 to the “digital to print” strategy: “We now first work for digital publishing and also produce daily papers out of what we had initially written for the Web”, says the Chief Editor. The conferences do not focus on applying printed page logic to newspaper production any longer; instead, it is the topics that take centre stage.

A task force consisting of a dozen editorial journalists developed, in more than a year’s worth of mock editors’ meetings, the new workflow patterns. Mandatory change management seminars have been organized for this purpose. In the Chief Editor’s opinion, the digital approach already inhabits most journalists’ minds, but not—as yet—their hearts.

The business model change is at the root of the change in approach: online publications should reach quality standards so high as to loosen the users’ purse strings. December 2012 saw the introduction of the “metered paywall”, a purpose-made payment model for *welt.de*. “We are hell-bent on and fired up about finding a digital business model for journalism”, says the General Manager. The daily print edition is losing significance within the brand realm of *Die Welt*.

The new “digital to print” strategy called into existence a new actor: the Multi-Channel Manager (MCM) deals exclusively with the three to six most relevant stories of the day in her or his section.

The topic of social media is, in the Chief Editor’s view, overrated: merely 1–5 per cent of the traffic that hits the publishing house’s websites originates from social networks. He does see potential in social media though, which is why a social media editor has been *in situ* for two years, soon to be joined by a second.

Growing Together: *Der Standard–derstandard.at*, Vienna

After years of separation spent in various stately buildings, the editorial departments of *Der Standard* and *Der Standard.at* moved to new, common premises at the turn of the year 2012/13. The co-publisher and Chief Editor declared at the inauguration of the new premises that the guiding principle of the move was “cooperation, rather than merging”.

This changed faster than the editors themselves expected: in June 2013, only half a year later and after only a few weeks of internal top management discussion, the company’s owner announced that *Der Standard* and *derstandard.at* would fast-forward the integration of their editorial operations and their business development in all sectors. This would give the company “more mobility and speed”.

Der Standard, with a daily readership of 382,000 (see media-analyse.at, 2012/13) was founded in 1989; its Web edition was launched in 1995 as the first German-language online newspaper and became an independent company in 2000. Fully owned by publisher Oscar Bronner, the print and online editions now share the same premises again.

The slow-progress policy, with successive steps taken towards cross-media operations, can be attributed, to a large extent, to the specific situation of the online *Standard*. The publication employs in excess of 50 journalists, the largest internet editorial staff in Austrian mass media. In March 2013, it boasted a total of 3.5 million unique users (according to ÖWA, see oewa.at) and reported net profits amounting to 2 million euros in

2012. *DerStandard.at* thus represents an exception, a rare case—both in Austria and internationally.

After moving to new premises in January 2013 with the hope of growing together, the Managing Editor of the print edition did not shun irony in analysing the new cooperation: “We share a kitchen. That is working out OK.” The pace of change increases fast, now that editorial and commercial teams are merged and heads of sections come both from former online and print operations.

The Vice Editor-in-Chief for all channels described the point of departure as an arduous process ahead: “We communicate a lot, but there have been only a few situations where we have done stories together.” Indeed, by moving to shared premises, *Der Standard* and *DerStandard.at* had at first well-nigh developed into a “coordination of isolated platforms”. Now, they are hurrying towards a more integrated concept, searching for an organization matrix for the entire company.

A common grasp of quality is regarded as a precondition for a shared newsroom culture. A task force comprising both print and online journalists was created to this end. An important step was taken in 2013: the new collective bargaining agreement in Austria established a common set of labour law provisions for journalists working for the digital and printed editions. The enterprise will have to develop more common prospects, says the Duty Editor pragmatically: “We need to prepare for a future in which at least one model is not going to work. Before that we have to look for ways to cut costs or to increase synergies.”

Convergence Descriptors: Towards an Extension of the Matrix Model

In our 2008 pilot study, we developed a matrix with 32 convergence descriptors. On the groundwork of the updated case studies, we are now able to augment the dimensions. Special emphasis lies on new dimensions which could not be identified five years ago. All in all, this new matrix with 12 descriptors is seen as an extension of the previously published matrix model. The focus has shifted to five essential areas which have played key roles in the convergence process over the past five years:

1. Market situation.
2. Newsroom organization.
3. Workflows and content.
4. Change management, skills and training.
5. Audience participation.

In the updated case studies, the media companies awakened to changed market situations—and reacted with new business models, which had an impact on the editorial convergence process (Table 1). At the *Welt* Group, all digital platforms came to the fore with the introduction of their paywall model—thus putting an end to the editorial hegemony of the daily print publications. Availing itself of the opportunity of its relocation, *Der Standard* “react[ed] to the situation of radical change in the media market” to overcome double economic and editorial structures.

The newsroom organization at *El Mundo* and *Die Welt* moved towards sections empowered within a matrix model and, above all, towards more transparency in the newsroom (Table 2): editorial staff should interact easily and frequently within an open space and an open CMS, in order to meet the challenges of a fast, cross-media world.

TABLE 1
Market situation

	Full integration	Cross-media	Coordination
Do the market situation and decisions on new business models influence the editorial convergence process?	Convergence as a foundation for company growth; digital platforms are promoted under different business models, but with a common economic strategy for all platforms and distribution channels	Convergence is an option; discrete distribution channels normally do not have a common strategy; driven by economic needs and sales plans, forces in the newsroom may be pooled on a case-by-case basis	Diversity of economic strategies is the rule; diversity of journalistic strategies for discrete/isolated platforms in the newsroom

TABLE 2
Newsroom organization

	Full integration	Cross-media	Coordination
What is the basic organizational structure of the newsroom?	Sections and section heads are responsible for all platforms; central desk only for breaking news and news prioritizing; new roles allocated to organizational functions	Platform-oriented division of the newsroom, but with a central desk or multimedia coordinator in charge of initiating and coordinating stories with cross-media character; collaboration between similar sections in print and online is encouraged, but not obligatory	Platform-oriented division of the newsroom; sections are doubled
What role does transparency play within the newsroom?	Philosophy of open space, open conferences and open stories; every journalist should have access to other journalists' research material; CMS as "virtual newsroom", with focus on stories and, furthermore, on all platforms; no "comfort zones"	Open planning process normally within the platform departments; open space and open conferences as options	No philosophy of open planning; journalists as "authors", with their "own" stories; platforms as competitors for users' and readers' interest

The daily production routine is no longer adequate in today's permanently driven news world (Table 3). The consequence, as we perceived it at *Die Welt* and *El Mundo*, is two-pronged: on the one hand, fast breaking news, with less emphasis on checking and

TABLE 3
Workflows and content

	Full integration	Cross-media	Coordination
Which aims guide the editorial planning and production processes?	The topics/stories take centre stage in the workflows; platforms are secondary and only in focus at the end of the production process	Platforms take centre stage in the planning process with long-time workflow traditions, but strategic case-by-case distribution is possible, sometimes enforced	With years' or decades' worth of workflow traditions, platforms dictate the workflows
What is the character of speed and routines—and what impact can they have on the quality of the news content?	Website and social media as drivers; two rhythms (independent of platforms): speed for breaking news and long-term, in-depth stories (investigative/exclusive); daily newspaper routines have taken a back seat	Speed of the newsroom is split: timeliness of news data for online, versus daily deadline routine for print—but with several interfaces (e.g. managing editors, central desk, media coordinators)	Speed of the newsroom is strictly split—without interfaces; workflows support platform quality

context; on the other hand, a focus on long-term stories with an exclusive character, as a unique feature of the newsroom and the brand (throughout all platforms).

In training, two challenges have been in focus over the last few years (Table 4): at *Die Welt* Group, mandatory change management seminars have been organized, while courses in blogging and social media platforms (e.g. Twitter) have been offered at *Der Standard* and *El Mundo*. The challenge of audience participation has infiltrated the newsrooms—with a couple of consequences (Table 5): at *Die Welt*, only some journalists use social media and two social media editors have been appointed; at *El Mundo*, social media have become common practice for all journalists; at *Der Standard*, where thousands of daily users' comments have been the norm for years, social media are fostered and the former Editor-in-Chief Online has been tasked with developing new forms of user-platform interaction in the future.

Three Models Approved

To sum up the results of the updated case studies, the three different models we developed five years ago have been confirmed—and were enriched with new details and descriptors. The *Full Integration model* is increasingly characterized by a matrix organization with strong sections and a topic-oriented planning process, against the backdrop of more transparency within the newsroom and also towards the public. A threat to quality is the ever-growing speed of the fast online world taking over the production rhythm and defining workflows in the newsroom. Long-term research for exclusive stories could improve quality—whereas the daily production rhythms of printed editions have taken a back seat. The *Cross-media model* has basically sustained the double structure with an

TABLE 4
Change management, skills and training

	Full integration	Cross-media	Coordination
Does the company see itself as involved in a change process and—if so—is change management supported by special seminars to give staff the chance to participate in the change processes?	Mandatory change management seminars; task force discusses and plans the new workflows and work conditions. Change is considered a permanent, flowing process	Change management “as-it-happens” and process development whenever new newsroom questions arise—no long-term planning. Occasional workshops on topics like brand quality, social media future	No organized change process. If need be, participation in seminars to observe integration development in other newsrooms. No dedicated change task force or manager needed
What kind of training is offered?	Training on new tools such as platform-neutral Content Management Systems, audio-visual recording, data mining, digital storytelling, social media	Currently, social media training is offered frequently and often cross-platform (voluntary), cross-over interest in training is welcome—but participation is not enforced	Training focused on platforms (e.g. traditional writing courses, search engine optimization for online editors, etc.)
What percentage of journalists is multi-skilled and works for more than one platform?	90–100	20–70	0–20
Skills and quality?	Multi-skill roles give reporters more control over the final product and boost their creativity in storytelling, but may overload them with technical procedures and increase time pressure	Multi-skill capabilities are required in leading/co-ordinating staff depending on personal interests or background, some are more proficient than others	Skills focus on improving the quality of one specific/isolated platform

emphasis on the platforms, but has developed several links and interfaces between the departments. The *Coordination model* still focuses on enhancing the quality of the specific isolated platform by means of a plethora of economic and editorial strategies.

Obviously, none of these models exists in a “pure form”—as we pointed out five years ago. Both the *Welt Group* and *El Mundo* have been moving towards a more stringent Full Integration model, whereas *Der Standard*, which has for a long time been successfully located closer to Coordination than to Cross-media, is now bowing to market pressure and striving to make up for delays in integration processes sooner, rather than later.

TABLE 5
Audience participation

	Full integration	Cross-media	Coordination
How are journalists using social media? Is there a social media policy in the company?	Almost every journalist uses social media in a professional context; process journalism is fostered; strategy/guidelines for the handling of social media in the newsroom	Social media platforms are mainly organized by one or several social media editor(s)/community manager(s); other journalists are encouraged to use social media, subject to individual decision	Social media are part of the online department; print journalists are not encouraged to use them, but do so on an individual basis
How do journalists use social media to spread the medium's content?	Almost every journalist uses social media to spread his/her story; authors struggle for transparency on an individual level	Specialized social media editors select content to be spread	The online department spreads its content
How do newsrooms/journalists deal with users' comments, contributions (information, photos, videos) and feedback in the newsroom?	Policy on user-generated content for all channels; general strategy towards transparency to the public; individual journalists are encouraged to discuss with audience on the website and in social media	Users' contributions, comments and feedback are handled in the online department in collaboration with a special desk or news desk	Users' contributions are handled in the online department

Conclusions and Prospects

Newsrooms are in a makeover process, whose main catalyst is the complex changes taking place in the market: general crisis scenarios within shrinking national economies, along with a shift towards the digital domain within the media value creation chain, engender new debates on improved newsroom strategies. Early adopters of print–online newsroom integration environments are completely remodelling their workflows, gearing them to content and section logic, following the commandments of ultrafast digital dissemination. At the same time, however, new high-quality formats are being developed, involving longer research and production time, more profound content investigation on the Web and more elaborate graphic processing, as is the case with background reporting and analysis in bolstered weekend print editions. In all the models we have analysed, the traditional logic and rhythm of daily newspaper production are losing ground. In the “Coordination of isolated platforms” model, the tendency is towards migrating reduced and redundant resources from print to digital publications, which also leads to discussions on stronger cross-media cooperation in the future.

As a new challenge, audience participation is becoming a key strategic question in all models, at the nexus of cross-media strategy development within the company and interactive competence enhancement in journalists from all dissemination channels. The

formulation of a common social media strategy and bolstering motivation towards user-generated content will become the universal bonding agent—even in companies which have so far relied on the strict separation of print and online journalists.

FUNDING

Subsidies from the Austrian Communications Authority (KommAustria) made this research possible.

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