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## **Media Convergence: Newsroom Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age**

**Zaki Habibi<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstraksi**

*Artikel ini menyajikan perdebatan seputar konvergensi media sebagai suatu fenomena yang tak terelakkan dalam perkembangan media massa abad ke-21. Diawali dengan diskusi perihal definisi konvergensi, penyebab kemunculannya, serta dampaknya bagi manajemen ruang redaksi (newsroom), artikel ini menyajikan ulasan tentang tantangan yang dihadapi organisasi media dalam skala global maupun nasional dengan disertai sejumlah hasil studi kasus di Inggris, Denmark, dan Indonesia. Tulisan ini juga mendiskusikan apakah surat kabar sebagai sebuah bentuk media akan lenyap di tengah pusaran kuat determinasi teknologi dalam industri media massa, dan perubahan mendasar apa saja yang akan terjadi sebagai manifestasi dari konvergensi media. Peluang dan strategi baru bagi pendidikan jurnalisme didiskusikan pada bagian akhir tulisan dengan menyajikan sejumlah usulan gagasan.*

### **Kata-kata kunci:**

*Digitalisasi, interaktivitas, konvergensi media, ruang redaksi multimedia (multimedia newsroom).*

### **Introduction**

Journalism and the mass media industry face a new phase in the 21st century. This is an era marked by some key concepts emerged in our social life, such as a global village, ecological-based and community-based action, and also, digital and visual culture. The mass media's role as a form of social control and the fourth estate—parallel with legislative, executive, and judicative institution—has been challenged with new orientation and expanded societal values which require different responses than in previous decades.

In addition, journalism as a method in mass media work has transformed in response to “the new world”. The emergence of this new world is indicated by the vanishing of dichotomous blocks, West and East, which represent capitalism led by the United States of America (US) and communism led by the Soviet Union respectively. The Cold War, then, is just a history now. Indeed, wars still happen in many regions, especially in the Middle East. Famine, conflicts, and natural disasters are still also part of our world. But, these do not represent the wars and conflicts between a “West World” and an “East World”. The motivation of these wars has changed, as have the solutions. Mass media, an important part of our global society, has also moved to a new perspective in telling stories from around the globe. This situation, then, has emerged a

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new media concept and a practical system in the media organisation called media convergence. It causes fundamental changes on how journalist work and newsrooms are organised.

### **New Technology, 'New' Audiences**

An explicit change in the media world nowadays is the new technology implemented in the whole process of media work, especially in the editorial process responsible for producing news. The emergence of the Internet, and its wide use since 2000, has impacted significantly on the mass media. News production—both for the print and broadcasting media—has become quicker and reaches more broadly than previously imagined. Thus, most mass media, even local newspapers, have built websites as the new platforms to reach their audiences.

Basically, the digitisation process has changed the media fundamentally. In previous eras, news production was manual and mechanical. Previously, the process was lengthy through linear stages that embraced the news-gathering and the news-writing by reporters or photographers, and news-editing by editors. In contrast, a new pattern called digitisation has created a system that works simultaneously. While reporters gather information from the field and photographers take important pictures, editors in the newsroom can monitor the process and, sometimes, also edit the results before the reporters and photographers come back to the office. They can submit their works from anywhere through Internet connections or specific networks. Databases, as support information, both for print and broadcasting journalists, are developed in the digital library too. Now, every person is connected to each other, the news production process is seen as simultaneous work not a linear process, and information is developed as a public domain not a private one anymore.

Moreover, media audiences have changed too, not only in terms of origin, but also their behaviour in consuming media. They are the 'new' audiences who are not loyal to just one medium. They skim newspapers, looking for what they really like. They choose magazines that represent their identity, and mostly, they spend a lot of time in front of computers connected to the Internet. In other words, their media accessing habits have changed into more simultaneous and individual-based motivation. This is the contemporary audiences of media nowadays, known as the digital generation living in a more digital world.

### **Meet the Challenges**

The two main situations mentioned above have happened in many parts of the world, for example, in the US. The distribution of newspapers has decreased by approximately five per cent per year, as has the viewership of television news. On the other hand, supporters of the new media that use web-based or Internet platform has increased rapidly. In 2006, Internet penetration in the US reached 80 per cent (Covington, 2006). It means that having easier access to the Internet has enabled more people in the US to obtain information and news through this medium.

However, conventional media, such as newspapers haven't vanished. It has transformed through media convergence efforts as a rational consequence of the

digital-based media. Conventional media based on a single-type media has been forced to adapt to these changing circumstances. Convergence has become the new trend in this adaptation process.

Several scholars have tried to define convergence as a specific concept related to mass media. Quandt and Singer explain convergence as “the blending or merging of formerly distinct media technologies, mainly based on digitisation processes, though the issues extend beyond those raised by the technology itself” (2009, p. 130). Further explanation shows that most journalism researchers relate the term to “newsroom convergence”. According to Quandt and Singer, this concept means the changes in work routines and organisational structures in editorial team inside a mass media regarding the production of content through various media platforms (2009, p. 130). Another scholar, such as Covington (2006), further describes convergence in terms of newsroom management, “Convergence needs to be undertaken as a growth strategy, not a cost-cutting measure. ... A successful convergence strategy requires a strong vision and commitment from the top”.

Convergence has become a trend in the media world nowadays regarding news reporting in more than one medium. The environment where newsrooms operated and journalists worked has been transformed from single-media to multimedia reporting (Saltzis & Dickinson, 2008). The multimedia reporting, in many cases, requires a digital platform as its major part. Using digital platform for media convergence effort creates an opportunity for everyone to be scholars or editors (Maynard, 2000). Multimedia perspective has erased the single and narrow perspective of newsroom work system in a media.

Multimedia reporting also develops a new pattern on the relationship between journalists (media professionals) and audiences (media users). There is no longer a distinct different role in terms of creating and publishing information between reporters, editors, and audiences, because multimedia newsrooms in the digital age have opened channels for everyone to share their thoughts, whether as media workers or media users. Connectivity has created interactivity, which is the key concept in this new world.

Moreover, a new media model—using web-based and interactive paradigm—is important to build democracy stronger, especially through the involvement of “informed citizens” (Bay, 2008). That’s why many conventional media have started to transform into media convergence. In this kind of media, information is presented with text, audio, and video through medium most comfortable to the audiences (Bay, 2008).

There are several purposes in adapting the newsroom convergence as a new perspective of media organisation. These purposes depend on every media’s motivation. A few scholars and journalists see that the aim of moving to media convergence is to create better stories for audiences, whether they are readers, listeners, and viewers (Haagerup, 2006). It is not only economic-based orientation in adapting to the new world and new audiences. Media convergence effort is a journalistic project, not a cost-cutting motivation for media management (Haagerup, 2006). Considerable scholarly research supports this argument. Saltzis and Dickinson’s (2008) who studied journalists’ response to media convergence efforts in

four major media in the United Kingdom (UK); the BBC, Sky News, *The Guardian*, and the *Financial Times* between 2002 and 2003, found that digitisation has changed both the media organisation and its working practices, and also that multimedia journalism created new challenges for journalists. However, they also found that this trend creates worries among journalists in terms of increased workloads, time pressure, and decline in report quality, though there is less supported evidence to confirm it.

Although the appearance of several worries related to media convergence efforts still occur, there are some success stories that have happened around the world. One of these is a Danish media organisation, *Nordjyske Media*, which is based in Aalborg, Denmark. Ulrik Haagerup, its Editor-in-Chief, describes their spirit of the transforming process from a traditional Danish newspaper into the most integrated media organisation in the world that has been credited by the World Association of Newspaper. Haagerup (2006) illustrates:

*"[All journalists] work together in a matrix organisation. ... Reporters at Nordjyske don't feel as though they work for any one medium. What they do know is that they work for people in the Northern Jutland ... their stories can reach 97 per cent of people in our area of half a million inhabitants".*

Transformation from "an old media" to "a new media" which puts stress on creating a multimedia newsroom has also happened in Indonesia. *KOMPAS*, a national leading newspaper has shown some changes too. Published since the 28th June 1965, *KOMPAS* has been the largest newspaper in Indonesia since the 1980's. However, stagnant circulation has emerged since the late 1990's with only 530,000 (Monday-Friday) and roughly 610,000 (Saturday and Sunday edition). Audiences' generation has changed, as has the external issues affecting the way people consume mass media. *KOMPAS* management re-designed the newspaper in June 2005 to address their 'new visual generation' as their potential future readers. Operating under the Kelompok Kompas Gramedia (KKG) as its holding company, *KOMPAS* then developed new product lines, including creating websites, not only for the digital version newspaper (<http://epaper.kompas.com>) but also an online media (<http://kompas.com>). In 2008, *KOMPAS* developed their community portal (<http://www.kompasiana.com>) and a news video database (<http://vod.kompas.com>) as new strategies for survival and increasing readership.

*KOMPAS* became more convergent in 2009 when they established a new system of accessing headline news. This system called Augmented Reality that can be accessed through the website (<http://kompas.com/ar>). It creates connections between daily headlines and digital database through a web-camera. A reader could expand the information from today's newspaper headlines by connecting to the Internet then exposing a specific code located inside the newspaper with an integrated web-camera on a personal computer or a smartphone to open relevant links as additional information related to the headline.

Similar transformation has emerged in other Indonesian media too. Media Group that consists of Metro TV and a newspaper, *Media Indonesia*, started media

convergence efforts after the Aceh tsunami in December 2004. Media Group learned from this tragedy that news coverage and the speed of broadcasting in such an unpredicted event were highly important. They realized that audiences use various media to seek information relevant to their needs. Although television invites sympathy with its audio-video characteristic, Metro TV recognized that they lacked capacity to address audiences' needs at this critical moment. Their reports were less comprehensive. This experience led Media Group to generate an integrative system in producing news since then. They use Metro TV to broadcast news features, interviews, and dialogues; while *Media Indonesia* presents a deeper newspaper analysis, and MetroTVNews (<http://metrotvnews.com>) serves audiences with quick, updated information that can also be seen through live streaming service and be downloaded into mobile phones.

### **Opportunities and Adaptation Strategies**

A new newsroom system should be introduced to every mass media, based on multimedia platforms, requiring multitasking-skilled professionals and multimedia infrastructures. It is argued that modern technology, lengthy training, and sophisticated organisation charts are the main issues involved in transforming to media convergence. Although Haagerup considers these elements are helpful, the most important factor relies on the understanding that the media's task is to serve the public by telling the audiences "useful and entertaining stories" through any medium or technology they want to use (Haagerup, 2006).

Besides this, a new perspective should be developed to educate and train future journalists regarding this changing. One possible way is to change the curriculum radically from single-media study to multimedia study, as the California-based Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education has opened a cross-media training that teaches future journalists to create news in three platforms; print media, news broadcast, and a website (Maynard, 2000).

However, other scholars and practitioners argue that there is another way. Media convergence is an evolutionary process, rather than revolutionary action. That's why the preparation of future journalists should be based on this perspective too. Gil Thelen (2002), the Executive Editor and Senior Vice President of *The Tampa Tribune* in the US, a pioneer of a convergent media, is a proponent of this argument. He suggests three important issues for future journalism education.

*First*, it is not necessary to create a "superman model" of a journalist who can produce news in all platforms or understand all sophisticated gadgets required for news reporting. He proposes a more rational way to educate future journalists by focusing on specialties while developing cooperation with other members in the whole news-gathering process.

*Secondly*, journalism students should be introduced to contemporary change, especially in terms of audience behaviour, mass media business orientation, and multimedia journalism. These are vital understanding in preparing students to face the real world.

*Thirdly*, journalism schools should prepare graduates as learner-workers, where although they are educated as print photographers, for example, they must also have strong motivation to obtain new skills in the workplace. This will not only enhance their capacity, but also support the whole team in the newsroom.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, the future of a newspaper relies on its ability to adapt. Although Internet use has increased highly and widely everywhere, it doesn't automatically mean the extinction of newspapers or broadcasting media such as radio stations and television would happen immediately. Every type of media could still exist as long as they transform from single-type media to a convergent media.

The goal of this change is not driven by economic-based motivation to reduce management costs, but to address the information needs of the 'new audiences' who are more digitally and simultaneously literate. In other words, audiences' consumption behaviour changes have to be responded to wisely by media organisation, especially in producing news and current affairs information. Media convergence efforts have significant impacts on the new perspective in reporting and news publishing, and also, create multimedia newsrooms with multi-skilled journalists who have specialties and the will to learn various journalism techniques in many platforms.

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