

# Mediatized Organizations and Organized Connections: Understanding Media Convergence from a Relational Construction Perspective

## Postprint

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### Abstract

As media “penetrates” into various domains including social organizations, the fundamental elements of social construction have already become embedded in deeply connected media practices. [Purpose] Therefore, understanding media convergence should not be confined to the narrow perspective of organizational transformation within media entities; it must also attend to its relational process of integrating with social mechanisms and shaping itself into a key node within the structure, in order to thereby achieve the goals of social integration and system integration. [Method] This article approaches from a media perspective and, based on discussions related to mediated organizations and organized connectivity, conceptualizes media convergence as a “systemic rule” that plays a crucial role in the modernization process of national governance capacity and governance system. [Results][Conclusion] Grassroots converged media not only constructs a conceptual reality where social mechanisms conform to media logic, but also, by connecting an organized, mediated heterogeneous relational network, points to a material practice that assembles various actors such as digital infrastructure, organizational institutions, and technical support, and in this process becomes an “obligatory passage point” that ensures the “presence” of various nodes in social governance.

### Full Text

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** As media “permeates” various fields including social organizations, the basic elements of social construction have become rooted in deeply connected media practices. Therefore, understanding media convergence should not be confined to the narrow vision of physical transformation within media organizations alone. It must also attend to its relational process of blending with social mechanisms and shaping itself into a key node within the larger structure, thereby achieving goals of social integration and systemic integration. **Method:** This article approaches the issue from a media perspective, drawing on discussions of mediatized organizations and organized connections to conceptualize media convergence as a “systemic rule” that plays a pivotal role in the modernization of national governance capacity and governance systems. **Results & Conclusion:** Grassroots integrated media not only constructs a conceptual reality in which social mechanisms follow media logic, but also points toward a material practice that connects an organized, mediatized heterogeneous relational network—one that incorporates digital infrastructure, organizational institutions, technical support, and numerous other actors. In this process, it becomes an “obligatory passage point” ensuring the “presence” of various nodes in social governance.

**Keywords:** media convergence; organization; mediatization; connection; relationship

## 1. Problem Formulation: Conceptual Contention in Media Convergence

Tracing back from the 1980s when the concept of “Media Convergence” emerged to the successive waves of convergence globally, explorations of media convergence have triggered “fission and recombination” across multiple domains including technology/form, organization/structure, industry/business format, and tactical management. In essence, intense turbulence is occurring within the media system, and “convergence” describes the overall state of this system facing qualitative transformation.

Media convergence is by no means a self-evident empirical concept. From an epistemological perspective, comprehending complex phenomena in the empirical world requires cyclical movement between practice and cognition to gradually clarify developmental trajectories and internal mechanisms. At the operational level, media convergence has undergone trials across technological, economic, subjective, content, and normative dimensions, yet theoretical research has generally remained within a “technological convergence” competitive framework, defining it from a technological standpoint. Typically, media convergence is first regarded as a form of “technological enablement” that breaks previous medium-specific divisions, allowing traditional media institutions to operate across multiple platforms. In other words, the concept emphasizes understanding “convergence” at the technological level, focusing on the aggregation of various media

forms and platforms based on digital technology [1], subsequently extending to the use of technological means to integrate all links from content production to market distribution.

This approach to understanding media convergence from media technology originates with Ithiel de Sola Pool, a representative figure of the American communication technology school, who introduced the concept of “The Convergence of Modes” in his 1983 work *Technologies of Freedom*. Pool argued that as electronic digital technology evolved, media boundaries would shift from “clearly distinct” to “multifunctional integration.” A given physical network could carry any category of media equipment, and a newly invented technology could support services previously requiring multiple technologies [2]. Thus, through new electronic digital technology (digital terminals) [3], historically independent communication media would eventually converge—point-to-point communication represented by telephones and mass communication represented by televisions would no longer remain separate. This state of blurred boundaries, ambiguous relationships, and aggregated forms constitutes “convergence.” In short, media convergence points to the dissolution of media boundaries by technology. Today, Pool’s prescient insights have become reality; convergence is no longer merely necessary but inevitable. In the digital intelligence era, “convergence” as a response to technological change appears as the inevitable result of technological development, which has further entangled the already confused relationship between communication technology and communication media.

However, Henry Jenkins, editor of *Convergence* magazine, criticizes this view, arguing that treating convergence merely as a “technical process” [4] and “seamless integration between technologies” is overly simplistic—a crude cognition that “reduces convergence to multimedia.” For Jenkins, convergence does not mean concentrating all technologies in one medium, but rather one medium accommodating all media technologies. More importantly, “convergence” implies a chain reaction that reshapes not only relationships among various elements in production channels but also extends its influence to the entire social reception domain. In other words, understanding media convergence requires transcending the media institution’s production chain to emphasize the new media logic and socio-cultural changes it brings. This involves content flow across multiple platforms, cooperation among various media industries, and shifts in audience behavior. Clearly, focusing solely on technological convergence is insufficient; what matters is the cultural system of human wisdom condensed behind this technological blending. Every hardware inevitably accompanies software, and likewise, every new technology emerges with an idea, filling modern progress with the color of conceptual history.

Thus, at least two approaches to understanding “convergence” have emerged: one focuses on function-driven convergence during technological change, manifested through cooperation, mergers, and integration motivated by economic interests or social needs to achieve technological/form convergence and industry/business format convergence—emphasizing “convergence” as an “endpoint”

where media essentially equals the media industry. The other understands convergence from the perspective of social integration, emphasizing convergence as a “process” where the “mediacy” of converged media and resulting social relations and cultural changes constitute its ultimate destination. This second approach has been further elaborated in domestic scholarship, producing theories such as the “nine fields of media convergence” [5], which emphasize convergence beyond media technology itself. However, whether integrating media terminals, production channels, or industrial institutions, these perspectives still draw circles outward from mass media institutions rather than examining the entire media ecosystem and society through converged forms. This relatively closed thinking path may relate to the inherent fragility of Jenkins’ own viewpoint. Some scholars note that Jenkins’ research on convergence culture appears to have a “new bottle, old wine” formalistic characteristic—merely importing old questions of media cultural research into new media contexts, emphasizing the power of media consumers rather than deep connections between media and the external world, thus failing to truly interpret the questions of “connection” and “relationship” he raises.

Moreover, in the Chinese context, the limitations of perspectives like Jenkins’ become even more apparent: starting from “convergence” logic alone seems unable to truly interpret China’ s top-down driven media convergence process. How should we understand “convergence” elevated to national strategy? Is there a theoretical perspective that interprets China’ s media convergence process from outside-in? In concrete integrated media practice, what considerations underlie county-level integrated media construction? What relationship exists between media convergence and “mediatized governance” ? In fact, media convergence is intimately connected to the concept of “what is media,” and media studies grounded in social theory can provide new pathways for understanding the essence of deep media convergence. From this perspective, the problematic consciousness in media convergence discussions becomes: Is it necessary to revisit “media” itself and re-examine media convergence based on “media logic” rather than “convergence” logic? This series of questions directs discussion toward the relationship between “media” and “social governance.”

## 2. Entity and Relation: Two Perspectives on Understanding Media

### 2.1 Entity: An Essentialist View of Media

The absence of a media perspective largely stems from the deeply entrenched essentialist view of media in communication studies. The field has long treated media as instruments and tools, emphasizing function and effect while the media itself disappears. This essentialist view reduces media to structural elements of society, specific social organizations, or metaphors of “container” or “pipeline” [6], thereby erasing profound differences between media. Following this logic, media becomes simplified into a process composed of various nodes

(links), where thought and ideas become objects, language and media expression become containers, and communication becomes a process of information transmission. Complex communication practices are generalized into “structures” in the structuralist sense, with “flesh and blood” on this “skeleton” limited to content and effects, while forms such as connection establishment, relationship reshaping, and connective communication brought by media and technological change are obscured.

Categorizing media as entity reflects essentialist thinking about media. Under essentialist thinking, media always exists on a realistic basis, causing traditional communication research to emphasize treating media as empirically perceivable, entity-based media organizations (i.e., “the media”). As an ontological existence within national governance systems, media undertakes policy propaganda and public opinion supervision functions, playing an intermediary and instrumental role.

## 2.2 Relation: A Constructivist View of Media

In human cognition, constructivism represents a worldview and methodology diametrically opposed to essentialism. As a research orientation and analytical framework, constructivism emphasizes the social nature of things. From a constructivist perspective, media’s existence is not merely a technical tool or power extension (organization), but more importantly a structural condition for social and cultural practice. Simultaneously, media is not an objective object awaiting discovery or identification, but something constructed through human interaction. Media’s intrinsic properties are not its singular, self-contained condition, but the role it plays in social interaction. In other words, media generates meaning through construction, and we should focus on its associations and interactions with other things, examining media itself in this process.

Compared to essentialist views, constructivism holds that media is endowed with meaning from the outset based on constructing social relations. It does not view media from an entity perspective, but considers media’s essence as a social-relational structure (rather than material structure), focusing on how media shapes society, concepts, and cognition—not how material structures carry information and circulate mechanically. It does not view media as “self-created objects” but as “structured objects,” not as an entity (organization, container, pipeline) but as a relationship, specifically manifested as the mediated or mediated process connecting people and society.

Thus, the conceptual contention over media convergence concerns not only “convergence” but also how to understand “media.” When the question of “convergence” is directed toward a “media” perspective, it means we cannot simply treat converged media as “manifest entities” —functional media and intermediaries that are explicit and implicit—but must view them as a “metaphor of relationship,” namely meaning spaces, information modalities, and social relations [7]. Deep media convergence carries strong relational ontology colors of humanistic

ethics [8], and the process of reaching convergence goals can be summarized as “the systematic response of the state, process, and patterns of change where everything becomes media and forms return to hiddenness” [9]. This process affects “all possibilities for exchanging social meaning, not the active adoption and possession of one medium by another” [10]. From this perspective, converged media transcends the “intermediary” meaning of entity theory, playing the role of relationship constructor in an inescapable material form. This construction specifically manifests as two forms: mediatized organization and organized connection, gradually revealing a structural force and systematic project compelled by technology’s “enframing.”

### 3. Mediatized Organization: Technology and Practice of Media Convergence

As objective existence and entity attributes are not core elements of media (converged media), the focus lies in its role in social interaction in media form and the new relational structure reorganized based on this logic. This aligns with Couldry and Hepp, who argue that in an era of deep mediatization, society and media exhibit a “dark convergence” where basic elements of social construction have become rooted in mediatized processes [11]. In this framework, media becomes a form of social “meta-capital” comparable to human resources, capital, and technology [13]. When media logic becomes an important logic of social operation, other social organizations and institutions must adapt to this logic. Mediatization causes “non-media symbolic forms to shift toward a media representation,” forcing non-media actors to turn toward and comply with this “media logic” when seeking media representation or in the process of media-cultural or media-social action.

Jensen’s understanding of media convergence no longer remains at the surface of technological convergence but focuses on deeper-level mediatized fusion. He emphasizes shifting from “media as technology” to “communication as practice,” constructing meaning in broader social contexts. In Jensen’s discussion, media convergence ultimately falls under the category of “meta-communication,” which includes agreements on definitions and interpretation rules for transmitted symbols, thereby shifting communication from content to relationship—not only transmitting information well but also constructing rules for social interaction.

Livingstone argues that emerging media like the internet incorporate all media into their integration process, connecting all media and remediating them by reshaping media’s possibilities in new contexts [12]. Specifically, traditional media themselves become construction objects for new media and begin operating according to new media’s logic. This reconstruction process is remediation. In practical reality, we can see Livingstone’s judgment manifested: mass media gradually become content suppliers for new media, rearranging or editing content according to new media’s communication patterns. On this basis, integrated media also demonstrates the power to incorporate mass media into the

remediation process. This is especially visible on intelligent media platforms empowered by artificial intelligence, where we can clearly observe how intelligent media's traffic rules and the openness of content production reconstruct traditional media's profit models and discourse power. Within the mediatization framework, integrated media platforms continuously reshape traditional media's production processes until traditional media rebuild social relations under the platform media framework.

Media convergence as a complex process of "remediation" specifically manifests as a media system innovation process: media technology innovation emerges in large quantities, forming an "emergent structure" that triggers systemic turbulence, ultimately displaying the form of a heterogeneous hybrid actor-network. We should jump out of examining a dominant medium in a specific social scene and instead examine the media combination based on a certain spatiotemporal environment and how this whole shapes the social world. Convergence simultaneously implies transformation in social relational modes and perspectives. Media convergence serving national governance and social construction is no longer technologically innovative and industrially restructured under commercial interests, but incorporates the all-media system under media convergence into the "whole" of national governance capacity and governance system modernization to achieve structural and agential integration of grassroots governance.

#### 4. Organized Connection: Agency and Structure of Media Convergence

According to British political scholar Andrew Chadwick's assertion in *The Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies* that "media is a political container" [14], media convergence can be viewed as a political container connecting heterogeneous agential forces and structurally influencing organizational relationships. As interests and values differentiate among various social groups, the media container becomes an organic interactive field that forms dialogue. This means that continuously converging media are not just intermediary tools between the public and government, but also relational networks connecting heterogeneous actors with different interest appeals. Here, different interest subjects compete in framing within the relational network by translating their own discourse frameworks. By positioning themselves as "Obligatory Passage Points" (OPPs), they attempt to generate public opinion that attracts social attention and response, leveraging integrated media platforms to connect and integrate differentiated public opinions. In this sense, the goal of media convergence can also be understood as creating new connections in the digital era through organized power.

In China's localized practice, media convergence is not accomplished by media "alone" but has its own action logic. Politically, media convergence is first a governance rule for new connections (this rule originates from actors' construction to ensure agreement among heterogeneous actors), requiring actors to construct their own agency in the process—thus a social structure constructed by agential

actors. The media convergence process specifically manifests as an interwoven process of agency and structure, where the two are not binary opposites. To some extent, the former is built upon the latter's existence and constitutes one of its elements: the former focuses on communication and consensus under normative guarantees, ensuring coordinated and interventionist actions are permitted and allowed by the latter; the latter automatically adjusts the former's behavior through systematic media manipulation. Even in certain cases, realizing action coordination depends on systemic mechanisms operating behind actors, which may not necessarily reach the consent and understanding critical to the former. For Giddens, this integration points on one hand to a mechanism that brings actors' interactive behavior into an "environment of co-presence" to bridge continuity and rupture in daily encounters; on the other hand, it points to interactions among actors or collectives across extended time-space, beyond co-presence conditions. From the structuration perspective, media convergence's structural features are both the medium and outcome of practices that repeatedly organize them. In other words, media convergence's systemic integration is established on the absence of co-presence and operates in Giddens' sense of structuration patterns, becoming an external structure relative to actors. Of course, this seemingly external structure is essentially an externalization of internality—evolutionarily speaking, structure is a product artificially constructed by actors, resulting from a long autonomization process of action practices guided by actors' internal habitus.

This action logic of agential connection based on organizational structure is particularly profound at the grassroots integrated media construction level. Institutionally and policy-wise, the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work in August 2018 proposed the task of building county-level integrated media centers, marking a shift in media convergence practice toward grassroots integrated media center construction. Under top-level design guidance, localities successively issued targeted construction plans and began orderly building county-level integrated media centers. As a "localized practice" of media convergence, grassroots integrated media becomes "institutionalized" and will become a key node integrating other social mechanisms and constituting structure—in other words, it becomes an "obligatory passage point" ensuring various nodes can be "present" in social governance. Fundamentally, the task of building county-level integrated media centers lies in constructing a visibility platform for grassroots social governance based on integrated media. When the identity of social governance subjects intervenes in the social governance process and becomes "visible," we cannot simply view it as traditional public opinion supervision and ideological indoctrination, but should focus on building it into a comprehensive regional media platform that broadly connects the public and all social sectors, constructing an interactive service platform with multi-subject participation, multi-party linkage, and collaborative governance, thereby achieving effective connection between government and citizens on numerous elements [15].

Thus, media convergence is no longer a simple "conceptual premise" or "men-

tal image,” but the result of practice. That is, media convergence is not only the construction of a mental reality but also a material practice process encompassing digital infrastructure, organizational institutions, and technical support. This practical process manifests as: first, social governance is mediatized, built through organized integrated media platforms that connect government, platforms, masses, and services through socialization processes—social governance mechanisms depend on this converged media process and structural force for construction; second, this construction is simultaneously the result of heterogeneous agential force games, where the practical process involves both meaning-making and integration of structure and agency, thereby breaking media convergence’s conceptual dilemmas through material practice; finally, through the mediatization process, “convergence” is no longer a simple conceptual premise but the result of mediatized practice. From this organized connection perspective, media convergence means functioning as a “system of norms” that facilitates new connections, playing a key role in social governance. The media convergence process aims to construct a mediatized, structured modern governance system to achieve social integration (cooperation/conflict relationships among actors) and system integration (logical coordination/disharmony among social system parts).

In social transformation, only media incorporated into relationships is meaningful. This stems from social change triggered by new media technology: as media “permeates” various fields including social organization, we can no longer examine media itself in isolation from a tool perspective. Boundaries among media, technology, and society increasingly blur, and keywords such as connection and relationship under media logic have expanded into numerous social life scenarios.

Media convergence is a systematic, holistic, and comprehensive project requiring multi-party practice and multiple cognitions for complete understanding. From a media perspective, understanding media convergence cannot be confined to media industry visions but must seek breakthroughs in the interactive relationship between media and technology, identify communication patterns in social interaction, and fully leverage integrated media’s roles as “regulator,” “corrector,” and “balancer” in social governance. From a paradigm shift in academic research, topics such as media convergence should be re-examined theoretically under “relationship” and “social construction” perspectives, investigating how they achieve the goals of coordinating social action, coordinating social governance, and improving social services within complex social operation systems.

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*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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