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## Analysis of Models and Forms of Media Convergence: Postprint

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### Abstract

Media convergence has transformed the way audiences use media, innovated existing business models, broadened the scope of media and communication education, and, more importantly, set higher requirements for the news practice skills of media professionals. Behind the integration of technology, business, and management lies an even deeper level of cultural convergence—the convergence between mainstream traditional media culture and internet culture.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

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**Keywords:** media convergence; technology convergence; business convergence; management convergence; cultural convergence

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## Introduction

In the era of independent media development, media products exhibited significant differences in production technology, functional features, and audience demographics due to variations in media forms and communication characteristics, with clear boundaries between technologies, businesses, and markets. Whether text, audio, video, or data, all content is uniformly converted into “bits.” Digital technology combined with wireless mobile technology gave rise to mobile television, while information processing technology merged with video transmission technology to produce IPTV. From on-demand to live broadcasting and pay-per-view, television programs have found new outlets on internet platforms, leveraging the freedom and flexibility of networks to grant audiences choice while enabling them to freely express their opinions, allowing content providers to improve program quality and adjust strategies based on direct audience feedback.

In the age of media convergence, the media and internet industries have become deeply intertwined, creating new products, establishing new departments, and meeting emerging demands through innovation. This fusion process, from breaking industrial boundaries to generating new media formats, involves multiple internal and external dimensions. Technology convergence serves as the prerequisite and foundation for all other forms of integration. Influenced by technological convergence, three domains of integration emerge: the most direct is business convergence, manifested primarily in changes to media forms and styles; second is industry convergence, also called economic convergence, referring to structural integration between different industries; and finally management convergence, which involves organizational integration of media and personnel. The effects of these four types of convergence—technological, business, industrial, and managerial—are readily apparent: they have transformed audience media usage patterns, innovated existing business models, expanded the scope of media education, and placed higher demands on media practitioners’ practical journalistic skills. Beneath these four forms lies an even deeper level of cultural convergence.

On February 25, 2022, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released its 49th Statistical Report on China’s Internet Development. The report revealed that by December 2021, China’s internet user base had reached 1.032 billion, an increase of 42.96 million from December 2020, with internet penetration reaching 73.0%. First, the urban-rural digital divide continues to narrow. All existing administrative villages in China have achieved “broadband access to every village,” historically resolving communication difficulties in underdeveloped regions. China’s rural internet user population has reached 284 million, with rural internet penetration at 57.6%, up 1.7 percentage points from December 2020, while the urban-rural internet penetration gap narrowed by 0.2 percentage points. Second, elderly populations are rapidly integrating into the digital society. Thanks to ongoing efforts to make internet applications more elderly-friendly, the demand and vitality of older adults for connecting to, accessing, and using the internet have been further stimulated.

By December 2021, the number of internet users aged 60 and above reached 119 million, with internet penetration in this demographic at 43.2%. Elderly populations now share in the fruits of information development alongside other age groups, with 69.7%, 52.1%, and 46.2% of elderly netizens able to independently perform activities such as presenting health codes/travel cards, purchasing daily necessities, and searching for information.

## 1. Media Technology Convergence

In 1983, Ithiel de Sola Pool provided the initial definition of “media convergence” with his observation that “the boundaries between media are becoming increasingly blurred.” In his view, “technological convergence is the primary force bringing traditional media into the digital communication environment.” Consequently, technological convergence has been described as “the aggregation of various communication modes into electronic, digitally presented transmission patterns driven by computer technology.” However, this does not mean that television sets and computers will merge into a single device, but rather that technological advancement drives convergence in communication forms and content products.

Although the vision of technological convergence remains partially unrealized today, Pool’s concept of “convergence of communication forms” has become deeply embedded in the transformation between traditional and new media. Originally distinct media products—whether text, audio, video, or data—are all uniformly converted into “bits.” The combination of digital and wireless mobile technologies produced mobile television, while information processing technology merged with video transmission to create IPTV. From on-demand to live and pay-per-view broadcasting, television programs have found space for resource distribution on internet platforms, leveraging network freedom and flexibility to grant audiences 选择权 while enabling them to freely express opinions, allowing content providers to enhance program quality and adjust strategic steps based on direct audience feedback.

Technology convergence forms the foundation of traditional media and network integration. It is the rapid development of information and communication technologies that has made it possible for different media products to be disseminated on the same platform. Media technology convergence has broken down boundaries between different media and created a batch of new media forms.

For instance, new technology exploration and application represented by “cloud services” has promoted innovation and development in media technology convergence. First, services such as “cloud performances” and “cloud cinemas” continue to be explored. “Cloud performances” utilize various audiovisual technologies to create new forms of entertainment content, overcoming the impact of the pandemic on offline entertainment and satisfying audience demands for interactive and immersive viewing experiences. “Cloud cinemas” enable users to

obtain more immersive high-quality audiovisual enjoyment online while providing innovative entertainment consumption methods through features like watch-together, cloud premieres, and cloud ticketing. Second, technologies such as 3D 实景 and virtual idols are being increasingly applied. 3D 实景 is replacing green screens as the shooting environment for self-produced drama series on video platforms, creating immersive visual experiences and special effects that make audiences feel physically present.

## 2. Media Business Convergence

Business convergence is a form of business integration built upon technological convergence. It not only simplifies the delivery of media services but also generates numerous new business formats through integration.

From television's emergence in the 1950s-60s, to the vigorous development of the internet in the 21st century, to today's online video and live streaming, the trajectory of technological factors driving continuous changes in media forms is clearly visible. The combination of video and network has produced many powerful new media forms with unparalleled integration and compatibility capabilities that can compensate for and eliminate certain deficiencies of traditional media, making them more competitive in the market.

In November 2004, the establishment of Letv marked the beginning of China's online video industry. In subsequent years, a series of media events unfolded around this keyword. Tudou, 56.com, and Joy.cn launched successively in the first half of 2005, followed by Youku and Ku6 in 2006, with the number of Chinese video-sharing websites jumping from 1 in 2004 to over 200 in 2007. By 2011, online video was booming globally, reaching a market size of \$6.27 billion, with \$4.25 billion in online video advertising revenue and 394 million online video users.

On September 20, 2016, TikTok (Douyin) launched, and by December 2020, its daily active users exceeded 600 million, with daily video searches surpassing 400 million. Another short-video community, Kuaishou, reached 320.4 million daily active users by the end of Q3 2021, with over 14 billion mutual follows. The 2021 Kuaishou Content Ecology Mid-Year Report noted that the platform has evolved from a network video platform into a pan-knowledge learning platform, particularly for young people who can not only acquire knowledge on Kuaishou but also find like-minded individuals and integrate into corresponding interest communities through various means.

In China, online video has established a broad audience base, with its utility value increasingly sought after by netizens. According to CNNIC research data, by December 2021, China's online video (including short video) user base reached 975 million, an increase of 47.94 million from December 2020, accounting for 94.5% of all internet users. Among them, short video users numbered 934 million, up 60.8 million from December 2020, representing 90.5% of all internet users.

In the past year of 2021, the online video market has demonstrated a trend of producing quality content, accelerating exploration of new businesses and technologies, and fostering an increasingly clear network environment. At the content level, mainstream film and television works celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China were continuously broadcast on major video platforms, playing a guiding role in mainstream values. A large number of works reflecting the Party's century-long struggle emerged, with online video platforms becoming important distribution channels. Excellent mainstream works were widely disseminated on these platforms, receiving unanimous recognition from users and the market while sparking heated discussions.

Meanwhile, short video user scale continues to grow, with the industry maintaining steady growth momentum. On one hand, short video platforms are accelerating their layout in the knowledge domain to promote knowledge dissemination. In terms of breadth, platform content covers life, education, humanities, finance, military affairs, and numerous other fields, fully meeting users' diverse needs. In terms of depth, platforms promote systematic knowledge transmission by launching features such as video collections and creating live open courses with renowned teachers from prestigious schools. On the other hand, short video platforms continue to integrate with traditional industries, creating greater economic value.

“Live streaming” has been a buzzword in recent years, with traditional media, online platforms, media professionals, and ordinary people all launching broadcasts. By December 2021, China's live streaming user base reached 703 million, an increase of 86.52 million from December 2020, accounting for 68.2% of all internet users. This includes 464 million e-commerce live streaming users, 302 million game live streaming users, 284 million sports live streaming users, 194 million reality show live streaming users, and 142 million concert live streaming users. Among these, e-commerce live streaming and sports live streaming were the two most prominent forms of development in 2021.

### 3. Media Management Convergence

“To increase reach, we must rethink the meaning of ‘publishing.’ At *The New York Times*, publishing typically signifies the completion of a report for journalists and editors, but at *The Huffington Post*, publishing marks the beginning of an article's life.” This summary appears to hit the nail on the head. Several years ago, an “internal document” titled “Newspaper Transformation in the Digital Age—The New York Times Innovation Report” was leaked online. Due to its timely research content, it quickly sent shockwaves through global media industries and communication academia. The report clearly stated that the media industry is undergoing brutal transformation: “Digital media are becoming more numerous, better funded, and more innovative. Social media platforms like BuzzFeed, Facebook, and LinkedIn are hiring large numbers of editors and launching multiple products targeted at news audiences, aiming to intervene more deeply in the news industry...” Interestingly, the source of the leak was

BuzzFeed itself, which, despite being only eight years old and independently operating for less than three years, had surpassed *The New York Times* with 160 million monthly unique visitors, rising to become the third-ranked news website in the United States.

This demonstrates that for traditional media, the fundamental problem to solve is how to achieve media convergence and how to implement it effectively. The key lies with people, particularly media practitioners. Talent convergence is an inevitable requirement as media enters the convergence era. As news organizations and media groups gradually establish convergent relationships, university communication departments and journalism schools have added relevant courses to prepare students for the demands of the convergence era.

#### 4. Media Cultural Convergence

Different media types exhibit distinct cultural characteristics. In the digital information age, as media industry structures and development directions increasingly converge, various media cultures are also merging. According to Bustamante, the convergence trend between media industries manifests primarily in three ways: first, media market boundaries are broken down and protective barriers gradually disappear; second, media business concentration increases with more media company mergers; and third, media management is showing a globally unified standard and model. The cause of these changes is undoubtedly the profound influence of information and communication technology innovation and development. Although Bustamante denies that media forms are transitioning from single local media to global omnimedia, this technology- and market-driven change has already reconstructed the cultural domain and is gradually weakening the creativity of “localization” and local characteristics.

Meanwhile, media convergence has triggered a series of debates surrounding society, politics, economy, and culture, as the roles of media producers, consumers, and gatekeepers have shifted post-convergence, creating new conflicts of interest. Media inherently possess social monitoring functions and can most intuitively reflect social realities. Theoretically studying the operation of media industries means exploring the fundamental conditions for human survival in the information age.

Upon waking, people habitually check their phones for automatically pushed news, then watch news, short videos, or e-books while commuting on public transportation. Upon arriving at the office, news pages and trending searches greet them as they open their computers. Throughout the workday, they communicate with colleagues and clients worldwide via instant messaging software like WeChat and DingTalk, as well as email. People today live in a “media metropolis,” with every aspect of life tightly enveloped by various media types. Simultaneously, cross-type, cross-regional, and cross-channel cultural production and consumption between media are seen as important aspects of media convergence penetrating social life, exerting broad influence on individual val-

ues and social identity judgments. We cannot imagine life without media. It is precisely this dependence on and emphasis on media that motivates more audiences to participate in media production, thereby actively transforming the cultural industry and media ecology.

Today' s media workers must not only produce a series of video, audio, image, and text content products for audience consumption but also provide platforms for audiences to create and exchange their own content. Therefore, examining such a media environment requires comprehensive consideration of four elements: content, connectivity, creativity, and commercialization. These four aspects are all reflected in cultural production. On one hand, media industries are content producers, while also developing platforms for audience use to incentivize user-generated content, thereby obtaining vast amounts of “free labor.” On the other hand, media work represents a form of cultural creativity, yet the content they produce also exhibits clear commercial characteristics.

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

*Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.*