

Surveys Show TV/Newspapers Maintaining Partnerships

by Camille Kraeplin and Carrie Anna Criado

In comparing two surveys of newspapers and television stations in the 210 largest U.S. markets, the later study in 2004-05 finds newspapers having more success sustaining partnerships.

When asked recently what they believed would be the most important issue within their industry in the coming years, a number of managing editors at the nation's largest newspapers mentioned convergence, a theme that has become a larger part of the media landscape.

Attitudes toward the role convergence journalism will play in the coming years run the gamut. At a recent international conference, executives heard that newspapers have no future without online and digital services, one significant segment of convergence journalism.¹ On the other hand, convergence may play a more limited role in future media organizations than we can imagine at this point—and in forms we cannot anticipate. This longitudinal study examined where convergence journalism has been and where it is going. It includes two surveys—the first conducted in 2002-2003, the second in 2004-2005. The latter, which re-examined the growth of convergence journalism, demonstrated that newspapers in this country's top 210 markets appear to be maintaining convergence partnerships with both Web sites and television stations. This article describes those partnerships and uses the economic theory of product differentiation to explain their success.

In 2002, Criado and Kraeplin conducted a baseline survey that determined the extent to which convergence journalism had taken hold in U.S. news media industries.² From the sample, they concluded that most of the news organizations viewed convergence as important to the future of the profession. They also

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noted that the majority of both newspapers and TV stations surveyed had forged convergence partnerships with another media platform—around nine in 10 newspapers and eight in 10 TV stations.

There has been much discussion over the precise meaning of convergence and a fully converged newsroom. According to Killebrew, convergence means that all platforms available for delivery to a Web-based operating system contribute to the final information product. It also suggests that information sharing and enhancement take place in the process.³ Singer writes that convergence journalism combines news staff, technologies, products and geography from previously distinct print, broadcast and online media.⁴ Dailey, Demo and Spillman examined the role of convergence in both TV and newspapers. They defined it simply as newspapers and television news staffs working together.⁵ For this study, convergence journalism was defined as print, broadcast and online news staffs forging partnerships in which journalists often work and distribute content across several news platforms. The only real difference between this definition and the one used by Dailey et al., is that the latter does not explicitly highlight content sharing, although it does not preclude it. Clearly, "working together" could encompass content sharing. In both cases, the focus is on collaboration across media.

In recent years, convergence has been driven by a combination of economic, regulatory, cultural and technological forces.⁶ The trade press closely covered the first industry experiments in convergence journalism. Much of this coverage presented the philosophical questions surrounding any news industry trend: Will convergence work, and how? Will it help the industry or hurt it? And if it does help, who will benefit most, company executives and shareholders, or front-line journalists and the public they serve?⁸ Other reports told the stories of news organizations that had embraced the convergence model, illuminating, as well, the steps they had taken and the lessons they had learned.⁹

A number of recent convergence studies by media scholars have taken a more systematic approach to survey the new landscape. At least one examined convergence strictly from the perspective of television practitioners. A 2002 effort explored how TV news directors defined convergence and how it was being practiced in the nation's TV newsrooms. Researchers found that nearly nine of 10 of these affiliates were practicing a type of convergence.¹⁰ Respondents listed sharing content, sharing staff or promoting another partner with whom they shared content as practices that defined convergence.

A more common approach has been to talk to both broadcast and print journalists. For instance, an online national survey conducted in 2003 among both daily newspapers and commercial television stations noted the need to update news staff, production quality, compensation for multi-platform production, and the legitimacy of media convergence as among the chief concerns of media professionals when it came to working across media platforms.¹¹

Likewise, as was noted above, Dailey, Demo and Spillman used similar survey instruments and approaches to interview both newspaper editors and

broadcasters. In 2004, their nationwide study of 372 newspaper editors found that about 30 percent were involved in news-gathering relationships with television stations.¹² In addition, newspaper partners were frequently found to participate in functions associated with convergence, such as sharing news budgets, promoting the partner's content and requiring staff to appear on TV broadcasts. In 2005, these researchers found that half of the television news organizations in the United States had partnered with a newspaper.¹³ As reflected in the 2004 study, these partnerships were characterized by cross-promotion of the partner's content and some sharing of daily news lineups.

In perfect competition, firms all supply an identical, standardized product. In monopoly, one firm sells a unique product, although that product may have indirect substitutes. Monopolistic competition, as the term suggests, represents a mixture of these two situations. The primary feature of monopolistic competition is product differentiation, where firms compete by selling products that differ slightly from one another.¹⁴ Product differentiation occurs in most consumer markets. However, media products have often been very standardized. For instance, Powers noted that it is difficult to distinguish among different local newscasts if one is not familiar with the stations' news personalities.¹⁵ Thus, she reported, even when viewership of local news was falling nationwide, many stations were reluctant to experiment with product differentiation. For instance, in smaller markets, only the most financially secure, No. 1 rated stations would risk adding more time for news to their programming. But in top-10 markets, where the financial stakes are higher, trailing stations compete by increasing their news presence throughout the day.

Convergence partnerships also appear to offer an attractive approach to product differentiation for local broadcast organizations, or at least the stations in the top 200 markets surveyed for this study. For these broadcasters, the appeal of partnerships with newspapers is the papers' reporting depth. And the definition of "partnership" can extend from sharing reporting tips to working together on investigative projects, which most likely would be promoted extensively on the broadcast medium, as well as by the newspaper partner. In addition, newspaper reporters may appear on their partner station's broadcasts as "expert" sources, while popular newspaper sportswriters or columnists may be featured on-air in special segments or shows. This differentiates the station's newscast and associates the station with favorite local media personalities. For newspapers in these partnerships, broadcasters provide a high-profile platform for both individual staff and the organization as a whole as well as an element of immediacy. This clearly differentiates the product in the public eye as well.

The Internet, however, may offer even more attractive ways of differentiating a newspaper brand. It provides the same competitive edge as broadcast, in addition to new storytelling possibilities. Chyi and Sylvie examined the role of the electronic, or online, newspaper in the media marketplace.¹⁶ They suggested that from the company's perspective, such competition makes sense in terms of profit-making only if the two media can attract mutually exclusive audiences.

To accomplish this, electronic newspapers should try to reduce substitutability with their print counterparts, or to differentiate themselves.

Chyi and Sylvie suggest that online papers should avoid relying on shovelware—moving whatever is published in the newspaper onto the Web without further developing the information. Shovelware provides inexpensive news but also may cause two problems. First, when online newspapers fail to distinguish themselves from their print editions, people may not bother to read online for the same information available in the paper's print edition. The authors argued that electronic newspapers distinguish themselves from traditional media by developing Internet-related features:

As different media satisfy medium-specific needs, any new communication technology trying to survive must successfully define itself by fulfilling pre-existing needs or creating new needs. . . . Thus services such as interactive forums, searchable news archives, online surveys, online transactions, up-to-the-minute information, live chat rooms, and audio/video presentations would make the electronic newspaper a distinct medium and give Internet news—as opposed to TV news, cable news, radio news or print news—a technological definition.¹⁷

Another important factor, according to Chyi and Sylvie, involves how print newspapers think about their online experiments. Due to the inevitable interrelationship with their print counterparts, many Web newspapers have not become independent entities, not even conceptually. However, implementing intermedia product differentiation requires new ways of conceptualizing news. Chyi and Sylvie cite the example of how in covering a spectacular murder case, Denver-area newspapers used their Web sections to provide “a mix of articles, sound files, discussion groups and other material.” So in the context of online newspapers, product differentiation refers to the development of Internet-specific features. As for what features will suit online newspapers best, experimentation must continue, the authors suggest. But the general principle remains—online papers must distinguish their product from print versions.

Research Questions

RQ1:

What changes in convergence journalism have taken place since Phase I?

RQ2:

Have television stations or newspapers generally done a better job of sustaining convergence partnerships?

RQ3:

Which convergence journalism partnerships, or which specific convergence models, appear to be most successful?

Methods

Researchers followed the same sampling methodology for both phases of this study. In Phase I (2002-2003) the 210 largest U.S. media markets were identified based on rankings provided by Nielsen Media Research.¹⁶ Then one TV station from each market was selected randomly. The largest daily newspaper, based on circulation, from the same 210 markets (there was only one newspaper in the majority of markets) was also selected. In Phase I, surveys were e-mailed in October of 2002 with a reminder following several weeks later. Follow-up calls to the majority of selected TV news directors and newspaper managing editors who had not responded

were completed through early 2003. For Phase II, the surveys were e-mailed in mid-November 2004. A reminder e-mail was sent in early December. However, due to a focused telephone campaign that lasted through the following spring, the response rate for Phase II jumped from 40 percent to 53 percent for newspapers and from 38 percent to 47 percent for TV respondents. In Phase II, all TV news directors and newspaper managing editors who had not responded to the e-mail survey were contacted by telephone.

Around 70 percent of the sampled papers were involved in each of the successful convergence alliances identified in the study—newspaper-Web and TV-newspaper. The newspaper-Web model has stabilized some since Phase I, but it is still a highly successful model, with much to offer both partners.

In Phase I, the survey that was e-mailed to selected news managers consisted of 18 items; only one of those items, the question that asked the name of the respondent's news organization, was open-ended. Most of the 18 closed-ended items were designed to measure level of involvement in what might be labeled as "convergence practices" or attitudes toward those practices. The latter was not addressed in this study. And most responses could be measured on the nominal or interval level.

In Phase II, five open-ended questions were added. Respondents did not answer these questions as consistently as they did the closed-ended questions. This was particularly true among TV news directors. To answer the study's research questions, researchers compared the results of Phase I with the results of Phase II.

The TV respondents in the two samples were demographically similar. In Phase I, a little more than a third (37.25 percent; N=51) were in large markets (1-50 based on Nielsen ratings). Just less than a third (29.41 percent; N=51) represented mid-sized markets (51-100). And a third (33.34 percent; N=51) were in small markets (101 or higher). In Phase II, 39 percent of respondents (N=92) were in large markets, 30 percent in mid-sized markets and 32 percent in small markets. The two newspaper samples differed somewhat. In both cases, mid-sized papers represented the bulk of the sample. However, newspapers with a circulation of 150,000 or more were better represented in Phase II. In Phase I, just less than half of respondents (45.59 percent; N=69) were from papers with circulations between 25,000 and 74,999. Nearly that many (44.12; N=69 percent) claimed circulations between 75,000 and 149,999. Around 6 percent (5.88 percent; N=69) of the sample comprised newspapers in the 10,000 to 24,999-circulation category, and another 4.41 percent were in the 150,000 or more category. In Phase II, the largest group of respondents were from mid-sized papers: 43 percent (N=105) represented papers with circulations of 25,000 to 74,999, and 20 percent represented papers with circulations of 75,000 to 149,999. However, papers with circulations of 150,000+ were also well-represented (26 percent; N=105). Just 9 percent of respondents represented papers with circulations between 10,000 and 24,999.

Results

What changes in convergence journalism have taken place since Phase I?

By Phase II, 68 percent (N=105) of managing editors said their newspaper had a Web partner, down from 95 percent (N=69) in Phase I.¹⁹ In contrast, although the number of newspapers that said they had a partnership with a TV station remained fairly stable, at 70 percent in Phase I (N=69) and 67 percent in Phase II (N=105), more TV stations claimed newspaper partners in Phase II, up to 56 percent (N=92) from 41 percent (N=51) in Phase I. [See Table 1]

In most of the newspaper-Web relationships identified in Phase II (78 percent; N=105), the Web sites were directly associated with the newspaper. In most instances, the site was owned by the newspaper, but had a separate staff. These partnerships were often characterized by reporters providing versions of stories they had written for the newspaper to the Web site. Around eight in 10 respondents in Phase II (N=105) said this took place at their organizations "frequently," versus 61 percent in Phase I (N = 69). Around seven

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents with Partners, by Phase

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Phase I</i>	<i>Phase II</i>
Reporters provided versions of stories written for the newspaper to the Web site	61	80
Reporters provided Web partner with briefs to update breaking stories	56	70
Reporters write stories exclusive to the Web	26	29
Staff journalists were frequently interviewed on air	40	36
Staff journalists were frequently wrote for TV broadcasts	10	10
Staff journalists frequently hosted TV shows or segments	13	8
Staff journalists frequently wrote for their newspaper partner	17	0
Reporters, anchors and other staff were frequently quoted in the newspaper	30	5
Reporters, anchors or other staff had their own column in the newspaper	25	11

in 10 newspaper respondents in Phase II said reporters would frequently provide their Web partner with briefs to update breaking stories they might be covering. This was also higher than in Phase I, when 56 percent of editors said this practice occurred frequently in their newsrooms. Only 29 percent of respondents in Phase II said their reporters frequently wrote stories exclusive to

the Web. This number did not change much from Phase I, when 26 percent of editors reported frequently providing exclusive Web content.

The open-ended questions also detected a range of additional activities undertaken by the newspapers online in Phase II that had not been asked about in Phase I. These included connective elements (online chats, invitations to opinion polls, question-and-answer forums and Web blogs) and supplemental efforts (a range of activities that involved posting material to the Web which space requirements kept out of the newspaper). Around 60 percent of the newspaper editors had said staff had made supplemental contributions to their Web partners. For instance, slightly more than six in 10 respondents (N=105) said they featured additional photos, photo galleries, slide shows, or video and audio on the Web. As one respondent noted:

Photographers do slide shows, sometimes with accompanying digital sound recordings, using photographs that did not get printed in the newspaper because of space considerations.²⁰

A number of respondents mentioned sports: "College town: extra football photos during the season."²¹ In other cases, the audio and video elements focused on a range of content:

Increasingly we are asking our reporting teams to think of ways they can use on-line strengths to add a little extra to long-term packages. A recent package on faith healing included slide shows and recordings our reporter did with subjects who were featured in his newspaper stories.²²

Some respondents described more technically sophisticated efforts including multimedia presentations, content-driven Flash programs and pod casting. A number of editors also said they used the Web site to accommodate longer textual elements such as databases, listings, crime reports, copies of source documents, movie reviews and longer versions of newspaper stories.

More than one third of newspaper respondents in Phase II (N=105) said their online efforts focused on interactive connective elements. As one editor noted:

We use the site to find people and sources for stories that we're working on. So while we supply our site with most of its content, we also use it as a reporting tool to find subjects and get more interaction going.²³

Another noted that the paper's reporters "participate in on-line chats"²⁴ while a third said they "develop questions for readers/reader participation."²⁵

TV-Newspaper Model

Unlike the newspaper-Web model, most of the TV-newspaper partnerships include two independent news organizations. For instance, 89 percent of the TV respondents in Phase II had partnered with a local paper that was not owned by their station's parent company. In contrast, only 5 percent were working with a co-owned paper. Among Phase II newspaper respondents with a TV partner, 74 percent were working with an independent station, while 19 percent had partnered with a co-owned station.

Among newspapers, some convergence practices remained fairly consistent from Phase I to Phase II of the study. For instance, 36 percent (N=105) of newspaper editors said staff members were frequently interviewed on air in Phase II, versus 40 percent (N=69) in Phase I. The number of newspaper staff frequently writing for TV broadcasts remained at around 10 percent in both phases of the study. And the number of newspaper journalists frequently hosting TV shows or segments dropped slightly, from 13 percent in Phase I to 8 percent in Phase II.

Many of the convergence practices that TV newsrooms were trying on for size during Phase I, however, seem to have been abandoned. Not one TV news director said that members of his or her staff frequently wrote for their newspaper partner in Phase II (N=92), compared with 17 percent (N=51) in Phase I. Also in Phase I, nearly 30 percent of news directors said that reporters, anchors and other staff were frequently quoted in the newspaper. In contrast, during Phase II, 5 percent responded the same way. And 11 percent of respondents in Phase II said staff frequently had a column in the paper, versus 25 percent in Phase I.

The open-ended questions in Phase II also identified some practices characteristic of the TV-newspaper model that were not evident in Phase I—collaboration (information sharing and cooperation on stories or projects) and cross-promotion (promoting the partner or the partner's content in the other medium). Efforts at collaboration were reported by 23 percent of convergent TV respondents (N=92) and 80 percent of convergent newspaper respondents (N=105) in Phase II: "We provide briefs and tips,"²⁶ "Exchange news budget,"²⁷ "We supply information for them"²⁸ and "Share news, projects together"²⁹ were typical comments from newspaper editors about collaborative practices. Here is one common response:

*We let them know the stories we're working on and give them copies. We give them info on how to get info. Generally cooperate with them.*³⁰

TV news directors offered many of these same answers: "Share leads on breaking stories,"³¹ wrote one. Explained another, "We often share information, especially when covering local politics."³² In some cases, collaboration involved more elaborate forms of cooperation. This could include anything from working together on special projects or enterprise stories to partnering on town hall

events to tapping newspaper staff to host shows or appear on air. One newspaper respondent wrote:

Our movie critic regularly contributes. . . . Television station also comes to photograph us when we have special projects.³³

A TV news director wrote:

We use . . . sports reporters in a weekly part of our sports block to discuss local sports and make predictions.³⁴

Likewise, cross-promotional activity was reported by 26 percent of convergent newspaper respondents (N=105) and 6 percent of convergent TV respondents (N=92). One typical description came from a newspaper respondent:

We provide a daily overview of the following day's headlines that appear in graphic form during the broadcast with a short explanation by the anchor. The TV station tells viewers they can read the story in the next day's edition.³⁵

TV respondents provided a forum to publicize the next day's newspaper stories: "We air one of their headlines 'Tomorrow' on our 10 p.m. news,"³⁶ wrote one. Broadcast staff members "write teases for paper, preview articles," wrote a newspaper editor.³⁷

Have television stations or newspapers generally done a better job of sustaining convergence partnerships?

Newspapers seem to have been more successful at maintaining these relationships than TV stations. For example, seven in 10 newspaper editors said their papers had maintained a partnership with a Web site and/or a TV station from Phase I to Phase II. However, among TV news directors, the number saying they had a Web partner dropped from 83 percent (N=51) in Phase I to 45 percent (N=92) in Phase II. Both groups seek out the TV-newspaper partnerships, but around seven in 10 papers had maintained them; the number of TV stations with partners, while growing, was still lower at six in 10.

Which convergence journalism partnerships, or which specific convergence models, appear to be most successful?

The concept of "success" was operationalized simply as continued existence/continuation as a convergence model. As suggested above, the two models that meet this criterion are the Newspaper-Web model and the TV-Newspaper model. Both models continued to thrive through two phases of the study, providing benefits for each partner.

Discussion

During the 1990s, many media analysts recognized the value of convergence journalism partnerships. The rate at which they moved online shows how much emphasis newspapers placed on the importance of a converged future.³⁸ In 1993, only about 20 papers had ventured online. A decade later, virtually every major U.S. newspaper had a Web presence. This study suggests a strong move toward convergence, as well. During Phase I, nearly all sampled newspapers had Web partners, as did eight in 10 TV stations. In addition, a majority of papers had forged convergence partnerships with TV stations. However, interest in convergence seems to have slowed.

One explanation for the apparent decrease in Web partnerships could be that respondents in both groups have become more careful about what they define as "convergent." For instance, news directors from stations with Web sites that simply repurpose material may no longer define that site as a convergence partner; whereas, they may have just a few years ago, when using a looser definition of convergence. This may suggest a more sophisticated understanding of convergence among journalists, particularly in the larger markets. At a recent meeting of the Newspaper Association of America, the organization's director of electronic media communications, Rob Runnett, said that newspapers should give as much thought to their online product as they do to their print product: "Online is not just a second home for your print edition."³⁹

As this quote suggests, and this study confirms, media organizations increasingly recognize the value of emphasizing the unique contributions of each partner in a convergence alliance, or of using these partnerships to differentiate their product. As consultant John Morton wrote in *American Journalism Review*:

*The chief goal of the [convergence] alliances for newspapers is to expand their presence and brand names online at a time when the Internet poses a potential, though as yet unrealized, threat to core newspaper businesses. For the non-newspaper partners, the attraction is access to the papers' large and superior newsgathering forces.*⁴⁰

Broadcast organizations clearly look to newspapers for depth of reporting; one way to differentiate oneself from other stations is to take on serious, in-depth investigative projects, the kind that a newspaper partner can facilitate. In addition, featuring well-known local newspaper columnists and reporters on your newscasts can only boost credibility with the audience. For the newspaper, both the staff and product receive increased visibility, often among a younger, more attractive audience, from the partnership. So these papers are engaging in product diversification as well, especially in terms of market placement. But newspapers seem to benefit even more from the product diversification avail-

able through online partnerships. The Internet makes available whole new modes of storytelling that are not at all restricted by the spatial constraints that limit print. As prior research suggests, such intermedia competition makes sense from a business perspective only if the two media—online and print newspaper partners—can attract mutually exclusive audiences. To accomplish this, real diversification must exist between the online and print versions of the paper.

Around 70 percent of the sampled papers were involved in each of the successful convergence alliances identified in the study—newspaper-Web and TV-newspaper. The newspaper-Web model has stabilized some since Phase I, but it is still a highly successful model, with much to offer both partners. Robinson defines connectivity, which characterizes this partnership, as using the characteristics of the Web to “create and maintain social, political and other kinds of cultural and democratic ties.”⁴¹ Under Deuze’s connectivity model of journalism, the monitorial, dialogic, orienting and other functions of a news medium function side-by-side, so that a strict division no longer remains between producers and consumers of news content.⁴² All become “prosumers.” This occurs on the Internet in a way not possible in other media. Thus, these partnerships utilize the Web’s connective strength, allowing newspapers to connect with readers and contribute to the distinctiveness of the newspaper’s online version.

When partnerships between newspapers and TV stations take place they are most often characterized by collaboration and cross-promotion. Study results suggest that newspaper journalists participate more in collaboration than their TV counterparts. They were more likely to be the ones sharing tips and information with their TV partners. And four in 10 of them were frequently interviewed on air. Clearly, this contributed in a positive way to product diversification for their TV partners. However, because of the low response rate among TV news managers to open-ended survey questions, the real contributions of TV staff to collaboration efforts was difficult to gauge. Likewise, although television stations might seem able to cross-promote, since they are a high-profile news platform, the low response rate among TV news managers made it difficult to determine how often stations promoted their partners.

Limitations and Future Research

This study offers an overview of where convergence journalism has been and where it is headed. It also provides a theoretical explanation for why some partnerships seem to be working better than others: Within those partnerships, each partner provides something to the other that it cannot provide easily, for itself, at all. In this way it diversifies the product or the brand. However, the study did not closely examine individual relationships. Nor did it gather extensive information about how successful partnerships operate on a day-to-day basis. In addition, a lower than ideal response rate overall, especially among

television executives, somewhat limited the representativeness of the findings. Future research might seek to take a closer, more detailed look at how some of these successful convergence journalism models function. That would help us understand not only what is happening in convergence journalism and why, but also precisely how.

Notes

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