

## **The Future of Converged Media in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research paper is to assess the future of rapid media convergence in Kenya. The research paper starts by defining converged media concept in Kenya, the evolution of converged media in Kenya, new media effects and the future of convergence in Kenya. There is an emerging trend in Kenya, like in other parts of the world in which converged media is becoming more reliable and it has thwarted the idea that new media was to replace the traditional media. The future of Kenyan converged media; where the traditional media feeds itself with the new media and produces a technological synergy to propel it in times of change is bright.

**Keywords:** media convergence, the traditional media

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### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Converged media**

The integration of both the new and traditional media is referred to as convergence. When media converge, they work as a single system, a product. According to Jenkins [1] analysis, when content flow across media platforms, when media co-operate across industries and the audience changes their migratory behavior, convergence occurs. For the last few decades in Kenya, a new has been emerging in media technology, especially telephony industry. Today in Kenya, gadgets such as telephones have serve multiple purposes, a phone can be used as a radio, a touch, internet connection, a television, a camera, a video recorder, an audio recorder, video players, and so on. This has happened as the integration of multiple functions that have in the past been confined to individual or single devices or gadgets are being integrated into one device.

This integration is called convergence in which one gadget is meant to perform functions of multiple devices. According to a 2010 policy briefing by the BBC World Service Trust, Kenya's media is one of the most respected, thriving, sophisticated and innovative in Africa. The media in Kenya has grown in leaps and bounds since independence. From a one-party state to an energetic multi-party system, Kenya has undergone significant changes that have impacted the media and the way leaders utilize the same to communicate to the masses. Technology has grown rapidly as Kenya provides one of the largest markets in east Africa. As a result, the media in Kenya has experienced rapid convergence. Today, devices like CD/MP3/DVD

players, PDA's and even camera phones have emerge and together with internet and new media have acted as complements to the traditional media[2].

Media convergence is not just a technological shift or a technological process; it also includes shifts within the industrial, cultural, and social paradigms that encourage the consumer to seek out new information[3]. Convergence, simply put, is how individual consumers interact with others on a social level and use various media platforms to create new experiences, new forms of media and content that connect us socially, and not just to other consumers, but also to the corporate producers of media in ways that have not been as readily accessible in the past. Rheingold [2] analyses that advances in technology bring the ability for technological convergence that can alter the social-side effects, in that the virtual, social and physical world are colliding, merging and coordinating. It was predicted in the 1990s that a digital revolution would take place, and that old media would be pushed to one side by new media. In Kenya today, some scholars have argued that broadcasting is increasingly being replaced by the Internet [4]. This process has enabled consumers the freedom to access their preferred media content more easily and at a more available rate than ever before. However, it is interesting how such literal replacement will be impossible today and in any near future. According to Ndonge and Khasandi-Telewa[5], the new media and specifically online platforms are here to complement the traditional media. Instead of phasing out the traditional media, the future of such old media is still bright and this explains for example why the print

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newspaper continues to thrive alongside online newspapers regardless of the prophesy of the early 70s through 90s that traditional media would die out.

In Kenya today the idea of media convergence has once again emerged as a key point of reference as newer as well as established media companies attempt to visualize the future of the entertainment industry. If this revolutionary digital paradigm shift presumed that new media would increasingly replace old media, the convergence paradigm currently emerging suggests that new and old media would interact in more complex ways than previously predicted.

The paradigm shift that followed the digital revolution assumed that new media was going to change everything[3]. When the dot com market crashed, there was a tendency to imagine that nothing had changed. The truth lay somewhere in between as there were so many aspects of the current media environment to take into consideration. Many industry leaders are increasingly reverting to media convergence as a way of making sense in an era of disorientating change. In that respect, media convergence in theory is essentially an old concept taking on a new meaning.

Media convergence in Kenya, in reality, is more than just a shift in technology but also in theoretical terms [6]. Convergence alters relationships between industries, technologies, audiences, genres and markets. According to Jenkins [7] Media convergence changes the rationality media industries operate in, and the way that media consumers process news and entertainment. Therefore, Media convergence is essentially a process and not an outcome, so no single black box controls the flow of media. With proliferation of different media channels and increasing portability of new telecommunications and computing technologies, we have entered into an era where media constantly surrounds us.

Media convergence requires that media companies rethink existing assumptions about media from the consumer's point of view, as these affect marketing and programming decisions. In this light Ndonge, Kemunto and Masese[8] analyses that the media and communication theories upon which media industry and players used to understand their audience has been deconstructed by the advent of the new media and the models of treating audiences as mere consumers is being phased off. Media producers must respond to newly empowered consumers [3]. Conversely, it would seem that hardware is instead diverging whilst media content is converging. Media has developed into brands that can offer content in a number of forms.

### **Evolution of Converged Media in Kenya**

Before Kenya attained independence, a handful of credible news media cropped up. The

Standard, formerly known as the *East African Standard*, became one of the largest and most influential publications in East Africa[9]. At that time, the newspaper typically concerned itself with happenings in Britain and less in Kenya. In many ways, colonial media served as a tool of perpetuating settler ideas across the Kenyan protectorates. The dawn of independence in 1963 heralded new roles for the media [10]. The challenges of poverty, disease and ignorance faced by most of the newly independent states in Africa, forced a certain understanding about the roles of media in educating and informing the citizens of their role in eradicating the evils. From purely liberation platforms, the media transformed themselves into vehicles for speeding up development. Indeed, this ideology saw many African governments nationalise media or begin to exercise unfettered control over them with the aim of using them to popularise the government's development agenda.

The re-introduction of multiparty democracy in 1991 after a long stretch as a single-party dictatorship heralded a major opportunity for the media. However, since the mainstream media was highly gagged by the regimes, the country experimented with other media such as print and use of other means of communication. From then, the ownership base expanded and media content became bolder as the technology grew. Today, emerging trends have greatly influenced the way the media has developed in Kenya[10]. Kenyan media have embraced technological convergence as today; they use print, TV, radio, mobile and internet platforms to deliver news and advertising[5]. The modern Kenyan consumer has access to news and information right at their doorstep.

New technologies have encouraged the development of citizen journalism. Audiences proactively collect and share emerging information with media houses. Media has become receivers of content from the public, a shift from its previous role as disseminators of news and information[5]. According to Ndonge [11] ordinary people have invaded an area that has been the preserve of journalists especially in the social media such as twitter, which has enabled every other person to gather, edit and disseminate news and other information without relying on the traditional mainstream media.

Moreover, people have realized the importance of adopting an intelligent curiosity mindset, where they challenge what is presented before them. All these developments signal a new era of media consumers that are heavily involved in the process of information gathering. While most scholars argue that the flow of cross-media is accelerating. Jenkins [7], O'Donnell [12] suggests, especially between films and video game, the semblance of media people outside of the media production industry misunderstand convergence. The

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conglomeration of media industry continues to sell the same story line in different media. This can apply in Kenya where media stories, for example, in online editions are the same as those broadcast on television and this applies even to media shows. Moreover, the same messages are transmitted by the same media through social media producing homogeneity of message, which is transmitted through different media.

### **New media effect**

Over the past few years, social media has emerged as a very powerful frontier for mass communication. A couple of things set Kenya apart in comparison to other African countries, especially with regard to active use of social media. However, Kenya lags behind other countries in terms of numbers on Facebook and Twitter, Kenya remains a strong rival in terms of usage and articulating issues. Kenya has been able to stage quite a number of social media initiated success stories [4]. Kenyans are very outspoken on social media and as such, forums are also some of the most active and politically charged as well. Realizing the value of social media, many candidates in the 2013 presidential elections now have an official presence on Twitter and or Facebook [11]. Uhuru Kenyatta, Martha Karua, William Ruto, Raila Odinga, Peter Kenneth, and among others harnessed the power of social media to reach out to their respective audiences [11]. Politicians' use of social networks as an avenue for mass communication has influenced the tone of communications put forth to various audiences.

Unlike traditional media, which is one-sided, social media is more interactive and provides the opportunity to receive instant feedback on any messages put across to audiences. This has created the need for more intentional and relevant communication. Users on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube range from teens to baby boomers, all of whom are intellectually equipped to challenge what they are told. Politicians making use of social networking sites will be judged by the promptness and relevance of responses to questions posed to them. While the impact and the effectiveness of using social media in the Kenyan presidential elections is hard to measure, Ndonge [6] analyses that it remains one of the best ways to connect with tech-savvy voters due to its viral nature, ease of use and low-cost.

### **The Future of Media Convergence in Kenya**

Media convergence has become a vital element of life for many people in Kenya. With the development of technology in different platforms and operations such as television, Internet and mobile communication, audiences have had both a bigger choice of media and a life which media technologies has made easier. However, one question needed to be asked: whether or not media convergence brings opportunities and challenges to the industry and society itself.

On the one hand, in terms of industry, with the development of technology, the cost of products and software was lowered. Instead of having different news crews for every medium, one converged media operation can use the same reporters and staff to produce stories for, television, telecommunication and Internet mediums. For example, in most Kenyan media houses, presenters of their affiliated radio stations host television shows. An example is a radio presenter Sheila Mwanjigha who is a presenter at both Easy Fm and NTV, a radio station and TV station respectively owned by Nation Media Group.

By combining each medium's resource, a converged operation can increase the quality of its product. As a result, satisfaction of customer is increased; this leads to a larger audience. From the public's standpoint, the increased convenience of information provided by converged stories makes usage of the media a better experience. Besides, in terms of society especially, media convergence causes the fragmentation of audiences for news [8]. Nowadays, people talk about not having enough time to do everything they want in a day or doing more than one thing at one time. Convergence performance leads the media to be more interactive and audience participation is encouraged [13]. This experience can be transferred to media convergence. In addition, greater audience engagement can help to enhance the way people experience the media. Moreover, with the interactive World Wide Web, audiences are able to download and share music, video, photo via social networking and become media content producers.

On the other hand, media convergence brings many challenges. Audiences complain about information overload and they can be overwhelmed and find it difficult. Furthermore, the rapid transformation of technology has obstructed audience's activities. People's lack of skill to take full advantage of new media, especially old people disable the advancement of the media convergence. So will an audience so used to traditional forms of media embrace a new way of receiving information? Media companies pursue audiences for greater benefit of marketing and advertising through cross selling.

While the future of converged media seems very bright, its proprietors will have to ask themselves some questions: Will the new technology that is anticipated be as revolutionary as people expect? Will the investment in convergence be profitable enough in the short term, or in the long term? What competing technologies should be utilized in order to produce the best media? Will converged media be successful in a world marketplace? Those are few of the many questions posed by the growing trend of media convergence.

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## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is an emerging trend in Kenya, like in other parts of the world in which converged media is becoming more reliable and it has thwarted the idea that new media was to replace the traditional media. The future of Kenyan converged media; where the traditional media feeds itself with the new media and produces a technological synergy to propel it in times of change is bright.

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