From Convergence to Connectivism: Teaching Journalism 2.0

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Abstract

Media Convergence leads to fundamental changes in the journalistic field. This is a challenge not only for the news industry but also for teaching journalism at universities. Improved skills and competences are needed in multi-modal editorial planning and cross-channel development of news stories. This paper describes the main drivers of change in the news industry, discusses consequences for journalism and teaching, and offers an innovative didactical approach, which combines an interdisciplinary perspective with the concept of connectivism and cognitive apprenticeship. The consequences of convergence that affect journalism education are inspected under three sub-topics: the changes in the curricula, the changes in the courses syllabi, and the changes in the technological infrastructures of the academic institutions. It is pointed out, that recognizing connections and patterns to develop novel ideas and concepts is the core skill for individuals today. The paper shows, how that approach could be realized in an international 10-day-intensive program.

Keywords: Media Convergence, Journalism, Crossmedia, News Production, Education, Connectivism

Media Convergence as a Meta Trend

A fundamental change in the media landscape has happened in the last decade, which could be described as convergence. Convergence was formerly defined as the merging of value chains in the TIMES-Industry: Established IT-companies invest in telecommunication, telcos invest in content, and media companies in net-infrastructure and so on. Others describe with convergence the horizontal integration of media companies across the borders of distribution channels like radio, print, or television. But today convergence must be seen in a broader way: We follow Rose et al. (2009: 1) in their understanding of convergence, which "involves a series of ongoing discontinuities in technology, infrastructure, consumer behavior, and competitive dynamics that are creating new competitors and business models and are redefining a wide range of industries besides media, telecommunications, and technology".

Let's start with discontinuities: It's harder than ever to predict developments on media markets, evolutionary trends in technology and user behavior have been replaced by disruptive changes, as you could see for example in the redefinition of business models in the music industry through legal (and illegal) downloads. This also changes strategic planning in media companies: A long term perspective is no longer suitable and must be replaced by new ways to observe trends in the companies' environment and to react on it with appropriate solutions for the customer's needs. In consequence the importance of knowledge and innovation management increases.

On the technology and infrastructure level digitalization, diminishing costs of storage capacities, broadband networks and open interfaces and standards are the main drivers of convergence. Killer applications like search engines, auction platforms, content aggregators or online social networks are based on it, but also local wikis, online designer shops, or blogs. Additionally web technology emancipates themselves from personal computers. Devices like smartphones and tablets, cloud computing, and trends like software as a service shifts the main technological demands to mobility and connectivity.

Also consumer behavior in general and especially media usage changed. E-Commerce has become a part of daily life for a broad spectrum of people. They all use the internet for gathering information in addition or as a substitute for radio, newspaper, and television. More and more social interaction is embedded in media channels, especially in social networks – a me-

ta-trend in post-industrial societies known as mediatization (see Krotz 2008). Moreover, user generated content is attractive for several targets groups – even though still a small part of the users produces it (see Sill 2011: 4).

Also patterns of news consumption change. Even younger people are partly overstrained of news feeds, continuous actualization of the same issues and breaking news. A qualitative study conducted by the news agency AP names that phenomenon "news fatigue" (AP 2008: 37ff): Instead of conventional news they are looking for more depth in situations, when they need these journalistic information to solve personal problems or they want to change it to "social currency" in their personal networks.

All these technological and social trends tend to new competitive dynamics in media markets. The business models of traditional media companies are seriously attacked by news competitors like Google or Facebook. Additionally media spending are shifted to online marketing and e-commerce. The willingness to pay of media buyers and users in the digital word is still low, and there is no empirical hint for, that this will change in the near future (see Kay/Quinn 2008 and PEW 2011). Media companies are in a kind of sandwich position: In local markets they lose media revenues to niche competitors, and on a global level they have to find their way to fit in the ecosystems which are built up by global players like Apple.

The consequences of convergence for journalism are obvious: Distribution channels like radio, television, online, and print are no longer separated. Established workflows, which focus only on one channel, are no longer suitable. They have to be replaced by new forms of cross-media production which consider the multi-channel-perspective from the beginning. Journalists and media marketers have to cope with some challenging task on their way to convergent products and production workflows.

Some of them should be mentioned here: There is a clash of different editorial cultures with their special understanding of key quality factors like accuracy or actuality (see Quinn 2005). Innovation cycles are extremely shortened due to the strong dynamics of convergence. Furthermore the importance of user integration increases with the emerging web 2.0. On the one hand this leads to new opportunities for journalism like crowd sourcing or data journalism. On the other hand there are some threads for editorials staffs: Online social networks and micro blogging services are about to become a functional alternative to organized journalism.

But it seems to be certain, that the rules of news business are redefined. Melanie Sill puts it in to the following words: "When I grew up in the news business, the guiding idea was ownership. If you were excelling, you owned the story. If you owned the story, people had to come to you to get it. In 2011, no one owns a story. Everyone's a distributor and most people can be a contributor. Not everyone wants to create journalism but lots of people are able to do so in certain circumstances." (Sill 2011: 4)

Professional Skills in Editorial Management, News Writing and Reporting

Editorial Management

As a consequence of the outlined changes the importance of some existing professional skills increases while the needs for some new skills emerge (Bull 2010; Long & Wall 2009). Compared with the former print and nascent online news environment at the beginning of the new millennium (Tumber 1999; Patterson & Patterson 2003; Allan 2006) today's media environment with online news, multiplatform publishing, user-generated content and emerging "paywalls" requires more from editors, management and journalists (Achtenhagen & Raviola 2009; Bartsova 2009; Allan & Thorsen 2009). To be successful in today's media environment, improved skills and competencies are needed in multi-modal editorial planning and cross-channel development of news stories.

As print readership is declining and online readership rapidly increasing, business models are changing. Advertisers are placing less money in print media and more in online media. Online reader preferences are shifting towards mobile phones and iPads. In this environment all levels of management must have a firm understanding of the specific demands of different media channels in presenting cross-media or multimodal news to audiences. At the same time more newspapers are introducing digital subscription plans ("paywalls") where readers are asked to pay for unlimited access to content. This makes it mandatory for a successful cross-media outlet to have management with entrepreneurial skills and successful digital business models that can accommodate integrated plans and implementation of media asset management and integrated workflows (Croteau & Hoynes 2006; Long & Wall 2009).

Today, all management and staff levels must therefore embody a level of web competence, especially improved understanding of key technologies, programming and integration of different media channels into one web platform (Vukanovic 2009, Chan-Olmsted 2011). This

includes social media where e.g. in Scandinavia social media represent around 60% of primary sources in published news stories. Sensing the potential of Twitter for branding among elite users, several newspapers in Norway now require their editors and journalists to include the name of the media channel in the Twitter address. This shows not only the need for editors, management and journalists to manage innovation processes (Ofsti 2011) but also to handle media ethics, privacy and use of sources (Vaagan 2011).

During the intensive program (IP), which is described here students will therefore be introduced to how to launch, run and staff a successful online magazine directed at the international consumer and business community and develop a competent, international staff of all-round journalists. The staff of media organizations is often homogenous and the innovative character of this IP includes tapping the synergies of 4 different countries and cultures in a collective effort. Depending on the journal's size, ownership and legal framework, the chief editor at least in smaller magazines is often also chief executive officer, reporting to the board or owner(s). As chief editor she/he is also legally responsible for all content and for all editorial decisions. The successful chief editor will know how to strike a fine balance between the commercial and editorial elements, which sometimes means resisting interference from the proprietor in the running of the magazine. At the same time, the editor needs to coach and inspire a variety of competent journalists. The journalists of a successful online magazine must also be able to deliver continuously high-quality reports and coverage of key issues and events, including user-generated content such as blogs and crowd sourcing, all related to the journal´s editorial profile.

Managing a successful online magazine requires multiple skills and competences on the part of the entire staff. Students from the four participant countries will role-play as editor and be confronted with tough editorial and ethical dilemmas. Students will develop skills and competences preparing them to work as successful editors and journalists in a multi-cultural context.

The lecture and role play will focus on the requirements especially of the editor in terms of creating and managing a successful online magazine, in the cross-pressure between owners, market, competitors, advertisers on the one hand, and on the other hand editorial responsibilities including audiences, legal, ethical challenges, accurate and truthful reporting as well as

forging a team of competent journalists from different cultures all producing continuously high-quality cross-media content.

News Writing and Reporting

Today, the successful journalist must project his/her narrative skills to a cross-media environment and write also for mobile phones and iPads. This means shooting, cropping, editing and captioning pictures; recording, editing and publishing audio reports and podcasts; shooting and editing video, creating packages and streaming live reports, interacting with user-generated content; interviewing and doing online research; sub-editing, proofreading and headlining, including search engine optimization; geo-tagging, geo-coding and geo-broadcasting (Bull 2010; Silvia & Anzur 2011). Cross-media news writing and storytelling are different from producing for broadcast media and print news. While broadcast news offers immediacy and impact (sound, visuals and emotions), print news offers depth, detail and permanence. Compared with these, today's web journalism is based on demand, it is interactive and innovative. For over 100 years print and broadcast journalists have used a narrative style that follows a linear process of news reporting and writing. This involves first getting the story, then pitching the story to the editor or news director, and then generating research, doing interviews and reporting the final story. In writing across media one adds elements to this process by creating a non-linear approach, which means that instead of developing a rigidly structured single narrative you choose to navigate through the elements of story by using a combination of text, still photographs, video clips, audio, graphics, and interactivity such as polls or blogs on a website in such a fashion that each medium is complementary. In this way different parts of a story are told using different media in the most engaging and informative way (Silvia & Anzur 2011). The new media environment is also trans-national which necessitates increased understanding of the process of globalization and intercultural competence, including European integration and the goals of EU2020 such as "Youth on the Move".

During the IP, students will therefore work as journalists, editors and staff and cover a variety of events and issues all related to improving educational and vocational cooperation among participating institutions, increasing student mobility and ultimately student employability in the European labor market and beyond. The innovative aspect of the IP includes encouraging students to immerse themselves in a cross-cultural working environment and benefit from synergies through co-writing and co-editing content across multiple media platforms, includ-

ing social media. Students will benefit from being familiarized with different institutional online magazines and blogazines in participating countries.

Students will achieve enhanced knowledge, improved skills and competencies in reaching out to digitally literate audiences through producing texts with video, audio and pictures in multimedia packages. In this manner students will become familiarized with both aspects of media convergence: the integrative aspect (the merging of different technologies and industries to create new forms of cultural product and new modes of production and delivery e.g. iPhones, iPads, androids) and the divergence aspect (the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries and the migratory behavior of media audiences, who will go anywhere for desired entertainment experience).

The lecture highlights factual reporting since storytelling is addressed in another lecture (Cross-media storytelling) later the same day. The emphasis is online news writing, how different media gratify audience needs and how news stories in each medium are presented, including language and style.

Media Convergence and its Consequences for the Academic Programs of Teaching Journalism

As it is already mentioned above, academic programs of teaching journalism become more and more complex. Media convergence brings about new tasks and requires multi-media skills for both present and prospective journalists and media professionals. It is often argued that "the market pressures transforming the journalistic field have changed other fields as well, including the academy". (Klinenberg 2005:61) As Kang states, "Innovations in digital technologies and global communication have compelled higher education institutions to be more responsive in their curriculum planning to meet the professional demands of the workplace, academia, and changing needs of students." (Kang 201:54) Within this framework, the consequences of convergence that affect journalism education may be inspected under three sub-topics: the changes in the curricula, the changes in the courses syllabi, and the changes in the technological infrastructures of the academic institutions.

The changes in the journalism curricula and syllabi may be observed from a general perspective of the discipline of communication. Kang points out that "the digital age has influenced

the map of integrated communication curricula in all areas encompassing Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Communication, Advertising, Public Relations and Digital Media." (Kang 2010:54) As a matter of fact, one can argue that, especially journalism education is the one academic area within the discipline of communication which is mostly affected by convergence, since the practical skills training constitute nearly half of the number of courses offered in the curricula everywhere in the world (Deuze 2006:23). The need to change the curricula is due to the fact that the journalistic field changes very dynamically. Professional standards and routines for cross media publishing are less distinctive than in traditional media channels. As a result, a more heterogeneous professional knowledge and experience of the learners becomes a must. According to Kang, subject offerings expand in line with the need to provide students with skill competencies and functional knowledge. (Kang 2010:54) Considering this, there is no doubt that in the age of convergence, practical skills training cannot be separated from the ability of students to use multi-media technology in any kind of digital platform, thereby forcing the faculty to enrich the departmental curricula with new courses, as well as restructuring and updating the old ones in line with these new needs.

The consequences of convergence on the transformation of journalism curricula is, of course, not only limited with the integration of practical skill courses in line with the new technology, it also requires courses syllabi to be updated. As Deuze points out "Convergence is not just a technological process amplified through digitization. Media convergence must also be seen as having cultural logic of its own, blurring the lines between different channels, forms and formats, between different parts of the media enterprise, between the acts of production and consumption, between making media and using media, and between active or passive spectatorship of mediated culture". (Deuze 2008: 103) There is no doubt that journalism education is not just training but also scholarship. Within this framework, as Hirst and Mosco state, "journalism scholars need to develop a deeper understanding of the ideological and normative functions of current professional practice in journalism and the mutual constitution. (Hirst 2009:94, Mosco 2004) Accordingly, syllabi of theoretical courses should be adapted to this new media situation that is determined by the consequences of convergence in line with this deeper understanding developed by journalism scholars. This means that courses that focus on the relation between media and, say society, culture, audience, politics, economics, political economy, history, law and the like should inevitably be restructured. Besides, courses that aim to provide students with managerial and marketing skills, as well as courses that are

about media policy, regulation or governance should be redesigned in line with this new 'cultural logic' of media convergence.

The renovation of the technological infrastructure of the academic institutions is another consequence of convergence that affects journalism education. There is no doubt that multichannel production requires a more complex learning environment, and as Tanner and Smith point out "many educators are continually monitoring current practices in an effort to incorporate the latest technology and industry developments into the classroom.". (Tanner&Smith 2007:214) In the digital, convergent media environment, students as prospective journalists are expected to produce and edit news stories on video, for the Web and for print, re-proposing the same story for different media. (Huang et al. 2006:18) This, of course, requires knowledge of software for producing video, Web sites, graphics, newspapers, and magazines; knowledge of how to operate a computer and use the Internet. (Huang et al. 2006:18) Accordingly, academic institutions of teaching journalism need to possess all these technological hard and software infrastructure in order to provide their students with the needed multimedia skills.

Didactical Approaches to a New Journalism Course

Both the field of Journalism as the practice of didactics in higher education have changed in the face of digitization. Just as the journalistic stages of research and the publishing of news stories has dynamised through innovative technological possibilities, so too have the tooling and methods of didactics been reshaped. They are part of an ecology of change in which they share semantics and are subject to similar technological forces.

During the pre- and post-millennial decades, internet technology was popularized by the World Wide Web, enabling web-delivered education that was mostly transmissive in nature, supporting a pre-internet behavioral approach to pedagogics. Contents were course based, mimicking the analog readers and course syllabi that had been the staple of education for many decades.

During the first decade a coming of age of computer aided didactics can be witnessed in which didactical content and its delivery have moved away from its pioneering stages and have adapted to innovative methods of teaching. One might also rightly assert that novel

technological possibilities -such as the principles of web 2.0 and web 3.0- dictate new ways of student interaction and -in doing so- open up new scenario's for student instruction and learning.

Web 2.0 based learning, with technology and systems that emphasize co-creation and collaboration, has changed the theoretical framework. Where once behaviour and knowledge transfer were main focal points for educators and their course programmes, now collaboration and peer-to-peer problem solving have fostered a theoretical approach often referred to as connectivism. Within a connectivist framework the web as a whole is regarded as a platform where communities are formed and students are generators and aggregators of content. The content of courses and the knowledge within them are shared and it is broadly accepted that contexts of use and application of knowledge are of a transient nature. Knowledge, skillsets and competences are constantly changing factors, depending on course themes, changing business climates, novel strategies, sociopolitical developments etcetera. Knowledge is constructed, assessed, reconstructed, reassessed and distilled in practice. Factors and determinants are merely identified and never set in stone. The result is a constructivist form of connectivism in which students take a 'cognitive apprenticeship' and lecturers act as coaching enablers. In general the following presumptions should drive a connectivist approach to didactics:

- Perspectives and opinions are fundamental to understanding a task or problem as complete as possible. Only then can the best solution be selected.
- Learning is a network-forming process in which information sources are connected in a nodal manner.
- Knowledge is stored in complex networks.
- Knowledge might be collected and stored in machine operated environments, so learning should be enabled and supported by a technological framework.
- Recognizing connections and patterns to develop novel ideas and concepts is the core skill for individuals today.
- Accurate knowledge of current trends and practice is the goal of connectivist learning activities.
- Students learn by making decisions. Selection of skills that are practiced and weighing the meaning and importance of information and data is an ever ongoing process.

When connecting the content of a course programme on journalism in a digitized professional work environment to a connectivist didactical approach, the 5-Lenses Model of Digitization by Mark Pegrum (Pegrum, 2009) seems to provide a fitting semantical structure. Seen as a whole, the course programme is a complex ecology of topics. These topics range from matters of journalistic practices to matters that are didactical and technological in nature.

Where the academic content fits best in the outer lenses (ecology, sociopolitical and social), the determinants regarding the didactical approach are centered on the innermost lenses (social, pedagogical and technological). As you may have noticed there is an overlap between these two approaches. This overlap can be explained as collaboration in a journalistic sense (working as co-workers in a newsroom/editorial environment), as well as collaboration in a didactical sense (students studying in a classroom), but also in technology as a driver for change of practice, as well as an enabler of innovative didactical purposes.

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