

The polyvalent journalist within the framework of business convergence¹

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Abstract

A growing number of the media is undergoing this complex process known as “convergence”. This is a phenomenon with repercussions for companies, technology, content and professionals, and is made up of some of the following aspects: integrated production, polyvalent journalism, multi-platform distribution and audience participation. But companies’ perception of this transformation, on the one hand, and the perception of professionals on the other, is quite different. And they also disagree when it comes to identifying its causes and goals. This article particularly analyses the role played by polyvalent journalists within this context and describes the arguments for and against such a figure.

Key words

Convergence, journalistic polyvalence, polyvalent journalist, integrated newsroom.

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Resum

Un nombre creixent de mitjans està experimentant aquest complex procés anomenat “convergència”. Es tracta d’un fenomen que té repercussions en les empreses, la tecnologia, els continguts i els professionals, i que es plasma en alguns dels aspectes següents: producció integrada, polivalència periodística, distribució multiplataforma i audiència participativa. Però la percepció que tenen d’aquesta transformació les empreses, per una banda, i els professionals, per l’altra, és ben diferent. I també divergeixen a l’hora d’identificar-ne les causes i els objectius. Aquest article analitza, en particular, el paper que desenvolupa el periodista polivalent en aquest context, i descriu els arguments a favor i en contra d’aquesta figura.

Paraules clau

Convergència, polivalència periodística, periodista polivalent, redacció integrada.

Definition and scope of convergence

If there has been one phenomenon that has characterised the communications industry in recent years it has been convergence. Or confluence, cooperation, coordination, newsroom integration, synergies or multimedia, as this process, which began in the United States but which now extends worldwide, has been given a number of names.

Professionals and academics have popularised this word in recent years; however, the term began to be applied in the communication field some three decades ago. A polysemic and dynamic term like this has led to numerous approaches from a whole host of perspectives. There are as many ways of understanding the concept as there are projects in development (Silcock and Keith 2006). Definitions originating from the professional sphere, which tend to focus on specific aspects – such as the configuration of newsrooms and production processes – have little to do with universities, which are generally more extensive. Recent work by Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip provide a detailed review of the literature on convergence (Salaverría and García Avilés 2008; Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip 2008). For the purposes of this article, we will be using the conceptual delimitation proposed by these authors:

“It is a multidimensional process that, facilitated by the wide-

spread implementation of digital telecommunication technologies, affects the technological, business, professional and editorial sphere of the media and augurs the integration of formerly disaggregated tools, spaces, work methods and languages so that journalists produce content that is distributed over multiple platforms through the languages appropriate to each one.” (García Avilés, Salaverría and Masip 2008)

Convergence has been the focus of a great many recent professional conferences at an international level. Since 2006, this transformation has been the main topic at the world editors’ meeting. The 2008 slogan, for example, was “Integrated newsrooms: why, how and when.” At last year’s edition, the Newsroom Barometer revealed that 86% of editors surveyed (700 throughout the world) believe that digital and print newsrooms will soon merge, 83% believe that journalists will soon have to produce content for all types of media and 70% of those who maintain circulation indexes forecast the integration of newsrooms within a few years (Chainon 2008).

Entrepreneurs, therefore, see this as a guaranteed way of restructuring the print media. However, we need to stop seeing convergence as a desperate measure for saving the press. Groups with powerful television divisions, such as Media General (Florida), Group Tribune (Chicago) and Bello

Corporations (Dallas), have been behind the most high-profile processes in the United States. In Europe, some of the most noteworthy experiences have been applied in public audiovisual corporations: the BBC in Great Britain, SVT in Sweden, NRK in Norway, DR in Denmark and YLE in Finland.

To a large extent, convergence is a reaction to the confused situation that the industry has been experiencing for more than ten years. The audience for the traditional media, primarily the press, is falling. Newspaper circulation in the United States is dropping every year by around 5% and the number of viewers is also decreasing. In 2007, the number of Spanish newspapers sold was 86 for every one thousand inhabitants, 17 fewer than in 2000 ("Dissemination...", 2008). Running parallel to this are the changes to information consumption habits. The internet has now overtaken newspapers as a source of information among Americans; in terms of the under-30s, internet is first, level with television (Pew Research Center 2008). Some 15% of the traffic that news sites receive comes from Google (Andrews 2007), underlining just how little interest thousands of users have in the headlines, i.e. brands. Publics are becoming atomised, they are finding out the news through mobile devices and consuming more information, but in less time. Advertising revenue is becoming less, while the competition to maintain it is on the rise. The current crisis situation is a delicate balancing act for profit and loss accounts, especially in digital media, which, with few exceptions, are not profitable.

Concentration by system

In short, communication entrepreneurs have felt that convergence may help them restructure systems and products for adaptation to the demands of the twenty-first century audience. This process has come in many guises, but there is only one dimension that acts as an umbrella embracing the rest: business. In the field of the communications business, convergence affects both organisations and content production and use. It is impossible to identify one single reason to explain why a growing number of media choose to go with this strategy. Despite this, the phenomenon would not have emerged if the relevant conditions, along two basic lines, had not been in place: new business structures and digitalisation.

During the 1980s, agencies, newspapers, magazines, television and radio, all five operated on the basis of analogue technology, coexisting (more or less) in harmony but independently. The following decade brought about the digitalisation of companies and, with this concept, convergence came onto the scene. The printed, audiovisual and cybernetic media began cooperating to reduce production processes and benefit from the advantages offered by each individual support. At that time, analogue and digital technology still coexisted. However, this circumstance underwent drastic changes in the new millennium, with the absolute hegemony of the second environment, the mushrooming of the internet and the proliferation of

new platforms. It was at that moment that a business concentration and media diversification process began to take off, from a monomedia philosophy to a multimedia philosophy. Prisa, one of the pioneers, is the paradigmatic case in Spain, but almost all Spanish groups have followed the same path: RCS MediaGroup and Recoletos, Godó, Planeta, Mediapro.

However, the commitment of business towards media diversification is not exclusive to large-scale groups. As Guimerà *et al.*, point out, as of 2005, and especially since 2008, local communication cannot be understood in Catalonia "without referring to proximity-based multimedia groups" (Guimerà *et al.*, pending publication). In their opinion, one of the elements which has characterised this environment over the last two decades has been the progressive consolidation of types of concentration that have created private conglomerates that manage a range of media in one area or different zones, which have transformed local content spread over several supports into the key to their business.

One of the clearest cases is the Segre Group. Created on the foundations of Prensa Leridana, the public limited company that publishes the newspaper that gives its name to the group, it took an important step during the 1990s with Segre Ràdio. In addition, in 2008, it expanded the number of FM frequencies: from two to three. The group moved into the world of analogue television in 2001 and, thanks to the terrestrial digital television bid (DTT), established itself as one of the leading operators in the country by securing four concessions, so enabling it to cover the whole of the Lleida region. Segre has also been present in the free press since 2006 through a local edition of the *ADN* newspaper.

Companies such as Edicions Intercomarcals, Premsa d'Osona, Publicacions Penedès, La Veu de l'Ebre, etc. have developed along similar lines. Curiously, local communication has experienced infrequent concentration, such as the accumulation (horizontal) of televisions or expansion towards other media, from the audiovisual area and not the press, which has historically been the case at a national, state and international level (Guimerà *et al.*, pending publication). For example, Vallès Serveis de Televisió has an interest in seven DTT concessions, is the parent company of Canal Català TV and has spread to the press (shareholder in the *A Sabadell+* and *A Terrassa+* publisher).

The digital condition

Together with business concentration and diversification, digitalisation is the other element without which it would be impossible to imagine convergence processes. The great changes in the field of information production began with the implementation of computerised newsrooms which, in the case of Spain, was rolled out between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. From a purely technological point of view, television professionals, for example, had already experienced the

introduction of video to replace film, the appearance of the Betacam system, etc. These years saw the birth of the information age, marked by the philosophy of Electronic News Gathering (ENG).

Consequently, electronic journalism meant that a single person was in charge of the entire recording process, as was already the case in radio. In the audiovisual environment, the new technology provided much faster, more fluid and more immediate recording. It also meant that, with compact editing equipment, the reporter, who had gone to where the events were unfolding, could record the piece and send it to the newsroom in minutes (Micó 2006a). The second great revolution in this field began at the end of the 1990s. This constituted a change which, for some authors (Bandrés *et al.* 2000), was even more profound than the introduction of video or the use of satellite: digitalisation.

This advance consisted of replacing analogue technology with numerical systems. In the press, the computerisation of newsrooms did not release journalists from some of the traditional routines but, in an overall sense they benefited from greater ease in the production of news, saving time and control over the end result. Besides this, companies spent less money and, at the same time, offered more competitive, higher-quality material.

As a whole, the digitalisation of communication companies meant that all information could be condensed into a common language based on zeros and ones, which meant that it could be reused and subsequently exploited through distribution via multiple supports, which were different from the one on which it had originally been produced: the web, mobile telephony, PDAs. All this thanks to an instrument that was becoming increasingly common: the computer.

Journalistic polyvalence

A complicated economic context, but with a favourable business structure and established technological innovations, has provided the industry with the right conditions for tackling an uncertain future and new business models, very often thanks to convergence. The strategies developed by companies have been very diverse and, generally, have avoided the maximalist positions that see this phenomenon, convergence, as a linear process which culminates in full integration, understood as the optimum scenario to be achieved as compulsory. The models that prevail in Catalonia and throughout Spain have been based on cooperation among professionals from different newsrooms and the multimedia treatment of news that can be broadcast over different platforms.

In this new context, journalists have had to take on tasks that were traditionally carried out by other professionals, forcing them to develop a more complex and demanding profile. This worker, the polyvalent (multi-skilled) or multimedia journalist, has to produce content for a range of supports (media polyvalence), and/or has to take charge of the whole production process or a large part of it (technological polyvalence), and/or deal with news from different environments or sections (thematic polyvalence) (Micó 2006b).

Despite the fact that the terms “polyvalent journalist” and “multimedia journalist” are often used indistinctly, Salaverría, García Avilés and Masip (2007) distinguish different levels of polyvalence:

• **Level 0. Monomedia and non-polyvalent journalist.** The journalist works exclusively for one medium and carries out a single task (writing, photography, etc.)

• **Level 1. Multimedia and non-polyvalent journalist.** The journalist works for more than one platform and carries out the same work in each (production, editing, etc.)

• **Level 2. Monomedia and polyvalent journalist.** The journalist works for a single medium, but carries out a number of tasks (writing, editing, etc.)

• **Level 3. Multimedia and polyvalent journalist.** The journalist works for different media and produces material for different platforms and also carries out the corresponding tasks for different journalistic disciplines (writing, photography, editing, speaking, etc.)

More modest media were the first to adopt the figure of the polyvalent journalist, often as a means of ensuring survival. However, there are larger companies and groups that have chosen similar solutions. Although this condition is not essential, the profile of the polyvalent journalist is starting to be implemented in media that have progressed along the path of integration, sometimes after having gone through a prior phase represented by newsrooms coordinated through “multimedia boards”, where polyvalence, if nothing else, is optional at the moment (García Avilés and Carvajal 2008).

Vocento was one of the first Spanish groups to take up convergence as a general strategy. For this reason, it applied a number of solutions: from newsroom integration to coordination between independent centres of work. As a result, a multimedia board has been created at *Hoy. Diario de Extremadura* that includes all the platforms that the group has in that autonomous community: the printed newspaper, website (hoy.es), radio (Punto Ràdio Extremadura) and television (Telefrontera). This ensures that all supports are complemented in terms of news coverage. *La verdad de Murcia* and *laverdad.es*, on the one hand, and Vocento radio and television broadcasters in the region (Punto Radio and Punto TV), on the other, also have a unique form of collaboration. The newspaper editor acts as convergence coordinator between the two newsrooms: first, for printed and internet media, and, second, audiovisual media. On this occasion, the media belong to different groups (García Avilés and Carvajal 2008). At *Ideal*, a publication also owned by Vocento, newspaper journalists take part on a cyclical basis in what they call the *multimedia bubble*, a type of small integrated newsroom, a test bed, which, at the same time, fosters synergies and joint work between platforms.

When two initially independent newsrooms combine to form a single place of work, a maximum point, although not necessarily an optimum point, of convergence is reached. The most well-known example in Spain is that of *20 minutos*, which merged the print and digital newspaper newsrooms, even though it has since ended up separating them. The director of this free newspaper used reasons of a business nature – doing away with duplicated work and improved management of personnel – and of a journalistic nature – offering improved products on any support – to justify this remodelling, which was subsequently undone. (Escolar 2006).

Since September 2007, *El Mundo's* Communication, Science and Sports editors have been working in both print media and for the online edition. Some 50 professionals from the Novotécnica group, which includes *La Voz de Almería*, Cadena Ser Almería and Localia TV Almería, also work in a single newsroom. Around 70% of journalists in the block are multimedia, i.e. they are able to produce pieces for any of the three platforms (García Avilés and Carvajal 2008).

The last to sign up to this movement was *El País*. Despite the fact that its managers have traditionally been opposed to newsroom integration, in light of the crisis that the newspaper business is undergoing they have taken the decision to “re-establish” the newspaper and merge paper newspapers and digital edition places of work (*“El País...”,* 2009). Given all this, it is still difficult to find single newsrooms that feed different platforms with information: press, web, television and radio. At most, some press offices, such as that of FC Barcelona, operate like this.

In the state audiovisual field, the figure of the multimedia journalist is less common than in the press. They frequently appear in small media, where media and thematic polyvalence is an economic necessity. Among large television channels, this is still an exception, although there have been moves in this direction, such as Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB). The television, radio and internet journalists of the Basque public broadcaster co-exist in the same building under the supervision of a multimedia board, which provides editorial coordination. Although each writer works for one support, it is possible that those who want to can report for the other platforms.

However, one of the most advanced and definite examples of polyvalent journalism in Spain did not originate at an integrated centre, quite the opposite in fact, but at a decentralised newsroom. This is the case of the Agència Catalana de Notícies (ACN), a medium, which, since its creation in 1999, has proposed the figure of the multimedia journalist who informs through writing, photographs and other audiovisual resources (Gordillo and Nogué 2008).

The explanation in economic terms given by ACN managers when they reveal their model is similar to the one used by Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA) directors to defend their “confluence” project, as we shall see later on (Masdeu 2008). The internet enabled them to weave a virtual network to reach, in the words of the director and one of the

agency’s assistant directors, potential customers “minimising production costs” (Gordillo and Nogué 2008: 52). The investment in infrastructure that classic teletype broadcasting required would have made a new agency in the region addressed especially at the proximity media unfeasible. However, with its own usage template, the company was able to establish it and, in only a few years, it has grown considerably.

In addition, from the start, the ACN promoted a multimedia journalistic profile, an option which led companies from other media to observe them with bewilderment, until they were used to it, or until some of them had to follow their example, especially the smaller companies. This convergence by principle exists alongside what could be termed “divergence by system”, as the agency has a decentralised structure, with its head office in Girona, a regional office in Barcelona, and most writers teleworking.

The fifty or so journalists taken on around the country communicate with each other by mobile, e-mail and instant messaging or chat rooms. In other words, in an age of concentration where group directors ask themselves whether a possible single newsroom (for their newspaper, cyber newspaper, radio and television) would help them save money, this virtual newsroom emerges as a strong contender. Analysing the current panorama of the sector in terms of comparison is a huge mistake. The market shows that each environment, each group, each medium demands a different solution. There are no universal answers. In any case, none has been found to date and each case needs to be studied in detail. However, this does not mean that there are no formulas that would inspire other companies. In fact, the traditional agencies of ANSA (Italy) and LUSA (Portugal) have already stated their interest in the “ACN model”, and have established “collaboration links” (Gordillo and Nogué 2008: 59).

Professional critiques, economic reasons

Companies see in convergence, in any of its forms, a valid strategy for existing in a changing context marked by uncertainties. Initially, the advantages are numerous: resources are shared, expenses are cut, time taken to produce information is reduced (the creation of new productions can be automated, for example, for mobile devices), gains in efficiency are made and profitability is improved as journalists can devote the time saved to other tasks.

At the CCMA, for example, the proposed convergence announced sought, among other aims, to make the most of resources, i.e. efficiency, which would consist of “sharing information and resources and coordinating the publication of the product” (Masdeu 2008: 86). Here is a justification that combined the commitment to a new way of working (“confluence”) with the aim of getting greater yield from work, while at the same time reducing expenses (a logical and licit ambition in any company, whether it is public or private).

Similarly, convergence allows the audience (and advertisers) to be transferred between media, the brand to be strengthened and extra revenue to be generated (such as with new payment services), and it also enables the group's revenue to be increased through advertising, for example, with block offers to appear on a number of platforms. The manager of Badalona Comunicació, Joan Montornès, sees this system as helping to “design commercial strategies [...] that work. The advertisers value our offering them impacts in three media that can reach different publics by contracting a single pack, at an affordable price” (Montornès 2007: 12).

In defence of the polyvalent journalist, the professional component is accentuated at the cost of the economic one, even though the latter is always present. According to its champions, this figure has greater control over the pieces, so achieving greater unity and internal coherence, as they are the sole author. In addition, they add, thanks to technology, they have greater capacity for action and freedom to take on any current event of interest. In all, as the theory goes, it results in the improved quality of the end products.

The critics disagree. Furthermore, the editors, who are the main driving force, appear to give them an argument when they confess that integrated newsrooms, polyvalent journalists or outsourcing will not necessarily mean an improvement to the quality of journalistic productions. It is true to say that 45% of those surveyed by the Newsroom Barometer feel that quality will increase this way; however, 28% think the exact opposite. It should be highlighted that in the 2006 edition of the same study, those who defended the argument that the quality of journalism would increase stood at 50% (Chainon, 2008).

The reservations expressed at the figure of the polyvalent journalist and integrated newsrooms are divided into two blocks: professional and legal-labour. Besides the loss of quality, the former includes the following:

- **Homogenisation of discourses.** Convergence reduces the number of media voices and makes the content uniform, so diluting the sometimes relevant nuances that would come out of different newsrooms that now have to be merged for economic criteria (Cottle, 1999). According to this hypothesis, pluralism would be harmed.

- **Different journalistic cultures.** For different authors (Silcock and Keith, 2006; Singer, 2004; Killebrew, 2002), it is difficult for the work dynamics of the press, radio, television and the internet – media with different styles, routines, values and rhythms – to coincide in order to work in a synchronised manner. This was the argument used by the more refractive groups that led to an eventual confluence of newsrooms among CCMA media (Domingo, (Masip and Micó, 2008). However, professional experiences point to the key to success in integrating newsrooms lying in a change to production processes. If the way of working is not redesigned, journalists will find it difficult to adapt to the new challenges.

- **Language and profile diversity.** As stated in the definition

almost at the start of this article, journalists who produce content for multiple platforms have to adjust to the languages of each, which is why they need specific skills. However, there are writers who do not have these skills and neither are they in a position to learn them (it is more difficult to train an employee with experience than a new one). Despite this, journalistic production, particularly on the internet, is increasingly more multimedia and less monomedia ((Micó and Masip, 2008). A printed newspaper is still a long way from being an audiovisual news bulletin; however, it is often difficult to pinpoint any differences between a cyber newspaper and the information portal of a television channel. In this second block of cases, journalists urgently need to be polyvalent.

- **Dumbing-down of style and narrative codes.** Despite the apparent contradiction with the above argument, there is a need to remember those voices which state that the style and narrative codes specific to each medium may be harmed due to the work of some reporters who have to work simultaneously for different supports and who do not know how to (or cannot) use the particularities of each language.

In terms of the setbacks derived from convergence and polyvalent journalism based on legal and employment arguments, the most often cited include:

- **A decline in working conditions.** The production of pieces in different formats for different supports and the adaptation of content to the respective languages and peculiarities mean an overload of work for journalists. The time invested in each piece is less than previously. As a consequence, quality is reduced, information is more superficial, and even includes mistakes (Bulla, 2002). In addition, the new demands mean that the working day has to be extended. A study by the National Union of Journalists revealed that working hours for a quarter of British writers have changed following the introduction of digital media into their companies; some 75% of those surveyed stated that they work longer hours since the integration of newsrooms (National Union of Journalists, 2007).

- **Smaller workforces.** If the tasks of different profiles from the past are concentrated into a single professional, who, in addition, is able to work for several platforms, it could be interpreted as being possible to get rid of certain figures. According to this thinking, the polyvalent journalist carries out the same work (or even more) than a group of employees with different skills. Staffing cutbacks announced in the world's media support this concern.

- **Lack of professional and financial recognition.** Despite taking on more tasks, the journalist does not receive greater recognition, either from the professional or financial point of view. From the professional perspective, online journalists, for example, have often been looked down on within the group. From the financial perspective, new attributions have almost never been accompanied by increases in salaries. In the case of *La Verdad de Murcia*, journalists who voluntarily decided to produce information for other platforms did so without any finan-

cial recompense (García Avilés and Carvajal, 2008). There are, however, exceptions, such as the *Diari de Girona*, where journalists are paid for the photographs they take that end up being published. The editor of the digital version of the *Financial Times*, Paul Maidment, says: "The only way for companies to value paper and digital newspaper journalists is for them to share working conditions and the system of remuneration" (quoted by García Avilés, 2006: 37).

- **Different working agreements and salary boards.** When newsrooms have to be merged of media, which, although they belong to the same group, are regulated by different agreements and salaries, another difficulty raises its head. Professionals with better working and salary conditions may see the changes as a threat to their status. Logically, the journalists in a less favourable situation – usually online journalists – tend to be the main defenders of the convergence, which they see as an opportunity to bring themselves level with their colleagues (Domingo, Masip and Micó, 2008). Tension also rises when journalists are assigned tasks that fall outside their profile description or the duties regulated by the collective agreement. Conflicts such as these are resolved by a financial agreement between the company and writer or simply by the abandonment of the project.

- **Management of copyright.** Convergence in general, and in particular the figure of the polyvalent journalist, arising from the merging or coordination of several newsrooms, cannot be studied without taking into consideration the consequences of the management of copyright associated with the authorship of the information. If the journalists' contracts do not expressly state otherwise, the material produced for a medium cannot be reproduced by another company, even though they are both part of the same group. Equally, content broadcast assignments in media other than their own – for example, the adaptation of a television report for a website – must be accompanied by the corresponding assignment agreement and payment.

Resistance to change is to be expected in any organisation. The best tactics for overcoming it include training and clear leadership, which may be accompanied by a certain ability to persuade. For innovation to be implemented appropriately, the skill of company managers is key to involving journalists, informing them about the aim of the process and making them participants in the procedure. It is vital that personnel view the transformation as an opportunity to make their work in the new media context easier and not as a financial measure imposed so as to reduce staffing levels and minimise costs at any price. One of the reasons for the icy reception of the CCMA confluence project by its staff is due to insufficient internal communication (Domingo, Masip and Micó, 2008).

BBC multimedia journalist Ben Hammersley says that companies confuse convergence with it being a short-cut to obtaining the same (or, even, greater) informational performance from fewer personnel (and, therefore, fewer expenses). And therein lies the rub. Despite his experience, Hammersley feels that it is

not possible to produce good journalism when working for more than two media at the same time, above all if one of them is television, a support, which, according to him, demands greater dedication. The professional has within their reach numerous multimedia tools, but they should not use them all at once, but rather, in each case, they need to decide the most appropriate one to tell a story.²

The aim would be to ensure that all professionals think as multimedia journalists and that at least a significant number of them could understand what it means and which format they should use and then spend time on it. The British journalist's approach has little in common with the idea of the one-man-band who has to cover an event, take the photographs and record the audio and video, as straight after they have to get a news story ready for the online newspaper, then broadcast live on radio and, finally, get a piece together for the television news. Ben Hammersley says that the work of the polyvalent journalist makes a lot of sense when it comes to following long-term events, in the form of extensive reports; however, he does not recommend this *modus operandi* for current affairs and breaking news.

Apart from decisive leadership and the involvement of employees to make initiatives work, such as the ones described so far, training is also needed. Opposition to convergence has often been due to employees being incorrectly prepared. In principle, this was the case at *20 minutos* and *Novotécnica* where journalists complained because they felt that they had not received the necessary training to tackle a newsroom integration process such as this successfully (García Avilés and Carvajal, 2008). However, editors are aware that the best way to improve the quality of their products is to invest in training (Chainon, 2008).

Conclusions

As we have seen, if the aim is to ensure that innovation like this gels, the business model needs changing and a new journalistic template fostering, based on information quality and the development of imaginative formulas for generating income. Despite the more conservative position, this solution is not always present in classically structured media. In any event, the answer is not to reduce staff levels – although sometimes the dynamics of certain companies would need rationalising – and the search for short-term results.

Obviously, this approach is difficult to marry with a crisis such as the current one. The Newsroom Barometer study mentioned above provides information that is as significant as it is worrying: the generalisation of integrated newsrooms, multimedia journalists and external services will not necessarily mean improved quality of information productions. The news coming from certain Spanish communication groups confirms this. In order to tackle the recession, Vocento plans, among other measures, to integrate radio and television, close or sell³

regional media offices and get rid of over a thousand jobs ("Adjustment Plan...", 2008).

In more humble media, both generalisation of the profile of the polyvalent journalist and implementation of integrated newsrooms tend to obey a need, which, as the subject suggests, becomes a virtue. This need may spell success for a project, even though it may erode its quality. In this sense, the director of Canal Blau, Xavier Abelló, resolves: "Despite technical problems [...] that arise depending on the synergies [polyvalent informer], these practices may go a long way to ensuring the existence of audiovisual media in certain medium and small cities [...]. It may be that a text the two media want to use could not exploit the possibilities offered by television, yet, however, it would ensure the economic feasibility of an audiovisual project in a medium or small city." (Abelló 2007: 14).

In any of its forms, convergence is without a shadow of a doubt a central aspect in today's journalism industry. However, we are faced with an erratic phenomenon that does not generate a consensus and does not offer a single universal application model. We also need to add to this the difficulty in measuring the success of current initiatives. Is it enough to take a hypothetical increase in advertising revenue into account? Lower running costs? Or should we be looking at qualitative criteria and criteria for improving processes and ways of working?

The answer is neither simple nor exclusive, although it does seem that economic indicators do prevail, especially during times of crisis like the current one. Two recent cases exemplify this. A few weeks ago, the *20 minutos* newspaper made public the results of an internal survey that gave a favourable assessment of the professional side to the merging of paper and digital newsrooms (Escolar 2008); however, in an interview to 233 grados ("Newsrooms...", 2009) on 24 January, the director of 20minutos.es, Joan F. Domene, announced the separation of the two media's newsrooms. The *El País* newspaper, traditionally against unification but which has now communicated its decision to integrate its newsrooms as of 1 March ("El País...", 2009), finds itself in the opposite position.

Notes

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- 2 Lecture given at the Blanquerna Faculty of Communication of the Ramon Lull University on 2 July 2008.
- 3 At the time of this article going to press, it was announced that Malaga City Council had bought the local television channel Vocento for 1.5 million euros.

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