News Media Convergence in the Context of the War in Ukraine

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Abstract: *This article aims to analyse media convergence in the context of the war in Ukraine by analysing the different dimensions of this phenomenon and its impact on public opinion. The phenomenon, which is booming, also takes into account the media economy and discusses how content is created and disseminated. The paper starts from the hypothesis that the application of media convergence influences the development of new journalistic creations and audience growth through new professional practice tools among the Romanian Public Service Television -TVR journalists, the distribution of material across multiple online platforms and the use of amateur images. The research method used is content analysis, and the corpus is composed of nine news stories having as subject the war in Ukraine produced by TVR journalists in the first year after the conflict broke out. The focus was on explaining the transitioning from traditional to hybrid media content, combining professional and amateur practices.*

Keywords: *media convergence; network society; news; media content; active audience; digitisation;*

Media convergence, a growing phenomenon

Media convergence is a phenomenon that has gained momentum with the technological development of online media platforms, bringing together specific elements of old and new media. "Convergence cements consumer loyalty at a time when market fragmentation and increased file sharing threaten old ways of doing business" (Jenkins 243) and "can be studied at a number of distinct levels, including cultural, industry, technological or regulatory levels, and these will often be present in different combinations" (Dwyer 3). Due to media convergence, audiences become active and participate with opinions, reactions, and suggestions wherever they watch accessible cultural material, especially on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

Media convergence is the production and dissemination of news in the most optimal medium for the reported event (Quinn et al. in Șuțu 40). In this process, journalists are challenged to find the logical and accessible thread of the story by coordinating written, graphic, audio and video components (Lanson, Fought qtd. in Șuțu 62).

Public access to information and news produced for television and then broadcast on different channels allows audiences with social media accounts

to debate topics at any time, online, with information consumers located in any country on the planet

Convergence is not just a technological process but is also implicated in and expressed as profound and ongoing social, cultural and economic change (Dwyer 8). Access to technology drives information consumers, at times, to become content creators themselves by having mobile phones or other devices with which they can create audio-visual material. Kevin Werbach of the FCC in the United States argues that the Internet is "substitutable for all existing media" (Werbach 1).

With the advent of the internet and media platforms featuring content created by professional journalists using traditional media, audiences have migrated to these new media where they can react, access unlimited content and create communities of shared interests.

Virtual communities, voluntarily created on various online platforms, bring together members interested in information and diverse content, and members support each other through continuous interaction (Karampelas 5).

"Humans are storytelling organisms that individually and collectively lead lives with stories and generally form a community with whom they can learn and share through dialogue" (Connelly, Clanidinin 2-14). Creating mostly online, communities aim to acquire knowledge, the most critical resource in society, to gain freedom. Online communities adapt to innovations, technology, and platforms and develop their communication skills through written or audio-video feedback, unlike the traditional audience receiving only information. The more members of communities are involved, the more visible, present, and impactful they are. The Internet has become a system where anyone can join and play (Scholz 1).

The work of internet communities in network societies is increasingly visible and weighs increasingly in the online environment (Vanghelescu 2021). Professional content creators and journalists are analysing the demands of network societies, identifying consumer interest in information, imposing changes in the news production process and adapting their content to the new changes by applying innovative filming and editing methods also suited to the online environment. "The technical conversion process we call 'digitisation' is only one element of the multi-directional change in the industry. However, it is fundamental; in some cases, continuity is the critical feature" (Dwyer 26).

Media content in transition, between amateurs and professional journalists

Media content is increasingly adapting to change. From video recorded on cassette tapes, content has come to be stored on memory cards of different sizes, in online environments or directly in the internal memory of mobile phones. The time it takes to publish media content has shrunk. Journalists can

quickly publish audio and video material on TV stations and their own media platforms. At the same time, online news consumers have become content creators by uploading amateur audio-video material online, and many are picked up by journalists and inserted into news stories (Vanghelescu 2022).

"New media can be characterised by two notions: conversations and communities" (Sparks 212), while "the network society emphasises the form and organisation of information processing and exchange" (van Dijk 30). Audio-video content and information transmitted by the public do not meet the professional criteria journalists consider, such as operating the camera, calibrating the zoom function, ensuring clear sound, and exposing the subject according to the light. Once taken, amateur material is checked and adapted to a professionally produced story. Gathering information is based on the principle of avoiding sensationalism. As the boundaries between "professionalism" and "amateur" activities blur, this can lead to business models that break or transcend existing power asymmetries (Hassler-Forest, Nicklas 88).

In order to avoid the trap of picking up false information, journalists check the profiles of the sources that published the information, contact the content producer and ask questions to verify the information, analyse the official pages of the institutions and check whether information on that topic has been submitted, contact different authorities that can confirm or deny the existence of the events captured in the amateur images. The verification also involves searching database archives, analysing metadata and cross-checking all the information gathered to establish the veracity of the information and audio-visual material.

Journalists take the footage and process it if it is confirmed that the information is accurate, captured at the location where the content producer claims it, and recorded when they claim it. Suppose they are shot in a different format from that suitable for television. In that case, the images are adapted for the news by processing the images graphically and enhancing the quality of the visual features. Suppose images are shot in a format unsuitable for television, vertically rather than horizontally. In that case, a mask is created from the montage using the blur effect and the black edges are removed. This alteration to the footage is a sign that the footage is being shot by someone unfamiliar with current technology. If frames are moved, a frame is stopped at specific points and a technical zoom is created to emphasise certain subjects in the footage. If the sound is affected by loud or ambient noises, journalists process it, normalise it and exclude disturbing elements to increase its quality. Applying technical modifications to amateur footage (taken from different sources) makes it suitable for television news broadcast on TV channels and the media institution's online platforms. The difference between amateur and professional footage is in the preparation and technique. Professional

journalists are the ones who make sure they have the proper audio-video technique, ensure the most appropriate station point during filming, analyse the recorded frames, check the shots used during filming, select images for which the white balance (colour temperature) has been set correctly and to a high standard. In contrast, amateur images do not follow any clear rules other than pressing the record and stop button. On the other hand, amateurs have been to places and events that the journalists themselves did not.

Trust in communication is "the generalized expectation that a message received is true and trustworthy and that the communicator demonstrates competence and honesty by conveying accurate, objective and complete information" (Renn, Levine 179).

Journalism contributes to the globalisation of everyday reality through media content made available to audiences. "A main consequence of these developments is the expansion and amplification of communicative options between journalism and the public, which leads to a diversification and dynamization of roles and the relationships between them" (Loosen, Schmidt 867-887). Journalists transmit products made with video cameras, microphones, and other professional devices to the public. In contrast, the public contributes to online platforms with amateur footage filmed generally with a phone, and these end up being picked up by professionals. Thanks to media convergence, audiences have become part of the production process of media products such as news, thanks to content creation, mobility, and the possibility to react online. The audience has become a social actor able to interact.

Convergence is changing how media industries operate, and ordinary people think about their relationship with media. We are at a critical moment of transition where the old rules are open to change, and companies may be forced to renegotiate their relationship with consumers (Jenkins 243). As consumer interest in amateur content grows, so does the number of online searches and views and the need for media convergence enforcement.

"Frames" refer to a centrally organised set of ideas that provide meaning "to a strip of unfolding events" (Gamson, Modigliani 143). They are "persistent patterns of knowledge, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion" of news through which news producers organise verbal or visual discourse in the news production process (Gitlin 7). The decision to accept amateur frames is made based on their veracity, and even if it decreases the quality of the video product in the news, it increases the quality of the information by associating the audio message with the video images. Amateur footage captures real moments, unprepared, spontaneous reactions, offers different perspectives uninfluenced by editorial politics and is shot from areas that journalists sometimes cannot access. The power of individual reviews will depend on the individual, the reader and their own level of

interaction and respect for other paratexts and the show itself (Kackman et al. 125). Due to media convergence, audiences become active and participate with opinions, reactions, and suggestions wherever they watch accessible material, especially on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter.

The flow of content, the distribution on several media platforms, the retrieval and processing of information from the virtual environment, and the coexistence of several systems make the relationship between them not fixed, and adapting to the new is an essential element in the production of new media products, adapted to the latest technologies.

"If information is power, then this new technology is the first to uniformly distribute information. With financial consolidation, media convergence, digitisation and the internet, we have entered the multi-device, multi-platform, multi-channel media world to whose multiplex creations multiple users contribute" (Staiger, Hake 10). The digitisation of the systems of making media products created by journalists produces continuous changes and involves adaptation on the part of both journalists and audiences. "A main consequence of these developments is the expansion and amplification of communicative options between journalism and the audience, leading to a diversification and dynamization of roles and relationships between them" (Loosen, Schmidt 867-887).

Methodology

This paper aims to identify the elements that have led to the reconfiguration and adoption of new tools in journalists' professional practices with the implementation of media convergence. I argue that "between communicator and receiver, the notion of blurred boundaries" has emerged (Loosen, Wiebke 68-84). In terms of the specific context of this analysis, we acknowledge that media are often used as propaganda tools, especially in crises, and production depends not only on information and labour but also on the economy. Although the funding sources are unknown to the public, the public space is accessible to them. The public can search for and access information, which they filter in various ways, depending on their personal decision and knowledge. The public sphere is "that space in society which is open, accessible, shared among many, collective and common" (Croteau, Hoynes 156).

The content analysis focused on nine news produced by Romanian Television. The criteria for selecting these news were first of all thematic, news about the war in Ukraine. Second of all, the news selected are characterised by proprietary convergence, appeared both in the classical TV news bulletin, as well as uploaded and made available online. Convergence of ownership occurs when the same trust promotes content "and distributes content across print, online, radio and television media platforms owned by the same owner" (Șuțu

56). From the nine items, five incorporate footage produced by amateurs and two by political leaders. During the analysis, I will consider three dimensions mentioned in the coding grid.

Coding scheme about frames

ACTORS		
GEOPOLITICAL ENTITIES	**INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LEADERS**	**CIVILIANS AND VICTIMS**
Ukraine Russia USA Donetsk Kramatorsk Zaporozhye Moscow Kharkov Donbas Nikolaev Germany Europe Kremlin Kiev Kahovka Severodonetsk Kramatorsk Vinnitsa Mariupol Odessa Sumi Bucha Borodianka	Volodimir Zelenski, President of Ukraine Colin Kahl - Secretary of State at the Pentagon Antony Blinken - Secretary of State, USA Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of State Vladimir Putin, President of Russia Zuzana Kaputova - President of Slovakia Irina Venedictova - Prosecutor General of Ukraine Liudmila Denisova - People's Advocate of Ukraine	Civilians in Donetsk Residents of Kramatorsk Residents of Kharkov Victims from Kiev

The content analysis covered about 20 minutes of audio-video material from nine news stories produced by TVR journalists about the war in Ukraine in the first year after the outbreak of the conflict.

Links - Date accessed (14.10.2023)	News title	Duration
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=331200108978432	Bombardament în Ucraina, tancuri ruse spre Kiev	1.53
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=912169183519814	Rușii au lovit o gară și un sat din Ucraina, 22 de morți	2.09
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=575516910944856	Russian missiles kill civilians in Ukraine	1.29
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=436819981919727	Russians launched dozens of missiles over Ukraine	2.31

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1297851084360733	Russia detained Zaporizhzhia power plant director for questioning	2.37
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=545002720209110	The bombing of a shopping centre in Kyiv	2.26
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1058829398365177	US sends advanced weapons systems	2.30
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=515032803663322	Ukraine's first war crimes trial	2.07
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=684354639449182	Mariupol mayor: 10 thousand civilians killed so far	2.53

Research results

From a communication perspective, 'frames' refer to a centrally organised set of ideas that provide meanings 'to an unfolding strip of events' (Gamson, Modigliani, 143).

The material entitled "Bombing in Ukraine, Russian tanks towards Kyiv" is 1 minute 53 seconds long. Amateur footage of the source Alexander Fursa, a user of online platforms, appears in the first 19 seconds. The footage was captured in Ukraine and reinforces the information in the body of the news about what is happening in the neighbouring country. At the same time, the news also includes footage of a fire, which does not follow professional filming rules. The rule of thirds is not respected, and the subject is not in a balanced position. The images are not stabilised and do not follow professional framing. These indications show that the footage was taken by an amateur and then processed by journalists and inserted into the news. Convergence is present in the news story by taking amateur material from the informal news stream.

TVR broadcasted the story on traditional channels and then published it on the website stiriletvr.ro and on the TVR News Facebook page, where the public could repeatedly access the material, indicating the presence of proprietary convergence. This news item has 18 thousand views, 196 platform-defined reactions (such as likes) and 23 comments.

The story, titled "Russians hit a train station and a village in Ukraine, 22 dead", is 2 minutes and 9 seconds long and starts with amateur-sourced photos of cars and train sets destroyed by the bombing. A video of Volodimir Zelensky, which was not professionally filmed, appears in the news item. The framing used by journalists for an interview is not followed. The picture is not balanced, and the subject is not centred. The framing is unstable, a sign that a mobile phone or laptop camera was used, and the footage has come into the possession of journalists. This indicates elements of media convergence. TVR broadcasted the news on traditional channels and then published it on the

website stiriletvr.ro and on the TVR News Facebook page, which indicates that convergence of ownership is being used. On the Facebook platform, the material registered 5,300 views. The public wrote 13 comments and left 153 reactions.

The video entitled "Russian missiles kill civilians in Ukraine" is one minute and 29 seconds long. The story begins with shaky, shaky, vertically shot footage, a sign that the recorder is an amateur. The footage was inserted at the start of the news item for 14 seconds and focused on what Vinnytsia, a Ukrainian town, looked like after the rocket attack. The news item features an interview with the president of Ukraine in a room where journalists attended no press conference. The head of state's statement was recorded without journalists present. At the same time, from minute 1.03 onwards, other images taken in Ukraine were inserted and filmed vertically, without following professional rules, but reinforcing the message of the news by associating audio or written information with video images. The material entitled "Russian missiles kill civilians in Ukraine" was broadcast on public TV channels and published on the website stiriletvr.ro and on the TVR News Facebook page, where 14 thousand views, 183 comments from the online public and 491 reactions were registered.

The news item with the headline "Russians launched dozens of missiles over Ukraine" is two minutes and 31 seconds long. It contains no amateur footage. The convergence of media ownership is reflected in the fact that the material produced by TVR journalists was published on the traditional media channels of Public Television and on the website stiriletvr.ro, as well as on the TVR News Facebook, where 17 thousand views, 84 comments and 287 reactions were registered.

The news item entitled "Russia detained the director of the Zaporizhzhia power plant for questioning" lasts two minutes and 37 seconds. From 00.37, the video contains amateur footage, filmed vertically, and the source mentioned is the head of the presidential chancellery. From 00.46, the President of Ukraine, Volodimir Zelenski, delivers a message, and the footage is taken by an amateur, who may be him. The framing does not meet journalistic standards, and the sound is not from a professional microphone. From minute 1.22, photos of wrecked cars have been inserted, and a source on the ground takes these indicated as the Ukrainian Security Service and not by journalists. Amateur source indicators are identified by low image quality, poor resolution, low sharpness, and non-conforming framing. At minute 2.04, there is footage of State Secretary Oleksiy Danilov, shot with a camera on a device such as a phone or laptop webcam. The news was published on the traditional media channels of Public Television, on the website stiriletvr.ro, and on Facebook TVR News, where 34 thousand views, 45 comments and 796 predefined reactions such as likes were registered.

The news item, "Bombing of a shopping centre in Kyiv", lasts two minutes and 26 seconds. At minute 1.14, Volodimir Zelenski delivers an audio-video message. The footage is professionally shot, the framing is respected, and the sound is captured on a professional microphone. The footage has been passed to the press, who have picked it up and passed it on to the general public. This footage produced by TVR journalists for traditional media channels was also published on stiriletvr.ro and the TVR News Facebook page. On Facebook, the news has 15 thousand views and 103 reactions, such as likes.

The news item with the headline "US sends advanced weapons systems" is two minutes and 30 seconds long. The video footage to illustrate the news is professionally shot, with respect for camera movements and framing. The news starts with still frames showing an artillery missile system. In a medium shot, the footage also shows a military man, in a medium shot, inside the command centre for the missile system, and this is a sign that a professional shoots the footage, as an amateur could not have gotten that close to a military system. At minute 1.04, Volodimir Zelenski transmits a new audio-video message which he filmed using a convergent mobile phone or laptop webcam device. The news was produced for TVR's traditional media channels and then published on the stiriletvr.ro website and on TVR's Facebook page Știrile TVR. Since it was uploaded to Facebook, it has registered 124 thousand views, 481 comments and 2,800 reactions.

The material, entitled "Ukraine's first war crimes trial", is two minutes and seven seconds long. The audio-video montage, produced by the TV editor, was illustrated with video footage recorded by journalists. The story was produced for TVR's traditional media channels and then published on the website stiriletvr.ro and on the TVR News Facebook page. On Facebook, it received 48,000 views, 177 comments and 855 reactions.

The video, entitled "Mariupol mayor: 10 thousand civilians killed so far", lasts two minutes and 53 seconds. Professional rules film the news illustration and synchro, a sign that professional video operators made them. The story was produced for TVR's traditional media channels and then published on the website stiriletvr.ro and on TVR's Facebook page Știrile TVR. On Facebook, it received 50,000 views, 93 comments and 664 reactions.

Amateur footage used in TVR news confirms the presence of convergence at the grassroots, and the need to use non-professional footage provides a quick and direct representation of events. Video images, through visual details, contribute to connecting with the audience mainly through the authentic impact they create. The content produced by TVR for news bulletins, thanks to the convergence of ownership, transits several channels of public television such as traditional TV, the institution's website or the digital platforms Facebook or Twitter. During the analysis, we also identified a corporate news flow created by professional journalists through news

gathering and processing and an amateur flow produced by non-professional content consumers.

Conclusions
In the context of the war in Ukraine, it is observed that the phenomenon of media convergence is applied in television news with the aim of bringing to the public images that field journalists did not have access to. In the approximately 20 minutes of news analysed, produced by TVR, we can observe the integration of traditional and digital content, the use of photo-video images taken by external sources mentioned in the material to reinforce the audio message by creating an association between the video and audio source. In five news items, we identified the existence of amateur images. We identified the presence of convergence in the wire by taking material from informal news streams or made with unprofessional means by various actors such as the President of Ukraine, Volodimir Zelenski, who recorded themselves with their mobile phone camera or laptop webcam without respecting journalistic rules of framing, lighting or composition. At the same time, we also identified the presence of ownership convergence, in that TVR distributes material made for television to the media platforms it manages. Making news for television and publishing it on the website and online Facebook platform confirms that the phenomenon of media convergence brings together old and new media, and the boundaries between amateur and professional content are becoming increasingly blurred.

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