Use and challenges of technological convergence in television media content creation, specifically for Sri Lanka

Dr. Nayana Suraweera

Senior Lecturer
Department of Mass Media,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Abstract: This research examines the use and challenges of technological convergence in television media content creation in Sri Lanka. The central question of this research is: What are the primary challenges and benefits associated with technological convergence in television media content creation in Sri Lanka? The primary objective of this research is to investigate the application of convergence technologies in Sri Lankan television production, particularly in the news and entertainment genres. Utilizing case studies at leading broadcasters, in-depth interviews with producers and technical staff, and self-observation within production environments, the research uncovers both the creative potential and challenges of convergence. Findings reveal the emerging application of multimedia storytelling—utilizing 3D effects, infographics, and live social media feeds, yet constrained. Findings indicate that while convergence technologies have significant creative potential, their implementation often falls short due to infrastructural limitations, a skills gap, and financial constraints. This paper concludes with recommendations for enhancing the convergence ecosystem within Sri Lankan television.

IndexTerms - Technological Convergence, Multimedia Storytelling, Sri Lankan Television, Production Challenges, Creative Potential.

I. INTRODUCTION

The computer and communication revolution that has occurred over the past few decades has spread across various domains of society, both locally, nationally, and internationally, and is having a profound impact on all aspects of humanity, physical and non-physical. The media, which is constantly influenced by it, has had to continually adapt its landscape in line with new technology, as it creates new genres, forms of media, and new forms of participation. The receiver, who has so far been dependent on information from traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio, can now obtain information from anywhere in the world at their fingertips as raw material. it has been able to challenge not only the forms of the media but also the definitions of media readers and the group of receivers who absorb information from the media.

The computer and communication revolution that has unfolded over the past few decades has profoundly transformed various aspects of society at local, national, and international levels. This technological advancement has significantly impacted both tangible and intangible phenomena of human life, reshaping how individuals interact, access information, and participate in societal processes (Castells, 2010). The media landscape, which is continually influenced by these technological changes, has had to adapt rapidly. New technologies have given rise to innovative genres, formats, and modes of participation, fundamentally altering traditional media paradigms (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006).

Previously, audiences were primarily dependent on traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television, and radio for information. However, with the advent of digital technology, the receiver can now access information from anywhere in the world instantly, often at their fingertips, utilizing the internet as a vast repository of raw material (Benkler, 2006). This shift has challenged not only the conventional formats of media but also the very definitions of media consumers—those who absorb and interpret information, thus transforming them into active participants in the media ecosystem (Jenkins, 2006). The democratization of information access has led to a more engaged and participatory audience, blurring the lines between media producers and consumers.

1.2 Identifying Media Convergence

The term "convergence" originates from the Latin word meaning "to come together," "to unite," or "to integrate" (Jenkins, 2006). In its broadest sense, convergence refers to the process of bringing different entities or technologies into a unified whole. In Sinhala, the word is similarly used to describe a process of merging or coming together. Scholars have offered varying perspectives on the concept of convergence. Some believe that media convergence is a critical relationship that was first articulated by the American Technology Office, which highlighted how different media forms and communication channels are increasingly interconnected through technological integration (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). However, there are differing opinions, with others emphasizing the social and cultural dimensions of convergence, beyond mere technological integration (Jenkins, 2006). The term "media

convergence" gained widespread recognition and popularity as it encapsulated the transformation of media industries and consumption patterns in the digital age, fundamentally altering how content is produced, distributed, and consumed worldwide (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

1.3 Media Convergence and Its Development

Media convergence involves the intersection and integration of three distinct industries: the electronic advertising industry, the newspaper industry, and the computer and information technology industry. This phenomenon has become increasingly prominent alongside the rapid development of communication technology. Convergence generally refers to the merging of previously separate communication media, including telecommunications, television, and personal computers (Jenkins, 2006). This integration creates new forms and capabilities that facilitate technological and industrial convergence, transforming how media content is produced, distributed, and consumed.

Media convergence is a phenomenon that builds interconnection between information and communication technology (ICT), computer networks, and media texts. Communication scholars believe that it is a combination of the three Cs: computers, communications, and content (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). This convergence has emerged primarily as a result of digitalization, which has revolutionized media practices, making digital platforms more accessible and versatile. The widespread adoption of the Internet has significantly accelerated the popularity and proliferation of media convergence, enabling seamless integration across various media forms and fostering new opportunities for interaction and content sharing (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

1.4 Media Convergence: An Evolutionary and Interdisciplinary Process

Media convergence is defined as the process by which non-homogeneous phenomena become structurally and functionally similar through an evolutionary process (Weerasinghe, 2011). In simple terms, it involves the convergence of multiple elements, such as tools, instruments, and platforms, used for the production and dissemination of news and media content. When considering the broader theoretical perspectives, it is logical to describe the flow or exchange of media content across multiple platforms as media convergence. This process facilitates the integration of various media forms, enabling content to be shared and accessed seamlessly across different channels.

Historically, the concept of convergence has been employed as a subject of study to describe and analyze diverse processes that differ from one another. Initially, the idea of convergence was explored within the natural sciences, where it described unrelated species evolving similar traits independently. Later, the concept was adopted by social and human sciences to analyze societal and technological transformations (Jenkins, 2006). As an analytical framework, convergence serves to examine changes in various components and provides a common platform for understanding the relationships among different fields. It is a technological practice that has profoundly influenced numerous sectors and has been particularly pivotal in shaping the functioning of social media, which emerged as a response to large-scale societal changes in history.

Media convergence is an ongoing process characterized by increasing interconnectedness across different formats and platforms. It is essential to understand that it should not be perceived merely as a restructuring capable of replacing traditional media. Instead, media convergence must foster synergy among various media formats and platforms that previously lacked integration or support. With the proliferation of wireless technology, control over content dissemination has shifted, allowing audiences to access information from multiple sources through unified, wireless channels. This evolution highlights the significance of convergence in shaping a more interconnected, interactive, and efficient media landscape.

1.5 The Impact of Media Convergence on the Integrated Media Landscape

The interaction of new media technologies compels us to adopt a model of communication known as convergence, which is defined as the mutual process of exchange and integration among two or more participants within a communication system (Karunanayake, 2004). This concept highlights how technological advancements have led to the dissolution of previously separate media identities, fostering greater integration across various platforms. Experts emphasize that future developments should focus on direct integration, as the increasing interdependence among all forms of media has given rise to a new form of journalism that is more interconnected and interactive (Athugala, 2011). The emergence of computers in the 1970s significantly intensified this process, leading to the development of all forms of media communication that are computer-enabled and operate in electronic and digital formats. This technological shift laid the groundwork for the rapid evolution of media forms, blurring traditional boundaries between different types of media.

Furthermore, media concentration has amplified the need for convergence, as the current characteristics and trends of convergence are seen as the culmination of previous convergence efforts. Technological advancements have facilitated the evolution of print and audiovisual media, transforming communication processes at such a rapid pace that they often defy traditional analytical frameworks. For example, with the development of computer technology and the Internet, newspapers, especially in the United States, began to struggle to maintain their competitive edge. During the 1980s, publications like USA Today experimented with visual journalism, incorporating colorful photographs and graphics alongside text to enhance visual appeal. This trend reflects a broader shift toward prioritizing visual forms of communication.

Television institutions have also undertaken efforts to undergo convergence, integrating with other media forms such as print and radio. By the late 1990s, the convergence process advanced further through the integration of newspapers with the Internet, exemplifying a new level of media consolidation. This progression aligns with the "30-year law" proposed by expert Sappho, which describes the gradual infiltration of new technologies into human culture over a period of three decades. Between 1978 and 2000, industries such as advertising, motion pictures, television, publishing, and computing increasingly integrated, although they maintained distinct relationships, fostering a complex web of technological and cultural interdependence.

Among the various mass communication media utilized by audiences, television stands out as the most immediate and life-like medium, owing to its capacity for real-time response to technological advancements. It is not an exaggeration to assert that television has been profoundly impacted by its process of media convergence, which refers to the merging of traditional media with digital and interactive technologies (Jenkins, 2006). Historically, human communication strategies have primarily relied on visual stimuli; however, the advent of television expanded this visual dimension by integrating movement, sound, and symbols into the

communication process. This development effectively opened new avenues for societal engagement, as television rapidly captured the collective imagination and broadened the audiovisual landscape of society.

The shift from purely audio-based communication to predominantly visual communication has transformed human perception and interaction. The influence of television imagery on everyday life demonstrates this transition vividly. Previously, communication relied heavily on auditory signals; now, visual signals, images, and symbols dominate, shaping perceptions and social interactions. This evolution reflects the progression from an information society to a media society, then to a television society, where visual signals and images are constructed around shared experiences and influence individual identities (Ellawala, 2012). Over time, individuals have evolved into "television persons," shaped and sometimes manipulated by televised content, which underscores the profound impact of visual media on identity formation.

In a competitive media environment, the creative use of content is crucial for capturing and retaining audience attention. Television's contribution to aesthetic education is increasing annually, fostering cultural awareness and societal development. According to Professor Tudor Weerasinghe (2007), television plays a vital role in bringing human cultural achievements closer to millions of viewers, thus supporting holistic spiritual and cultural development within society. Its influence is especially significant within households, where its audiovisual content stimulates and excites viewers' minds, often surpassing other forms of media in impact.

Communication scholar Wilbur Schram emphasized that a creative approach to television—considered both a composite media form and an art—must meet three essential criteria: (1) informing society about necessary changes, (2) providing opportunities for acquiring skills essential for societal transformation, and (3) enabling public participation in decision-making processes (Schram, 1966). Although scholars may interpret these principles differently, their core emphasis remains on the aesthetic and communicative power of media texts.

With the rapid development of communication technologies, social media has emerged as a new form of media, dramatically expanding the reach and engagement of audiences worldwide. Unlike traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, which historically relied on direct, one-way communication, social media facilitates interactive, participatory communication on a global scale. This shift has posed significant challenges for traditional media outlets, which must adapt to the changing landscape where audience engagement and user-generated content are paramount (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Historically, the role of the journalist was a professionally designated occupation, defined by media ethics and typically associated with fixed salaries and formal employment conditions. However, in the contemporary digital landscape, this distinction has become increasingly blurred. Today, ordinary citizens have the opportunity to assume the roles of amateur or citizen journalists, transforming the traditional media paradigm into a more democratized and participatory environment. This shift has been facilitated by globalization and the widespread accessibility of information from home, empowering citizens to engage more deeply with political, economic, and socio-cultural issues. Consequently, a critical juncture has emerged for the survival of local media within an interconnected environment where audiences can access global content instantly and in various formats.

To retain this mobile audience, it has become essential for the media to adopt new formats and methods. Consequently, to engage with the latest creative phenomenon that has emerged from the synergy between technological innovators and content providers, television has had to embrace a new approach to content creation characterized by technological convergence. In this context, newspapers, radio, and television have been merging in terms of both format and content, prompting the media to present various genres more creatively through innovative applications. Thus, convergence significantly impacts the creativity of the content offered by the media, which in turn affects audience retention. This trend can be observed not only in the Sri Lankan media landscape but also as a global phenomenon.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The rapid evolution of media technology has transformed television production worldwide, with convergence—integrating multiple media forms—becoming a vital strategy. In Sri Lanka, despite the potential for innovative storytelling and audience engagement, the application of convergence remains superficial and inconsistent. This research addresses the core problem: What are the uses, challenges, and implications of technological convergence in Sri Lankan television content creation? The study aims to explore how convergence is practically implemented, the barriers it faces, and its impact on content quality and professionalism.

3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

- To examine how convergence technologies are applied in Sri Lankan television production, particularly in news and entertainment genres.
- To identify the challenges faced by broadcasters in implementing convergence effectively.
- To assess the impact of convergence on content quality, professionalism, and audience engagement.
- To explore strategies for overcoming infrastructural, skill, and resource limitations.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing multiple data collection methods:

4.1 Self-Observation

Self-observation was conducted during the production processes of various television programs. This approach revealed that while some broadcasters utilize multimedia elements, many do so superficially, often as aesthetic enhancements rather than integral components of storytelling. In-depth interviews were conducted with scriptwriters, producers, and technical staff across several television networks. Key insights include:

Creative Potential: Many interviewees acknowledged the creative possibilities offered by convergence technologies but noted that their actual use often fell short due to limitations in skills and resources.

Superficial Use: A common theme emerged regarding the superficial application of multimedia elements, where broadcasters used basic text overlays and animations without enhancing narrative depth.

Document Analysis: Review of broadcast content, scripts, and production notes to analyze the depth and nature of multimedia integration.

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5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Convergence Applications and Challenges in Sri Lankan Television Productions

The rapid evolution of media technology and communication paradigms has profoundly transformed television production worldwide, and Sri Lanka is no exception. Convergence—defined broadly as the integration of multiple media forms and channels—has become a pivotal strategy for television broadcasters seeking to attract and retain increasingly sophisticated audiences. This discussion critically examines how convergence is applied within Sri Lankan television, especially in news production, and explores the inherent challenges and implications for professionalism, creativity, and societal perception.

5.1.1 The Creative Potential of Convergence in Television Genres

In the modern media landscape, the primary goal of integrating convergence technologies is to foster creativity and enhance audience engagement. For Sri Lankan television channels, incorporating multimedia elements—such as visual effects, animations, computer-generated imagery (CGI), and interactive content—has enabled a transformation from traditional linear broadcasting to dynamic, multi-sensory experiences. For example, the use of 3D effects and computer animation in recreating events, such as natural disasters or political rallies, serves to deepen viewer understanding and emotional engagement. These techniques, initially popular in sports and weather segments, have increasingly permeated news and feature programs, reflecting a broader trend toward multimedia storytelling. As Weerasinghe (2014) notes, convergence allows for the transmission of content across various media—verbal, written, visual, and audio—creating a cohesive and immersive viewer experience (Weerasinghe, 2014).

The creative application of multimedia features—ranging from photo montages to animated infographics—has also expanded the narrative scope of news. Broadcasters now utilize computer-generated effects to dramatize data or emphasize key points, thereby making complex information more accessible. This aligns with global trends where media producers are shifting from merely reporting facts to crafting compelling visual stories that resonate with the audience's desire for entertainment and immediacy.

Interviewees, including scriptwriters and technical producers, acknowledged that convergence technologies—such as computer-generated imagery (CGI), animations, and multimedia overlays—offer significant creative potential. Several participants highlighted that multimedia elements are increasingly integrated into storytelling to enhance visual appeal and emotional engagement. For example, a senior producer stated: "We now incorporate 3D effects and animated infographics to dramatize complex data, making news more engaging and understandable." However, during self-observation of production processes, it was evident that many broadcasters primarily use basic multimedia features, such as text overlays and simple animations, often as aesthetic add-ons rather than core storytelling tools. This superficial use suggests a gap between the technological potential and actual creative implementation, aligning with the literature's concern that convergence is sometimes reduced to aesthetic embellishment rather than meaningful storytelling.

5.1.2 The Evolution of News Formats and Convergent Practices

In Sri Lanka, the convergence of genres has led to a redefinition of news formats. Traditional news reading, characterized by a single anchor delivering information, has evolved into multi-layered presentations involving live feeds, social media integration, and multimedia overlays. For instance, a news broadcast might include live interviews, social media comments displayed as on-screen text, and real-time data visualizations—all synchronized through convergent technology. This shift reflects a societal expectation that news should be more than mere information; it should be engaging, interactive, and visually stimulating. The use of multimedia elements in news reading—such as written text, photographs, video clips, and sound effects—serves to recreate reality in a more vivid, immediate manner, fulfilling the modern viewer's appetite for instant and comprehensive information. However, the question arises: does the mere inclusion of multimedia elements constitute true convergence or creative application? In the Sri Lankan context, often only superficial or aesthetic enhancements are employed, such as displaying text on the screen or adding basic animations, which may not significantly enhance the content's depth or professionalism. This raises concerns about the authenticity and quality of convergence practices.

5.2 Challenges in Implementing Convergence in Sri Lanka

Implementing convergence in Sri Lankan television faces a range of significant challenges that impede its full realization. Infrastructure limitations remain a primary obstacle; many broadcasters operate with outdated equipment, such as analog transmission systems and basic editing tools, while high-speed internet remains inconsistent and unreliable in many regions, hindering real-time multimedia integration and live broadcasting across multiple platforms. The absence of advanced editing suites, sophisticated graphics software, and robust transmission infrastructure further constrains the quality and scope of convergent content, often resulting in basic or fragmented multimedia presentations. Additionally, there is a notable skills gap among media personnel, as compelling multimedia storytelling demands expertise in graphic design, video editing, animation, and digital content creation—skills that are often lacking due to limited training opportunities and resource constraints. Without targeted capacity-building initiatives, broadcasters often adopt superficial or rudimentary multimedia practices, which fail to harness the creative and engaging potential of convergence fully. Financial limitations also play a crucial role; many media organizations lack the necessary

funds to invest in cutting-edge technology, skilled personnel, and innovative content development, leading to reliance on minimalistic or borrowed convergence strategies that imitate international standards without meaningful adaptation to local cultural and audience needs. Overcoming these interconnected challenges requires a coordinated effort involving infrastructural upgrades, comprehensive training programs, and strategic resource allocation to foster a sustainable and contextually relevant convergence ecosystem in Sri Lankan television.

5.2.1 Professionalism and Content Quality:

A significant concern in the application of media convergence within Sri Lankan television is the tendency for broadcasters to prioritize superficial multimedia enhancements, such as flashy text overlays, basic animations, or pre-designed graphics, without integrating these tools into the core narrative or journalistic process. This practice has sparked an ongoing debate about whether such superficial use truly constitutes genuine convergence or simply aesthetic embellishment aimed at capturing the viewer's attention. Critics argue that when multimedia elements are employed merely as visual gimmicks, they risk diluting the integrity and professionalism of news content. Instead of enhancing storytelling or providing more profound insights, these superficial elements can serve as distractions, undermining the credibility of the broadcast and eroding public trust in journalistic standards. Furthermore, reliance on such gimmicks may reflect a lack of substantive content, where the focus shifts from delivering accurate, balanced information to creating visually appealing but shallow presentations. This trend raises questions about the long-term impact of convergence on journalistic professionalism, as it may foster a culture of sensationalism rather than promoting critical and analytical reporting. Ultimately, for convergence to positively influence media content, it must be strategically integrated into storytelling, emphasizing meaningful engagement and accurate information delivery, rather than serving as a mere visual ornamentation.

As global audiences become increasingly media-savvy, Sri Lankan broadcasters face the pressing challenge of elevating their content to meet heightened expectations for quality, originality, and technological innovation. Viewers today are more discerning, often seeking engaging, multimedia-rich narratives that leverage the latest digital tools to enhance storytelling and provide a more immersive experience. This shift requires broadcasters to adopt new strategies, invest in cutting-edge production techniques, and embrace innovative formats to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving media landscape. However, despite these pressures, a significant portion of the Sri Lankan population continues to rely heavily on traditional media consumption habits, such as television and radio, which are often characterized by linear programming and limited interactivity. This persistent reliance on conventional media complicates efforts to fully transition into convergent digital environments, where multimedia integration, interactive content, and on-demand services are becoming the norm worldwide. Consequently, broadcasters face the dual challenge of innovating to satisfy a more media-savvy audience while simultaneously addressing the needs of viewers who remain anchored to traditional media formats. Bridging this gap requires strategic investments in digital infrastructure, content diversification, and targeted outreach to ensure a seamless transition that caters to diverse audience preferences without alienating existing viewers.

5.2.2 The Global Context and Local Adaptation

On the international stage, media convergence has been propelled mainly by the rapid proliferation of digital platforms, social media networks, and mobile devices. These technological advancements have transformed how audiences consume news and entertainment, fostering interactive, multi-platform experiences that blur the boundaries between traditional and digital media. Major global broadcasters and media companies have invested heavily in integrating multimedia content, including videos, live streams, interactive graphics, and user-generated content, across multiple channels to engage audiences more dynamically and foster deeper connections.

In contrast, Sri Lankan media organizations are still in the early stages of adapting to these global shifts. While some channels have established dedicated websites, social media pages, and mobile applications, the integration of multimedia content across platforms remains inconsistent and often superficial. Many broadcasters tend to replicate international practices by embedding videos or displaying animated graphics without fully leveraging the strategic potential of convergence to serve local audiences effectively.

This raises a critical question: does simply copying international practices—such as embedding videos or using animated graphics—constitute genuine creative convergence? The answer largely depends on the strategic and contextual application of technology to meet the specific needs, preferences, and cultural sensibilities of Sri Lankan viewers. Merely transplanting global formats without adaptation risks producing content that feels disconnected from local realities and lacks authenticity. Conversely, integrating local storytelling traditions, cultural symbols, and linguistic nuances into multimedia presentations can significantly enhance the relevance and resonance of content. For example, incorporating indigenous narratives, folklore, or community perspectives into multimedia storytelling can foster a sense of identity and trust, making convergence a tool for cultural preservation and community engagement rather than just technological spectacle. Ultimately, effective adaptation requires a thoughtful balance—embracing technological innovation while remaining rooted in the local context. This approach ensures that convergence not only modernizes Sri Lankan media but also enhances its cultural relevance and social impact.

5.3 Future Directions and Recommendations

To fully realize the potential of convergence, Sri Lankan media organizations must undertake comprehensive strategic reforms, including investing in infrastructure and technology, such as upgrading equipment, enhancing internet connectivity, and adopting cloud-based solutions, to facilitate seamless multimedia production and distribution. Equally important is enhancing skills through continuous training in digital journalism, multimedia storytelling, and visual communication to ensure staff are equipped for innovative practices. Developing content strategies that are deeply rooted in local culture, issues, and audience preferences will ensure that convergence efforts are relevant and authentic, rather than mere imitations of international trends. Fostering a culture of innovation by encouraging experimentation with emerging formats, such as interactive news, virtual reality, and augmented reality, can position Sri Lankan television as a regional leader in convergence practices. Additionally, strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks with clear guidelines and support mechanisms will promote ethical, professional, and forward-thinking applications of convergence, ensuring sustainable growth and societal benefit.

6. CONCLUSION

The application of convergence in Sri Lankan television productions offers significant opportunities to enhance storytelling, expand audience engagement, and diversify content delivery across multiple platforms. Advanced technologies such as high-definition broadcasting, interactive graphics, virtual reality, and social media integration can enable broadcasters to create more immersive, dynamic, and culturally resonant content that appeals to both local viewers and the global diaspora. However, these opportunities are tempered by considerable challenges. Infrastructural limitations, including inadequate internet connectivity, outdated equipment, and limited access to advanced production tools, restrict the extent to which broadcasters can fully leverage multimedia integration. Additionally, a skills gap persists, with many media professionals lacking training in digital journalism, multimedia storytelling, and new technological platforms, which hampers innovation and quality. Resource constraints further compound these issues, as investments in technology and capacity building require substantial financial commitment. Moving forward, a strategic and context-aware approach is crucial—one that emphasizes capacity building through targeted training programs, prioritizes infrastructural upgrades, and ensures that content remains culturally relevant and authentic. By aligning technological advancement with local cultural narratives and audience preferences, Sri Lankan media can navigate the complexities of the digital era more effectively, positioning themselves as innovative players in regional and global media landscapes while preserving their unique cultural identity.

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