

FROM REMEDIATION TO CONVERGENCE:

looking at the portuguese media

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ABSTRACT - The digitalization in the journalism sector and the emergence of the Internet have transformed media convergence into a new field of research. In a first stage, researchers were centered on convergence processes in the newsroom, namely in questions related with entrepreneurial reorganization (KETTERER et al., 2004; QUINN, 2005) and journalists' professional routines (SALAVERRÍA, 2003; MASIP; MICÓ, 2009; VERWEIJ, 2009). However, it was soon understood that convergence influences a larger area: the migration of traditional media to the Internet and the rapid technological evolution showed that convergence was a transversal phenomenon that also happened in the contents field (CÁDIMA, 1999; QUINN; FILAK, 2005), news distribution (BRUNS, 2003; CABRERA, 2010) and information consumption (BOWMAN; WILLIS, 2003; JENKINS, 2006; SUNDET; ESPEN 2009). The present work is centered on the study of contents convergence, attempting to produce an accurate portrait of the Portuguese media situation.

Keywords: Convergence. Remediation. Journalism. New media.

DA REMEDIAÇÃO À CONVERGÊNCIA um olhar sobre os media portugueses

RESUMO - A digitalização no setor do jornalismo e a emergência da Internet transformaram a convergência mediática num novo campo de investigação. Numa primeira fase, os investigadores concentraram-se nos processos de convergência dentro das redações, nomeadamente nas questões relacionadas com a reorganização empresarial (KETTERER et al., 2004; QUINN, 2005) e com as rotinas profissionais dos jornalistas (SALAVERRÍA, 2003; MASIP; MICÓ, 2009; VERWEIJ, 2009). Mas cedo se percebeu que a convergência influenciava uma área mais vasta. A migração dos meios tradicionais para a Internet e a rápida evolução tecnológica mostraram que a convergência era um fenómeno transversal que ocorria também no campo dos conteúdos (CÁDIMA, 1999; QUINN; FILAK, 2005), na distribuição de notícias (BRUNS, 2003; CABRERA, 2010) e no consumo de informação (BOWMAN; WILLIS, 2003; JENKINS, 2006; SUNDET; YTREBERG, 2009). Porque acreditamos que a convergência de conteúdos implica necessariamente uma convergência nos processos a montante, neste trabalho debruçamo-nos exclusivamente sobre o resultado do processo noticioso: os conteúdos jornalísticos. Com base na realidade portuguesa procuramos diferenciar os conceitos de convergência e remediação (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999), identificando marcas características dos dois processos.

Palavras-chave: Convergência. Remediação. Jornalismo. Novas mídias.

“Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins, 2006, p.2)

CONVERGENCE VS. REMEDIATION

Despite all the multiple studies on the convergence phenomenon, there is no consensual definition for it among researchers (SALAVERRÍA; AVILÉS; MASIP, 2010). Among the several definitions that try to define this phenomenon in a wider sense, Jenkins (2006, p. 2) characterizes convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment they want”.

A concern with contents and organizations is noted here, but also with the role of audiences, a variable often ignored by researchers. Following the same line, Machado and Teixeira (2010, p. 13) resort to various authors to define convergence as “a complex and polyphonic concept used to define the integrated and continuous production of information by one or many different teams for multiple platforms and with specific formats and languages for each one, in an organization formed by media formerly acting as autonomous processes of production”. In this case also the attempt to integrate the various facets of convergence is noted, searching for a definition capable of embracing all the fields of convergence. This is, by the way, a tendency in the area, with many researchers trying to define convergence as a multifactor process. Dupagne & Garrison (2006) also argue that convergence must be analyzed in the technical, economic and legislative fields. Jenkins (2006) maintains similarly that convergence must be analyzed in three major fields: distribution of information to multiplatforms, cooperation between media companies and the migration and behavior of audiences. Lastly, Salaverría (2010) proposes that the analysis be made in four fields: contents, technological, entrepreneurial and professional convergence.

Of the three proposals mentioned, the one made by Salaverría is the one that most interests us because it clearly emphasizes our own subject of study: contents. In our opinion, this is the fundamental element in the identification of a convergence process because the existence of contents with specific languages adapted to the media in which they are distributed implies necessarily that in the fields before it the remaining convergences have been verified. As stated by Machado and Teixeira (2010), convergence implies necessarily an integrated production of

contents for different platforms, using for this specific languages. In the same line of thought, Boczkowski (2006) states that converge can be the supplying of a multimedia content that merges the characteristics of contents which were previously distributed through different media, going back to McLuhan (1964) when stating that the contents of any media are always another media. These authors therefore agree in a fundamental point: we can only speak of convergence when the final product is content with unique characteristics.

This clarification permits a distancing from other authors that associate the concept of convergence with simple multiplatform distribution (QUINN, 2005; JENKINS 2006), without referring explicitly to the necessary adaptation of contents to the characteristics of the reception devices. And this is where the major difference between convergence and remediation processes is found.

Remediation is understood as the process of renewal of old contents performed by new media. This means the new communication media refashion the contents of the previous media, thus remaining a connection between old and new media (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999). This process can occur at different levels: in the case of digital media, the level can vary between a discreet improvement of the previous media, maintaining some of its characteristics, to more profound remediations, in which the new digital media tries to absorb completely the older one. Bolter and Grusin (1999) emphasize that the old media is always present because, in a more or less visible way, the new media always depends on the former, creating even a semantic relationship between the two: “all current media function as remediators and that remediation offers us a means of interpreting the works of earlier media as well” (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999, p. 55).

In the field of contents, the authors consider that “convergence” and “remediation” are similar, stating that “convergence is remediation under another name” (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999, p. 224). We disagree with this argument: it is true that in both cases we are speaking of contents that result from others used by previous media; however, there is a very important difference between the two concepts: while convergence implies necessarily a new language that integrates previous contents, remediation can be an accumulation of contents from different origins distributed in the same platform. In this sense, convergence is always remediation, but not all remediations can be considered convergences, because the latter implies integration and not mere accumulation of contents.

1 Traditional media: remediation as a step in digital convergence

Mass media history shows that each new media goes through a vague period until it settles down with its own characteristics. This means that new media start by mixing the contents of their predecessors (remediation) until they settle on their own language (convergence)

We can use radio as an example: the sound, a natural element of this media, can be transmitted in the form of voice, music or noise: The voice (oral verbal communication) is here a remediation of the text (written verbal communication) characteristic of the press. In the first years of radio, the voice placement of entertainers and journalists showed that the professionals were reading texts in a manner close to that of reading a newspaper. Later, radio tried to draw closer to the oral culture and looked for a manner “between the reading of texts and oral improvisation” (GONZÁLEZ, 1996, p. 49). As Meneses (2003, p. 101) states, “there are two different almost contradictory manners in radio: the read and the spoken. The second is desirable; the first is the reality”.

This period of adaptation of the written text to an oral media exemplifies the remediation process characteristic of the media. In the case of radio, convergence only materialized when the voice was joined by music, noise and silence, creating what Balsebre (*apud* SOENGAS, 2003) calls “auditory images” i.e., the power that sound has to generate mental images, transmit feelings and create atmosphere when combined with voice in a tone adapted to the medium. It was not simply a matter of connecting different types of sounds but of finding a set of rules that are the basis of radio-phonetic news.

In the case of television, its distinctive trademark is image with sound. When fixed, image is a remediation of photography although in this case adapted to a television format (4/3 or 16/9). The audio that accompanies the images is remediation of the radio sound, but with some differences. “In TV, the sound narration must be supported by the images and be coherent with them so as not to produce a lack of *raccord*, but, at the same time, it must add data not visible and facilitate details that viewers are not able to discover by mere contemplation” (SOENGAS, 2003, 10).

In this case it is possible to identify an initial state of convergence with the introduction of the *raccord*, i.e., the obligatory existence of a logical sequence between the image and the text. We are seeing a case in which the new media links contents previously distributed by other media, but it does so through integration, thus creating a differentiated product.

Beyond going through this remediation process that evolved until the current convergence, it is equally possible to identify examples

of inverse remediation in some of these media, i.e., processes where the previous media tries to incorporate characteristics of the emerging media. Shows with public participation by phone, a characteristic of radio, are an example of inverse remediation in TV: these programs where listeners call in to express their point of view about a specific topic are a common presence today in the programming of thematic news channels. In these cases, image is absolutely unnecessary; the interventions take place by telephone and the announcers do little more than manage the time attributed to previously selected viewers. Another interesting example of inverse remediation occurs in newspapers: the spaces for questions and answers used to explain certain concepts are an adaptation of the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), a characteristic of the Web.

The rise of the Internet made the phenomena of remediation – direct or inverse – more visible and nowadays almost all traditional communication media have created online versions or adapted some of the characteristics of the Web. In the case of Portugal, newspapers, radio stations and television channels continue to evolve in a process of remediation, with few examples of contents convergence.

1.1 Press

Newspapers were the first media to create web versions: in only five years, the majority of journalistic publications launched online versions (ALVES, 2001) trying to follow the growing interest of users in this new media. The fact that the first wave of media to reach the web was mostly composed of newspapers made text and photos the dominant contents in the first generation of web journalism. In the Portuguese case, the first publications to arrive were *Jornal de Notícias* and *Público*, both in 1995. The first exclusively online newspaper, *Setúbal na Rede*, started only three years later, in 1998. This leadership assumed by newspapers was due to the fact that electronic editorial programs used in the newsrooms permitted the exporting of contents in HTML, which facilitated the migration of newspapers to the Web without requiring large investments in human or material resources. At this stage, the publications limited themselves to transferring paper contents to the Web (shovelware) trying to increase the value of the offline trademark (KRUEGER; VAN DER BEEK; SWATMAN, 2004), their only revenue source. Since then, traditional media with online versions started on a path to remediation on the way to the desirable convergence that in a near future will make it more difficult to identify the original media.

Having been the first to reach the Internet, the written press

has also the longest evolutionary trajectory. After the shovelware stage, newspapers tried to integrate some of the web characteristics into their online versions. Hypertextuality, multimediality, interactivity, immediacy, personalization, memory and ubiquity (BARDOEL; DEUZE, 2001; DÍAZ NOCI, 2001; HALL, 2001; MACHADO; PALACIOS, 2003) have been progressively integrated into the new online versions, however at a slower than desirable pace.

If the online editions of the written press are far from offering convergent contents, in their traditional versions they offer some interesting experiences of reverse remediation; a good example of this process is the utilization of images in movement. In October 2008, *Esquire* marked its 75th birthday publishing a special edition with the first cover page in the world to use e-ink¹ (electronic ink). This was the first mass distribution of a publication with images in movement. More recently, the press started to use augmented reality, another possibility for the “integration” of video in printed editions. Pointing a computer web cam at printed codes in a magazine, the reader can watch a set of videos on the screen of a computer or on a mobile phone.

1.1.1 The Press in Portugal

In the case of Portugal, online newspapers achieved some content autonomy, but convergence is still far from being confirmed. Multimediality is still done through accumulation and not by integration: the videos presented - mainly news and interviews - are autonomous elements that repeat the textual information. Thus, they are a mere remediation of television, as the language used is identical. Hypertextuality, in turn, is just the offering of links to related news existing in files (memory) with rare cases in which these links are inserted in the text: usually they are found in a lateral menu or at the end of the news.

The readers' participation, the most used form of interactivity, is equally discreet: questionnaires and the chance to comment on the news are the alternatives offered, but those comments are never used to enrich the news, even if they add pertinent information.

Among the new formats, another way to identify a convergence process, only photography galleries and linear infographics have any use, but they are low complexity news formats and very similar to others already used by television and the press, respectively. Among the Portuguese publications, the dailies *Público*² and *Jornal de Notícias*³, along with the weekly *Expresso*⁴, are the newspapers that better exploited the potentialities of the Internet, but the differentiation of

contents in relation to the written versions is relatively small. In the field of native digital newspapers the panorama is even more dismal: the titles are few and the lack of human resources leaves little space even for the newspapers' own agenda.

There are some experiences in Portuguese newspapers and magazines in the field of inverse remediation. The adaptation of the FAQs, mentioned earlier, is used by *Público* (P&R: *Perguntas e Respostas* – Questions and Answers) which in this column clarifies questions relating to the news. Also the newspaper *L*⁵ uses in its printed version a kind of substitute version of hypertext, underlining certain words and linking them by means of a line to more information or to URLs.

One of the cases in which convergence occurs is in the magazine *Sábado*, which has been using Augmented Reality since July 2010. The magazine prints on its pages graphic codes that access a site created for that effect⁶ which allows the reader to see on his/her computer or smartphone a set of videos which complement the text. This use of Augmented Reality is a good example of convergence because the contents presented are an integral part of the news, complementing the written information.

1.2 Radio

In the case of traditional radio, the most evident change happened at the interactivity level: the characteristic telephone contact with the listeners is now supplemented with opinions that reach the studio through the social networks. Some contents inspired in web 2.0 applications have also appeared, opening up more space for the listeners' voices.

In the Web versions, radio had a beginning similar to that of newspapers, using mostly text and photos in the early years. In this case, there is no relation with the contents of the original media, but rather a use of contents adapted to the dial-up connections characteristic of the earlier times. Because of this, web radio versions were always very different from the traditional versions: "On the Internet, radio strays from its original concept and in the website it can present different services from radio broadcasting, establishing a new structure, richer and more varied that competes directly with the traditional format of radio (CORDEIRO, 2004, p. 2). This view of a "competing radio" affords a glimpse of a more advanced remediation process, to the point that it is possible to really speak of convergence.

1.2.1 Radio in Portugal

In traditional radio broadcasting, the major change was

the entrance of the social networks in all the morning and afternoon entertainment programs. This improved the space for intervention by the listeners, who now have interaction tools that are more efficient than traditional phone calls. Also there appeared some programs influenced by the Web: (*O meu blogue dava um programa de rádio*⁷ – my blog turned into a radio program - *Rádio Comercial*), in which the program producer tried to give voice to the blogs' spirit, reading some posts from the authors of these spaces. This is an example of reverse remediation.

In their Web versions, Portuguese radios started by the above-mentioned movement closer to the press models: yet in 1996 TSF⁸ was already offering sound on its page. Three years later, the site of this radio station presented hypertextual news and podcasts, two formats characteristic of the new media. Although podcasts have spread among Portuguese radios, hypertextuality did not evolve, there being above all a bet on multimediality. At present the majority of radio stations, including local ones, offer contents similar to those of television channels, namely news and interviews in video. The best example of this reality⁹ is *Rádio Renascença* which has a large offer of videos, including news, reporting and even complete news services ("V+"). This model of multimediality by accumulation continues to be a remediation of television contents, since no mark of adaptation to the media is visible, as happens in television.

However, Portuguese radio on the Web also presents convergence marks. In the case of TSF the use of sound as a complement to the text, substituting citations to audio files, is noted. Unfortunately, this format is not much used: the most usual one is the offer of news integrated in text and in sound, with the second case being the version transmitted in the hertz broadcasting.

In *Rádio Renascença* the convergence is visible in the existence of some genres originating on the Web, such as multimedia infographics¹⁰. The example of this radio station must be emphasized because it offers multimedia of high quality and variety although it belongs to a communication group that owns no newspapers or television channels.

1.3 Television

In traditional TV, the Internet traces are very similar to those noted in radio. In the field of interactivity with viewers, the use of e-mail and social networks is a current practice in many entertainment programs and even information programs. With digital TV, new doors were opened in the interaction field, with viewers able to personalize their own programming grids and in some direct TV transmissions they can choose

the best views, selecting the camera best positioned in the field.

Concerning online TV versions, in the early years the TV sites appeared more to be electronic brochures of the station, showing the programming and some information about contents. In the beginning of the new century, TV stations started to include news, but, as in all other online media, in textual format due to technical questions relating to bandwidth. If the downloading of sound was slow in narrow band connections, with video the situation was even worse. The generalization of broadband and the new video compressing formats made the process more rapid, allowing television stations to broadcast in streaming and make programs available in vodcast. Among the traditional communication media, television is the one that least changed its nature in the web versions, having in this media a kind of non-linear channel in which the user can make his own programming according to his interests.

1.3.1 Television in Portugal

Inverse remediation in Portuguese television is visible mostly in the growing use of the social networks: in some information programs there is a journalist in the studio to introduce the comments and questions of viewers in the debate (*Pontapé de Saída* - Kickoff – on RTPN) and in other cases it is the presenter that does it (*5 para a meia-noite* – 5 minutes to midnight – on RTP1). The episode that better illustrates this situation of interaction between journalist and viewers with resource to Web 2.0 is without question the delivery of a hamburger to Alberta Marques Fernandes, a journalist from RTP. While she was preparing the evening news and in the scope of a discussion about fast-food that was underway on Twitter, the journalist wrote on her mural that she felt like having a hamburger. One of the cybernauts decided to answer her request, and from that moment started his mission, photographing and publishing every step until reaching RTP to deliver the hamburger. Meanwhile the community maintained contact with the journalist who was about to start presentation of the evening newscast. The goal was achieved and all ended with a direct signal to confirm receipt of the request¹¹. Although it is a picturesque episode and without any influence on the contents, this case shows clearly until what point integration of the social networks with traditional television broadcasting can influence the latter.

Also in the field of traditional broadcasting, the growing use of photos and videos sent by TV viewers stands out. This situation already happened before digitalization (*Isto só Visto* – Just seeing It - RTP), but with the popularization of digital cameras and smartphones

it became habitual also in the news, mainly in cases of accidents and natural phenomena. The news services of some stations have included signatures made up exclusively of photos sent by viewers (*Verão – Summer - SIC*).

Regarding online versions of Portuguese television stations, only after 2002 multimediality became a regular offer on televised sites, but there was no concern with adapting videos to this media, a situation that lasts until the present day. The news exhibited on traditional TV is compressed and reduced to a smaller format without any concern with relation to the type of view to be used on a reduced format. It is a mere remediation to which one of the characteristics of journalism on the Web – memory – is added, since the news appears always associated with other images related to the same topic.

Interactivity and personalization are also present in the web versions of TV, in the former case with the possibility of comment/sharing and in the latter with applications (*O Meu Telejornal*¹² – My Newscast - RTP) that allow the user to construct a newscast according to his/her preference.

One last remark to mention that the TVI¹³ site makes sporadic use of hypertextuality with links to news on other specialized sites belonging to the same media group.

2 Aim: convergence

Through history, the new media started by remediating their predecessors until acquiring their own language. Simultaneously, an inverse remediation process was visible in which the predecessor media tried to always aggregate some characteristics of the new media, trying in this way to resist the natural loss of audiences when a new media enters the media ecosystem.

With the emergence of the Internet, and the possibility that all the media could migrate to this new space, the idea of convergence of contents was created, thus creating the conditions for the emergence of a new language. In reality, what has been seen in Portugal is what Salaverría (2010, p. 39) calls “confluence of contents”, i.e., the media groups that have newspapers, radio and/or TV stations transported to the digital versions the contents of all their other medias creating a sensation of multimediality that is no more than a triple offer of the same information.

Using the classifications defined by Salaverría (2010), “convergence of contents” (multimediality) is far behind with relation to the maturity already reached by technological (multiplatform), entrepreneurial (concentration) and professional (polyvalence)

convergence. The present multimediality by accumulation in Portuguese media is a mere remediation and cannot be seen as a phenomenon of convergence of contents. We believe that this only occurs when a specific language of its own with unique characteristics and differentiated from the remaining media is utilized.

In the area of journalistic contents, and concerning the field of news, convergence implies the implementation of a set of alterations at the level of the architecture of the news, as well as the existence of rules for the adaptation of the various types of contents to different situations. Canavilhas (2007) suggests an architecture (Tumbled Pyramid) and a multimedia grammar that tries to show how, when and where links, videos, sound, photos and infographics should be used. This proposal aims to be a starting point for the establishment of a set of rules that will allow journalism to advance from the remediation phase to the convergence of contents phase, exploiting conveniently the potentialities of the Web.

Hypertextuality, understood as a possibility for linking information blocks with links, has been used in menus and connections to related news which limits its potential. While narrative units, links have a semantic function connected with the amplification of information and a second function as a support for surfing, pointing out reading clues. As has been seen, no Portuguese communication media uses this characteristic regularly, functioning only to link the news to related matters or to previous news (memory).

Multimediality, defined as the capability of a news item to include contents of various types (SALAVERRÍA, 2005), has a strong presence in online newspapers, especially in the video field. In the majority of the Portuguese media it is a case of multimediality by accumulation, i.e., the publications present the same news in video and text formats, instead of the existence of a complementary relation between both contents. This option prevents the creation of an added value that would justify payment for the access to those contents.

In the case of interactivity, the experience does not go beyond the instructional level, in which the user chooses courses of reading by clicking on links. The remaining levels identified by Cairo (2008) - manipulation (the possibility of changing the characteristics of the subjects participating in inquiries that make up part of the news item itself) and exploration (integration in virtual environments or simulation) - have a residual use.

Lastly, personalization, a characteristic used a lot nowadays due to the emergence of mobile devices as platforms to access the news, has also

been little explored, boiling down to the possibility of syndicating contents.

Beyond the use of these Web potentialities in the news, convergence also implies the emergence of new journalistic genres particular to the Web. Multimedia infography, serious games and interactive reporting are examples of contents native to the web that result from the convergence of some of the characteristics previously enumerated; however, only multimedia infography has had reasonable utilization in Portugal and even so, only with average quality.

Technological, entrepreneurial and professional convergence “favors these dynamics of rising hybridization of contents and formats” (SALAVERRÍA 2010, p. 39), but right now there are few Portuguese examples of convergence in the field of contents. Thus there is a long way to go from the current stage of remediation until the true convergence of contents characterized by hypermultimediality through integration, with various levels of interactivity and the possibility of personalization of the news.

NOTES

- 1 Available at: <<http://www.esquire.com/the-side/video/e-ink-cover-video>>.
- 2 Available at: <www.publico.pt>.
- 3 Available at: <www.jn.pt>.
- 4 Available at: <<http://aeiou.expresso.pt/>>.
- 5 Available at: <www.ionline.pt>.
- 6 Available at: <<http://ra.sabado.pt>>.
- 7 Available at: <http://radiocomercial.clix.pt/programas/o_meu_blog.html>.
- 8 Available at: <www.tsf.pt>.
- 9 Reference is not made to RDP because the site’s organization makes it difficult to distinguish between what is the production of RTP television and what is the production of the radio station.
- 10 Available at: <http://rr.sapo.pt/Multimedia_Infografia.aspx?fid=106>.
- 11 Available at: <<http://caoepulgas.blogspot.com/2009/02/joelysandra-o-twitterheroi.html>>.

- 12 Available at: <<http://www0.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=205901&tm=8&layout=122&visual=61>>.
- 13 Available at: <<http://www.tvi24.iol.pt/>>.

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