UNIT 10: MEDIA CONVERGENCE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 Learning objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain what is convergence
- Discuss the relevance of convergence in the present circumstances
- Explain the impact of convergence on conventional forms of media

10.2 Introduction

In the previous units you have learned about different kinds of media and how each one is significant in its own way. Now in the present times all technologies and all media are evolving. A new digital communications technology has emerged. An electronic superhighway is surfacing. Voice, video and data are converging, giving rise to whole new range of digital, multimedia and interactive communication technologies.

This is the age of convergence and in this unit we will deal with convergence. We will discus about what is convergence, its relevance in today's communication society and its impact on the old forms of media.

So let us begin the unit with an introduction to convergence.

10.3 Convergence – an introduction

Today we are living in a world where perhaps there is nothing that has been left untouched by the advancements in technology. Media and communication is one such area where tremendous changes have come so as to adapt to the enduring demands of technology. One of the major fallouts of such adaptation is what we term as 'convergence'.

All modes of communication and information are continually reforming and in the process changing the way we create, consume, learn and interact with each other. Simply speaking, convergence can be explained as the tendency of different technological systems to evolve towards performing similar tasks. Convergence of media occurs when multiple products come together to form one product with the advantages of all of them. In convergence, previously separate technologies such as voice and telephony features, data and productivity applications and video move towards sharing resources and interact with each other in such a way that they acquire new efficiencies.

For instance, earlier you could watch Television programmes only on a TV set, listen to radio only on a radio set, use the computer only to work on data and use the mobile phone only to make calls or send messages. Now with growing convergence all of this has changed. You can watch TV and listen to radio on a computer – internet radio and internet television has made this possible. You can access the internet on the TV set and on your mobile phone. On the same mobile phone you can have a digital camera, camcorder, voice recorder, mp3 player, voice recorder, access to news updates and lot more.

The evolution and unprecedented popularisation of the Internet in the recent years clubbed with the activities, products and services that have emerged in the digital media space of late have resulted in the interlinking of computing and other information technologies, media content and communication networks.

But convergence is more than simply the merging of technologies. Media convergence is a concept in which old and new media intersect. It is the interface where grassroots and corporate media interlock in such a way that the traditional roles played by media producers and media consumers dramatically change leading to situations which were earlier unpredictable in many ways.

Convergence of media had led to shifts within the industrial, cultural, and social paradigms. It encourages the new age consumer to seek out information. Convergence had enabled the media consumers to interact with each other on a social level and at the same time use various media platforms to create new experiences, new forms of media and content that connect them socially, and not just to other consumers, but most significantly to the corporate producers of media in much more easy and accessible ways.

The roots of network convergence can be traced back to the beginning of digital communications. It was digitalization which made it possible to reduce information into discrete, identifiable and thus, more easily transferable pieces of information. Transfer of information thus became faster and more efficient as more signals could move through a single communication path. Earlier there were separate communication networks for different types of communication. They were designed differently, and were therefore most often incompatible. However, the attributes of digital communication was used in the case of network convergence to efficiently and effectively distribute different types of information - voice, video and data on the same communication network. Till a few years back, all this was unimaginable, but now the technology makes it possible. Customers now have more options to choose from.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – A

1. What do you mean by convergence?

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2. Give some instances of convergence of media?

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3. The roots of network convergence can be traced back to the beginning of _____.
4. Convergence enables the distribution of different types of information - voice, _____ and data on the same communication network.

10.4 Relevance of convergence in the present circumstances

Convergence is the key today. Convergence can be viewed in a number of ways. One is in terms of the converging of different types of information like voice, video, and data over a common infrastructure or within a common computing platform. The other one is the converging of the industries itself, such as communication, entertainment, and computing.

But all said and done, the impact of convergence has been extremely encompassing. In fact all facets of institutional activity and social life including business, government, art, journalism, health and education are increasingly being carried out in the digital media spaces across a growing network of ICT devices. An increasingly wider range of technologies have been converted and are still being converged into single multipurpose devices.

For the consumer as well as the media owners, convergence has come as a boon. For the consumer convergence translates as more features in less space. For the media owners on the other hands it serves as a means for remaining competitive in the struggle for market dominance. Therefore, in the past ten years or so, there has been a growing trend of companies converging technologies to create demand for new products.

Telephone companies for instance are integrating 3G on their phones. Television has already converged the technologies of movies and radio, and is now moving ahead with convergence with the mobile phone industry. Personal computers are being used even to make phone calls. The PC is being transformed through faster processors that support advanced graphics and multimedia capabilities. The PC today is no longer just a computer – it is a collaborative communication and media tool. Mobile phones can not only be used for making phone calls and text messages but are being designed to hold images, videos, music, television, camera and all kinds of multimedia. Even more advanced

features like video recording, gps receivers, data storage and security mechanisms are being integrated into the traditional cellphone.

In the education field, a professor's lecture can be delivered live to remote campuses or stored in the form of video-on-demand files on a web site; Employers can use the converged networks to deliver presentations and training to employees from remote locations directly at their desktop eliminating many extra costs like travelling.

Apart from all of these advantages, there is yet another factor which is driving convergence – it is the cost factor. Convergence eliminates the cost of maintaining three separate networks for voice, video, and data. By using converged networks, corporations can make substantial saving in terms of equipment, staff, and services. And this factor coupled with its other advantages is a major force that acts in favour of convergence.

However, it is important to understand that in actuality media convergence is more than just a shift in technology. In reality it is something that has altered the very relationships between industries, technologies, audiences, genres and markets. Convergence has changed the dynamics of media operations and also the way in which media consumers access and process media content.

With the increase in the number of media channels and new telecommunications and computing technologies becoming more and more portable, we are literally living in a world surrounded by media. And this world exists within a culture of convergence.

Convergence as viewed today is indeed a debate about the impact of technology and how it has paved the way for a mature Information Society. With the many new opportunities and possibilities that convergence has opened up, citizens have been able to enrich their lives, not just in the economic dimension, but in the social and cultural dimensions as well. Convergence has expanded the overall information market beyond imagination, and will do so even further. If it is properly implemented, convergence will make immediately accessible the vast knowledge base that is now being computerized. It will also make direct voice and video communication accessible everywhere. Data sharing, if

supported with adequate security and safeguards, will allow information and commerce to flow freely. In the real sense of the term, we will be able to create a true global village, where there will be instantaneous multimedia communication that will result in sizeable increases in productivity, ensure a better quality of life, provide enhancements in education and recreation, and also promote cross-cultural understanding. For instance, the low cost of the World Wide Web has enabled even small business to market globally.

If India is successful in harnessing the benefits of convergence by creating an environment that is supportive, it will prove to be a powerful motor for job creation and growth, plus increased consumer choice and cultural diversity. In India convergence in India has been a process which was faster than expected. The convergence has brought in web casting, video on demand, internet via cable. The delivery of Internet through cable network is available across the country today.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – B

1. What are the ways in which convergence occurs?

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2. How is convergence a boon both for consumers and media owners?

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3. What are the advantages of convergence in the field of education and in administration?

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4. Do you think convergence is cost effective? How?

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10.5 Impact of convergence on conventional forms of media

Technology is ever changing and its effect on the media scenario has been revolutionary. With new and better devices emerging every second, it was thought by many people right in the 1990s that a digital revolution would change the entire media scenario and old media would be pushed to one side by new media. Media convergence which has come about as a result of digitalization has no doubt introduced new possibilities in terms of media access as well as production. Well established media companies are attempting to visualize the future of the entertainment industry in terms of convergence.

But many questions are being raised regarding the future of the conventional media. Will there be a time when there will no more a TV set or a radio set or a personal computer? Will we instead have a single device which will merge everything together? Are we heading towards a future where current television shows will merge into a hybrid with World Wide Web style content? For instance will television shows also include other types of media like text merged into them. And will web pages begin to be more of visual content that tell a story. Could it also become possible that both the television and the computer will be equipped to use a similar browser which will make it possible to view the same content on both devices. Will there be a time when television content will exactly be the same? And will it eliminate the need of the less efficient technology. Is convergence actually sounding the death knell of age-old-technologies. These are questions which are being raised and debated upon.

Convergence advocates debate that convergence is not the end of old media. In fact, it provides a platform where many technologies can co-exist and they will not replace each other. The new age customer has been pampered by growing technological advancements and their demands are so immense and varied that it has become impossible for one technology to be able to meet all the requirements of the market-place. Therefore, each technology will be able to define its own space and redefine the way the consumers access the media.

It is being suggested that new and old media would interact in ever more complex and innovative ways. As a result many industry leaders are looking towards media convergence as a way of consolidating their position in the ever growing market. In that respect, media convergence is not about replacing the old but about redefining it. It is not possible for the multimedia services to replace the judgment value that is provided by the traditional media. Therefore, even in a multimedia environment, the traditional media will continue to have a significant role to play.

There can be no doubt that multimedia carries with itself the potential to immensely increase the range of services available and offer more choices to the users. However, it is also true that for success new technology alone will not suffice. Technology might be potent, but technology itself is in the hands of people. As such the future of multimedia will be decided by the people who use it. Everything will depend on the wants and needs of the user, how they react to the numerous new options available to them and most importantly, whether they are willing to pay for it.

Not only that, convergence is not something which is ‘only virtue and no vice’. It has its downside too. Specially if we consider converged devices in their initial forms, they are often found to be less functional and reliable than their component parts. Let us consider an example. A movie DVD will perform better on a traditional DVD player than on a games console. Again, when a single device is loaded with more functions, the ability of that device to serve its original function decreases. Let us take for example, the iPhone. It is primarily supposed to function as a mobile phone but is designed to perform many different tasks. Despite its primary function being making phone calls, it does not have a numerical pad to make phone calls. Instead, in order to make the other functions possible, it has a touchpad, which many users have found to be inconvenient compared to a conventional phone. Again one might be able to watch TV programmes on a computer screen, but one cannot deny that a TV is a TV and one cannot feel the same comfort in watching programmes on the computer screen.

Therefore, we cannot say that convergence will finish off the old technologies but will provide an opportunity to reinvent itself and evolve for the better.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – C

1. Why are established media companies today attempting to visualize the future of the entertainment industry in terms of convergence?

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2. Do you think that converge will lead to the end of old media? Why?

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3. What are some of the downsides of convergence?

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

- Simply speaking, convergence can be explained as the tendency of different technological systems to evolve towards performing similar tasks.
- Convergence of media occurs when multiple products come together to form one product with the advantages of all of them. In convergence, previously separate technologies such as voice and telephony features, data and productivity applications and video move towards sharing resources and interact with each other in such a way that they acquire new efficiencies.
- But convergence is more than simply the merging of technologies. Media convergence is a concept in which old and new media intersect. It is the interface where grassroots and corporate media interlock in such a way that the traditional roles played by media producers and media consumers dramatically change leading to situations which were earlier unpredictable in many ways.
- Convergence of media had led to shifts within the industrial, cultural, and social paradigms. It encourages the new age consumer to seek out information.
- The roots of network convergence can be traced back to the beginning of digital communications. It was digitalization which made it possible to reduce information into discrete, identifiable and thus, more easily transferable pieces of information.
- Earlier there were separate communication networks for different types of communication. They were designed differently, and were therefore most often incompatible. However, the attributes of digital communication was used in the case of network convergence to efficiently and effectively distribute different types of information - voice, video and data on the same communication network.
- Convergence is the key today. Convergence can be viewed in a number of ways. One is in terms of the converging of different types of information like voice, video, and data over a common

infrastructure or within a common computing platform. The other one is the converging of the industries itself, such as communication, entertainment, and computing.

- All facets of institutional activity and social life including business, government, art, journalism, health and education are increasingly being carried out in the digital media spaces across a growing network of ICT devices.
- For the consumer as well as the media owners, convergence has come as a boon.
- Convergence eliminates the cost of maintaining three separate networks for voice, video, and data. By using converged networks, corporations can make substantial saving in terms of equipment, staff, and services.
- Convergence as viewed today is indeed a debate about the impact of technology and how it has paved the way for a mature Information Society.
- Well established media companies are attempting to visualize the future of the entertainment industry in terms of convergence. But many questions are being raised regarding the future of the conventional media.
- Convergence advocates debate that convergence is not the end of old media. In fact, it provides a platform where many technologies can co-exist and they will not replace each other.
- It is being suggested that new and old media would interact in ever more complex and innovative ways. As a result many industry leaders are looking towards media convergence as a way of consolidating their position in the ever growing market.
- Technology might be potent, but technology itself is in the hands of people. As such the future of multimedia will be decided by the people who use it.
- Convergence is not something which is ‘only virtue and no vice’. It has its downside too. Specially if we consider converged devices in their initial forms, they are often found to be less functional and reliable than their component parts.
- Again, when a single device is loaded with more functions, the ability of that device to serve its original function decreases.

10.7 FURTHER READINGS

10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A)

1. Simply speaking, convergence can be explained as the tendency of different technological systems to evolve towards performing similar tasks. Convergence of media occurs when multiple products come together to form one product with the advantages of all of them. In convergence, previously separate technologies such as voice and telephony features, data and productivity applications and video move towards sharing resources and interact with each other in such a way that they acquire new efficiencies.
2. We can watch TV and listen to radio on a computer. We can access the internet on the TV set and on the mobile phone. On the same mobile phone we can also have a digital camera, camcorder, voice recorder, mp3 player, voice recorder, access to news updates and lot more. All these are examples of convergence.
3. Digital communications
4. Video

B)

1. Convergence can occur a number of ways. One is in terms of the converging of different types of information like voice, video, and data over a common infrastructure or within a common computing

platform. The other one is the converging of the industries itself, such as communication, entertainment, and computing.

2. Convergence is a boon for the consumer as he is able to get more features in less space and choose from a variety of options available. For the media owners on the other hands it serves as a means for remaining competitive in the struggle for market dominance. Therefore, in the past ten years or so, there has been a growing trend of companies converging technologies to create demand for new products.
3. As a result of media convergence a professor's lecture can be delivered live to remote campuses or stored in the form of video-on-demand files on a web site; Again, employers can use the converged networks to deliver presentations and training to employees from remote locations directly at their desktop eliminating many extra costs like travelling.
4. Yes, convergence is cost effective. This is because it eliminates the cost of maintaining three separate networks for voice, video, and data. By using converged networks, corporations can make substantial saving in terms of equipment, staff, and services. And this factor coupled with its other advantages is a major force that acts in favour of convergence.

C)

1. Well established media companies are attempting to visualize the future of the entertainment industry in terms of convergence because it has introduced new possibilities in terms of media access as well as production.

2. Convergence is not the end of old media. In fact, it provides a platform where many technologies can co-exist and they will not replace each other. The new age customer has been pampered by growing technological advancements and their demands are so immense and varied that it has become impossible for one technology to be able to meet all the requirements of the market-place. Therefore, each technology will be able to define its own space and redefine the way the consumers access the media.

3. Converged devices in their initial forms, they are often found to be less functional and reliable than their component parts. Let us consider an example. A movie DVD will perform better on a traditional DVD player than on a games console. Again, when a single device is loaded with more functions, the ability of that device to serve its original function decreases. Let us take for example, the iPhone. It is primarily supposed to function as a mobile phone but is designed to perform many different tasks. Despite its primary function being making phone calls, it does not have a numerical pad to make phone calls. Instead, in order to make the other functions possible, it has a touchpad, which many users have found to be inconvenient compared to a conventional phone. Again one might be able to watch TV programmes on a computer screen, but one cannot deny that a TV is a TV and one cannot feel the same comfort in watching programmes on the computer screen. These are some of the downsides of convergence.

10.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Explain the impact of convergence on media networks?
2. Do you think convergence is a boon or a bane? Why?
3. Discuss the genesis of convergence.