

UDK: 659.4
Pregledni rad
10. XII. 2022.

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CONVERGENCE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ABSTRACT

Today, we encounter the term “convergence” in various contexts, so it is defined as a process by which things are brought closer to each other or as a process of combining, permeating and joint functioning of certain media and channels. Convergence in itself corresponds completely to the term, but also to the practical application of public relations. Public relations are processes of communication of an organization with its internal and external public to accomplish mutual understanding, build social responsibility, and realize common interests. They aim to establish and develop relations while striving for two-way symmetry.

The key aspect of public relations is accomplished by the integration of channels of communication. Therefore, the convergence of media becomes an indispensable part of integrated communication. Since public relations use channels of communication to communicate daily with their target audiences in choosing strategies and tactics of communication, the practitioners of public relations will always go from an integrated approach to converging communication channels and ensuring a symmetrical transfer of a message. In terms of communication management, the tactics, strategies, and approaches of public relations depend largely on the medium of communication. As such, the convergence of traditional and new media has brought a drastic change to public relations. Public relations, as a dynamic profession, should be the leader in the use of digital skills, and convergence as a “digital creative platform” becomes an opportunity that also gives answers to the challenges of digital transformations of integrated communication.

Keywords: public relations, convergence, integrated communications

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INTRODUCTION

The advance of communication technology and tools has erased time and distance limitations. Today, the world is connected through several channels in real time. Different courses of communication are being connected to create a flawless and efficient network. The merging of two or more traditionally different channels has led to new communication models and trends. In the last decade, the internet and social media have grown tremendously. Organizations are looking to build mutually beneficial relationships with their target public, establish and maintain mutual communication principles, and connect with potential clients. No matter which tools, models, or techniques are used, the entire business area is becoming more relations-oriented – mutual understanding, building social responsibility, and accomplishing mutual interests.

The elasticity of media in relation to time has defined its longevity. Innis claims that media lacking elasticity are less durable and needier of converging. These adjustments affect the work of media and the quality of distribution and production of its contents.

Media management is important for the practice of public relations. Some of the models of relations developed by Grunig and Hunt require notable redefinitions thanks to the internet and the challenges they have faced. It seems that the models of the press agency model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical model, and two-way symmetrical model are almost disappearing. As media converges, so should public relations. (Achor et al., 2015; Arango-Forero et al., 2016)

1. KEY POINTS

1.1 Public relations

We can follow the origin of public relations from Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. In ancient Greece, the art of speaking was valued more than anywhere else. Aristotle, the most famous philosopher of the ancient world, valued rhetoric and tried to scientifically

establish it in his works. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle claims: “Again, supposing we had the most exact knowledge, there are some people whom it would not be easy to persuade with its help, for scientific exposition is in the nature of teaching is out of the question; we must give our proofs and tell our story in popular terms – as we said in *Topics*, with reference to controversy with the many.” (Aristotle, 1886, 1355a/12)

Here the methods of persuasion and arguments must necessarily be founded on common attitudes. It is evident from the quote that rhetoric is at the service of truth. Aristotle here proves his modernity related to speaking skills also by indirectly stating that a scientist must be capable of announcing his discoveries and achievements to the masses using simple, comprehensible language.

Simple terminology has not been accepted in this area in international practice, which has been reflected in the interpretation and definition of public relations and in the shaping of verbal identity. Edward Bernays, a pioneer of public relations, in his book *Public Relations*, defines public relations as “(1) information given to the public, (2) persuasion directed at the public to modify attitudes and actions, and (3) efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with that institution.” (Bernays, 1952, 3).

Bernays states that public relations are founded on three elements; informing, persuasion and integration of people with people (Bernays, 1923). Tomić defines public relations as a process of communication between an organization with its internal and external public to accomplish mutual understanding, build social responsibility, and realize common interests. The previous definition contains a few connected elements: (1) The organization establishes and maintains internal (internal public is informed on time) and external communication (maintaining, advancement with the external public – media, shareholders, consumers, government, etc.). (2) Organisations establish and maintain mutual understanding (relates to achieving trust, appreciation, and social responsibility). (3) Mutual understanding is established by primary two-way symmetric communication. (4) Public relations practitioners are

constantly collecting data, processing it, and delivering information, which contributes to more efficient planning and decision-making within the organization. (5) Public relations are realized legally and legitimately (Tomić, 2016).

1.2 Convergence

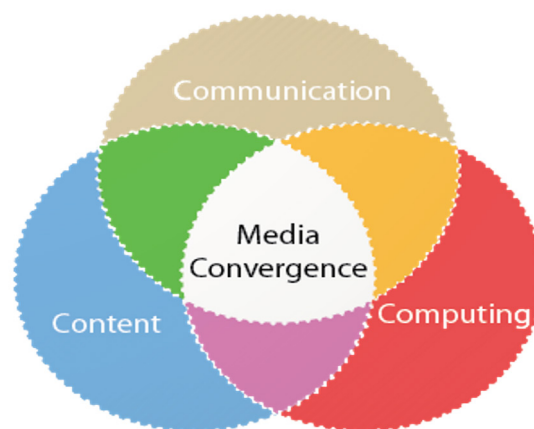
Convergence in a wider sense is regarded as merging, connection, similarity, conformity of traits, and the pursuit of the same goals, and approach. Converging means approaching from both sides, aspiring to the same end. Today we are met with the term convergence in various contexts, therefore we define it as a process of becoming closer, of permeation and mutual functioning of certain media and channels. In the context of interpersonal communication, it would signify a tendency to move toward one person and unite in a common center. A mobile phone is thus a convergence of telecommunications and informatics. Convergence in media has become a special area of research.

Jenkins defined media convergence as: „We could think, of the issue of convergence in terms of the sensorium. This idea is particularly enlightening because, on the one hand it lets us grab a hold of the perspective of technical logos inherent to humanity itself as once and always convergent; and, on the other, it brings us back to the ecological perspective held by McLuhan about reality, which would find its key aspects in understanding media as environments.“ (Arango-Forero, Roncallo-Dow, Uribe-Jongbloed, 2016, 23).

In a convergent communication environment, audiences have participated further and have taken advantage of the opportunities opened up by new media technologies. In a sense, technological changes are more than just instrumental changes for communication, they are true transformations which slowly draw new boundaries to a communication culture which was before segmented by bound media (Arango-Firero et al., 2016).

Media convergence simply refers to the connection of different types of mass media like traditional media, press media, electronic media, new media and the Internet, alongside portable and

highly interactive technologies through digital media platforms. Deuze suggests that media convergence should be viewed as ‘cooperation and collaboration’ between previously unconnected media forms and platforms (Deuze, 2011). That results in 3C combination – communication, content, computing.



In a convergent communication environment, audiences have participated further and have taken advantage of the opportunities opened up by new media technologies. In a sense, technological changes are more than just instrumental changes for communication (Orozco Gomez, 2007); they are true transformations which slowly draw new boundaries to a communication culture which was before segmented by bound media (Arango-Firero et al., 2016, 24).

Divergence, on the other hand, means disagreement, contradiction, dissent. This is the type of media that starts from an integrated, convergent format but is disintegrated into multiple media formats. It is the presentation of information through different media types like a news site, a news blog and news feed (Opgehaffen, 2008). But media convergence in the 21st century has led audiences to provide instant simultaneous consumption, through multifunctional devices, for which traditional barriers between media industries, at least from the consumer end, tend to disappear. In their stead, now there is but a moment and a set of circumstances for the contact with the media message. It is the age of the au-

dience (Arango et al., 2016, 25). The development of media convergence processes is mainly due to the following three factors: (a) digitalisation, (b) deregulation of media and communication markets, and (c) changes in user preferences (Lungmayr, Dal Zotto, 2016).

1.3 Types of media convergence

Stöber (2004) discusses the four factors of change need to simultaneously occur to shape a new system entity and a viable business model: technological, cultural, political and economic factors. Advancements in technology usually correspond to reductions in cost and significant increases in functionality (McPhillips, Merlo, 2008).

Jenkins (2001) outlines four types of convergence:

1. technological: the convergence in technology drives the economic, social, cultural and global convergences, creating in turn the media convergence of today and the years ahead
2. economic: the horizontal integration of the [entertainment] industry and the definition of new value chains.
3. social or organic: the multi-screen multitasking environment created by device ecosystems or the connectivity between different groups of users
4. cultural: novel formats and platforms for creativity using various media technologies across different industries and consumer groups.

Iosifidis (2011, 172) defines three levels of convergence: “the technological level (mainly due to the digitization of broadcasting, IT and telecommunications networks), the structural level (as a consequence of corporate alliances across different sectors) and the services and markets level”.

1.4 Mass media

Mass media is a subset of mass communication (Lorimer, 1994, 43) and according to McQuail's definition, we differentiate 5 characteristics:

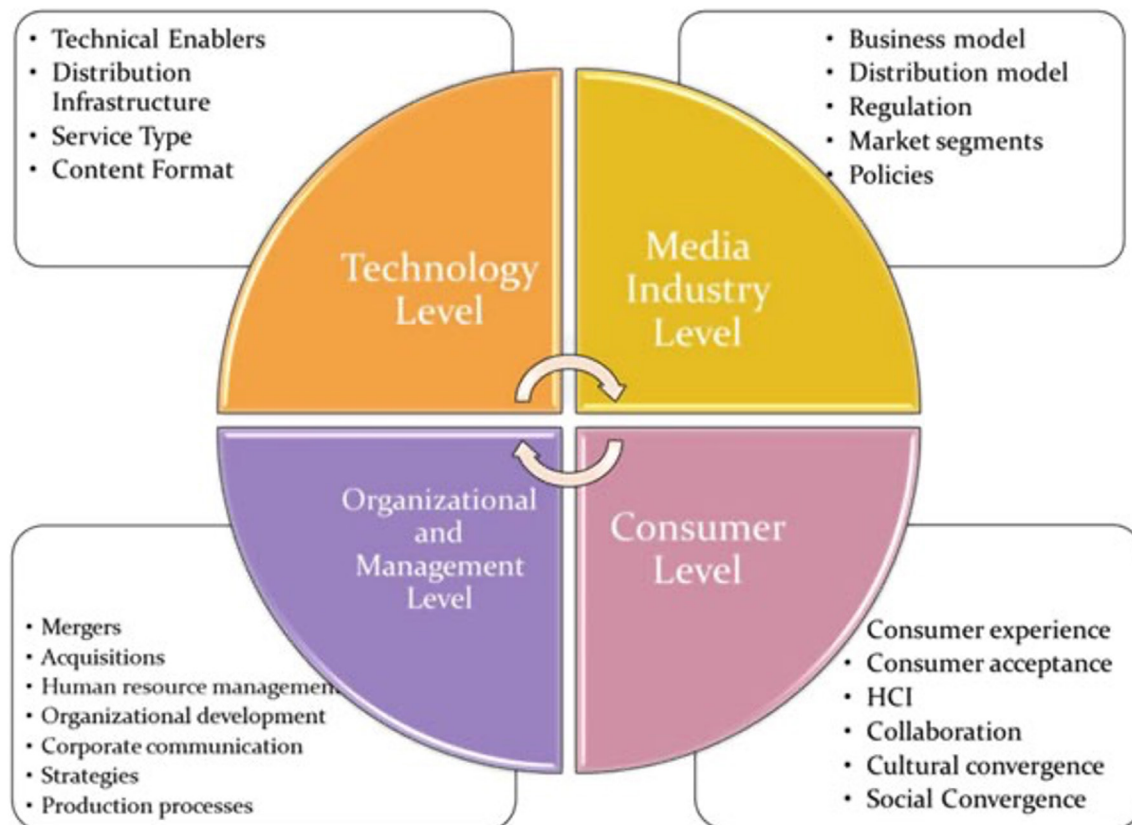
1. They are a distinct set of activities (creating media content)

2. They include special technological configurations (radio, television, videotext, newspaper, books)
3. They are tied to formally constituted institutions or media channels (systems, stations, publications);
4. They operate in accordance with certain laws, rules and understandings (professional codex and practices, public, social expectations and habits);
5. They are a product of persons occupying certain roles (owners, regulators, producers, distributors, advertisers, members of the public);

“Mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences.” (Janowitz, 1968). In this definition, ‘communication’ is compared with ‘transmission’ “as viewed by the sender, rather than the fuller meaning of the term, which includes the notions of response, sharing and interaction (...) New media can (sometimes simultaneously) serve both for mass communication and for personalized, individual communication.” (McQuail, Deuze, 2020, 76).

Commonly, by mass media we mean the four most socially influential mass media: press, film, radio and television, and their converged forms made with digital technology. The influence of media convergence on different levels can be depicted graphically (fig. 1).

“Technological convergence is attractive to media industries because it opens multiple entry points into the consumption process and at the same time, enables consumers to more quickly locate new manifestations of a popular narrative” (Jenkins, 2003, 284). The companies with many platforms on their portfolio can amortize the cost of production: that is, once they have paid to have a message produced they send it out through the newspapers, magazines, cable channels, and Internet sites they own or control. In the last few years there has been a progressive growth of the number and size of media available to public relations experts. In this part the most important traditional media will be analysed: television, radio, newspaper and journals.



1.4.1 Television

Television still represents one of the most powerful mass media. It, as a medium, combines everything into one message – written word, spoken word, moving pictures, colour, music, animation and sound effects, thus creating power over other media (Tomaš, 2022). The visual element is the core factor by which television is different from other media, and it provides tremendous influence. Because of its visual influence, television highlights personality. It is a value that public relations practitioners must have in mind while preparing material for television broadcast. They should also note that the existence of a television show is based on its rating. Rating determines the election of shows and their content.

When deciding on the usage of television in a media mix, it is necessary to firstly decide upon: (1) The time of message broadcasting and (2) The

area of broadcasting. The choice of television time implies expenses, features and adaption to the program and with respect to those three factors, we differentiate prime time, day time and limit time. Prime time in countries of Western civilisation is the time from 8-9 PM. That period is the most expensive one since the biggest segment of the target audience is watching. Day time includes the period from 10AM to 4PM. Scientific shows, travel shows and children's content is broadcasted at that time. That type of content takes up almost 60% of television time. Limit time is the time preceding (7 – 7.30PM) and following (9 – 11PM) prime time: it also includes the morning. Morning time, 6 – 10AM, and late at night, from 11PM, is when serious music, literature, avant-garde movies and similar, are broadcasted (Kesić, 2003).

In the work of public relations experts, television is an irreplaceable communication channel be-

cause it represents a huge arena where they can communicate whatever they want. The possibilities of the use of television are numerous and therefore, it is good to review them from two sides (Wilcox et al., 2001):

Network level:

1. Guest appearances in news and *talk-shows*
2. Suggesting news and reports to informative programs
3. Videocommunication for the public
4. Ideas for shows
5. Hidden publicity
6. The reporting of public and communal services

Local stations level:

1. Guest appearances on local *talk-shows*
2. Monitoring protests
3. Videotapes for news
4. Movies

1.4.2 Radio

Public relations practitioners understand that radio as a medium is important because of its ability to spread news and broadcast messages. Speed and mobility represent special properties that make radio unique among the most important media of communication. Similar to television, public relations are interested in using radio in a certain field, such as the number of radio stations, the width of the network, the number of radio receivers, the specificity of the program, the number of listeners, the expenses of radio propagation, etc.

The number of radio stations is increasing, especially of local and private ones. Informing through radio because of its specificity is done frequently through local radio stations, as well as through national radio networks (Tomić, 2016).

1.4.3 Newspapers

Newspapers do not create a social community but contribute largely to setting its limits and maintaining its unity. They advocate for common interests and attitudes, especially where the same newspaper appears every morning. Thus, a

local paper helps a city or a region maintain a feeling of identity.

Newspapers content often depends on the information sent by external sources. Former Public Relations Secretary of the New York mayor has pointed out that public relations generate about 50% of articles in New York newspaper (Wilcox et al., 2001). This fact may encourage public relations experts, but they must be aware of the fact that commercial newspapers are present on the market mainly for profit. The revenues of publishing houses in the USA have fallen from 49,5 billion in 2005 to 22,04 in 2021. (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/184046/estimated-revenue-of-us-newspaper-publishers-since-2005/>, accessed 28/10/2022.) Digital advertising accounted for 39% of newspaper advertising revenue in 2020, based on this analysis of publicly traded newspaper companies. The portion stood at 35% in 2019 – but at 17% in 2011, the first year it was possible to perform this analysis (Pew Research <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/newspapers/>, accessed 28/10/2021).

When contemplating how to use newspapers in public relations, the materials intended for the newspapers should be delivered in the form of a press release or as a list of facts based on which a journalist may write a text. When a public relations officer wants to showcase facts and not a press release, a personal conversation with the editor or an influential journalist helps the presentation and acceptance of the idea. Such personal contact with editors and journalists should last exactly as long as the editors have time for public relations officers. Most practitioners of public relations find that editors and journalists should not be bothered after those encounters, as it greatly annoys them.

In creating news for media, public relations officers should not assume that editors or journalists understand every context of the story they want to communicate. This fact should be in mind when bigger projects are at play. In such situations, the target journalists should be isolated and supplied with additional materials. The chance of the newspaper showing sympathy toward big projects is greater if editors get the information before the whole story is published (Wilcox et al., 2001). The newspapers remain an

important medium, a channel of communication for public relations regardless of the development of electronic media.

1.4.4 Journals

Journals are also efficient channels of communication. In companies, they represent one of the most efficient means of communication because they enable communicators to direct concrete messages toward the target audiences. The market of journals is diverse: it ranges from general to specific publications. It is a reflection of diverse needs, interests, and lifestyles. Numerous business and professional publications serve the special needs of professional groups, associations, companies, etc.

Journals have various advantages. One of them is that opinion makers read them. Research shows that young people and numerous other groups read journals. It is considered that information received through journals is more permanent than information received through newspapers. Readers can read them more than once, and they are often the subject of discussion.

Readers who have special interests use journals for a more detailed procession of the topic. Journals shape opinions, create affinity toward ideas and products, influence projects, and contribute to establishing a standard in a profession. In political communication, they can mobilize a political message. They are well-designed, and they use photography of great quality. Although most of them are available online, research shows they are still being read in their physical form (Brom, 2010).

2. CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION IN A CONVERGED REALITY

Messages are not self-mobilizing. They are transferred from the sender (the source) to the receiver, through one or more channels or media. A channel or medium is an instrument or a way of transferring a message from one person to another. Channels come in various forms. It seems each of our five senses can function as a channel.

In interpersonal communication, we usually speak of sight and hearing as the most frequent channels of communication. However, there are many cases in which we send and receive messages through the channels of touch, smell, and taste. In most face-to-face interactions, we use a combination of channels; we hear each other's voices and we see each other's movements. We are also inclined to touch each other at different times during our interactions. The messages transferred through each of those channels give us a far wider repertoire of incentives we attach meaning, potentially allowing for more understanding of certain communication events (Tomić, Jugo, 2021).

The vertical approach of communication, from top to bottom, is replaced by a horizontal, two-way, public-oriented, "prosumer" (producer and consumer) approach. The combination of public relations and convergence lies in the adjustment of public relations to the reality of the advancement of communication technology.

2.1 Types of communication channels

Research has shown that communication channels differ in their ability to transfer messages. Some channels are complete and more abundant because they can process several information signs, include more information systems at once, facilitate feedback and be very personal (Robbins, Judge, 2007). Therefore, there are two types of communication channels: personal and indirect.

Personal communication channels include two or more persons communicating mutually and directly. That type of communication is used frequently among family members, friends, and acquaintances, and in literature, it is called "word-of-mouth communication" (Kesić, 2003, 61). This type of communication channel is the most complete one because it ensures maximum transmission of information during one episode of communication. The conversation includes several information systems at the same time (words, body position, facial expressions, gestures, intonation), guarantees quick feedback, and has personal meaning.

Indirect communication channels transfer messages without personal contact or interaction. They include media, atmosphere, and events. With that in mind, communication channels can be: 1) auditory or vocal channel (*language and non-verbal elements*), 2) visual channel (*facial expression, body language, habitus, spatial communication*), 3) tactile channel (*touching the body, stroking*), 4) olfactory channel (*body odor*), 5) thermal channel (*sensation of body heat*), and 6) gustatory channel (*sense of taste*) (Kunczik, Zippel, 2006).

Aside from the classification of channels and media in terms of personal and indirect, certain authors also divide them into impersonal (e.g., mass media) or interpersonal (formal communication between two or more persons, face to face, through the phone, through a letter, or online) (Schiffman, Kanuk, 2004). Also, at the base of this division are indirect and personal channels.

2.2 Strategic choice of communication channels

Public relations experts nowadays have an assortment of communication channels and tools. In the planning of communication with internal and external participants, public relations practitioners estimate the quality of each relationship and based on that decide upon which actions are required to strengthen, build or fix the relationship. When a practitioner decides to communicate with the key public, then the planning of the media also begins. The aim is to recognize or investigate the best and most functional channels of communication used by the public. Practitioners then create a media plan estimating what potential or exposure each media might create in the context of target groups (Heath, Coombs, 2006). What channel or tool shall the public relations experts choose? They will choose the one that will maximize the visibility of their message to the public. The choice of the channel is an especially strategic decision. Sometimes there is no choice. If they receive a question from the media, they will answer it, often with questions the reporter is asking in confidence or publicly (reactive position). Another time the practitio-

ners create a plan that should be implemented (proactive position). After recognizing the goal, an experienced expert chooses the most effective communication (Tomić, 2006). But in the end, it is necessary to know as much as possible about potential communication channels available for the public relations program in order to choose the most effective channel of communication.

2.3 Integrated strategy of communication

The choice of the channel can, as a consequence, have a strategy of media mix that will ensure visibility and optimal repetition of the message. The choice of communication channels and strategic media mix should always be based on the achievement of organizational goals. Such a choice can be made also in accordance with marketing and advertisement experts. That can result in integrated communication because each of those disciplines makes messages directed toward the public (Weintraub Austin, Pinkleton, 2015). The integrated model of media in public relations indicates the differences of main communication channels, but they are in their integration suitable and necessary for fulfilling the goals of the set program. That model offers a useful starting point for planning media in public relations by focusing the attention on strategic differences between media.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERGENCE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Convergence in itself completely corresponds to the term but also to the application of public relations. Convergence accomplishes the key aspect of the application of public relations by integrating communication channels. The development of media has brought dominance of one media over the other. With the creation of radio, the influence of the press has shrunk to a certain extent, and with the creation of television, radio lost its importance, as well as the press. With new media, the significance of all mainstream media had fallen until the information revolution.

Media convergence has brought on the challenge of learning, unlearning, and relearning. The four models of public relations, press agency, publicity, public informing, the two-way asymmetrical,

and the two-way symmetrical model, all have their strengths and weaknesses (Jenkins, 2001; Jenkins et al., 2013). However, with the proliferation of new media, which has stopped the hegemony of the traditional media pair with different dimensions accompanied by problems that require an input of public relations, there is a need for an inclusive, continuous, and cyclic approach or a paradigm of the practice of public relations. Public relations experts are forced to learn new techniques such as desktop publishing, become more creative, learn to write for multimedia platforms again, and stay on the surface in the industry. Those who adapt to change switch around approaching unforeseen circumstances in public relations activities.

The information revolution does not replace old media with new but instead brings them closer. It crushes the communication possibilities which is a classical concept of media convergence. Future public relations use communication channels to communicate with the public daily. In choosing strategies and tactics of communication, the practitioners of public relations will always go from an integrated approach by converging channels of communication and ensuring a two-way transfer of the message. Thus, the concept of convergence of communication channels becomes a prerequisite without which it is not possible to achieve.

As characteristics of convergence in public relations, we can suggest:

- Using more channels for the development and shaping of an effective communication/message enables the visibility of the message in public.
- The achievement of a synergic effect as a base of convergence. It means that no matter which forms of communication or media is decided on, they must complement each other, thus ensuring synergic effects. We define that as “speaking with one voice”.
- Enabling clarity, consistency, and the maximum effect of a message through the integration of the message to target audiences.
- The result is the construction of relations based on mutual understanding and trust, which is the objective of public relations.

CONCLUSION

Media convergence has shown to be useful in the digital era, and therefore, also in the public relations profession. The most important advantage of media convergence is the immediate availability of news and content based on the moment. It is regarded as one of the most important characteristics of media convergence when observing traditional and new media. Furthermore, public relations experts can aim at the best public or group and modify the content. Another advantage of media convergence is that it has expanded the limits of traditional media by mixing them with new media, by which the current and newest content is provided. With media convergence between traditional and new media, the expenses of digital marketing have also subsided, making this process even more accessible and efficient. By sublimating the definitions of public relations, the joint approach to those definitions is reflected in the starting point as public relations essentially deal with relations to the internal and external public. Public relations set and develop relations, striving for two-way symmetry. To establish and develop relations, one must use media (personal and indirect) or communication channels. Communication channels can ensure an optimal transfer of messages, which are the center and base of all relations, only through convergence.

From that point of view, the use and need for two-way communication rule out the concept of divergence, opposition, and disagreement. Quite to the contrary, public relations connect and aim for the same goals and win-win relationships, which is a permanent process of merging. Exactly those key premises are the base of the definition of convergence. Therefore, it could be stated that convergence is the core of modern symmetrical public relations because it brings organizations closer to their public.

Given the so far unseen growth of the influence of digital media, to be successful, organizations must integrate channels of communication and perform multiple methodologies and establish relations with the internal and external public.

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KONVERGENCIJA U ODNOSIMA S JAVNOŠĆU

SAŽETAK

U današnje vrijeme, pojam “konvergencija” susrećemo u različitim kontekstima, pa se definira kao proces približavanja stvari jednih prema drugima ili kao proces spajanja, prožimanja i zajedničkog djelovanja određenih medija i kanala. Konvergencija sama po sebi u potpunosti odgovara pojmu, ali i praktičnoj primjeni odnosa s javnošću. Odnosi s javnošću su procesi komuniciranja organizacije s unutarnjom i vanjskom javnošću radi postizanja međusobnog razumijevanja, izgradnje društvene odgovornosti i ostvarivanja zajedničkih interesa. Cilj im je uspostaviti i razviti odnose dok teže dvo-smjernoj simetriji.

Ključni aspekt odnosa s javnošću ostvaruje se integracijom kanala komunikacije. Konvergencija medija postaje neizostavan dio integrirane komunikacije. Budući da odnosi s javnošću koriste kanale komunikacije kako bi svakodnevno komunicirali sa svojom ciljnom publikom u odabiru strategija i taktika komuniciranja, praktičari odnosa s javnošću uvijek će polaziti od integriranog pristupa konvergirajući komunikacijske kanale i osiguravajući simetričan prijenos poruke. Upravo taktike, strategije i pristupi odnosa s javnošću, u smislu upravljanja komunikacijom, uvelike ovise o mediju komunikacije. Kao takva, konvergencija tradicionalnih i novih medija donijela je drastičnu promjenu u odnose s javnošću. Odnosi s javnošću, kao dinamična profesija, trebali bi biti predvodnici u korištenju digitalnih vještina, a konvergencija kao „digitalna kreativna platforma“ postaje prilika, ali i daje odgovore na izazove digitalnih transformacija integriranog komuniciranja.

Ključne riječi: odnosi s javnošću, konvergencija, integrirane komunikacije