



Media convergence in Uzbekistan: Format, technologies and legal sphere

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Abstract

Development of convergence process in printed mass media is considered in the article. New technologies have changed the structure of media landscape. Realities in which “new media” originated and are developed, as well as subsequent transformations in newspaper editions, in particular in Uzbekistan, are analyzed.

Keywords: media convergence, “new media”, information space, digitalization, Uzbekistan mass media

Introduction

In modern realities, the mass media received various, previously new characteristics for them. In this line multimedia and interactivity, digitalization, as well as existence in global media space should be mentioned. Being represented, among other things, in the digital world, the new format mass media received all of the above characteristics.

Researchers, calling this phenomenon media convergence, believe that it is the result of new, changed realities of editorial offices of periodicals that until the end of the 20th century were independent and self-sufficient even in spite of appearance of new types of mass media at that time – radio and television. At the intersection of the past and present centuries, the spread of computer and network technologies to some extent corrects the means and methods of information transfer, its delivery, which fundamentally changes the structure and vectors of the editorial development [9].

It should be emphasized that the term “convergence” was first used much earlier, in 1713. Its authorship belongs to the English philosopher-naturalist William Derham, who used the term in the work “Physico-theology, or, Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from his Works of Creation” [8]. Note that since those times and up to 60-70th of the last century the term was used to describe phenomena in the sphere of politics, economics, and natural science. With the advent of computers, the word came from the lat. “convergo” – “approaching”, “converging” – has expanded the range of applications.

In the current sense for the media space, this term means a multitasking mode of information consumption in the modern world. A person can talk on the phone, in parallel with the background watching TV, flipping through a newspaper or magazine, looking through the tape in the account on social networks. This multitasking became the result of technical achievements, the penetration of computers and the Internet [8]. Along with this, there are opportunities for information dissemination through various media platforms (cross-media). Availability of information in the form of texts, media files has become global due to technical progress.

Convergence has also become one of the most significant signs of “new media”. These include online versions of newspapers and magazines, directly the Internet media, as well as network and mobile TV and radio, social networks, etc [2]. Sometimes the term “convergent media” is considered synonymous with the term “new media” [3].

It should be emphasized that such a lack of a fully developed understanding, interpretation of the term “convergence”, is likely due to the fact that media researchers in different states with different models of press development imply practice adopted in a certain edition under this phenomenon. That, in turn, strengthens the subjectivity of characteristics of the above phenomenon. This is influenced by the originality of the country, the mentality and culture of information consumption of the population, as well as such factors related to political and economic realities in each specific country. Among the priorities are the legislation regulating the functioning of the mass media, the degree of penetration of technology, the Internet and its speed, qualitative and quantitative indicators of mobile industry development.

In the process of analyzing the phenomena that make up the process of convergence and development of newspaper editions in conditions of formation of “new media” in Uzbekistan, it should be noted that in the media landscape of the country, positive changes have recently taken place aimed at developing the information sphere and the mass media, creating conditions for implementing the constitutional rights of citizens to promptly obtain objective and reliable information.

A certain work has been carried out on bringing the normative and legal framework in the field of mass media with international standards. The program document, on the basis of which reforms in various spheres are currently being implemented in the country, is the Action Strategy on five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021. In the relevant section of the document, the tasks are set on strengthening the role of the mass media in the life of society, strengthening the protection of journalists’ professional activities, ensuring openness of activities of the

state governing bodies and administration, introducing modern forms of information about rights and freedoms, legitimate interests of citizens. The authorities are trying to improve the sphere of digital media. Addressing the representatives of the sphere on the professional holiday – Press and Mass Media Workers Day – President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted that “currently there are over 400 websites and information portals in the global network in the .uz domain, most of them also operate in foreign languages. A new creative generation – Internet journalists is being formed in this sphere [7,1].

It should be noted that, as it is integrated into the international information space, the electronic media landscape of Uzbekistan is represented by radio, television and the Internet. With the progressive development and rooting of media convergence in the early 2000s, an electronic newspaper joined to them.

At that time, the editorial offices of leading newspapers and magazines, trying to keep pace with the times, opened electronic versions of their publications. The most important argument in favor of this step became that the online version allowed to increase the audience coverage. Although, it is worth noting, in view of insignificant Internet coverage of the country’s territory, in the early years it was a small increase – about 10-15 percent from subscribers of the paper version.

Later, after a while and with development of technologies, the benefits were appreciated by the readers themselves. A loved edition can be read at home, at work or on the screen of a mobile phone. A number of publications began to post an electronic version of a fresh issue even before the publication was published. Already at this stage, electronic versions have got the upper hand on the efficiency of informing the reader. The next most important advantage will become interactivity, which provided an opportunity to establish full-fledged feedback and interaction with the audience.

Currently, as reported on the official website of Uzbekistan Press and Information Agency [6], there are more than 1,500 mass media in the republic. Among them there are about 700 newspapers, many of which have their own websites.

Note that often the site of the newspaper is a digital analogue of a printed publication, simply existing in a different form, and the web resource is identical in content to the newspaper.

It should be emphasized that such a strategy is predominant in the communication environment of Uzbekistan. To some extent, the existing legislation contributes to this. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the mass media”, which is in effect at the stage of preparing this article, devotes an entire article under the number 27 of the electronic version of the periodical [1].

In the normative act, the electronic version of a periodical printed publication is regulated as one of the ways of disseminating a periodical printed publication. It is said that the editorial office of a periodical printed publication has the right to distribute an electronic version of a periodical without registration of an electronic version as an independent mass media subject to identity of the content of the printed and electronic versions of relevant periodical and compliance with legal requirements. On dissemination of the electronic version of the periodical, its editorial office is obliged to notify in writing the registering authority.

It should be emphasized that the current law, which entered into force more than 10 years ago, currently does not take into account all the specifics and trends of the modern media sphere. Legislative norms indirectly suggest that the newspaper, if desired, to distribute information to the audience more quickly, which publishes more materials on its electronic portal in comparison with the newspaper version, is obliged to create and register separately from the already existing edition of the print media also the edition of the information website. Otherwise, as indicated in the above-mentioned law, the electronic version can only completely duplicate the printed version, except for the reservations stipulated in the normative act: it is not considered as a violation of the content identity of the exception from the electronic version and (or) replacement of all or part of advertising messages contained in printed version of the periodical, as well as reduction in the volume of materials presented in the electronic version in comparison with the printed version [4]. It remains to add that the above reservations are inherently insignificant and do not have any influence on the state of affairs.

Taking into account the developed environment and the specifics of the legislative regulation, not all traditional media in Uzbekistan transfer the main focus of information activities from the pages of the paper version to the Internet site. This, in particular, concerns the sites of most of the central newspapers, which are only an electronic transcription of the printed primary source. At the same time, the statistics of the national search system www.uz testifies that the websites of the main socio-political and socio-economic newspapers of Uzbekistan were registered in 2006-2008.

An indicative trend is emerging according to which the main criterion for their effectiveness is circulation for central state media of Uzbekistan at the present stage of their development, development of modern information environment. This fact demonstrates the focus of editorial policy, first of all, on expanding the audience of the traditional, printed version. In order to prevent the decline in sales of printed versions, many newspapers practice updating of their websites not in the early morning, but closer to lunch time. In this way, subscription campaigns do not lose their meaning. This practice is typical for a number of mass media.

In this context it is also appropriate to emphasize the degree of presence of the majority state socio-political editions of Uzbekistan in social networks, which should be taken into account in the context of the analysis of the effectiveness of media websites.

In the context of actualization of consumption of traditional media content, including with the help of popular social networks and Internet messengers, not all publications are represented on these sites. On the websites of electronic versions of publications there are icons “twitter”, “facebook”, “vkontakte” (in contact) and “odnoklassniki” (classmates). However, the links from them are returned to the current page, that is, they do not work. This fact allows us to assume that the editorial staff at the moment are not interested in promoting newspapers on the space of social networks.

Thus, there is every reason to believe that at the present stage of developing the web space, not all editions of Uzbekistan’s state media have an understanding and a strategy for developing their presence on the Internet. Electronic versions

of newspapers, identical in content to paper versions, cannot be considered successful and appropriate to the current level of Internet media. They do not use the potential of multimedia, new communication platforms. In addition, the editorial offices need to correctly assess the importance of effective use of interactive capabilities. The reason for this situation can be both an inadequacy of current realities of the legislative base, and the unwillingness of the editorial managers to change the approaches developed over many years. The absence of personnel specializing in creative activity in the Internet media is also a significant complication.

It should be emphasized that, as noted above, many mass media in Uzbekistan are in search of their own model for development of their Internet versions. Therefore, if some publications fill websites with various multimedia and interactive services, others just begin to do it.

An example is the regional mass media. Taking into account the tendency of the last few years to regionalizing the market of printed products, which are more in line with the interests and needs of readers of this or that administrative unit, there is an aspiration to increase electronic editions of printed mass media in the regions of Uzbekistan. Almost all regional print media have their own websites. Of course, by now, there is still an unresolved circle of issues on development of new media platforms by the local press, the creative methods and techniques of web journalism, the processes of convergence and technological communication. In this line of development of contemporary media sphere, a comprehensive study of these aspects of activities of regional mass media, examples of their successful activities, seems relevant.

According to the national search system www.uz, the leader among the electronic versions of regional mass media is the website of the joint editorial office of newspapers Zarafshon and Samarkand Gazette. Among all the sites represented in the category "News and Media", the website of the khokimiyat of Samarkand region occupies the 59th place by popularity^[5].

The website was registered in April 2008. At the same time, it is distinguished from similar ones by rather modern design and decoration. The main articles presented on the portal repeat the publication of the paper version. At the same time, they are divided into thematic areas. Based on the statistics of views, the most popular articles are highlighted, which, of course, creates additional convenience for readers.

On the website www.zarnews.uz, which was registered in 2008, the announcements of the following issues of the newspaper are posted. Here, more than in other regional publications, interactive opportunities are used. Through the site, a survey is conducted on current themes. In particular, in summer, these are issues related to organization of children's recreation in recreational, school camps, sports sections and courses of children's creativity, events in public gardens and parks. Based on generalization of received responses, as reported on the website, articles on this theme will be prepared, highlighting the problems that readers are telling about.

The mechanism of feedback of the editorial staff and the audience is quite transparent. An analysis of letters received in the newspaper is monthly shown on the website in the form of a diagram. There is a subscription to the RSS-list on the

portal, the account of the editorial office of newspapers Zarafshon and Samarkand Gazette has been created and is being developed in the main social networks, for example, facebook.

The detailed information on the history of creation of newspapers Zarafshon and Samarkand Gazette, which is published on the website helps to establish additional communication, confidential contact with readers, the main milestones of their development, achievements and awarded with state awards and prestigious journalism awards the members of the team, well-known pen masters, who have worked or cooperated with Samarkand newspapers. Details are given about the management, employees of publications with their portraits, descriptions of functional duties, the range of covered themes and specialization.

Photo gallery posted on the website is also noteworthy. Multimedia content of this section is well-developed, there is also a thematic rubrication, which makes it much easier to find interesting photos.

With all of the above, no doubt, the regional mass media should be closer to their consumers through electronic versions of their publications, more actively implement the technology of information dissemination in the network, make it more visible, and their websites – interactive.

As already noted, the considered websites due to specifics of development of this media segment in Uzbekistan with small limitations were electronic versions of printed publications. At the same time, another model develops in the information space of the country, when the site of the printed publication functions at the level of an independent Internet media that offers original content that is different from the base edition. This can be both texts written specifically for the website, and multimedia materials. Practice shows that it is these sites that take into account the specifics of the Internet space, usually have high rates of attendance and citation.

Basically, this model is implemented by editions of private editorial offices with previously prevailing entertaining content. For example, the private edition "Darakchi" successfully uses the opportunities of convergence on the website www.darakchi.uz. Multimedia content of this resource is well-developed, photos and videos are very common. Attendance of the website is not possible to assess due to closedness of statistics on the initiative of the editorial board, however, based on the data that about 57 thousand users were subscribed to the telegram channel of "darakchi" (www.telegram.me/darakchinews_bot), it can be concluded that the number of unique visitors to the portal per day exceeds several thousand unique visitors.

The editorial staff of the website "Darakchi" is betting on both exclusive content and the use of visualization capabilities. Photo reports are often published on the website. The headings of the materials use verbs in the active voice, key phrases, as well as the name of the locality where this or that event occurred. This method is used by most leading Internet media in the global space.

Constant updating is another important requirement, a necessary condition for the attendance of resources. The portal updates the news approximately every half hour, the journalists and copywriters responsible for this react instantly to the events taking place, placing both text and multimedia

materials, as the Internet journalism demands: it should take less than an hour from the moment the event occurred to the moment when the information about it appears on the information portal page.

In the context of tough competition in private media market in Uzbekistan, some newspapers, like the “Darakchi”, abandon the outdated print-first strategy and move on to the convergent-first model. To meet constantly changing technical and technological requirements, such sites are constantly being upgraded. When developing a site update, the fact is taken into account that a large amount of information can tire a user, as a result, the main page is divided into several sections and tries to present only the latest and interesting news in them.

In general, the offer of diverse content and diversification of ways of its delivery reflect the development of innovative processes in the media sphere. Many types of content began to appear on many domestic sites. We are talking about photo publications, video clips, slideshows, and info graphics. Visual information in the Internet media is significantly increasing. The most common way of visualization in regional Internet media is the use of photographs. The headlines on the website www.darakchi.uz often use the words “photo report”, “photo fact”, “+photo”, “+video” or placed next to some news icon indicating that the full text contains photo materials. On the Internet, the number of photos, in contrast to the newspaper, is not limited. Thus, each publication can be added 5-10 pictures or more, which are displayed on the network in sufficient resolution, allowing to view all the details. A photo-report can also be made in the form of a slide show.

A perspective direction of mass media development in the context of convergence of the media space is the placement of video on the websites. Many of these videos are gaining tens of thousands of views. While in many foreign publications, in the Uzbek segment of non-state media, it has become traditional to publish all types of information (text, photos, audio, video, infographics) within the same publication in the network. Experiments with multimedia formats are often conducted by entertainment websites that try to diversify their web resources.

Among the latest trends in the readers’ preferences is their becoming more flexible, the reader more easily moves from one type of media to another, requires more and more interactivity. The activity of Internet users is concentrated on popular social networks, where completely different mass information flows. The new environment forms new rules of interaction with the reader, the role of both traditional and convergent mass media is gradually leveled.

The conducted analysis led to conclusion that among the newspapers of Uzbekistan the most innovative promotion strategy also remains the prerogative of private media. The analyzed edition of “Darakchi” has accounts in five social networks, where it has a total of more than 170 thousand subscribers.

It should be mentioned that success of presence of mass media in social networks depends not so much on the number of subscribers of the page as on the number of active users. In this respect, the accounts of “Darakchi” meet the specified requirements. In this case, it is worth noting that the content, which the newspaper places in popular social networks, is

almost identical. Typically, these are newspaper headers, equipped with hashtags and photos. Thus, the publication uses social networks to relay news, specially written posts are practically absent. Based on international practice, ideally these posts are presented in the form of small texts that briefly describe the substance of the material, create intrigue and encourage the reader to visit the website. In this promotion strategy, it is also appropriate to have an easier style of communication with a reader, which allows to make connections with people, to attract them, and journalists and editors themselves become “friends” of users on the social network.

In this context, it can be concluded that the mass media, ignoring modern forms of dialogue and retaining existing development strategies, will lose their audience. They will also have difficulties in attracting a new reader. Conservative media can be very likely to be outside the trends of modern development. In media space, as it seems, the convergent strategy, focused on multichannel in production and distribution of multimedia content, is preferable. In turn, qualitative changes in the media sphere, conditioned by its technological transformations, lead to a significant transformation of creative methods and methods of journalism.

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