

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE IN KAZAKHSTAN BASED ON THE TELEVISION EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to show how the convergence process is manifesting in Kazakhstan. Even if the phenomenon has only begun in recent years; from a journalistic perspective, it is characterized by some subtle aspects and trends. The principal focus is on the convergence process in the Kazakh television sector. One must not forget the process is quite unexplored in the country. Barely any research findings or statistics are available on the media convergence process in Kazakhstan. This paper seeks to use available information to demonstrate how the traditional Kazakh media industry is evolving toward new media. Media convergence is based today on new communications technology, including mobile phones, devices, laptops and others. This study should be of interest in that it will uncover the challenges facing the Kazakh media and shows approaches toward convergence connected to multimedia. It will touch upon various forms of convergence taking place with online media. The main conclusion of this study shows that media convergence is taking place quite rapidly in the country due to various technologies-notably, the extensive use of the Internet for television services.*

Keywords: media convergence, mobile media convergence, Kazakh media industry, TV convergence, multimedia journalism.

„Old media will be replaced throughout time with new media. Bloggers will continue to replace journalists. This process is happening today in all developed countries”¹ It is obvious we are witnessing a broad transformation of the media in all of its forms and venues. The speed with which technological capabilities are evolution means media is expanding and changing almost daily. Television broadcasting can no longer compete without adding online resources for their audiences. All top television providers are now advanced in their creative use of online resources, including for live broadcasts and pre-recorded programming. This convergence of media technology is now an important way content is delivered to audiences.

What do we understand under media convergence? According to the Encyclopedia Britannica the general concept of convergence refers to *„phenomenon involving the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks, and media content. It brings together the „three C’s”-*

¹ J. Kolodzy, *Convergence journalism: writing and reporting across the news media*, Lanham, Md., Rowman&Littlefield, 2006, p. 5, 7.

computing, communication, and content-and is a direct consequence of the digitization of media content and the popularization of the Internet”²

Media convergence has empowered users to produce and distribute their own content, viewing and listening schedules can be personalized via on-demand or search content and mobile services, users can engage with one another via peer to peer technology.³

„Since the 1990s, the term ‘convergence’ has been applied most commonly to describe the development of digital technology and the integration of text, numbers, images and audio”⁴

Technological convergence served as the beginning of the process of convergence in journalism. *„The original discussions on media convergence focused on the technological aspect: computers and digitization”⁵* The concept of „media convergence” first appeared in 1960.⁶ Moreover, in 1987 the „Green Paper” was published under the auspices of the European Economic Community, which regulates telecommunication services and the development of a unified market. It was this document that was the harbinger of media convergence. In May 1994, Martin Baugemann in the European Commission report proposed the creation of an information society based on the Internet. The report was published three years after the development of the very first websites by Tim Berners-Lee, as the final stage in the creation of Web 1.0. The European Commission report, *„A Green Paper on the Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors and its Implications for Regulation. Towards an Information Society Approach”*, was published in December 1997.⁷ According to this Green paper *„The ability of different network platforms to carry essentially similar kinds of services, or the coming together of consumer devices such as the telephone, television and personal computer”⁷* Through technology, everything is greatly simplified. For instance, telephone devices are now used like TVs or PCs. People can watch movies, TV shows and news

² T. Flew, *Media convergence*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017, Retrieved from: www.britannica.com; A. E. Grant, S. J. Wilkinson (eds.), *Understanding media convergence: the state of the field*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

³ C. D. Zotto, A. Lugmayr, *Media Convergence Handbook, volume 1, Media Business and Innovation*, 2016, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-54484-2_1.

⁴ T. Dwyer, *Convergent media and privacy*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Houndmills; New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

⁵ J. Kolodzy, *Convergence journalism: writing and reporting across the news media*, p. 5, 7.

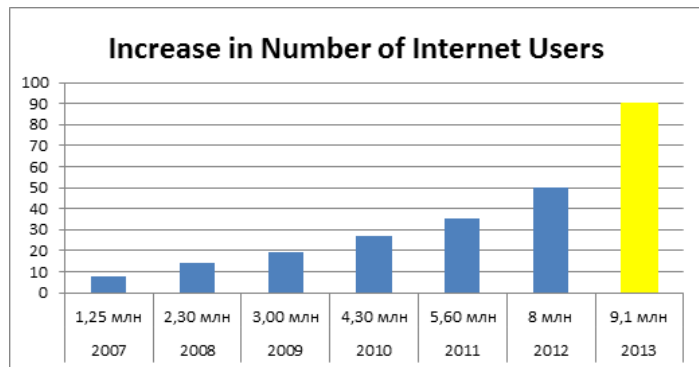
⁶ R. Szczepaniak, *Media Convergence-Approaches and Experiences*, Cracow, Poland, Peter Lang, 2013, p. 18.

⁷ *Green paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors, and the implications for regulation. Towards an information society approach*, European Commission, Brussels, 3 December 1997, retrieved from: www.ab.gov.tr.

using smart handheld devices.

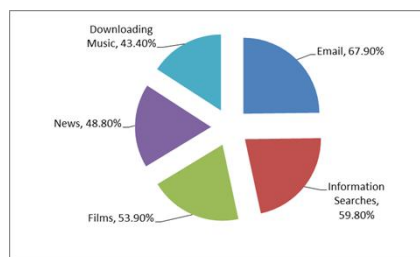
Technological convergence and the merging of technical advances have influenced the evolution of a new Kazakhstani media greatly. Domestic channels have partially transformed into online broadcasters. Television in Kazakhstan now has high potential to complete its online transition. Today, out of the 17 million people living in the country, more than 10 million use the Internet.⁸ This a significant figure. Between 2007 and 2013 the number of users increased from 1.25 million to over 9 million users (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Showing
Increase in
Number
of Internet
Users from
2007-2013
(millions)



The increase in the use of the Internet includes exchanging emails, downloading a variety of entertainment, and seeking information. Nearly 60% of Kazakhs seek information through the Internet and nearly 49% of use the Internet for news, which has important implications for television news organizations (see Figure 2)⁹.

**Figure 2: Why Are Most
Internet Users Online?**



As far Kazakh researcher Galiya Ibrayeva, convergence is one of the kinds of demassification who'smade changes in media technologies,

⁸ *Forbes Kazakhstan*, retrieved from www.forbes.kz.

⁹ *Kazakhstani people spent \$1.5 billion in online stores for the year, 2013*, retrieved from: www.forbes.kz.

media content and media market.¹⁰ That is, intensively developing of new information technologies creates competition between traditional and new media as well. In a word, the author gives a number of examples of modernization of Kazakhstan's media space, where that use modern methods of information transfer, such as online broadcasting.¹¹ According to another Kazakh researcher Saule Barlybvaeva, common people started to make news that has something to say and to show. Millions of people became available to new tools enabling them to publish on the Internet. Therefore, participants in the media market have to reformat the filing. „*Since the 1990s, the term 'convergence' has been applied most commonly to describe the development of digital technology and the integration of text, numbers, images and audio*”.¹² „*The Internet is becoming more dynamic, acquiring new multimedia features. Television interviews, chat with viewers via mobile phone, e-mail, as well as Internet chat-is just the beginning*”.¹³ Author claims that television should become the universal service provider of new form of informing, connecting, entertainment and e-commerce when the television set will be universal access to global Internet content.

The Importance of Social Media

Accordingly, there has been significant growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Vk, Instagram, and others (see Figure 3). As a result, some technological convergences are taking place for various forms of media content. For example, a TV channel typically has an official website as well as social network accounts as additional platforms. Social media platforms are performing well as a medium for promoting television content. They also mobilize the public and encourage interaction through user comments and discussions. The most often visited and popular social network in Kazakhstan is V Kontakte.ru (see Figure 3). Each national TV channel has its own V Kontakte.ru account, which is a markedly higher figure than the Facebook platform enjoys with Kazakh media outlets.¹⁴

¹⁰ G. Ibrayeva, *At the crossroads of communications: journalism, media of Kazakhstan*, Almaty, Kazakh University, 2013, p. 57.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹² T. Dwyer, *Convergent media and privacy*.

¹³ S. Barlybayeva, *Kazakhstan: Information and Communication Infrastructure*, Almaty, Kazakh University, 2012, 89 p.; S. Barlybayeva, A. Alzhanova, K. Myssayeva, *Convergent Journalism*, Almaty, Kazakh University, 2016, 119 p.

¹⁴ *Internet audience in Kazakhstan: portrait and preferences of the user, 2015*, retrieved from: www.forbes.kz; *The population of Kazakhstan came to 17 million 28 thousand people*,

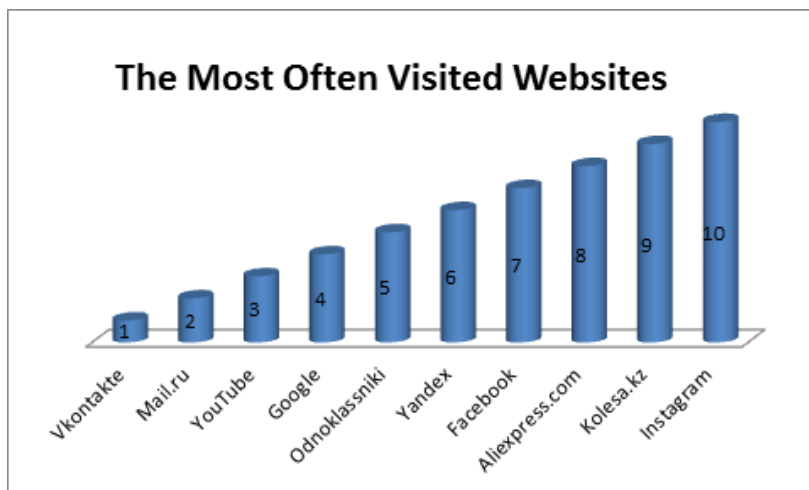


Figure 3: Shows Most Popular Sites

According to Jatin Srivastava,¹⁵ article about Communication Evolution and Influences: „A cellular phone is an example of a converged media, but the converged technology does not exhaust its scope of convergence. In other words, cellular phones are used for downloading mass media (e. g., YouTube.com videos), transferring ideas (e. g., using Twitter, Google Chat) and not just for verbal exchanges between individuals”. Therefore one of the most influential trends on the Internet today is the ability for social media users to like, share and comment on content they enjoy or believe is important. Online audiences are certainly setting the pace in terms how and when breaking news and reports (including TV video) are consumed. When important content hits a nerve, it can become popular fast and spread quickly.¹⁶

According to a report on the Action Plan for the Information Kazakhstan-2020 state program for 2013-2017 (first stage), the terrestrial digital broadcasting program was adopted for the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2014. The program is planned for completion by 2017.¹⁷ The main purpose of the „Informational Kazakhstan-2020” program is making conditions providing conversion of Kazakhstan to informational society. It is interesting to note several media indicators from this Action

Tengrinews, 2013, retrieved from: www.tengrinews.kz.

¹⁵ „Diffusion of Innovations: Communication Evolution and Influences”, in *Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, The Communication Review*, no.15, 2012, pp. 294-312.

¹⁶ H. W. Nienstedt, S. Russ-Mohl, B. Wilczek, *Journalism and media convergence*, Berlin; Boston, De Gruyter, 2013.

¹⁷ *Media Usage Rates by the Ministry for Investment and Development*, 2015.

Planin bellow:

-the number of subscribers of the national satellite network will count 500 thousand subscribers in 2020;

-domestic TV channels available throughout the country-45 in 2017;

-expansion of the geography of distribution of Kazakhstan television channels to 100 foreign countries in 2017, 110 in 2020;

-he representation of print and electronic media on the Internet - 70% in 2017, 95% - in 2020; Media accessible via the Internet-50% in 2017, 80% in 2020; the share of the population satisfying the basic information needs at the expense of the domestic media (according to sociological research)-64% in 2017, 70% in 2020; an increase in the volume of advertising media, attracted by state-owned media, by 35%-in 2017, by 50%-in 2020 (relative to 2012). So we can see firsthand that technological evolution via the Internet is moving along quite well in Kazakhstan.

This process, in turn, is pushing forward the dynamic transformation of traditional journalism into multimedia journalism. These forces form the roots of modern media convergence and raise several questions about convergence in Kazakhstan.

RQ₁ How has the Kazakh media technology evolved since the beginning of the convergence process?

RQ₂ How are advanced technologies influencing online TV services in Kazakhstan?

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative data was used to answer the research questions. Quantitative data for this article was collected from the official websites of national television channels. Each site was examined to determine the presence of traditional broadcasting, online broadcasting, live online broadcasting, on demand programming, and online use. In addition, the use of social media was identified. If a characteristic was found, it is marked with a „+”. The findings are illustrated in tables 1 and 2.

**Table1: Methods for Broadcasting
TV content through Various Platforms**

№	Channel	Traditional Broadcasting	Online Broadcasters	LiveOnlineBroadcasting	On DemandProgramming	Online Capacity But Not Used
1	Khabar	+	+	+	+	
2	24.Kz	+	+	+	+	
3	Kazakhstan	+	+	+	+	
4	Astana TV	+	+		+	
5	KTK	+	+	+	+	
6	Kazakh TV	+	+	+	+	
7	Channel 31	+	+		+	
8	Eurasia 1 TV	+	+	+	+	
9	Mir	+	+		+	+
10	Tan (from 2014 national)	+	+		+	

Table 2: Television Channels on Social Networks and Internet Portals

№	Name of channel	Official page (site)	Twitter	Facebook	Vk	Instagram	YouTube	Mail
1	Khabar	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
2	24 Kz	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
3	Kazakhstan	+	+	+	+			
4	Astana TV	+	+	+	+			
5	KTK	+	+	+	+			
6	Kazakh TV	+	+	+	+			
7	31 TV	+	+		+			
8	Channel 1 Eurasia	+	+	+	+			
9	Mir	+	+		+	+		
10	Tan	+	+		+			

Materials from American and European researchers were used for a comparative analysis and to describe the effect of globally evolving convergence on the experience of consuming news content. This analysis made it possible to pinpoint some commonalities and map Kazakhstan's own path toward media convergence.

Qualitative research involved interacting with local reporters on their Facebook community page named „Kazakhstan's journalists”. This led to some conclusions as to how the latest media technologies are being embraced in the country. An internet survey among media workers was also conducted. The survey was prepared on the „Survey Monkey” platform. It had been functioning for 9 days. A total of 42 people took part. The survey included the following questions:

-How do you think modern technologies affect TV services?

-How necessary is online news broadcasting?

The survey was analyzed in order to determine the role of convergence in the mass media and the impact of new technologies on television.

New Kazakh Media during a Time of Technological Progress

The new Kazakh media began with the development of the Internet and new media technologies in the mid-1990s after Kazakhstan's split from the Soviet Union. The Internet, cable-satellite TV, and mobile phones are important globalizing forces. Globalization is partially a consequence of the evolution of new media technology and its influence on the changing shape of information consumption and communications in the country and across the world. The 10 top national TV channels operate both traditionally and online. Traditional television broadcasting in Kazakhstan is in most cases targets regional and rural audiences. According to the 2013 census, the rural population of Kazakhstan amounted to 45.1% of the total population.¹⁸

It is important to note that thanks to progressing of new technologies TV content expanded. One of the questions in the survey was about new technologies „How is the Latest Media Technology Being Used with Online TV Service?”. According to the information from this survey 32 person from 42 participants agreed that there is big impact on. Curiously, one respondent asserts fact of low rate of consumption online service by Kazakhstan's viewers. And there are played role some of

¹⁸ *The population of Kazakhstan came to 17 million 28 thousand people*, Tengrinews, 2013, retrieved from: www.tengrinews.kz.

problems with Internet connection in region (very slow), expensive cell service and poor quality of video (See Figure 4).

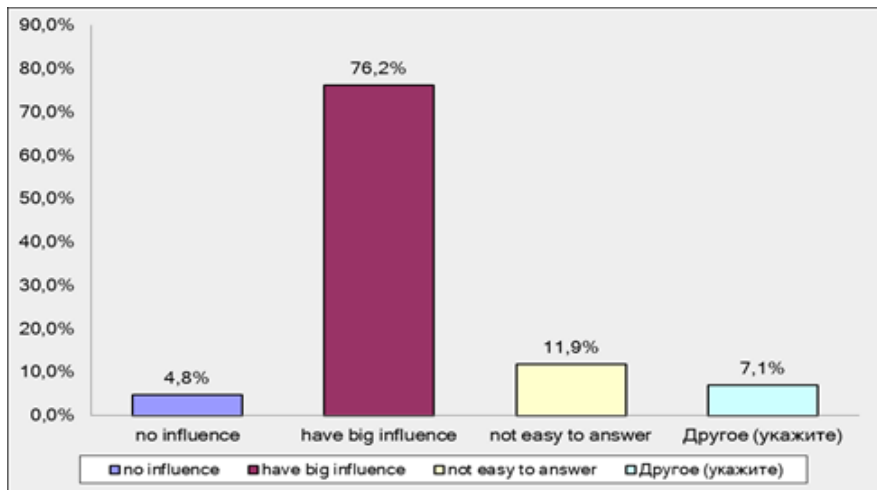


Figure 4: How is the Latest Media Technology Being Used with Online TV Service?

The Path toward Media Convergence in Kazakhstan

The first .kz national domain was registered on September 19, 1994. The first Internet site in the Kazakh language showed up four years later, in June 1998. While television remains by far the most popular platform for media consumption, mobile phone usage has seen enormous expansion in recent years, going from a penetration rate of 35 percent in 2005 to 155 percent in 2011 making it the only communication medium not only to come close to but actually to significantly outpace the high usage levels of television in Kazakhstan. This growth rate makes it the sole communications medium to significantly outpace television usage levels.

A lack of reliable and systematic data on news consumption and its audience now makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions on the main shifts toward the digitization of news and information over the period studied. What scarce data exists, however, suggests that television has been and remains the dominant medium for news consumption. A growing and vibrant community of Internet users exists in Kazakhstan, and the number of online news sources catering to this group is also

growing. Although Internet rankings are highly volatile, a handful of online news resources routinely make the top 25 ratings on Zero.kz, a site that calculates statistics on the usage of websites¹⁹.

Social networking has also grown tremendously over recent years. „As one example, in March 2011, Facebook had 268,160 Kazakhstani users; by April 2012, this number had risen to 435,020 users; and in October 2012, Facebook was reported to have 616,120 registered users in the country, more than double its membership base over the previous 18 months”²⁰.

During online survey 35 of journalist from 42 were agree with necessity of online broadcast the news. One of them commented „It is useful when you lost news from TV set program”. When other journalist claims that the schedule of news on TV and Radio do not change and the people are accustomed to it (See Figure 5).

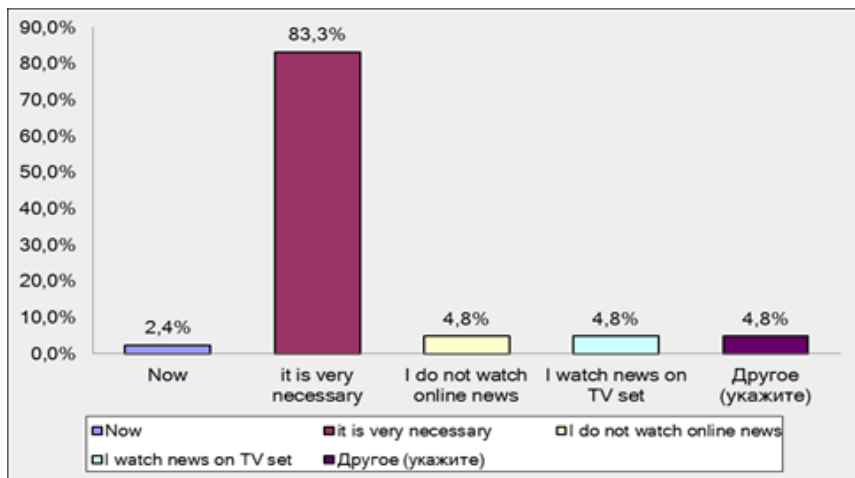


Figure 5: Is it necessary to broadcast online news?

It is easy to find links to download mobile applications on TV channels’ official websites. For example, on the news site-24.kz, you can click on the relevant link and download the channel’s mobile version if you own a Mac or Android device. This demonstrates that traditional journalism, print media and TV reporting are adopting new creative media technologies and mobile applications.

Janet Kolodzy, the author of „Convergence Journalism”, describes the preconditions for modern convergence as follows: „Journalists need to

¹⁹ *Country Report, MDM-Kazakhstan*, 2013.

²⁰ B. Kisikov, *Not the Kazakhstan Internet, Vlast*, 11 May 2012, 2013, retrieved from: www.vlast.kz.

understand the increased time being spent at work and getting to work is affecting how much time people use consuming news and how they go about it. People do not have the time in the morning before they head out the door to read a ninety-six-page morning paper. Many get their local news, particularly weather and traffic reports, from the car radio, or by checking a morning newscast on television. Some leave for work before the morning newscasts begin, or before the newspaper is delivered to their door... People are not reading the newspaper or watching television while on the job, but they do check the latest news online. By the time their workday ends and they go home, they might have missed the evening news on network television, and they likely fall asleep before the late-night local wrap-up at 10:00 or 11:00 pm... The news cycle has become 24\7-nonstop, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week-because American lives have become 24/7".²¹

The situation is similar in Kazakhstan. In 2009, TV channels were passive and inert and did not know how to present themselves and their media products online via social networks and mobile applications. However, today, six years later, they have become much more experienced and professional.

RQ2 How is the Latest Media Technology Being Used with Online TV Service?

Due to a lack of time to watch the news or read papers, the new generation of Kazakh nationals prefers the swipe of a finger to look at a video on a smart device. „*For reporters, convergence is taking multiple forms - from talking about their beat on television, to calling in the latest developments to an online producer, to planning special projects for multiple media*”.²⁴

People started talking seriously about convergence in Kazakhstan in 2012. Moreover, now, one can find fully converged editorial offices. However, years ago, journalists were asking themselves-was the convergence of media was just a fashionable trend or a matter of survival? How pressing is the problem with intensifying competition on the media market? Does it present a new income opportunity? Or, will it be more of a liability? Many other questions were raised. Running a fully converged publishing business means always being highly connected with fast emerging technologies and applications and using these in ways that put one ahead of the competition. These are the challenges of today and tomorrow-challenges of technology, creative thinking, and opportunity’ Oleg Gant, Head of project „the developing new media” speaks in his interview on site of Internews Kazakhstan.

²¹ J. Kolodzy, *Convergence journalism: writing and reporting across the news media*, p. 5, 7.

The Genesis of Kazakh Convergence

The starting point of convergence of traditional media in Kazakhstan was with the launch of the Internews Network project-„The Development of New Media”. The Internews Network project team collected information from traditional media in Central Asia (newspapers, TV channels, news agencies) and within one year, turned a traditional industry into a converged one. New Reporter is online platform in Central Asia devoted to new media, convergent journalism, multimedia modes of information transfer, reviews of new online tools and recommendations for their practical application. An example of this effort is project „Lada” in Aktau, a newspaper „New Vestnik” in Karaganda, small editions-„The Urals Week” and „Our Newspaper”. Thanks to working with New Reporter they have appeared own web site, learn how to lead this site and other principles of convergence.²² The latest stage in the convergence of the media has created vast opportunities. Media outlets are now using modern technology and processes confidently. These include a variety of mobile devices used to deliver content across various media platforms. Podcasting is a popular example. Today, nearly every news organization offers links to internally created podcasts. Most media corporations are also ensuring their content is optimized for devices such as mobile phones and iPods as these grow in importance as the new distribution channels.

The Debate Rages On

As online journalism emerges in Kazakhstan, a heated debate began on the impact new technology would have on the news writing process. One side viewed the situation in which traditional media was becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet with trepidation, while the other saw it as the future of journalism and a great opportunity. Is it possible to say that television channels went online to only lose their audiences? In my view much effort has been made to stay competitive with online content provider networks.

The American media passed this stage of discussion some time ago, even as the debate continues in terms of the potential for the survival or displacement of traditional media with the new. In the United

²² *Internews Kazakhstan*, retrieved from: www.internews.kz; *New reporter*, retrieved from: www.newreporter.org; *News of Kazakhstan and the world: "Khabar"*, retrieved from: www.khabar.kz.

States, all TV shows have their own social network accounts, where they post their episode guide and announce on going events. This allows programs to maintain direct contact with their audience, to keep them informed on what's new, to learn their preferences and share some internal secrets.

A Look at a New Popular Application

Popular online application trends are important for journalists as well. Rather than write in generalities, an example one of the latest social media apps that is rapidly gaining popularity is „*Mentions*” one of the fastest growing and newly popular social media innovations. This application is specifically designed for journalists, celebrities, athletes and other public figures. In early autumn 2015, *Mentions* was made available to specific groups of public figures with verified Facebook accounts. To use the application, you need be a verified registered journalist with a blue checkmark on your Facebook account.

To get registered, you submit a request and provide supporting documentation. With the help of journalists, *Mentions* allows you to interact with readers very easily and to join discussions and broadcast events in real time. In contrast to Periscope, *Mentions* was designed for public figures and journalists only. It is used widely in Europe and America. To test its popularity in Kazakhstan, a small survey was sent to the community of local journalists on Facebook (more than 2 million members).

The question was worded as follows: „*Dear Colleagues, Good day! For the purpose of a research article-are there any local journalists who have tried out 'Mentions', the recently created Facebook app for celebrities and journalists? If there are, please leave your comments on this app below this post. Thank you for your feedback!*”. A link was included to the official *Mentions* Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/facebookmentions>. The results indicate that no Kazakhstani celebrities, public figures or media representatives have a Facebook page with the verified blue check mark that allows one to register on *Mentions*. The sole exception was Radio Azattyk (Radio Free Liberty), which is headquartered in Prague: <https://www.facebook.com/RadioAzattyq/?fref=ts>.

In their comments to the post, journalists offered to organize a webinar on this topic. We clearly saw some reactionary elements within Kazakhstan's media sector, even if this took place on unconsciously. But the facilitation of media convergence is in the country's national interest

for all parties involved. New technology has transformed traditional television journalism through the convergence of online and traditional venues.

Conclusion

This discussion of the media convergence process focuses for most on the how the phenomenon is playing out in Kazakhstan. The goal of the study is to analyze how the development of media convergence and new technology are affecting online television broadcasting. The study seeks to describe the obvious impact new technology has been having on traditional Kazakh journalism. The periodical press, as well as radio and television all, have websites today, where users can read or view content at anytime, anywhere they want. Media convergence is now firmly entrenched as part of the Kazakh media's evolutionary development process.

The answer to research question 1 is the Kazakh media technology absolutely evolved since the beginning of the convergence process. The results were heterogeneous, national level television channels (10 were selected) are equipped for direct online broadcasting. Regional TV channels have a low capacity for online broadcasting. The methods TV channels use for broadcasting on their websites were also reviewed. The results are shared on Table 1. Moreover, certain local TV channels broadcast online in exclusively in Kazakhstan. The study used international research on media convergence as its foundation. American and European research provides a solid resource to form an overall picture of media convergence, and therefore to define the Kazakhstan experience in comparison.

The answer to research question 2 is progressing of new technologies certainly influencing online TV services in Kazakhstan. New global media technology trends are now becoming popular in Kazakhstan. As an example, this paper uses the Mentions Facebook video-application, which is intended solely for actors, athletes, musicians, public figures and journalists. A constructive debate is taking place among media professionals on the evolution of convergent journalism. Contemporary journalists (mostly under age 45) are actively using and promoting new technologies, while old-timers (the so-called „Soviet School”) prefer to stick with traditional media. It should be noted the state has offered considerable support to stimulate the media convergence process. The most important example of this is the

national-, „Information Kazakhstan-2020” development program. Most traditional media consumers (newspapers, TV) in Kazakhstan live in rural areas. Urban residents lean greatly toward mobile applications for activities such as viewing television programs.

In brief conclusion, this study found:

- The convergence process is irreversible;
- Kazakhstan’s traditional media now makes extensive use of new technology and apps;
- Internet service biggest audience lies in the country’s major cities;
- Content adapted to a convergence environment can and often is distributed immediately (sometimes virally) via various media;
- The convergence of contemporary journalism is nearly keeping pace with technological advances. New innovations and applications are rapidly generating and stimulating new opportunities as a result.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

