

Uncovering the Quality of Converged Journalism

— A Case Study of *The Tampa Tribune* News Stories —

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— A Content Analysis of *The Tampa Tribune* News Stories —

Abstract:

A content analysis, coupled with an in-depth interview, was done in this case study on *The Tampa Tribune*, a component of The News Center in Tampa, in an attempt to answer the question whether converged journalism has jeopardized journalistic quality. After comparing the quality factors shown in the *Tribune* stories before, at the beginning of, and three years into convergence, this study has found that media convergence has overall sustained the quality of news reporting.

Introduction

Converged journalism refers to the practice of reporting news for multiple media platforms such as television, newspaper, the Internet and radio. A reporter could practice converged journalism either voluntarily or as encouraged or required by his or her company that either owns multiple media platforms or cooperates with a company that owns another media platform (Huang, et al, 2003a).

Over the last decade or so, the burgeoning practices of converged journalism have caused heated debate among media owners, news professionals and scholars on the impact of converged journalism on the quality of news reporting (e.g. Blethen, 2002; Haiman, 2001; Stevens, 2002; Stone, 2002; Carr, 2002; Finberg, 2002; Luzadder, 2003). In June 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) relaxed its earlier rule on media cross-ownership. This relaxation has, again, triggered fierce debate about the pros

and cons of media convergence, but surely it has paved the way for more converged journalism in the years to come.

Opponents of converged journalism worry that, with less profound professional knowledge in a non-primary platform and with limited time for filing a story for multiple media platforms, a reporter might not be able to produce quality journalism. Andy Barnes, president and CEO of *The St. Petersburg Times* says: “I don’t think you’re going to get the best newspaper report if someone is, in the first hour after the event, filing for a different medium” (Palser, 2002). Stone (2002) believes that most backpack journalists are a “[J]ack of all trades, and master of none,” and that they can “only deliver mediocre journalism.” She says: “In time, the message that quality comes from those journalists who practice a defined job, be it writer, videographer, photographer or editor, will be clear” (Ibid.).

Opponents focus on news content rather than on channels. William Dean Singleton (2003), vice chairman and CEO of MediaNews Group, says,

Right now, few priorities are more important than providing our readers with the high-quality content they seek no matter if it’s in our print edition, online, via a mobile phone or Palm Pilot, or by some other means not yet invented or tried.

How we deliver the news is not nearly as important as what we’re delivering. And with apologies to James Carville, let me remind you, “It’s the content, stupid.”

Also, opponents are afraid that the quality of reporting will suffer if media companies place their focus on reducing cost, cutting staff and making more money rather than focusing on how to better serve the audience. University of Wisconsin-Madison journalism professor James Baughman worries that big media companies become so pre-occupied with turning a profit that they sacrifice good journalism to save a buck (Gabetas, 2002). An Associate Press story reported in 2000: “Some print reporters find it intimidating and call it cheap labor, since they are not paid extra for the additional duties. But some are going with the flow.” Thomas Kunkel (2003), dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland and president of *American Journalism Review* magazine, says that ending the ban on cross-media ownership is not a good idea, which he says could cost good journalism. Responding to a newspaper editor

who takes better marketing as the reason for promoting converged journalism, Robert Haiman (2001), President Emeritus of the Poynter Institute, raised a serious question, “but you are supposed to be an editor. So why aren’t those two words, ‘better journalism?’” Haiman (Ibid.) believes that converged journalism will drag down the journalism quality, but “quality content will be king,” he said. The *St. Petersburg Times*, a nationally renowned newspaper, is closely watching what happens to the *Tribune*. Paul Tash, editor of the *Times*, concedes the newspaper/television/ Internet triumvirate holds rich promotional opportunities, but remains skeptical of its journalistic value (Ibid.).

Proponents of converged journalism, on the other hand, argue that quality journalism is the focus of converged journalism, convergence has improved and will continue to improve quality in news, and it offers the potential to serve the community better. Keith Hartenburger, manager for the news and programming for Tribune Co. Intergroup Development, which comprises 11 newspapers, 22 television stations, four radio stations and numerous Web sites, says, “Our goal is to provide quality journalism around-the-clock on any medium available to the user” (Barney, 2001). Kolodzy (2003) says that “competition hasn’t always brought diversity and quality in news. Convergence can — if done right... Convergence means cooperative relationships between television, online, and print media. In places where this already exists, good journalism still flourishes.” WFLA-TV Assistant News Director Deb Halpern says, “This is an opportunity to tell your story to more people” (Gabetas, 2002).

Responding to the charges of convergence focusing on profiting and exploiting employees, Diane McFarlin, publisher of *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune* says: “For me, convergence is not about doing more with less, but about doing more with more. Efficiencies? That's not why we're in it. We are losing money from convergence. Don't ever expect to make a lot of money from convergence” (Palser, 2002). Lou Ferrara, general manager for electronic media at *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, claims that the quality of journalism ultimately is improved since the convergence between the newspaper and the local SSN Channel 6 TV Station was launched in 1996 (Luzadder, 2003). Ferrara agrees with Halpern: “Convergence provides reporters more points of entry to a story, the technology to do more in-depth reporting, and in a more timely

way... Convergence does not lessen journalism in any way, shape or form. It should improve it” (Ibid.) Talking about workload, WFLA Managing Editor, Susan DeFraties says: “Reporter workloads will be carefully managed. If you put in extra hours one day, you'll get time off on another” (Gabetas, 2002).

Insights are not hard to find on the quality journalism issue from these polarized opinions and claims, but they all cry for evidence. Gut feelings, anecdotes or personal experiences should not become the support for such serious exploratory endeavor.

In 2003, Huang, et al conducted a comprehensive national survey among newspaper editors, TV news directors, and grass-root news professionals on how news practitioners were coping with the phenomenon of media convergence. One of the questions that served as an attitude-finder was whether the quality of professional productions such as writing, photography, video or design would deteriorate if news professionals have to prepare different versions of the same story for multiple media platforms. Huang et al (2003b) found that opinions split:

Some 38% of the editors and professionals agreed or strongly agreed that the quality would deteriorate, 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed and the other 22% were not sure. Editors and professionals showed no significant difference on this attitude T-test. Such a concern was not prevalent in the news industry.

The study concludes:

Both editors and news professionals do care about quality, but they are not prevalently concerned about the quality of work currently re-purposed for multiple media platforms. Therefore, there is no reason to be concerned that future journalists who are being trained on multiple media platforms and better prepared for convergence will be jacks of all trades but masters of none or will produce worse reporting (Ibid.).

To find out whether the news practitioners’ overall optimistic attitudes in the Huang et al study are justified, the authors of this study conducted a content analysis on the news stories carried in *The Tampa Tribune*, a component of the converged journalism model, The News Center in Tampa, Florida, in an attempt to find out how media convergence is related to journalistic quality. The authors also conducted an in-depth

interview with Craig Gemoules, deputy managing editor of *The Tampa Tribune*, to cross-examine and enrich the data from the content analysis.

It is not our intention to establish a causal relationship between media convergence and quality of reporting. Neither a content analysis nor in-depth interviews can do such a job. Gemoules also pointed out that “not all changes that have happened at the newspaper or the television station are driven by convergence.”¹ Our effort in this study was to make objective observations about the quality of journalism at the *Tribune* before, at the beginning of and three years into convergence. The goal of the study was to provide empirical evidence from the perspective of newspaper journalism to the important ongoing conversation about quality reporting issue in converged media environment.

We conducted this case study on the belief that what has happened at *The Tampa Tribune* has ramification for the future and implication for other new media that are riding on the same boat of convergence. We hope that this study on the *Tribune* will shed light on other news media’s convergence practices.

Literature Review

Nowhere in the country has the media convergence experiment been more noticeable and pronounced than at The News Center, which includes *The Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV and TBO.com. These three news organizations are owned by Media General Incorporated, a multi-million media outfit with headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Before 2000, the three organizations maintained separate offices, and different working professionals separated a mile apart. But in March 2000, all that changed. The three hitherto independent entities, relocated to a glittering five-story edifice overlooking the Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa, dubbed “The News Center.” From here, journalists from the three organizations began to hold joint editorial meetings, jointly gather news stories, or as Gil Thelen (2002), the then executive editor and vice-president of *The Tampa Tribune*, put it:

We began to socialize, spend time together... creating a spirit of trust, shared values and experimentation [where] print reporters learned TV fundamentals

from WFLA professionals and... TV reporters learned print skills [while] photojournalists learned to be ambidextrous with still and video cameras.

In January 2000, before The News Center was officially established, The *Tribune's* Florida Research Group surveyed 429 adults in West Central Florida to gauge the opinions and awareness of the partnership (Bowles, 2000). The study found that the respondents were very positive about the new services and quality of news coverage the partnership would offer.

The decision to take *The Tampa Tribune* as a case study was double-barreled. First, *The Tampa Tribune* was chosen out of thousands of newspapers in the nation because it is under The News Center, a model of media convergence that has come under close scrutiny in the nation over the last three years. Since *The Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV and TBO.com were housed under the same roof in March 2000 to disseminate news across platforms, much has been written about this news entity (e.g. Luzadder, 2003; Fliegler, 2002; Gates, 2002; Carr, 2002a; Carr, 2002b; Bradley, 2002; Thelen, 2002; Colón, 2000; Smith, 2000), but little has been done to measure the relationship between convergence and quality of news stories.

Second, *The Tampa Tribune* was chosen out of the three converged media entities at The News Center because, traditionally, newspapers have been regarded as the leaders of quality journalism among all media. Newspapers have the longest history of all news media. William Dean Singleton, vice chairman and CEO of MediaNews Group, regards newspapers as “the strongest media on the planet” and the “cornerstones of convergence” (I Want Media, 2002). Rosenstiel et al (2003) write: “The newspaper in town usually is the news gathering organization with the greatest resources, the most reporters, the strongest expertise, the deepest beat system, and often the most active investigative teams.” All other media have relied, to different degrees, on newspapers both for information and for leadership in quality journalism. All indications are that newspapers will remain thriving and profitable in the years to come (Gates, 2002; Roat, 2002). Gates (2002) believes that “convergence with broadcast and online media is the shape of things to come for newspapers.” Studying the quality in news in *The Tampa Tribune* provides a suggestively characteristic profile of the quality of converged journalism.

For three years from 2000 to 2003, *The Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV and TBO.com “hacked through the wilderness without benefit of a map or GPS” (Stevens, 2002). They followed their lofty ambitions of making “better journalism,” as Forrest Carr, news director of WFLA-TV, put it (Luzadder, 2003). Carr says, “We can put a story out, have it on TBO.com, *The Tampa Tribune* and TV, thereby creating a voice that just wasn't there before for our journalism, so that our stories have more reach, more power, and greater effect” (Stevens, 2002).

Stevens (2002) reported:

When the *Tribune* announced that it would be converging, the reporters went into a panic, says Cheryl Schmidt, the *Tribune's* special features editor. They thought they would have to file for TBO.com and appear in front of WFLA-TV's cameras. A few do, but most don't... *Tribune* reporters were given an option to take part — unless they are on a breaking story and need to work in the other medium, but new hires will be expected to do stories for all three outlets.

Up to 2002, cross-platform reporting was not yet a norm though the three media were physically housed under the same roof. In April 2002, Stevens reported that only a small group actually crossed over the media boundaries on a regular basis at The News Center in Tampa. “What’s become more common,” she said, “is that reporters and editors share information.” Stevens (Ibid.) further reported, “Although The News Center's editors and producers hope and anticipate that more reporters will cross media lines, they're fairly content with reporters sharing information to enrich stories across media platforms.” This observation was confirmed by the comments of Rich Gordon, who chaired the New Media Program at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and toured much-touted converged newsrooms in Orlando, Tampa and Sarasota, Florida, in 2002. “What I saw there was that jobs haven’t changed very much,” he said. “Print reporters are still focused on print. TV reporters are still focused on TV” (South and Nicholson, 2002). Forrest Carr (2002a), news director of WFLA-TV, confirmed their observations by saying, “In most cases, this [convergence] simply comes down to the sharing of tips and information.”

To ensure good quality, The News Center developed the Citizens' Voice project in October 2001 to address reader questions, explain news decision-making and ask the public to hold Tampa journalists accountable (Fliegler, 2002). Forrest Carr (2002) says, "Convergence creates a more powerful form of journalism. With greater power comes greater responsibility — and the need for greater accountability." Six months after the launch of the project, editors extended "The News Center Pledge" to readers and viewers. The pledge published the core values of The News Center's journalism, including correcting mistakes, giving voice to the voiceless and acting as watchdogs for the community (Fliegler, 2002). The document acknowledges the partnership among the three platforms but commits to separate and independent editorial decision-making. It promises, among other things:

- Accuracy and fairness;
- To promptly correct mistakes;
- To give voice to the voiceless and cover our community in all its diversity;
- To conduct ourselves with compassion and sensitivity to privacy;
- To be a watchdog for our community and hold the powerful accountable including ourselves.

In an attempt to evaluate the quality on news in *The Tampa Tribune*, Donna Reed, now former editor of *The Tampa Tribune*, says that convergence has "changed the dynamic of the newsroom. Deadlines are constant. We have a new way of thinking, visually, because TV and online are so visually dependent, and newspapers are not. So, I think it's made us a better paper visually; it's made us smarter in being timely and succinct" (Stevens, 2002). Reed says, "The goal of convergence is not and never was a reduction in numbers," and points to stories that *Tribune* and WFLA reporters work on together, rather than one reporter doing the job of both. "Simply, two brains are better than one," she says (Stevens, 2002).

All such evaluations, self-evaluations and self-disciplines are necessary in helping with the healthy growth for The News Center. But how can we know whether such endeavors on the side of the journalistic practitioners have converted to quality

journalism? This is also the question we had for Picard's way of defining journalistic quality.

As an expert on quality of journalism, Robert Picard has acknowledged the difficulty of defining journalistic quality. Picard (2002) has a germane comment:

The quality concept is problematic when applied to journalism because it is nearly impossible to articulate what elements makes (sic) up the concept. As a result, quality tends to be defined not by its presence but its absence and observers are in the position of saying "we can't define good quality, but we know bad quality when we see it."

As a result, Picard proposed that quality be defined by journalistic activities such as interviews, telephone gathering of information, attending events about which stories are written, etc. The question we have about such defining is, again, whether the efforts on the part of the journalists are necessarily converted to good quality in stories?

Rosenstiel et al (2003) had a different approach from Picard's. Rosenstiel et al's comprehensive 2003 study sponsored by the Project for Excellence in Journalism investigated the quality of some 23,000 stories from 172 TV stations of different nature including ownership types over five years. The part from the study that is most valuable to our study is how they defined quality. The authors conducted a focus group that comprised 14 respected local television news professionals and station group heads from a diverse cross section of companies and regions around the country. All participants believed that the following factors constitute the quality of news:

1. Covering the whole community,
2. Be significant and informative,
3. Demonstrate enterprise and courage,
4. Be fair, balanced and accurate,
5. Be authoritative and
6. Be highly local.

Based on the focus group findings, the authors operationalized each factor except for "covering the whole community."

The study found that stations with cross-ownership were more than twice as likely as stations overall to generate “A” quality newscasts. None of the six stations in the sample earned an “F” grade in quality, compared with 8% of all other stations. They also found that cross-owned stations “were more likely to do stories that focused on important community issues, more likely to provide a wide mix of opinions, and less likely to do celebrity and human-interest features. Cross-owned stations were also, however, slightly less enterprising than other stations.” They concluded that “[s]tations with cross-ownership — in which the parent company also owns a newspaper in the same market — tended to produce higher quality newscasts.” The authors of the study acknowledged that the small sample size made them unable to infer much from the data and could have possibly skewed the data.

We found the definition of journalism quality in Rosenstiel et al’s 2003 study highly useful to our study. We revised the definition and re-operationalized it to fit our research needs. We found it, as Roesenstiel et al did, hard to operationalize the factor “covering the whole community.”² Therefore, we dropped this factor.

A few studies focused on the products of converged media environment as we would do. For instance, Pritchard (2002) found on the converged coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign that half of the media outlets had different slants in their television coverage than in their print coverage. The other half carried the same slant in both platforms’ coverage. Overall, his study found that “common ownership of a newspaper and a television station in a community does not result in a predictable pattern of news coverage and commentary about important political events in the commonly owned outlets.”

Methodology

Since the debate about the effect of media convergence on the quality of journalism is far from being conclusive, instead of approaching the study with a hypothesis, we raised a general research question: How does media convergence relate to the quality of journalism? We attempted to answer this question through the case of *The Tampa Tribune*.

To measure the five quality factors inherited from Roesenstiel et al's study, we created a coding sheet, in which the five factors were defined and operationalized (See Attachment 1).

Enterprise

We defined “enterprise” as the effort put in disseminating news to the maximum number of audience/viewers/readers in informative and expressive ways.

As we understand, newspapers use wire stories. A local newspaper usually does no more than choosing, editing, and laying out such external stories. The effort put in such external stories is much lower than driving up with a newspaper's own stories. We distinguish such external stories from the in-house stories generated by staff to properly credit enterprise to *The Tampa Tribune*.

We distinguished stories generated by the *Tribune* staff, WFLA-TV staff and TBO.com staff to find out to what extent cross-platform reporting had been done.³

Along the same rationale, we counted how many incidents occurred in which stories on WFLA-TV or TBO.com were promoted in the *Tribune*. For example, if the *Tribune* directed readers to TBO.com or WFLA-TV for more information, that was counted as being promoted on another medium.

Finally, we counted how many stories were packaged. Packaged stories call for more effort and show more sophistication in reporting. They tend to be more visual and report an event or events either in more detail or more comprehensively. Packaged stories were defined as a group of news items that contain at least two stories or at least three forms of news such as textual story, photo, infographics, timeline, or a fast facts box, that are about the same topic.

Significance

We defined story significance as the extent to which stories touch on underlying themes, ideas, trends or issues. To measure significance of stories, we categorize all stories to be counted into nine categories:

1. Business stories

2. Government stories
3. Tragedies/Malfesance stories
4. Education/Family stories
5. Health/Environment stories
6. Science/Technology stories
7. Culture/Entertainment stories
8. Sports stories
9. Other

These categories were derived from the *Tribune* reporters' job titles shown on their Web site.⁴ Each category contains multiple examples listed under that Web site (See Attachment 2). These categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but all coders were trained to find the primary slant of a story that fits in one of these nine categories. We held the same conviction as Roesenstiel et al (2003) did that “[i]ssues of public malfesance are considered more important than stories about celebrities.” We attempted to find out where the primary effort went in all the staff-generated stories.

Fairness and balance

For fairness and balance, we counted how many sources each story used. Usually, more sources mean more points of view. We classified stories into the ones using no source, one source only and two or more sources.

Authoritativeness

Authoritativeness refers to whether the newspaper used in a story anonymous sources only, person-in-street and/or anonymous sources only, or used expert, authoritative or first-hand sources.

Localization

This concept examines to what extent stories can be related to the lives of local residents. We defined “local” as all the counties in the Tampa Bay area including Tampa,

St. Petersburg and vicinities. We categorized stories as local interest stories, non-local stories with local impact explained, and non-local stories without local impact explained.

To make comparisons chronically so as to detect any effects that convergence practices had on the quality of news stories, we used a revised version of “composite week” sampling technique described by Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p. 147). First, we decided on three stages to make comparisons: before convergence, at the beginning of convergence and three years into convergence. Each stage contains six-months-worth of newspapers.

Next, from each six months, we sampled one week out of each month. If, in March, for instance, the first week was chosen, the second week would be chosen from April. Newspapers from Monday to Friday from each chosen week were selected.

As a result, 30 issues of newspapers were selected from each period. In total, 90 issues of the *Tribune* were selected from all three periods for comparisons. We noticed that the sample was small and sampling error could cause potential bias in the data.

We counted the number of stories in each issue excluding columns, op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, “briefs,” and certain short sections such as “Daily Calendar,” “Today in History,” “Corrections,” “Florida Lottery,” and more. Then, each story was assigned a symbol from each category of measurement.

All four coders were involved in the coding sheet design and went through a two-week coding training provided by the primary investigator. The intercoder reliability index using Scott’s Pi was 0.91.

For the interview, the authors came up with a list of questions based on the findings from the content analysis. Three authors participated in the interview.

Findings

Enterprise

We have noticed that, in 2003, the *Tribune* used more wire stories than in-house stories though the average number of in-house stories remained comparatively consistent over the years.⁵ In 2003, The

Figure 1: The average number of stories

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
The Average Number of <i>Tribune</i> In-house Stories	27.00	23.37	24.23
The Average Number of None News Center Stories	27.97	27.86	31.57

Tribune used seven more wire stories than in-house stories on average. In comparison, the uses of wire stories and in-house stories were pretty even before convergence (see Figure 1). Gemoules explained that this change is not necessarily convergence related. He said that the *Tribune* had experienced an enormous thirst from readers for international news because of the war against terrorism and also because of the presidential election on its way. “We would have been derelict if we hadn’t increased our wire coverage,” he said.

Over the three 6-month periods, extremely few cases were found in which WFLA-TV or TBO.com reporters’ names were printed either alone or together with a *Tribune* reporter’s name in the bylines on the *Tribune*.⁶ Eight stories in total were found in which a WFLA-TV reporter wrote for the *Tribune*. Four cases

Figure 2: Total number of News Center stories contributed by WFLA-TV and by TBO.com

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
WFLA-TV Reported for the <i>Tribune</i>	3	3	2
WFLA-TV cooperated with the <i>Tribune</i>	0	2	2
TBO.com reported for the <i>Tribune</i>	0	1	0

were found in which a WFLA-TV reporter cooperated with a *Tribune* reporter to report on the same story. TBO.com contributed only two stories to the *Tribune* in the ninety issues of *Tribune* in the sample (see Figure 2). In 88% of the issues, the *Tribune* was the sole provider of in-house stories. In those issues that did contain cross-reported stories, 96% of the stories were from the *Tribune*.

After various experiments at the beginning of convergence on how to cooperate among the three entities in reporting, Gemoules said, The News Center administration decided that sharing tips and information was the best strategy. “When you are on an important story, you are no longer just talking to your editor, you are also talking to somebody from TBO, and you are also talking to somebody from Channel Eight... There is a lot of exchange of just tips and information,” Gemoules said.

The cases in which stories from WFLA-TV or TBO.com were promoted on the *Tribune* or the *Tribune* stories were said to be carried in WFLA-TV

Figure 3: Total number of cases in which WFLA-TV or TBO.com stories were promoted on the *Tribune*

Before	Beginning	3 Years later
4 cases	20 cases	4 cases

or TBO.com were few. Most of such cross-promotions occurred at the beginning of convergence. In all the 25 issues in which there were promoted non-*Tribune* stories, 23 issues carried just one such promotion. In total, 26% of the newspapers in the sample carried cross-promoted stories. The stories that got promoted most on the *Tribune* were

sports stories. There were 10 such stories, which took 36% of all the promoted stories (see Figure 3).

Finally, we found that there was not much difference in packaging stories in the early months of convergence and before convergence. But the number of packaged stories soared three years later (see Figure 4). This drastic change is statistically significant ($p=0.001$, $f=8.4$, $df=2$). Gemoules said that the use of more packaged stories was largely related to “The Power to Grow Readership: Research from the Impact Study of Newspaper Readership,” a study conducted in April 2001 by the Readership Institute under the Media Management Center at Northwestern University.⁷ Gemoules said: “It came out with eight recommendations for a newsroom to make a newspaper better. One of the recommendations was a culture change, to make the newsroom more collaborative... I think the convergence experience helped us become a more collaborative newspaper.”⁸ Taking advantage of the *Tribune* redesign in 2002, Gemoules said, the newspaper staff increased story packaging to boost readership. “Packaging in a way helps people navigate from the surface to the depth... We tried to use the physical change of the paper as a lever to be more enterprising across the board,” Gemoules said.

Figure 4: Average number of packaged stories

Before	Beginning	3 Years later
3.73	3.34	5.87

Significance

Over the nine categories of news stories, and over time, the *Tribune* reporters have almost always reported sport events the most except for the initial stage of convergence, when the *Tribune* reported about an equal amount of government stories and sport stories. Other categories of stories that the *Tribune* staff reported on frequently included government, tragedies/malfeasance, and business stories (see Figure 5). Over the years, we have observed no dramatic changes in terms of reporting effort inclinations though the *Tribune* has carried fewer sports stories after convergence than before convergence ($p=0.001$, $f=10.7$, $df=2$).

Figure 5: Average number of categorical stories

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
Business	3.20	3.03	2.93
Government	4.17	5.94	4.03
Sports	9.00	5.66	7.10
Tragedies/ Malfeasance	3.27	3.94	3.67
Education/ Family	2.43	1.66	1.73
Culture/ Entertainment	2.63	1.74	2.33
Health/ Environment	1.73	1.26	2.00
Science/ Technology	0.47	0.31	0.30
Other	0.13	0.00	0.10

Gemoules mentioned that as an experiment, the sports reporters both from WFLA-TV and from the *Tribune* had become one team. All of them reported both for the newspaper and for the television. Therefore, they are the most converged reporters at The News Center and have been making the improvement of the quality of sports reporting as their priority. The fact that there has been prominent sports reporting at the *Tribune* has to do with the proportionally prominent status sports have in the Tampa Bay area. Gemoules said that the Bolts were on a winning streak; the personnel changes of the football team were news as a result of the former Super Bowl victory; sports are big economic engines in the community; the facilities cost a lot of money for taxpayers, and sports need to be covered strongly.

Fairness and balance

We have observed a consistent pattern of using more than two sources in reporting among the *Tribune* reporters on a daily basis across the three stages of comparison. Few stories used only one source, and no story used no sources at all (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Average number of stories that used different number of sources

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
Used no source	0.77	0.26	1.03
Used one source	3.63	4.00	4.00
Used two or more sources	22.60	19.20	19.33

Authoritativeness

Again, we have observed a consistent pattern of using expert, authoritative or first-hand sources in reporting among the *Tribune* reporters on a daily basis across the three stages of comparison. Extremely few stories used person-in-street or anonymous sources only, or only used anonymous sources (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Average number of stories that used different levels of authoritative sources

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
Used anonymous sources only	1.00	0.80	1.23
Used person-in-street or anonymous sources only	2.07	0.23	1.9
Used expert, authoritative or first-hand sources	23.87	22.37	21.00

Localization

A pattern of focusing on local interests on a daily basis was found among the *Tribune* reporters across the three stages of comparison. In the few non-

Figure 7: Average number of stories with local interests

	Before	Beginning	3 years later
Non-local in-house stories without local impact explained	2.17	2.11	3.30
Non-local in-house stories with local impact explained	3.2	2.17	3.63
In-house stories about	21.57	19.20	17.33

local stories, often, reporters attempted to explain the local impact an event could have (see Figure 8).

Three years into convergence, *The Tampa Tribune* has retained its editorial autonomy. Gemoules has noticed the following three big changes at the Tribune since March 2000.

1. **A higher sense of urgency.** Gemoules said that the *Tribune* reporters now tend to plan ahead to the next day, think about what other angles they can pull out of a reported story for the next day, and what more they are able to do today.
2. **Broader reach to readers.** Gemoules reported an increasing awareness of the size of the megaphone that they have coming out of the building. “When we do a story, I think we have a higher sense of awareness that it’s going to hit more ears and it’s going to have a bigger impact in the community than if it just appeared in one platform alone,” Gemoules said.
3. **More creativity in reporting.** “If we feel we’ve broken something online already or on television already, we may be more creative in the way we write the story,” said Gemoules. They now tend to report more on ordinary people and put them in a lead, for instance, after all the authoritative sources have been quoted in the earlier breaking news. The *Tribune* reporters try to “hit the sweet spots,” to use Gemoules’s words, which mean, to tell stories in the best approach and let the community own the stories.

Discussions and Conclusions

Media convergence is still evolving at The News Center. Three years of convergence practice at The News Center may not be enough to show a complete picture of media convergence, but it has certainly come with some results.

The biggest finding from this study is that *The Tampa Tribune*, and actually The News Center, has chosen sharing tips and information across the three media platforms as their reporting norm. Cross-platform reporting, which has been often reported on and touted in trade magazines, was not a norm in 2002 as Stevens and Gordon observed, nor

was it the case in 2003, as we found out in our content analysis. The reporters at The News Center have done more cross-platform story promoting than reporting for another platform. For those people who believe media convergence to be routine cross-platform reporting, they will be surprised to find media convergence has hardly happened in the News Center. Newspaper people are still the primary force for reporting for the newspaper. Subsequently, content analysis on the *Tribune* stories over time shows that the quality of the *Tribune* reporting has remained comparatively stable across time in terms of being fair and balanced in sourcing, using authoritative sources, and localizing stories. The *Tribune* is still producing similar number of in-house stories, but has significantly expanded its wire coverage to include more international and national stories to fit readers' needs. Such increase, however, is not a result of media convergence as Gemoules pointed out. The *Tribune* reduced the number of sports stories after convergence though such stories were still dominant in 2003 to reflect strong local interests. The *Tribune* has continued focusing on reporting important issues related to government affairs, tragedies and malfeasance and business affairs. Three years into convergence, the use of packaged stories has gained an astounding leap forward. But, again, the increased story packaging did not result from the convergence effort, as Gemoules said. To some extent, convergence has helped the *Tribune* reporters cooperate and collaborate to package stories so that stories have more depth and attract more readers, according to Gemoules.

No matter how *The Tampa Tribune* has shown their understanding of what media convergence means, three years into their convergence efforts, the quality of news reporting at *The Tampa Tribune* has largely retained. This study has legitimized the finding from Huang et al's 2003 study that the concern for the collapse of quality of news because of convergence is not prevalent in the media industry.

After the study was completed, we checked the *Tribune's* readership over time in an attempt to corroborate our quantitative findings. The increase in readership may not necessarily mean better quality of journalism, but deteriorated quality could surely drive away readers. By the end of 2003, when our content analysis was completed, the readership of *The Tampa Tribune* on Sundays increased 14% during a 12-month period,

and the readership of the daily *Tribune* (Mondays through Saturdays) increased 4% during the same period. By comparison, the readership of *The St. Petersburg Times*, a non-converged newspaper, during the same period followed the national downward trend: its Sunday readership dropped 5%, and daily readership fell 1%.⁹ These readership data have not let down the *Tribune* readers' expectation for the *Tribune's* new services and quality of reporting when they responded to the January 2000 survey sponsored by the *Tribune's* Florida Research Group. Gemoules' interpretation of the readership boost is, "There are many factors that cause people to buy and read newspapers, but convergence certainly has played a role in providing urgent, enterprising and in-depth coverage."

Whether staying on the level of only sharing tips and information justifies the cost of housing the three media under the same roof in the name of media convergence is yet to be seen in the years to come. We suggest that future studies be done on whether cross-platform reporting at the grass-root level on a daily basis can raise instead of sustaining the quality of reporting. We also suggest that comparisons be done between the quality of reporting from converged news production environments and that from non-converged counterparts. It might be interesting to use the same coding sheet from this study for other converged and non-converged media and compare results. As convergence continues to evolve and change the media landscape, more studies need to be conducted on the impact of media convergence on the quality of journalism.

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Attachment 1

Your name initial: _____

Total number of stories for today: _____

Total number of in-house stories: _____

Coding Sheet

1. Date
2. How many stories were generated by Tribune staff?
3. How many stories were generated by WFLA-TV staff?
4. How many stories were generated by TBO.com staff?
5. How many stories were cooperated by Tribune WFLA and/or TBO.com staff?
6. How many stories were generated by non-News Center media outlets?
7. How many story packages are there?
8. How many i-h stories were about local interests?
9. How many were i-h non-local stories w/ local impact explained?
10. How many were i-h non-local stories w/o local impact explained?
11. 1. How many i-h stories were business stories?
12. 2. How many i-h stories were government stories?
13. 3. How many i-h stories were sports stories?
14. 4. How many i-h stories were tragedies/malfeasance stories?
15. 5. How many i-h stories were education or family stories?
16. 6. How many i-h stories were culture/entertainment stories?
17. 7. How many i-h stories were health/environment stories?
18. 8. How many i-h stories were sci/tech stories?
19. 9. How many i-h stories were of other interests?
20. How many i-h stories used expert, authoritative or first-hand sources?
21. How many i-h stories used person-in-the-street or anonymous sources only?
22. How many i-h stories used anonymous sources only?
23. How many i-h stories used no source?
24. How many i-h stories used only one source?
25. How many i-h stories used two or more sources?
26. 1. How many i-h business stories were promoted on another medium?
27. 2. How many i-h government stories were promoted on another medium?
28. 3. How many i-h sports stories were promoted on another medium?
29. 4. How many i-h tragedies/malfeasance stories were promoted on another medium?
30. 5. How many i-h education/family stories were promoted on another medium?
31. 6. How many i-h culture/entertainment stories were promoted on another medium?
32. 7. How many i-h health/environment stories were promoted on another medium?
33. 8. How many i-h sci/tech stories were promoted on another medium?
34. 9. How many i-h stories of other interests were promoted on another medium?
35. How many i-h story packages were promoted on another medium?

“i-h” means “in-house.”

- If you have observed any cross-promoted items, please give a brief description here or on the back.
- Also, take a note on anything that deserves special attention.

Attachment 2:

Definitions of categories of news

1. Business

- National economy
- Stocks
- Growth and development
- Local businesses
- Banks
- Real estate
- Retail
- Consumer issues
- Workplace/manufacturing

2. Government

- Federal government
- State government
- City/County government
- Federal Courts
- City/County courts
- Police
- Transportation
- Public safety
- Social services
- Diplomatic issues

3. Sports

- Professional or non-professional
- National or local

4. Tragedies/Malfeasance

- Crimes
- Malfeasance
- Scandals
- Accidents
- Disasters
- Wars

5. Education/Family

- Children
- Teens
- Families
- Day cares
- Schools
- Universities

6. Culture/Entertainment

- Pop culture
- Arts
- Music
- Movies
- Fashion/style
- Home/gardening/pets
- Travel
- Food
- Recreation
- Religion
- Local organizations
- Hispanic affairs
- Other minority issues
- History/Heritage

7. Health/Environment

- Public health
- Fitness
- Hospitals
- Disability
- Elder issues
- Environment
- Water
- Weather

8. Science/Technology

- Space
- Computer technology
- Medical sciences
- Military sciences
- Etc.

9. Other

¹ Personal interview in March 2004

² The word “community” could mean many things, such as geographic community, ethnic community, racial community, age community, interests community, etc. Defining community in any of these ways could be easily subject to criticism of neglecting other ways of defining community. This illusive term sounds interesting on paper but makes it hard to measure.

³ By looking at the e-mail address in each byline, we could tell from which medium a story came and whether a story was cooperated on.

⁴ See details at <http://tampatrib.com/tribhelp/staff.htm>.

⁵ The minor differences among the three means are not statistically significant.

⁶ From this paragraph on, all the stories mentioned in comparisons refer to the *Tribune* in-house stories.

⁷ This study can be found at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/building/imperatives/main.htm>. Gil Thelen, the then editor of *The Tampa Tribune* said: “We’re using the study in a number of ways: 1. Its principles underpin our redesign. 2. It’s a basis for the work of the company-wide readership taskforce, one of the company’s five strategic priorities for 2002. 3. We’re incorporating the recommendations into our daily scorecards for sections of the Tribune” (quoted from “The impact of *Impact*: How newspapers are putting the study to work” by the Readership Institute, which can be also at the URL in this endnote.)

⁸ The eighth recommendation of the study reads: “[N]ewspapers that have adaptive, constructive cultures tend also to have higher RBS (Reader Behavior Score) – that is, more time, frequency and completeness... Constructive cultures tend to be more outward-looking and responsive to changes in the environment. They expect achievement at both the individual and group level. Collaboration and coordination across departments are not optional – it is how they operate.”

⁹ The data are from *Scarborough Research*, Release 2, 2003.