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Journalists in the convergence process - project presentation

- Publications / Projets de recherche - Le journalisme dans la convergence. -

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Description :

Stratégies des groupes de presse dans le processus de multimédiatisation des industries culturelles et médiatiques

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This program aims to observe the circumstances and to analyse the potential consequences of a phenomenon that has a crawling impact on media since two decades and has brutally speed up from the beginning of the year 2000: the process of "multi-mediatization" (or convergence) of information contents produced by media companies. This phenomenon finds expression particularly in a reorganisation of companies' capital and production structures on the one hand, in a modification of continuums and information products on the other hand. These evolutions would denote a double shifting. Firstly, it would indicate a shift of the place of media companies within the communication market, henceforth in competition, especially in the diffusion/distribution process, with other actors of whose are telecommunications providers, equipment manufacturers, content or software developers who invest massively in the production of individual terminals or other devices that provide access to information content (portals on the Internet). Secondly, it would denote a shift of competencies, status and finally identity of journalistic staff that has to produce contents in which production-broadcasting-valuation processes are evolving. This project intends to tackle these issues on a socio-economical approach decentred from the information strategies of a large and emblematic North American group, News Corporation and on the other hand, by a set of in-depth case studies on French media companies involved in convergence development strategies.

Project objectives

Press groups are traditionally very attentive to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) developments. Telematics, the Internet, cellular phone services and digital television services are considered, often since their first steps, as new modes of broadcasting, valuation, promotions and relationships with readers, advertisers and economical and social actors but also as new information sources whereas technologies participate in the renewal of the concrete modes of information production. Thus, since more than two decades, the relationship between press and ICT oscillates between an over-valuation of the stakes, which two extreme forms represents whether technologies as the entry key in a new El Dorado or as a risk of seeing disappear the traditional press forms, and a sub-valuation of the difficulties to define viable operating modes that divert press actors from ICT.

For a decade, technological evolutions has let foresee new industrial configurations and transformed production processes. More and more used by all actors of media production, digital technology seems to open up new opportunities of synergy between some activities that were still very compartmentalized until recent time (for instance radio, television or press journalists), of fusion of different functions since the origin (production of the content and of the finished good), of synthesis of heterogeneous technology supports (through websites offering pictures, sounds, video and texts) and of disappearance of professional identities in the past very strictly affirmed (reporting is not anymore a strictly journalistic act).

This form of "multi-mediatization", also called "convergence" in order to express this merging process in a coherent context, concerns also the operators' level. After a stage of companies' capital diversification (companies nowadays are rarely part of media specialist groups), their merging that erases yesterdays' divisions between types of support, groups internationalisation, new entrance of industrial firms interested in program stocks, entrance of telecommunications providers and other media actors thanks to the Internet and the mobile phone industry, it seems henceforth that program creation and/or broadcasting are critical within the competitive environment in order to acquire new customers (the Internet) or retain them (mobile phones).

Finally, it is necessary to mention the role of the Internet in the convergence context. This new media has always been developed with a strong "free" implication of its users and this background tendency doesn't seem to decrease. Even in "merchant" activities (online sales, auctions, games) net surfers' contribution to the creation of an information corpus for the community is essential. Newspapers have certainly a known practice of "letters to the Editor" that they control and filter. But digitalisation increases tenfold possibilities of collective information production and net surfers have learnt to get organised in this manner. Regarding to that, the press must therefore define itself as a mediator, which presents organisational difficulties (an additional role for journalists?), economical ones (is it a profitable activity?) or ethical ones (how objective the "moderator" must be?).

Project organisation

Three analysis axes will have to be coordinated:

- On the one hand, the technological transformations concerned have to be perfectly stated: to review innovations and put them into a diachronic perspective and a synchronic ones, to relate singularities to general tendencies in order to measure the actual impact of new tools on the two following points;
- It is then necessary to analyse the reengineering of information production modes and especially the transformations of the production process, job transformations, in relation with products and services evolutions and their diffusion and valuation modes;
- Finally, partnerships or acquisition strategies in between media groups and between media groups and other economical actors will be studied, especially in order to examine their relationships with the reengineering of information production modes, technologies and job mutations, developments of the groups in terms of capital structure, production resources, and financial, commercial and technological partnerships. The observation will be made on selected French groups and, in order to underline the existing contrast, on the American pole News Corporation.

Sub-projects description

Sub-project 1: socio-economical approach of cultural industries

In a first stage, we are going to conduct a review of the grey literature, specialist media and legal information such as annual reports.

Then, by contrast, we will study the strategies of News Corporation under three perspectives. First of all, multi-positioning of the group enables to analyse which relationships could evolve between media activities and other activities of the group, especially thanks to ICT. Afterwards, the importance and originality of broadcasting strategies on the Internet on mobile of News Corporation press contents enable to examine the models used in comparison with newspaper publications. Finally, through MySpace we will analyse whether information broadcasting on this collaborative website is likely to interfere with previous broadcasting modes on the Internet or not.

This analysis will be carried out from already collected data and interviews realised at distance. In fact, it aims to prepare the second stage of this research project (not included in the previous proposition) which will lead us to carry out some interviews with financial actors in the USA and American industrial actors. On the other hand, we will participate in case studies realised in France in order to examine in more depth the financial and industrial structures

and strategies and the press information creation, production, reproduction, broadcasting and valuation in relation with job mutation.

Detailed realizations and milestones: at the end of one year and a half of bibliographical and ground research (especially in the USA), a report on this axis will be submitted in December 2008.

Sub-project 2: Economical approach of the technological and entrepreneurial stakes in concerned groups

In the first place, the work will consist in collecting an economical and financial data set related to press groups themselves and to new electronic consumption forms. Some interviews on the strategic orientations regarding new technologies will complete this initial collection. Then, the objective is to seek to relate the developments of the groups' lines of business with the tendencies of electronic information consumption (dispersion of Internet connections, but also high speed broadband, time budget...). An analysis of business case studies carried by new distribution and mediation channels put forward by the groups will be made: direct payments by a third party, integration in multi-supports packages, subcontracting to network operators or providers,...The objective is to sketch the main themes of an adaptation of press groups strategies (financial ones but also protection of competitive advantages especially in relation with information valuation and facing the evolution of their structural business context and competitive environment (new entrants)).

Detailed realizations and milestones: cf. following sub-project.

Sub-project 3: observation of the journalistic practices of multi-mediatization

The project work will consist in a set of monographs on media groups selected for the interest they could have for the understanding of changes in progress and their investment in the multi-mediatization process. At first, emphasis will be laid on the reality of the convergence process for journalistic practices (content, skills and resource exchanges, organisational and institutional changes). It will then focus on organisational strategies implemented by the groups and companies (institutionalisation, trainings) and on the behaviour of journalistic staff and their representative organisations in order to better understand what could be evolving on the identity viewpoint.

In France, case studies on companies or groups which have implemented convergence policies will lead to favour three kinds of companies or groups: regional information groups (Ouest France? Le Télégramme?), specialist general public information groups (L'Equipe?), general information groups (TF1? Canal Plus? Bolloré?).

Detailed realizations and milestones: at the end of these investigation, studies with the selected groups and companies (they should last from May to November), a report constituted by monographs and preceded by putting into perspective the outcomes of research axes 2 and 3 will be submitted in March 2008.

Significance for theoretical research

It is advisable to analyse the alliance and acquisition strategies and the oligopoly forms linked to the multi-mediatization process. The study of multi-support strategies must take into account the stakes related to

industrial and financial structures and strategies. In particular, we have to examine the issues raised by concentration operations and by financialisation. Does the oligopoly process conduct to an "impoverishment" of the "diversity" of contents and, as it happens, of the information pluralism? In the studied industries, the research project will aim to determine precisely bargaining powers and to analyse their impacts on the contents.

Firstly, in some cultural and media industries, especially in the field of not free television concentration accentuates an ancient process of reorganization of the different actors of the industry which conducts to favour downstream activities rather than upstream activities. In other words, as far as press is concerned, is the development of various broadcasting supports, paper or electronic, made at the expense of the resources allocated to information production? This question is frequently asked. However, by reading existing research papers, an obvious lack of research based on ground investigations emerges. Concentration could conduct, within poles or groups, to transform the work organisation process. It is therefore appropriate to examine what were the concrete changes in work processes from a selected sample of groups which have known concentration operations.

Secondly, except the hypothetical reduction of resources dedicated to information production, there is also the reduction in number of independent groups that is to say of distinct editorial poles or at least information production ones. Besides, concentration affects the relationships between industrial actors themselves and between industrial actors and consumers. Poles or groups acquire a dominant position on one or several marketplaces by vertical integration within their own industry or by horizontal diversification. They benefit from important bargaining powers that enable them to withdraw from competitive games. Could we consider that only these actors are susceptible to maintain their position? In other words, are independents (who in this hypothesis would not be independent anymore!) damned to be reduced to a vassal status by dominant actors, their products being "rationalised" by them? We have to mention here that the term "independents" does not refer to very small actors on micro markets but to actors not vertically integrated or horizontally diversified.

Thirdly, concentration could go with what is called financialisation phenomena that we suggest to define as increasing relationships between industrial and financial actors (banks, mutual or investment funds, financial consultants, rating agencies). These relationships could result from loan, bond issue, consulting or rating operations that come nowadays with the industrial operations. It tackles, consequently, the issue of supposed interventions of the financial actors. We are forced to admit that editorial stakes in the penetration of financial capital, whether it is French or from abroad, are not easily discernible. Financial actors, especially Anglo-Saxon funds would wish new forms of companies' governance. Besides, the conception of value-adding, that is to say seeking the best financial performance by share is constantly advanced in companies' views. It would conduct to the implementation of a new set of indicators and management tools. What about the development of these tools? Do they have an impact on the creation and production process? Do they lead to a narrow association of marketers or control management staff to editorial directors? Are these last ones incited, if not obliged, to respect managerial norms prior to creation? Are the relationships between editorial offices and the financial directions becoming narrower and more restricting? Whatever it is, attempts to rationalise contents by the board of companies, groups or poles, are even more difficult to implement so that the value of informational products is bound to the insertion of an employee or a set of employees' intellectual contribution. Facing difficulties, poles content themselves with favouring purchasing, reducing information production spending, especially by reducing the resources allocated to information production, don't they?

Significance for applied research and training

On the view point of socio-economics of cultural industries, two elements take part in the originality and the importance of this project. Indeed, cross examinations on the journalistic domain, both at the macro level with industries, at the meso level with companies and at the micro level with journalists and other actors taking part in

information production, and on an international perspective, enable to apprehend in a holistic way the changes that are operating and the merging tendencies and to tackle often ignored or little investigated issues. We are not familiar with any ground investigation study realised, both on concentration and financiarisation issues and on technological changes and their respective impacts on journalistic content. The choice made through this project to consider at once concentration, financiarisation and professions issues conduct to examine the media production, circulation, consumption and uses processes under two viewpoints. These different approaches, to our mind, are complementary. That is why it seems worthwhile that this project coordinates the two approaches under a transversal research question.

On the viewpoint of economics of media groups

As "traditional media", press had, for a long time, to cope with the emergence of new technologies and innovations: local radio and television channels, telematics, the Internet, free newspapers (Le Floch and Sonnac, 2006). Media groups did react by trying to maintain two priorities: information production and advertising incomes. concurrently, they evolved by implementing strategies of diversification, financial concentration, outsourcing of some activities (publishing),... however, the current evolution within the convergence process contributes to create a rupture between media groups and new technologies. On the one hand, the convergence of distribution channels (fixed or mobile telecommunications, television and the Internet) may be considered as a new opportunity of diversification in the continuity of previous ones. However, new communication means (fixed and mobile telecommunications, Internet providers) are already in place and controlled by powerful groups; media groups are consequently carried along in a provider/principal logic where their bargaining power is eroded. Besides, the current convergence process raises important issues on copyright management since contents are increasingly "mixed" and the forms of return not really steady. On the other hand, "Web 2.0", which emerges from blogs and Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) tendencies, contributes to establish a generalised auto production mechanism and favours the emergence and the network connection of information production and consumption communities. Finally, as the Internet favours network effects, technical intermediaries (Microsoft, Google) are able to exploit the distance created between "traditional" information producers and their more and more detached consumers.

On the viewpoint of sociology of journalism

Journalists' professional identity was established on steady principles: on the one hand, compartmentalization of professionals within their media (radio, press, television) and their production community (Chanon, 1986. Devilland and al, 2001), since mobility between media types was rare and simultaneous activities did not exist; on the other hand, a precise division of roles: sources were not very active in information production and located outside the media itself, journalists have to research and choose information they were going to present, manufacturing workers finalised the layouts. However, a continuous shifting operates (Ringoot and Utard, 2005. Sant'anna, 2005): whereas sources occupy an increasing place in information collection and selection, manufacturers have almost disappeared and journalists are nowadays in charge of the layout. Journalism experiences a shift of its functions towards technical acts whereas it wanders from ground reporting. "Multi-mediatization" falls within this process; in the most advanced companies in the "convergence" process, journalists work henceforth for the group and constantly cross their resources and outcomes; they share reporting resources, exploit a matter comprising sound, text and picture for different supports, diversify finished forms of the same product, in function of a fragmented public and users of various supports (press, radio, television, Internet, mobile phones). In this new organisation, journalists appear more as depersonalized content providers than salaried authors they used to be.

On the viewpoint of education and training

The phenomena we proposed to study are susceptible to affecting journalism and communication education. On the one hand, the "convergence" process tackles the issue of diversification and intensification of technical, even

technological, trainings; multi-mediatization implies for journalists to be trained to master collection and edition methods and tools used by different medias, that is to say written work, photography, video, animation; even though it is probable that forms of specialisation will remain relevant and structuring, the "convergence" process forces to this diversification of skills which has already been observed on a smaller scale: radio, then press and television and at last websites have conducted journalist teams towards an internal multi-competency status (radio reporters have laid out their report themselves, press writers have taken their photographs and insert their article in the final layout themselves, television teams have sometimes been reduced to a unique person); the "convergence" process is going to increase considerably this requirement since it will restrict journalists to quit their reference supports to work on other media forms. On the other hand, the "convergence" process participates to this large fusion process of functions that were yesterday more separated only a short time ago; it not only conducts to an internal hybridization in the media field but implies moving closer professionals and structures, especially because it will facilitate cross valuations between supports and between advertising products (in media and outer). It is obvious that the "convergence" process will also concern advertising products which variants will be offered on several media, and that journalistic and advertising editorial teams will be involved in the same strategies and production processes.

The suggested research program will enable educational teams, in particular ones also close to laboratories such as at the ENSTB, the IUT (technical school) of Lannion and the universities of Paris 8 and Paris 13, to prepare answers to these new educational challenges: up to which point students in journalism should be prepared for technical diversity? How should they apprehend the economical organisation of media? Should gateways with organisational communication and advertising training be developed in order to better prepare future professionals to work within these converging universes while maintaining their professional identity? The IUT of Lannion has already begun this reflection process within its board (in which sit representatives of six journalism workers and employers unions) and first exchanges allowed to measure the current status of this issue within the professional community.

Significance for tools development

We have to stress the reengineering of information production, diffusion and valuation processes in the press in relation with the information multi-mediatization. The development of multi-mediatization logic leads to modify, either marginally or already systematically, the production/distribution/uses process as well as the evolution of professional forms. The following issue will be examined:

- First of all, what are the changes in progress in information production processes in regards of the development of multi-support strategies? To which extend does ICT introduction contribute to the development of writing forms? How does the place of journalists evolve in comparison with the situation of other information producers? What internal organisational changes are we assisting to? How do cost structure and dynamics develop and in particular to which extend are cost dynamics and the evolving conditions of reproduction affected by the digitalisation process? How do new technologies change tasks repartition and production process organisation? Does the owner of the main function, that is to say, press companies boards intervene more in writing functions? What do induce concretely variants on various supports? What granular effects and differentiation forms are developing (we must examine the limits of mass-personalisation and particularly the viability of personalisation)? What place does "upstream marketing" occupy? What are the relationships between current technological or marketing innovations and the accentuation of individualisation? How is consumers' production taken into account by the press companies and are discussions on pluralism in line with these production processes? Could we talk about co-production on certain supports? If yes, does it challenge the product uniqueness and the place of journalists?
- Secondly, how do broadcasting modes change with the multi-support tendency? This element of industry is considered by most authors as the one where industrial tendencies have been developed earliest and strongest. Diffusion/distribution is obviously a very concentrated actor within the industry. At this level, we will have to consider concentration and industrialisation impacts on the diversity of offers.

- Thirdly, how do valuation modes evolve with multi-support and what is at stake? More generally, what is the influence of financing modes on informational choices? What is the importance of globalisation for the assertion of global production norms? How do various forms of financing develop and what relationship do they have (exclusivity or coexistence)? To which extent are we evolving from an economy of scarcity to an economy of abundance? In comparison with the valuation process that operates around an object (product uniqueness), what happens when the digitalisation process makes it necessary to find other valuation modes? What is the shift from paid work to free contribution? What is its influence on production diversity and quality? What is the added value brought by services adjunction in comparison with previous forms of cultural and media industries? In which way have uses and user relationships been transformed? How do network tools and digital interactive services change the connection and valuation of contents in comparison with mediation activities? To which extent do these evolutions, proper to personalisation and supported by discussions on diversity, become concrete in reality? How do random characteristics of valuation of new forms of intellectual work integration evolve?

At the end of this program, the teams involved will organise a presentation of their outcomes during a study day dedicated to media professionals in Brittany.

Work already realised by the team on the subject

CEMTI team has published several research papers on the ownerships of cultural and media industries and the editorial stakes of concentration. We can cite in particular Bouquillon, Philippe, (2005), « La constitution des pôles des industries de la culture et de la communication : entre coups financiers et intégration de filières industrielles », *Réseaux*, Volume 23, n° 131, pp. 111-144. Some research has also been carried out on the stakes of the Internet for cultural products: Bouquillon, Philippe, (2001), « L'édition de produits culturels sur Internet : vers un nécessaire renouvellement théorique », in Collectif, *Emergence et continuité dans les recherches en sciences de l'information et de la communication* », Société Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, pp.15-22, Paris ou Bouquillon, Philippe, (2001), « La culture face à Internet : enjeux culturels et d'action publique », *Les enjeux* (online electronic journal of GRESEC), numéro 2, GRESEC/University Stendhal-Grenoble3.

LabSIC team has worked especially on the convergence process and the modelling of knowledge: Combès Yolande (1995): « Comment la convergence s'envisage dans le champ de la communication personnelle », in revue TIS, pp.163-187. Lacroix Jean-Guy, Miège Bernard, Moeglin Pierre, Pajon Patrick, Tremblay Gaétan (1993) « La convergence des télécommunications et de l'audio-visuel : un renouvellement de perspectives », in revue TIS, pp.81-105 ; Combès Yolande, « La modélisation des connaissances et du savoir : interrogations critiques autour d'une nouvelle voie de l'informatisation sociale » in Actes du colloque du CREIS- Informatisation et anticipations : entre promesses et réalisations, Strasbourg, 10-12 juin 1998, pp. 249-262. Moeglin P. (2003) : « Industrialisation de la prestation éducative, de la médiatisation à la rationalisation » in Moeglin P., Tremblay G. (dir) 2001 *Bogues globalisme et pluralisme tome 3 TIC et éducation*, pp.69-83. CEMTI and LabSIC teams will work jointly on the first sub-project: the socio-economical approach of cultural industries. Their work will last two years, from January 2007 to December 2008.

LUSSI team has at its disposal particular skills to analyse new kinds of challenges press groups face. From a recognised expertise in telecommunications and Internet economics (*Économie des télécommunications et de l'Internet*, Éditions Economica, par Dang Nguyen & Phan, 2000, *L'entreprise numérique*, Éditions Economica, par G. Dang Nguyen, 2001) and in industrial economics (*Économie industrielle appliquée*, Éditions Vuibert, par G. Dang Nguyen 1995), it has recently analysed the issues linked to the formation of epistemic communities (Dang Nguyen and Pénard, 2004, 2006). It is particularly able to tackle issues of price setting and e-commerce (Dang Nguyen,

Mevel, 2006).

CRAPE team has built an important expertise in journalism sociology. Besides researches on identity building (Les pro du journalisme, D. Ruellan, PUR, 1997; Sociologie du journalisme, E. Neveu, La Découverte, 2001. Devenir journalistes, D. Marchetti and D. Ruellan, La documentation française, 2001 L'identité de journalistes québécois au défi d'internet, F. Le Cam, 2005. Le journalisme en invention, R. Ringoot and JM. Utard, dir., PUR, 2005), the laboratory has produced two important studies on production changes and transformation of journalistic identity: introduction of collaborative computing in regional and local daily press (Journal local et réseaux informatiques, D. Ruellan and D. Thierry, L'Harmattan, 1998) and experiments of the Internet in local informational space (B. Damian and al, Inform@tion.local Le paysage médiatique régional à l'ère électronique, L'Harmattan, 2001). LUSI and CRAPE teams will work jointly on the monographs for sub-projects 2 and 3. LUSI will be in charge of the economical approach of technological and entrepreneurial stakes of the groups involved. CRAPE will be responsible of observing the journalistic practices concerning the multi-mediatization process.