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# Evaluating National Media Convergence Strategies on Social Networks: The Role of Technology and Legal Challenges

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## Abstract

The present study aimed to design and explain a model of national media convergence strategies on social networks, with a particular focus on technological and legal variables. In terms of purpose, this study was applied research, and in terms of implementation method, it employed a mixed-methods qualitative–quantitative design. In the qualitative phase, a grounded theory approach was adopted. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted through purposive sampling with 18 media experts and managers, communication scholars, and cyberspace specialists. In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was distributed among 117 experts and professionals in the fields of media and cyberspace to test the model derived from the qualitative findings. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) and SmartPLS software. The theoretical framework of the study was based on an integration of media convergence theory, network society theory, platform governance theory, and public sphere theory. The qualitative findings indicated that media convergence strategies are influenced by causal conditions, including emerging artificial intelligence technologies and platform infrastructures; contextual conditions, including legal and governance policies; and intervening conditions, including professional ethics and copyright regulations. The resulting outcome is the formation of an interactive news ecosystem. In the quantitative phase, hypothesis testing confirmed the significant effect of technological variables and platform governance indicators on convergence strategies ( $\beta = 0.881$ ). Nevertheless, although filtering emerged as an important intervening variable in the qualitative analysis of the interviews, it did not exert a direct and statistically significant effect on media convergence strategies in the quantitative phase. Professional ethics challenges and legal monitoring mechanisms were also identified as key components affecting the formation of an interactive newsroom. To achieve successful convergence on social networks, national media organizations need to reconstruct their newsroom structures on the basis of artificial intelligence and develop dynamic legal and ethical frameworks. Such measures would enable them to move beyond technical and platform-related constraints and re-establish their authority as a trusted media reference.

**Keywords:** media convergence, national media, social networks, artificial intelligence, media law, structural equation modeling

## 1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the structure of the contemporary media environment and altered the relationships among media institutions, audiences, technologies, regulatory systems, and news markets. In the traditional broadcasting model, national media organizations generally operated through centralized production structures, professionally



controlled distribution channels, and relatively stable patterns of audience consumption. Social networks, however, have disrupted this model by enabling users, citizen journalists, influencers, online news agencies, and algorithmically organized platforms to participate directly in news production, circulation, interpretation, and evaluation. The resulting environment is characterized by continuous information flows, accelerated news cycles, fragmented audiences, multidirectional communication, and competition among institutional and noninstitutional actors for visibility and credibility. Media convergence has therefore become more than the technical integration of communication platforms; it represents an organizational, strategic, cultural, legal, and technological process through which different forms of content, production routines, professional roles, and distribution infrastructures are coordinated within a unified media ecosystem (Lugmayr & Dal Zotto, 2019). For national media organizations, convergence is especially important because their historical authority as primary sources of public information is increasingly challenged by the speed, accessibility, personalization, and interactive affordances of social networks.

Media convergence is rooted in the interaction between technological change and institutional adaptation. Digital technologies have reduced the boundaries separating television, radio, online journalism, mobile communication, and social networking platforms. News content is no longer produced for a single medium or consumed through a single device; rather, it is created, reformatted, distributed, and discussed across interconnected platforms. This process requires media organizations to reconsider traditional newsroom structures, editorial routines, audience strategies, and performance indicators. Convergence also changes the meaning of media production because content must be adaptable to multimedia formats, searchable within digital environments, shareable through social networks, and responsive to user interactions. In this sense, convergence is not achieved merely by creating official accounts on social platforms. It requires an integrated operational model that connects editorial decision-making, technological infrastructure, audience analytics, regulatory compliance, and cross-platform distribution. The global transformation toward dual physical and virtual spaces has intensified these requirements by creating parallel social environments in which identities, relationships, markets, institutions, and communication practices are simultaneously organized offline and online (Ameli, 2019). Consequently, national media organizations must operate within both institutional broadcasting systems and decentralized platform environments whose governing logics differ substantially.

The platformization of news is one of the most consequential dimensions of this transformation. Social media platforms do not function as neutral communication channels; they actively structure the visibility, circulation, prioritization, and monetization of news through algorithms, data infrastructures, content moderation systems, and commercial policies. Algorithmic recommendation mechanisms determine which stories receive public attention, while platform rules influence how news organizations present content and interact with audiences. Social platforms have thus acquired functions traditionally associated with publishers and distributors, even when they define themselves primarily as technology companies (Cetina Presuel & Martínez Sierra, 2019). This institutional ambiguity creates significant challenges for accountability, transparency, copyright protection, editorial independence, and public-interest communication. Platform power is exercised not only through market dominance but also through the ability to establish technological standards, regulate user access, organize data flows, and influence the conditions under which public communication takes place (Van Dijck et al., 2019). National media convergence strategies must therefore account for the asymmetric relationship between public or state-affiliated media institutions and privately governed global platforms.

These platform dynamics have also altered patterns of news authority. Audiences increasingly encounter news through social feeds, search engines, messaging applications, short-video platforms, and user-generated content rather than through direct access to television channels or official news websites. The transition from institution-centered news consumption to platform-mediated exposure weakens the exclusive gatekeeping authority of conventional news organizations. Contemporary audiences can compare sources, challenge official narratives, share alternative interpretations, and participate in the circulation of breaking news. Research on digital news consumption indicates that social platforms, mobile technologies, and video-based formats have become central components of the global news environment, while news avoidance, declining trust, platform dependency, and fragmented consumption remain major concerns (Newman, 2024). The growing use of social media as an information source can also shape public perceptions of social conditions, insecurity, risk, and institutional performance (González-Serrano et al., 2025). Therefore, the migration of audiences toward social platforms has implications not only for media competition but also for public opinion, social trust, and perceptions of collective security.



Within this environment, national media organizations face the strategic challenge of maintaining or reconstructing their reference status. Media reference status refers to the extent to which audiences recognize a media institution as a credible, timely, authoritative, and accessible source of information. On news websites and digital platforms, reference status is influenced by factors such as content credibility, professional quality, speed, transparency, user experience, audience engagement, and the ability to respond to emerging events (Roushandel et al., 2023). Trust is particularly important because audiences are exposed to a wide range of competing sources whose accuracy and institutional accountability vary considerably. Strategies for enhancing trust in national media include improving transparency, strengthening professional standards, addressing audience concerns, increasing representational diversity, and reducing the gap between public expectations and institutional communication practices (Mohammadnejad et al., 2021). When national media fail to meet these expectations, audiences may increasingly rely on foreign platforms, unofficial channels, or interpersonal networks for news.

The challenge of reference status is especially significant for the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and other national media institutions operating in a highly competitive digital environment. The presence of national media networks on domestic and foreign social platforms has become a necessary component of contemporary communication policy, but the effectiveness of this presence depends on the quality, continuity, and strategic coherence of institutional activities (Abtahi, 2023). Merely reproducing television content on social networks does not constitute meaningful convergence. Effective platform presence requires content adaptation, real-time interaction, audience segmentation, multimedia production, and coordination among organizational units. It also requires clear criteria for evaluating message production and distribution. Such criteria may include content relevance, technical quality, audience accessibility, distribution speed, platform compatibility, ethical compliance, and consistency with institutional objectives (Alavi Boroujerdi & Rahmati, 2021). Without an integrated evaluation framework, national media activities on social networks may become fragmented, reactive, and disconnected from broader organizational strategies.

The newsroom is a central organizational unit in the process of media convergence. Traditional newsrooms were designed around medium-specific workflows, hierarchical editorial control, and scheduled broadcasting. Converged newsrooms, by contrast, require continuous coordination among journalists, producers, social media editors, data analysts, multimedia specialists, technology teams, and legal advisers. Comparative examination of international newsroom models demonstrates that contemporary media organizations increasingly employ integrated, cross-platform, and digitally coordinated production structures (Daliri, 2021). These structures allow news organizations to collect information once and adapt it for multiple platforms while maintaining editorial consistency. The reinvention of television news also involves innovative formats, mobile-first storytelling, interactive video, live streaming, audience participation, and content designed specifically for social media environments (García-Avilés, 2020). For national media institutions, the formation of an interactive newsroom may provide an organizational mechanism for connecting traditional broadcasting capacities with the speed and interactivity of digital platforms.

The need to redesign newsrooms is closely related to broader transformations in the future of news. Emerging scenarios indicate that journalism will increasingly be influenced by automation, datafication, artificial intelligence, personalized distribution, platform governance, and changing professional roles (Nasrollahi & Alborzi, 2020). Artificial intelligence can support transcription, translation, content recommendation, automated summarization, audience analysis, verification, visual production, and the detection of misinformation. It can also facilitate the rapid adaptation of content for different platforms and audience segments. Nevertheless, AI-based production introduces questions regarding accountability, transparency, bias, intellectual property, professional displacement, and editorial responsibility. Consequently, the technological modernization of national media cannot be separated from legal and ethical governance. A convergence strategy based exclusively on technical adoption may increase production capacity without ensuring public trust, institutional accountability, or compliance with journalistic standards.

Editorial strategy is another essential dimension of convergence. News organizations must determine how social media content is selected, verified, contextualized, reformulated, and incorporated into professional news production. Social media provides access to eyewitness accounts, public reactions, emerging trends, and user-generated materials, but it also increases exposure to rumors, manipulated content, coordinated disinformation, and decontextualized information. Effective editorial strategies therefore require systematic verification, source evaluation, ethical screening, and platform-specific presentation



(Sofyan et al., 2024). The integration of social media into news production should not weaken professional gatekeeping; rather, it should modernize gatekeeping by combining journalistic expertise with digital verification tools, audience intelligence, and rapid response mechanisms. This balance is particularly important for national media because institutional errors may have broad consequences for public trust and social stability.

Audience-centeredness has emerged as a fundamental principle of digital media strategy. Social media audiences are not passive recipients but active users who comment, share, remix, criticize, and produce content. Their expectations are shaped by immediacy, personalization, accessibility, transparency, and participation. The use of mobile social networks has also affected interpersonal and intergenerational relationships by transforming the ways in which individuals communicate, form identities, exchange information, and negotiate social norms (Sadeghi, 2021). Cyberspace associations can influence behaviors in both virtual and physical environments, including forms of social participation and risky behavior (Abbasi Shavazi, 2018). These findings demonstrate that the audience relationship with social media is multidimensional and extends beyond news consumption. National media strategies must therefore consider social, psychological, and cultural patterns of platform use rather than treating audiences only as numerical indicators of reach.

The public-health and policy implications of social media use further reinforce the need for responsible convergence strategies. Debates concerning problematic social media use increasingly emphasize that platform effects should not be reduced to individual behavior or neurological mechanisms. They should also be examined through public-health, institutional, regulatory, and policy perspectives (Shannon et al., 2025). Platform design, attention economies, algorithmic amplification, commercial incentives, and social inequalities can shape user experiences and information exposure. From this perspective, national media institutions have a responsibility not only to compete for attention but also to promote reliable information, reduce harmful communication patterns, and contribute to a healthier public information environment. This responsibility requires ethical standards that address sensationalism, privacy, vulnerable groups, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and the social consequences of digital news circulation.

Professional ethics is thus an indispensable component of media convergence. In traditional broadcasting environments, ethical supervision was often embedded in institutional routines and hierarchical editorial review. In social media environments, however, the pressure for rapid publication can reduce the time available for verification, reflection, and legal consultation. The use of user-generated content also creates uncertainties regarding consent, privacy, ownership, authenticity, and potential harm. National media organizations need updated professional codes that address digital production, automated content, citizen journalism, platform engagement, and real-time correction practices. A ritual communication approach to national media news management emphasizes the role of communication in maintaining shared meanings, social cohesion, and cultural continuity rather than viewing news solely as the transmission of information (Sharifi, 2019). Accordingly, ethical convergence should support interaction and participation without compromising social responsibility or cultural legitimacy.

Legal challenges are equally important. Freedom of the press developed historically through political struggles over censorship, state authority, democratic participation, and public accountability (Alini & Kia, 2022). In digital environments, these longstanding concerns intersect with new issues, including platform regulation, cross-border data flows, content removal, intellectual property, algorithmic governance, privacy, and jurisdiction. National media organizations may operate simultaneously under domestic law, platform terms of service, professional codes, and international technological standards. This multiplicity creates uncertainty regarding legal responsibility and institutional authority. The absence of a specialized system for continuously monitoring and updating regulations can result in inconsistent practices, delayed responses, and legal exposure. A dynamic legal monitoring mechanism is therefore required to identify regulatory changes, assess their implications, and translate them into operational guidelines for journalists and editors.

Filtering policies constitute another critical legal and governance issue. Restrictions on foreign social networks may be justified through concerns regarding national security, cultural protection, misinformation, data sovereignty, or illegal content. However, such restrictions can also complicate national media convergence by limiting institutional access to platforms on which large segments of the audience remain active. The opportunities and threats associated with social networks for television news include expanded reach, real-time communication, audience participation, and multimedia innovation, alongside risks related to credibility, dependence on foreign platforms, misinformation, and regulatory conflict (Vafaei Zanouz et al., 2020). Therefore, filtering cannot be evaluated only as a technical restriction; it must be examined as an intervening governance



condition whose effects may vary according to audience behavior, platform migration, organizational capability, and the availability of domestic alternatives.

News policy-making provides the broader institutional context within which these technological and legal challenges must be managed. A coherent national news policy should define public-interest objectives, institutional responsibilities, professional standards, platform strategies, and mechanisms of accountability. Fundamental components of news policy-making in IRIB include ideological, cultural, technological, organizational, professional, and audience-related considerations (Khojasteh Bagherzadeh, 2019). The complexity of these dimensions means that convergence cannot be implemented through isolated technical projects. It requires coordination among policy-makers, senior media managers, newsroom professionals, technology specialists, legal experts, and audience researchers. Moreover, news governance must remain sufficiently flexible to respond to rapid technological change while preserving institutional values and regulatory legitimacy.

The strategic importance of media governance extends beyond the media sector itself. Evidence from other organizational contexts suggests that media governance and policy frameworks can contribute to high-quality development by shaping information environments, institutional behavior, and stakeholder confidence (Zhao et al., 2025). Although such findings emerge from the context of tourism enterprises and green transformation, they illustrate the broader management principle that media governance can function as a developmental mechanism rather than merely a communication activity. For national media, convergence strategies may similarly influence organizational performance, public trust, policy legitimacy, and the capacity to support social development. This managerial perspective requires convergence to be evaluated in terms of governance outcomes, organizational learning, adaptability, and long-term value creation.

Communication effectiveness is also associated with strategic message design and audience response. Although advertising research differs from news communication, models such as attention, interest, desire, and action demonstrate that media effects depend on the ability of messages to attract attention and guide audience engagement through sequential psychological processes (Taghizadeh, 2024). In the context of social media news, visibility is the first condition of influence, but visibility alone is insufficient. Content must also generate interest, establish relevance, encourage interaction, and sustain trust. Therefore, convergence strategies should integrate platform analytics and audience-response indicators without reducing journalistic value to popularity metrics. A balanced system should measure reach and engagement alongside accuracy, credibility, diversity, legal compliance, and public value.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to design and validate a model of national media convergence strategies on social networks, with particular emphasis on technological factors and legal challenges.

## 2. Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted to evaluate national media convergence strategies on social networks, with an emphasis on the role of technology and legal challenges. Given the complex, multidimensional, and exploratory nature of the subject, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods qualitative–quantitative design was employed. Under this design, qualitative data were first collected and analyzed, after which the findings obtained from this phase formed the basis for designing the measurement instrument and conducting the quantitative phase. This approach was selected to ensure, on the one hand, the in-depth identification of previously unexplored dimensions of the phenomenon from the perspectives of experts and, on the other hand, the quantitative validation and prioritization of the resulting model in a broader population. In the qualitative phase, the study employed grounded theory based on the systematic approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The participants in this phase consisted of 18 academics and experts in the production and dissemination of news through national media and social networks, who were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included a record of academic research, authorship of books or scholarly articles, teaching experience in the field of news policy, and familiarity with cyberspace. Regarding demographic characteristics, 78% of the participants were men and 22% were women. In addition, 89% were older than 45 years, and 83% held doctoral degrees. Furthermore, 50% of the participants had more than 20 years of professional experience in the fields of news and media. Sampling in the qualitative phase initially began purposively and subsequently continued through theoretical sampling to address conceptual gaps until theoretical saturation was reached. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with an average duration of 75 minutes and were analyzed through the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, 598 initial codes were extracted from the interviews. Following screening and





integration, repeated and similar codes were eliminated, resulting in 211 final open codes. During axial coding, these codes were organized into 58 subcategories, from which 14 main categories were ultimately extracted. During selective coding, the main categories were organized within six paradigmatic constructs: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, the central phenomenon, strategies, and consequences. The theoretical model of the study was thus developed. Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data. These strategies included data triangulation through the use of multiple sources, such as interviews, upstream policy documents and records, and field monitoring; member checking of the findings by the participants; and the systematic documentation of the research audit trail. The application of these procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and robustness of the qualitative findings. In the quantitative phase, the paradigmatic model extracted from the qualitative phase formed the basis for developing a researcher-made questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 58 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very low” to “very high.” The statistical population in this phase consisted of news service desk editors, editors of different news sections in the national media newsroom, managing directors of online news agencies, journalists working for online news outlets and national media news departments, citizen journalists, and editors of various national media news divisions. Because no complete sampling frame was available for the statistical population, 117 eligible individuals were selected through nonprobability purposive sampling. Based on the requirements of path analysis in structural equation modeling, this sample size satisfied the minimum sample-size requirements. Regarding demographic characteristics in the quantitative phase, 35% of respondents were women and 65% were men. In addition, 34% were younger than 30 years, 40% were between 30 and 40 years, 18% were between 40 and 50 years, and 8% were older than 50 years. Regarding educational attainment, 12% had qualifications below the bachelor’s level, 33% held bachelor’s degrees, 37% held master’s degrees, and 18% held doctoral degrees or higher qualifications. In terms of professional experience, 13% had fewer than 5 years of experience, 45% had between 5 and 10 years, 27% had between 10 and 15 years, and 15% had more than 15 years of experience. To assess the quality of the measurement instrument, construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity, and instrument reliability were examined and confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability. The results indicated that Cronbach’s alpha exceeded 0.70 for all constructs and that composite reliability (CR) was also above 0.70 for every construct, demonstrating satisfactory instrument reliability. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, indicating adequate convergent validity of the questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), normed fit index (NFI), goodness-of-fit index (GOF), and  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  values were used to evaluate model fit. The results showed that the SRMR value was 0.068, which was below the acceptable threshold of 0.08; the NFI value was 0.931; and the GOF value was 0.783. All these values fell within acceptable ranges and indicated an adequate fit of the research model. The qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated at the “connecting” level. More specifically, the findings obtained from the qualitative phase, including the categories and relationships extracted from the paradigmatic model, were used as inputs for the quantitative phase in developing the questionnaire items and formulating the research hypotheses. The questionnaire data were subsequently analyzed through structural equation modeling, and the relationships among the components were assessed using path coefficients, t-statistics, and significance levels. By integrating the qualitative findings, which provided the conceptual framework of the study, with the quantitative findings, which demonstrated the structural validation and numerical prioritization of the components, the final research model was developed. This model is theoretically grounded and has practical applicability and relative generalizability in the areas of news policy and media convergence.

### 3. Findings and Results

The findings of this study are presented in two qualitative and quantitative sections. In the first phase, data obtained from semi-structured interviews with experts were used to identify the dimensions and components of national media convergence strategies in response to social networks and to formulate them within a paradigmatic model. In the second phase, the conceptual model derived from the qualitative findings was tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS.

In the qualitative phase, data obtained from 18 semi-structured interviews with experts in media, communication, news, and media policy were analyzed using the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998). The analytical process consisted

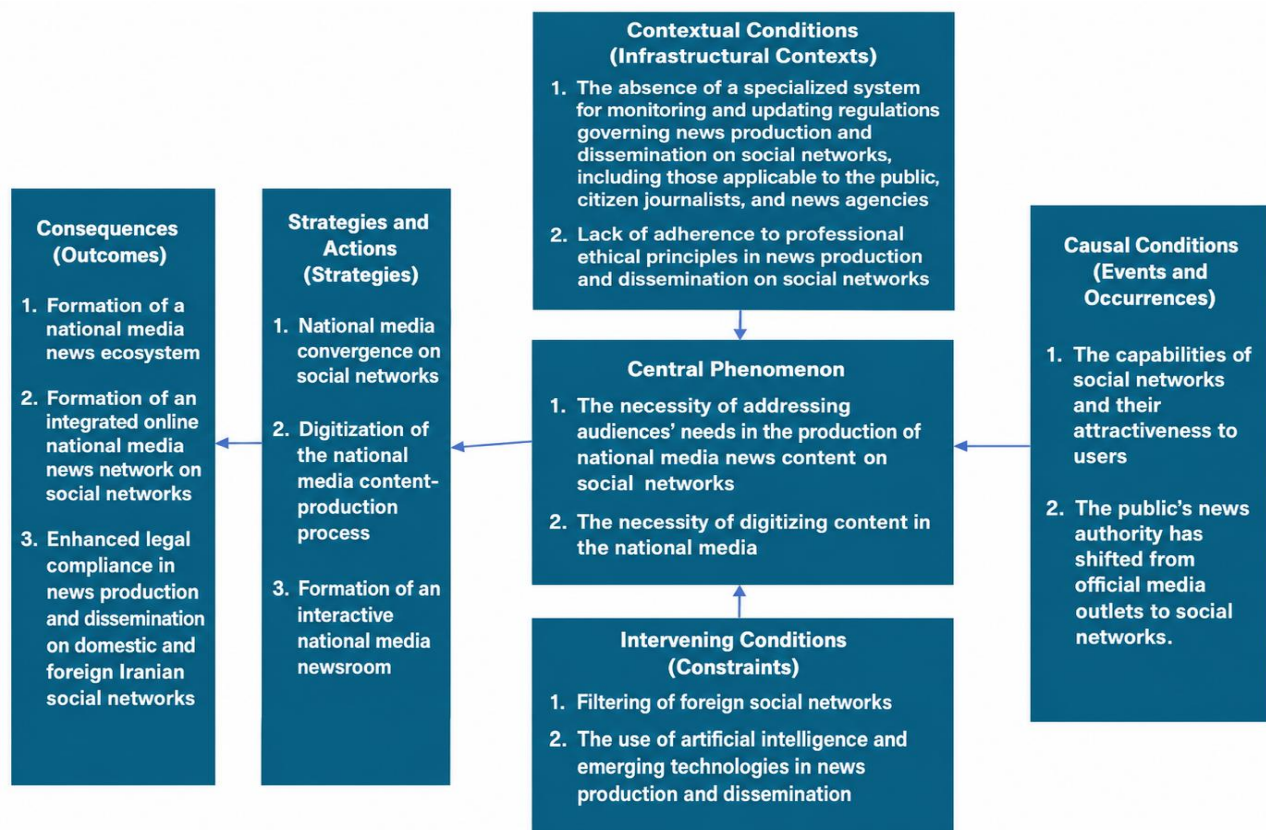


of open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, 598 initial codes were extracted. After refinement, integration, and removal of duplicate items, the number was reduced to 211 final codes. During axial coding, the final codes were organized into 58 subcategories and 14 main categories. During selective coding, these categories were classified under six paradigmatic constructs. The qualitative findings indicated that national media convergence strategies on social networks are shaped by a combination of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions and ultimately result in outcomes such as enhanced legal compliance and the formation of an integrated news network. A summary of these components is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of the Components and Categories of the Research Paradigmatic Model**

| Paradigmatic Construct | Main Categories and Components                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Causal conditions      | The attractiveness and affordances of social networks for users; the transfer of news authority to social networks                                                   |
| Contextual conditions  | The system for monitoring and updating news-production regulations; the level of adherence to professional ethical principles in cyberspace                          |
| Intervening conditions | Social network filtering policies; the application of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in news production                                           |
| Central phenomenon     | The necessity of attending to audience needs; the necessity of digitizing national media content                                                                     |
| Strategies             | National media convergence on social networks; digitization of the content-production process; formation of an interactive newsroom; development of a news ecosystem |
| Consequences           | Formation of an integrated national media online news network; enhanced legal compliance in news production and dissemination                                        |

Based on these findings, the paradigmatic model of the study was designed. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual and structural relationships among these constructs.



**Figure 1. Paradigmatic Model of National Media Convergence on Social Networks**

In the quantitative phase, the model extracted from the qualitative phase was tested using data collected from 117 professionals working in national media and online news agencies. The model was evaluated in two sections: the measurement model, addressing reliability and validity, and the structural model, addressing model fit and hypothesis testing.

To evaluate the measurement model, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined. First, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated for all constructs, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Indices of the Measurement Model**

| Construct                               | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | AVE   | Status       |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Social network affordances              | 0.876            | 0.872                      | 0.968 | Satisfactory |
| Transfer of news authority              | 0.943            | 0.956                      | 0.817 | Satisfactory |
| Attention to audience needs             | 0.875            | 0.802                      | 0.822 | Satisfactory |
| Need for digitization                   | 0.886            | 0.928                      | 0.752 | Satisfactory |
| Legal monitoring system                 | 0.865            | 0.914                      | 0.883 | Satisfactory |
| Professional ethics challenges          | 0.962            | 0.968                      | 0.912 | Satisfactory |
| Filtering                               | 0.789            | 0.852                      | 0.891 | Satisfactory |
| Use of artificial intelligence          | 0.898            | 0.972                      | 0.938 | Satisfactory |
| National media convergence              | 0.784            | 0.878                      | 0.815 | Satisfactory |
| Digitization of the production process  | 0.937            | 0.825                      | 0.932 | Satisfactory |
| Formation of an interactive newsroom    | 0.945            | 0.966                      | 0.853 | Satisfactory |
| Formation of a news ecosystem           | 0.920            | 0.939                      | 0.677 | Satisfactory |
| Formation of an integrated news network | 0.875            | 0.723                      | 0.679 | Satisfactory |
| Legal compliance                        | 0.876            | 0.739                      | 0.763 | Satisfactory |

The results presented in Table 2 show that Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.70 for all constructs; therefore, the internal consistency reliability of the constructs was confirmed. Composite reliability also exceeded the threshold value of 0.70 for all constructs. Moreover, the AVE value was above 0.50 for every construct, indicating satisfactory convergent validity of the measurement instrument.

In the next stage, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct, represented by the diagonal values, should be greater than the correlations between that construct and the other constructs, represented by the off-diagonal values.

**Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Matrix for Assessing Discriminant Validity**

| Construct                         | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14    |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Social network affordances     | 0.984 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2. Transfer of news authority     | 0.552 | 0.904 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3. Attention to audience needs    | 0.710 | 0.535 | 0.907 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 4. Need for digitization          | 0.647 | 0.576 | 0.716 | 0.867 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 5. Legal monitoring system        | 0.500 | 0.567 | 0.542 | 0.479 | 0.950 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 6. Professional ethics challenges | -     | 0.592 | -     | -     | -     | 0.952 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 7. Filtering                      | 0.436 | 0.592 | 0.491 | 0.445 | 0.451 | -     | 0.931 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 8. Artificial intelligence        | 0.490 | 0.586 | 0.561 | 0.484 | 0.788 | -     | 0.505 | 0.942 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 9. National media convergence     | 0.351 | 0.442 | 0.459 | 0.397 | 0.717 | -     | 0.344 | 0.659 | 0.977 |       |       |       |       |       |
| 10. Digitization of production    | 0.555 | 0.624 | 0.651 | 0.533 | 0.617 | -     | 0.638 | 0.468 | 0.713 | 0.965 |       |       |       |       |
| 11. Interactive newsroom          | 0.253 | 0.359 | 0.436 | 0.409 | 0.388 | -     | 0.334 | 0.324 | 0.495 | 0.732 | 0.924 |       |       |       |
| 12. News ecosystem                | -     | 0.656 | -     | -     | -     | 0.635 | -     | -     | 0.497 | -     | -     | 0.976 |       |       |
| 13. Integrated news network       | -     | 0.572 | -     | -     | -     | 0.586 | -     | 0.467 | 0.384 | -     | -     | 0.740 | 0.950 |       |
| 14. Legal compliance              | -     | 0.525 | -     | -     | -     | 0.449 | -     | 0.568 | 0.430 | -     | -     | 0.523 | 0.576 | 0.982 |



According to the results presented in Table 3, the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation coefficients with the other constructs. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the model was confirmed at a satisfactory level.

**Overall model-fit indices:** The overall fit of the model was evaluated using three standard structural modeling indices, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Overall Model-Fit Indices**

| Fit Index | Estimated Value | Criterion or Acceptance Threshold | Fit Status              |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| SRMR      | 0.068           | Less than 0.08                    | Satisfactory            |
| NFI       | 0.931           | Greater than 0.90                 | Satisfactory            |
| GOF       | 0.783           | Greater than 0.36                 | Satisfactory and strong |

As shown in Table 4, the values of the fit indices indicate a high degree of correspondence and consistency between the proposed conceptual model and the collected empirical data.

**Coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ):** To assess the explanatory power and predictive capability of the structural model, the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) and Stone–Geisser predictive relevance indices ( $Q^2$ ) were calculated for the endogenous variables.

**Table 5. Coefficients of Determination ( $R^2$ ) and Predictive Relevance Indices ( $Q^2$ )**

| Endogenous Variable                                   | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | $Q^2$ | Explanatory and Predictive Power |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------------------------|
| National media convergence on social networks         | 0.881 | 0.877          | 0.890 | Very strong                      |
| Attention to audience needs                           | 0.856 | 0.852          | 0.950 | Very strong                      |
| Digitization of the content-production process        | 0.819 | 0.817          | 0.980 | Very strong                      |
| Formation of a news ecosystem                         | 0.816 | 0.810          | 0.830 | Very strong                      |
| Formation of an interactive newsroom                  | 0.668 | 0.666          | 0.690 | Moderate to high                 |
| Legal compliance in news production and dissemination | 0.755 | 0.748          | 0.840 | Strong                           |
| Formation of an integrated news network               | 0.710 | 0.703          | 0.790 | Strong                           |

The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate that all endogenous constructs in the study had satisfactory and substantial coefficients of determination and predictive power. The largest proportion of explained variance was associated with the national media convergence construct ( $R^2 = 0.881$ ). Furthermore, the positive  $Q^2$  values for all constructs indicate the strong predictive relevance of the structural model.

**Path coefficients and hypothesis testing:** Path analysis was conducted to test the research hypotheses. A summary of the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t-statistics, and significance levels is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Path Coefficients, Significance-Test Statistics, and Prioritization of Structural Relationships**

| No. | Structural Path or Hypothesis                                                      | Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ ) | t-Statistic | Significance Level (p) | Hypothesis Status | Effect Priority |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1   | Formation of an interactive newsroom $\leftarrow$ Legal compliance                 | 0.881                        | 3.883       | < .001                 | Supported         | First           |
| 2   | Formation of a news ecosystem $\leftarrow$ Formation of an integrated news network | 0.612                        | 9.333       | < .001                 | Supported         | Second          |
| 3   | Attention to audience needs $\leftarrow$ National media convergence                | 0.516                        | 9.736       | < .001                 | Supported         | Third           |
| 4   | Need for digitization $\leftarrow$ Formation of an interactive newsroom            | 0.486                        | 2.132       | < .001                 | Supported         | Fourth          |
| 5   | Use of artificial intelligence $\leftarrow$ National media convergence             | 0.478                        | 3.840       | .005                   | Supported         | Fifth           |
| 6   | Attention to audience needs $\leftarrow$ Digitization of the production process    | 0.454                        | 7.215       | < .001                 | Supported         | Sixth           |
| 7   | Professional ethics challenges $\leftarrow$ Formation of an interactive newsroom   | 0.406                        | 5.271       | < .001                 | Supported         | Seventh         |
| 8   | Legal monitoring system $\leftarrow$ Formation of an interactive newsroom          | 0.394                        | 5.769       | < .001                 | Supported         | Eighth          |
| 9   | Transfer of news authority $\leftarrow$ Attention to audience needs                | 0.298                        | 3.386       | .001                   | Supported         | Ninth           |
| 10  | Transfer of news authority $\leftarrow$ Need for digitization                      | 0.296                        | 4.505       | .001                   | Supported         | Tenth           |

According to the findings presented in Table 6, the path between the formation of an interactive newsroom and legal compliance, with a path coefficient of  $\beta = 0.881$ , ranked first in terms of effect priority. The formation of a news ecosystem was also identified as a key prerequisite for the establishment of an integrated news network ( $\beta = 0.612$ ).

**Effect-size index ( $f^2$ ):** The magnitude of the effects of the exogenous variables on the corresponding endogenous constructs was calculated and interpreted using Cohen's effect-size index ( $f^2$ ), as presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Effect-Size Indices ( $f^2$ ) for the Hypothesized Relationships**

| Structural Relationship                                                            | Effect Size ( $f^2$ ) | Effect-Magnitude Interpretation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Formation of an interactive newsroom $\leftarrow$ Legal compliance                 | 0.452                 | Strong                          |
| Formation of a news ecosystem $\leftarrow$ Formation of an integrated news network | 0.362                 | Strong                          |
| Attention to audience needs $\leftarrow$ National media convergence                | 0.219                 | Strong                          |
| Use of artificial intelligence $\leftarrow$ National media convergence             | 0.154                 | Moderate                        |
| Professional ethics challenges $\leftarrow$ Formation of an interactive newsroom   | 0.132                 | Moderate                        |
| Legal monitoring system $\leftarrow$ Formation of an interactive newsroom          | 0.106                 | Moderate                        |
| Transfer of news authority $\leftarrow$ Attention to audience needs                | 0.090                 | Moderate                        |

The analysis presented in Table 7 indicates that structural and interactive variables have stronger effect sizes than environmental factors in predicting media convergence outcomes.

The findings demonstrated that national media convergence in response to social networks is a multidimensional and systematic process whose realization requires the restructuring of news-production structures, responsiveness to audience needs, the adoption of emerging technologies, and the strengthening of legal and ethical foundations. In the qualitative phase, the paradigmatic model indicated that the transformation and transfer of news authority, together with the attractiveness of social platforms, constitute the principal drivers of the need to transform traditional news-production structures. In the quantitative phase, structural model testing revealed that structural strategies, particularly the formation of an interactive newsroom, had the highest path coefficient and played the strongest role in enhancing legal compliance. The development of a news ecosystem was also identified as an essential prerequisite for establishing an integrated news network, while the role of artificial intelligence technologies as catalysts of media convergence was confirmed. Finally, the rejection of the direct effect of filtering policies on the sustainable development of the news ecosystem confirms that policies based on physical restrictions do not provide sustainable effectiveness in advancing contemporary convergence strategies. Strategic attention should instead be directed toward the design of interactive multimedia newsrooms, structural flexibility, and the development of new ethical norms.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to design and validate a model of national media convergence strategies on social networks by integrating technological, organizational, legal, ethical, and audience-related dimensions. The qualitative findings showed that convergence is not a single technical intervention but a multidimensional and systemic process shaped by causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, a central phenomenon, strategic actions, and organizational consequences. The attractiveness and communicative affordances of social networks, together with the transfer of news authority from official media institutions to social platforms, were identified as the principal causal conditions. The need to attend to audience expectations and to digitize national media content constituted the central phenomenon, whereas regulatory monitoring, professional ethics, filtering policies, and the application of artificial intelligence represented the contextual and intervening conditions. The strategic responses included national media convergence on social networks, digitization of content-production processes, establishment of an interactive newsroom, and development of a news ecosystem. These strategies were expected to produce an integrated national media news network and improve legal compliance in news production and dissemination. The quantitative results generally supported this paradigmatic structure and demonstrated that the proposed model possessed satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, explanatory power, predictive relevance, and overall fit.

The identification of social network affordances and the transfer of news authority as causal conditions reflects the fundamental restructuring of contemporary news consumption. Social networks provide users with immediacy, accessibility, multimedia content, interpersonal sharing, and opportunities to participate directly in the production and interpretation of news. These affordances have weakened the exclusive gatekeeping position of traditional broadcasters and have shifted a considerable



portion of news discovery to platform-based environments. The result is consistent with international evidence indicating that audiences increasingly access news through social platforms, mobile devices, video services, aggregators, and messaging applications rather than directly through conventional media outlets (Newman, 2024). The findings also correspond with research demonstrating that social media has become an influential source of public information and can shape perceptions of insecurity, risk, and social reality (González-Serrano et al., 2025). Therefore, the transfer of news authority identified in the present study should not be interpreted merely as a decline in television audiences; rather, it represents a broader redistribution of communicative power among media institutions, platforms, users, citizen journalists, and algorithmic systems.

The findings further indicated that national media convergence must be grounded in responsiveness to audience needs. In the structural model, national media convergence was significantly associated with attention to audience needs, with a path coefficient of  $\beta = 0.516$ , while digitization of the production process was also significantly related to audience responsiveness, with  $\beta = 0.454$ . These results suggest that convergence becomes meaningful only when technological and organizational transformation is translated into content that corresponds to the preferences, concerns, consumption habits, and interaction patterns of contemporary audiences. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing that trust in national media depends on responsiveness, transparency, credibility, diversity, and the extent to which media content reflects audience expectations (Mohammadnejad et al., 2021). It is also aligned with research on national media presence on domestic and foreign social networks, which indicates that an effective presence requires more than the formal establishment of institutional accounts and should involve platform-specific content, continuity of activity, audience engagement, and strategic coordination (Abtahi, 2023). The present findings therefore reinforce the proposition that audience-centeredness is not a secondary communication tactic but a central organizational requirement for media convergence.

The significant relationship between attention to audience needs and the transfer of news authority, with  $\beta = 0.298$ , also provides an important explanation for the declining reference status of conventional media. When official media institutions do not respond rapidly to emerging information needs, users tend to seek alternative sources that offer greater speed, accessibility, interactivity, or perceived relevance. News reference status is therefore increasingly determined by the capacity to become the first, most credible, and most accessible source within a competitive platform environment (Roushandel et al., 2023). This finding is also related to the broader social functions of mobile social networks, which have changed communication patterns, generational relations, and the ways in which users form and maintain social connections (Sadeghi, 2021). Because social media use is embedded in everyday interpersonal and cultural practices, national media cannot recover news authority solely through formal institutional credibility. It must also become integrated into the actual digital routines through which audiences discover, evaluate, discuss, and redistribute information.

One of the most important findings of the study was the central role of the interactive newsroom. The structural path involving the formation of an interactive newsroom and legal compliance had the highest coefficient in the model,  $\beta = 0.881$ , and the corresponding effect size was strong,  $f^2 = 0.452$ . This result suggests that newsroom restructuring is a decisive organizational mechanism through which national media can improve both convergence and regulatory accountability. An interactive newsroom can connect journalists, editors, social media specialists, data analysts, multimedia producers, legal advisers, and technology professionals within an integrated workflow. Such integration reduces fragmentation, accelerates verification, improves coordination across platforms, and allows legal and ethical review to become part of the production process rather than a delayed corrective intervention. This conclusion is consistent with comparative research on global newsroom models, which has shown that digitally integrated and cross-platform newsrooms are increasingly required to manage continuous news cycles and multiple distribution channels (Daliri, 2021). It also supports the argument that television news must be reinvented through innovative formats, social media adaptation, interactive storytelling, and organizational coordination between broadcasting and digital units (García-Avilés, 2020).

The significant relationships of professional ethics challenges and legal monitoring systems with the formation of an interactive newsroom, with path coefficients of  $\beta = 0.406$  and  $\beta = 0.394$ , respectively, further demonstrate that newsroom convergence cannot be reduced to technological modernization. The accelerated nature of social media news production increases the risk of inaccurate reporting, privacy violations, unauthorized reproduction, manipulation of user-generated content, and insufficient verification. Consequently, the interactive newsroom must incorporate ethical review, legal awareness,



correction mechanisms, and clearly defined responsibilities. The result is consistent with the ritual communication perspective, according to which national media management should protect shared meanings, cultural legitimacy, and social cohesion rather than focusing exclusively on the rapid transmission of information (Sharifi, 2019). It is also compatible with the historical evolution of press freedom, which demonstrates that media development has always involved a tension among freedom, responsibility, state regulation, and public accountability (Alini & Kia, 2022). In the digital environment, this tension is intensified by platform governance, algorithmic circulation, and cross-border dissemination.

The role of legal monitoring identified in this study is particularly significant because digital media regulation changes rapidly and involves multiple overlapping jurisdictions. National media organizations operate simultaneously under domestic law, internal regulations, professional codes, copyright rules, platform terms of service, and technological standards. The absence of an institutional mechanism for monitoring and updating these requirements can produce inconsistency and legal vulnerability. The strong contribution of legal monitoring to the interactive newsroom therefore indicates that legal compliance should be institutionalized within the daily production cycle. This interpretation is supported by research on platform power, which emphasizes that digital platforms exercise regulatory authority through technical architectures, data policies, moderation systems, and access rules (Van Dijck et al., 2019). Social platforms also function as publishers and distributors because their algorithms determine the ranking, circulation, and visibility of news content (Cetina Presuel & Martínez Sierra, 2019). Accordingly, national media organizations require legal and governance capabilities that extend beyond conventional broadcasting regulation and address algorithmic distribution, platform dependency, copyright, user data, and content moderation.

The study also confirmed the role of artificial intelligence as a catalyst of convergence. The use of artificial intelligence was significantly related to national media convergence, with a path coefficient of  $\beta = 0.478$  and a moderate effect size of  $f^2 = 0.154$ . This finding indicates that AI can facilitate the automation and integration of news-production activities, including transcription, translation, summarization, recommendation, verification, content adaptation, audience analysis, and multimedia production. The result is aligned with future-oriented analyses of news production, which identify artificial intelligence, automation, datafication, personalization, and platform integration as major forces shaping journalism and newsroom organization (Nasrollahi & Alborzi, 2020). It is also compatible with the concept of media convergence as the integration of technologies, content, industries, and user practices within a unified digital system (Lugmayr & Dal Zotto, 2019). However, the significance of professional ethics and legal monitoring in the same model shows that technological adoption must be governed carefully. AI may accelerate news production, but it can also introduce algorithmic bias, uncertain authorship, fabricated content, copyright violations, and reduced transparency.

The study's emphasis on AI and digital production should also be interpreted within a broader public policy framework. Social media technologies are not neutral instruments, and their effects cannot be explained solely through individual usage patterns. Platform design, algorithmic incentives, commercial attention models, and institutional regulation shape the quality of online communication and public exposure to information (Shannon et al., 2025). Therefore, the application of artificial intelligence in national media should be accompanied by public-interest criteria, explainability standards, human editorial supervision, and mechanisms for accountability. The finding that media governance contributes to organizational and developmental outcomes is consistent with evidence that policy frameworks and media governance can support high-quality institutional development by influencing stakeholder behavior and information environments (Zhao et al., 2025). Thus, AI-based convergence should be treated as a governance project and not merely as a technical upgrade.

Another major result was the relationship between the news ecosystem and the formation of an integrated news network, with  $\beta = 0.612$  and a strong effect size of  $f^2 = 0.362$ . This finding indicates that an integrated news network cannot be created simply by merging existing channels or establishing a centralized online outlet. It requires an ecosystem in which editorial units, technological systems, legal frameworks, social media accounts, audience databases, citizen-generated content, and professional news agencies operate through coordinated standards and interoperable processes. This finding supports the dual-spatialization perspective, which explains how contemporary institutions operate simultaneously in physical and virtual environments (Ameli, 2019). National media convergence must therefore connect the traditional broadcasting organization with the networked digital environment. The development of such an ecosystem also requires clear message-production and



distribution indicators, including technical quality, strategic coherence, platform suitability, audience responsiveness, and institutional consistency (Alavi Boroujerdi & Rahmati, 2021).

The results further demonstrated strong explanatory and predictive power for the endogenous constructs. National media convergence had the highest coefficient of determination,  $R^2 = 0.881$ , followed by attention to audience needs,  $R^2 = 0.856$ , digitization of content production,  $R^2 = 0.819$ , and formation of the news ecosystem,  $R^2 = 0.816$ . These values suggest that the combination of causal, contextual, technological, and strategic variables explains a substantial proportion of the variance in convergence outcomes. The strong  $Q^2$  values further indicate that the model has considerable predictive relevance. These findings validate the qualitative conclusion that national media convergence should be approached as an integrated policy and management system. They also correspond with studies of news policy-making in IRIB, which emphasize that technological, organizational, cultural, professional, ideological, and audience-related dimensions must be coordinated in a comprehensive policy framework (Khojasteh Bagherzadeh, 2019). The results therefore challenge fragmented approaches in which technology, content, regulation, and organizational structure are managed independently.

An important finding was that filtering of foreign social networks, although highly salient in the qualitative interviews, did not demonstrate a direct and statistically significant effect on the formation of the news ecosystem in the quantitative phase. This divergence between qualitative importance and quantitative direct effect suggests that filtering may operate indirectly, conditionally, or through mediating mechanisms rather than as an immediate determinant of convergence strategies. Filtering may affect access, audience migration, platform choice, trust, or organizational uncertainty, but the development of a news ecosystem appears to depend more directly on internal capacities such as newsroom integration, digital production, AI adoption, legal monitoring, and audience responsiveness. This interpretation is consistent with studies identifying both opportunities and threats of social networks for television news, including audience access, rapid dissemination, interactivity, misinformation, platform dependency, and regulatory conflict (Vafaei Zanouz et al., 2020). It also suggests that restrictive policies alone cannot replace organizational innovation. Even when access to platforms is constrained, audiences may continue to use them through alternative methods, while national media organizations still need credible content and adaptive distribution strategies.

The relatively limited direct role of filtering can also be explained by the power of editorial and communication strategies. Effective social media news production depends on content selection, verification, adaptation, and presentation, regardless of the degree of platform restriction (Sofyan et al., 2024). Similarly, media effectiveness depends on attracting attention, generating interest, maintaining relevance, and encouraging audience response, principles that are also reflected in communication models such as AIDA (Taghizadeh, 2024). Therefore, a national media strategy centered predominantly on access restrictions may not address the underlying reasons audiences prefer social networks, such as speed, relevance, participation, and format diversity. The study's findings indicate that convergence should focus on improving the communicative value of national media rather than relying primarily on environmental restrictions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that successful national media convergence requires simultaneous transformation at the technological, organizational, legal, ethical, and audience levels. The strongest relationships were associated with interactive structures, integrated ecosystems, legal compliance, audience responsiveness, and artificial intelligence. Structural and interactive variables produced stronger effect sizes than environmental constraints, indicating that national media institutions possess meaningful internal capacity to shape convergence outcomes. Social networks may have redistributed news authority, but the restoration of national media reference status remains possible through credible content, integrated newsrooms, digital production, strategic platform presence, regulatory intelligence, and ethical accountability. The study thus extends previous research by integrating these dimensions into a single empirically validated paradigmatic model.

The study was subject to several limitations. The qualitative phase was based on interviews with 18 experts, and although theoretical saturation was achieved, the participants were primarily professionals with extensive experience in national media, news production, and communication policy. Their perspectives may not fully represent younger journalists, independent digital media professionals, platform developers, citizen journalists, or ordinary social media users. In the quantitative phase, nonprobability purposive sampling was used because no complete sampling frame was available, which limits the statistical generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design also prevented the examination of changes in convergence strategies over time. In addition, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may have been affected by professional





expectations, institutional sensitivities, or socially desirable responses. Finally, rapid changes in artificial intelligence, platform policies, filtering practices, and media regulation may alter the relative importance of the identified variables.

Future studies should test the proposed model using larger probability samples drawn from different national media departments, online news agencies, digital-native media organizations, and regional broadcasting centers. Comparative research could examine whether the model operates similarly across public, private, and platform-based media institutions or across different national regulatory environments. Longitudinal designs are also recommended to assess how technological adoption, audience behavior, and legal policies influence convergence over time. Researchers should examine potential mediating and moderating mechanisms associated with filtering, platform dependency, public trust, organizational agility, and digital literacy. Additional qualitative studies involving audiences, citizen journalists, social media editors, technology developers, and legal practitioners could refine the model. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could also evaluate the effects of AI-assisted production, interactive newsroom structures, and platform-specific content strategies on news quality, engagement, trust, and legal compliance.

National media managers should establish integrated and interactive newsrooms in which editorial, technological, legal, ethical, and audience-analysis functions operate collaboratively. Artificial intelligence should be adopted through clearly defined human-supervision protocols, transparency standards, and accountability mechanisms. A permanent regulatory monitoring unit should be created to identify legal changes, update operational guidelines, and provide rapid consultation to journalists and editors. Content-production processes should be redesigned for digital-first and platform-specific distribution rather than merely reproducing broadcast material online. National media organizations should also develop unified audience databases, real-time feedback systems, multimedia production teams, and coordinated domestic and foreign platform strategies. Performance evaluation should combine reach and engagement indicators with accuracy, trust, public value, ethical compliance, and responsiveness to audience needs. Finally, convergence policies should prioritize organizational adaptability, content credibility, and interactive communication rather than relying predominantly on restrictive access policies.

### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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The authors report no conflict of interest.

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