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Convergence Culture: Where Old And New Media Collide



Synopsis

Henry Jenkins at Authors@Google (video) Winner of the 2007 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Katherine Singer Kovacs Book Award 2007 Choice Outstanding Academic Title

Convergence Culture maps a new territory: where old and new media intersect, where grassroots and corporate media collide, where the power of the media producer and the power of the consumer interact in unpredictable ways. Henry Jenkins, one of America's most respected media analysts, delves beneath the new media hype to uncover the important cultural transformations that are taking place as media converge. He takes us into the secret world of Survivor Spoilers, where avid internet users pool their knowledge to unearth the show's secrets before they are revealed on the air. He introduces us to young Harry Potter fans who are writing their own Hogwarts tales while executives at Warner Brothers struggle for control of their franchise. He shows us how The Matrix has pushed transmedia storytelling to new levels, creating a fictional world where consumers track down bits of the story across multiple media channels. Jenkins argues that struggles over convergence will redefine the face of American popular culture. Industry leaders see opportunities to direct content across many channels to increase revenue and broaden markets. At the same time, consumers envision a liberated public sphere, free of network controls, in a decentralized media environment. Sometimes corporate and grassroots efforts reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding relations between media producers and consumers. Sometimes these two forces are at war. Jenkins provides a riveting introduction to the world where every story gets told and every brand gets sold across multiple media platforms. He explains the cultural shift that is occurring as consumers fight for control across disparate channels, changing the way we do business, elect our leaders, and educate our children.

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Henry Jenkins, Director of the Contemporary Media Studies Program at MIT, attempts in his acclaimed 2006 book *Convergence Culture* to look beyond the hype surrounding new media and instead analyze the cultural transformations that occur when these new media meet the old. Arguing against the idea that convergence should be understood primarily as a technological process, he instead demonstrates that it represents a cultural shift as consumers are urged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content. Rather than writing from an objective viewpoint, Jenkins instead describes what the media landscape looks like from the perspective of various localized people. He also is quick to dismiss the idea that in the future consumers will get all their media from one device, referring to this prognostication as the 'black box fallacy.' Through his book, Jenkins explains how convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. Throughout the six chapters making up the first edition of the book, Jenkins looks at a number of scenarios that highlight the way culture is shifting based on the intersection of new and old media. He describes in detail the fans of the television show *Survivor* who have banded together online to form communities that attempt to find out as many secrets about the show as is possible, using this example as a microcosm to explain how knowledge can be formed within a community that would be impossible to be formed by individuals working separately. He also discusses the ramifications that interactive audience-driven voting has had on the hit *American Idol*, and the potential backlash against its new brand of corporate sponsorship.

Convergence Culture by Henry Jenkins gives an in-depth and critical look at how the World Wide Web has transformed traditional media to be more amalgamate, multi-level, and less isolated, allowing for a more participatory culture, and illustrating the power of collective intelligence. As the Internet blurs the lines that once separated specific mediums Jenkins writes, "Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (p.3). By focusing on a few major examples of how the media is shifting from isolated experiences into transmedia storytelling, Jenkins explains the relationship between convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence, illustrating how the "new media" is "impacting relationships between media audiences, producers and content"

(p.12). He explains that because aspects of our everyday lives pass through various media, convergence has created a new type of media consumer who communicates on several platforms. To reach the new consumer, traditional media must also be present on different forums. Jenkins explains most of these "discussions" throughout Convergence Culture within the context of specific pop-culture and political examples. The first of which begins in his first chapter, Spoiling Survivor, where he outlines the impact of a communal reception of the TV show "Survivor." By looking at one of the most democratic uses of the Internet (message boards), Jenkins analyzes Survivor fans' interactions with "spoilers" of the show, calling it "collective intelligence in practice" (p.28).

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