

From The Theater of Mind to Visual Radio: Transforming Broadcaster Practice in the Age of Media Convergence

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of broadcasting practices within the context of media convergence, particularly focusing on the shift from the traditional theater of the mind, which emphasizes auditory imagination, toward visualized radio practices. This transformation not only reconfigures the sensory orientation of radio but also reshapes the performance of broadcasters. Broadcasters are now required to maintain the distinctive characteristic of radio as an imaginative auditory medium while simultaneously adapting to emerging visual and digital media ecosystems. This issue is significant as radio institutions increasingly adopt visual platforms to sustain their relevance in a rapidly evolving, digitally convergent media environment. This study employs a qualitative grounded theory approach, utilizing three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with radio practitioners and supported by observational analysis of visualized radio practices. The findings reveal that broadcasters are no longer limited to on-air performance but are also engaged in live streaming and visual content production. While radio visualization does not fundamentally alter the core production processes of radio, it complements and extends them. This hybrid practice enables radio to remain resilient in the digital era. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that radio visualization has become an essential strategy for broadcasters to sustain their performance, negotiate professional identity, and preserve the theater of the mind within a multimedia environment.

Keywords: *Radio Visualization, Theater of Mind, Media Convergence, Broadcasters*

1. Introduction

The media in Indonesia have undergone a significant transformation (Parkatti et al., 2022). This transformation, driven by digitalization and media convergence, has marked a fundamental shift in how media institutions operate, how content is produced, and how audiences engage with media (Setiadarma & Rizkiansyah, 2021). Conventional media are now integrated with new media to deliver multimedia content via computers and the internet. This development has led to the convergence of information and communication technologies, computer networks, and media content, commonly conceptualized as the three Cs: Computing, Communication, and Content (Albadri, 2023). Media convergence practices have compelled radio institutions to incorporate visual elements through live broadcasts, commonly referred to as visual streaming or visual radio (Rusmana et al., 2024). In response to these shifts, the concept of visual radio has emerged as a strategic adaptation within the broadcasting industry, integrating audio content with video streaming and social media platforms. This development reflects a broader reconfiguration of radio practices, where broadcasting is no longer limited to voice-based delivery but extends to visual representation and real-time audience engagement across digital channels (Priana et al., 2025).

In this context, radio has traditionally been conceptualized as a “Theater of the mind”, in which broadcasters rely on sound, voice, and narrative to stimulate listeners’ imagination. However, consumption patterns from Generation Z and Millennials have shifted significantly to listening to the radio via mobile phone (Lubis, 2016). And they can now access content through various channels, such as streaming platforms (Priana et al., 2025). These developments suggest that radio is no longer the primary medium of choice for audiences (Maswar, 2024). The above phenomenon simultaneously poses significant challenges and creates new opportunities that were previously absent in the radio industry (Barrios-Rubio, 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). However, in the context of media convergence, this principle is increasingly challenged not only at the level of audience consumption but more importantly within the professional practices of broadcasters themselves.

Based on observations conducted by the researcher on 57 radio stations in the city of Surabaya, the findings reveal varying levels of adaptation to media convergence. A total of 33.3% (19 stations) are no longer active, 50.9% (29 stations) are in the process of transitioning toward convergence, and only 15.8% (9 stations) have fully implemented media convergence. Among these nine stations, Suara Surabaya FM was selected as a primary case due to its active and consistent implementation of visual radio within the private broadcasting sector. In comparison, RRI has also

actively adopted visual radio practices within the public broadcasting domain. Furthermore, the adaptation of platforms such as YouTube (Piñeiro-Otero & Pedrero-Esteban, 2022), TikTok, and live streaming services has introduced new expectations for visibility and visual engagement. These developments compel radio institutions to move beyond their purely auditory identity and adapt to a more visually oriented media environment (Priana et al., 2025).



Figure 1. Visualization Radio

This picture shows that broadcasters are central figures in both on-air programs and multiple content distribution (Rusmana et al., 2024). These changes are actively renegotiated by broadcasters through their everyday practices. They are no longer solely responsible for stimulating imagination through sound; they must also manage visual presence, maintain real-time interaction with audiences, and produce content across multiple digital platforms.

In relation to radio, a growing body of research has examined its transformation in the digital era, highlighting the migration from conventional broadcasting toward online streaming, podcasting, and cross-platform distribution (Damayanti et al., 2024; Gissani et al., 2024; Megamuslimah, 2024). This is appropriate; the scholarly discussions on media convergence have been widely developed, particularly emphasizing the integration of media platforms, participatory culture, and the shifting dynamics between producers and audiences (Jenkins, 2006). Besides that, these studies underline how radio institutions adapt strategically to maintain relevance amid increasing competition with digital media. Previous studies have extensively examined media convergence. Albadri's study shows that digital transformation has driven traditional media to adapt structurally and operationally toward a digital ecosystem, resulting in changes in work practices, distribution strategies, and journalistic

competencies. Meanwhile, Li et al. (2021) argue that convergence is shaped not only by technological factors but also by political forces, leading to differences between state-owned and market-oriented media. Government-affiliated media tend to benefit from stronger institutional support, whereas market-driven media face greater pressure from declining audiences and advertising revenue. Nevertheless, the central challenge for media today has shifted toward producing relevant and accurate information. In line with this, Setiadarma & Rizkiansyah (2021) demonstrate that media convergence has also extended to government media in Indonesia, including parliamentary media (DPR). In the context of radio, Barrios-Rubio (2021) highlights that radio has transformed into a multiplatform and transmedia medium, while still maintaining its audio-centered nature. Furthermore, Andok (2025) identifies podcasts as a new form of media emerging from the convergence of radio and digital communication, characterized by on-demand access, interactivity, and personalized content consumption.

Therefore, although previous studies have examined the transformation of radio and the emergence of visual radio, limited attention has been given to changes in broadcasters' work practices. In fact, broadcasters serve as the primary representation of broadcasting institutions and act as the frontline in communicating with audiences. This study explores the changes in broadcasters' professional practices following media convergence. Furthermore, it aims to examine how broadcasters reinterpret and negotiate the concept of the "theater of the mind" through their everyday broadcasting practices within the context of media convergence. In addition, this study highlights how broadcasters strategically navigate and negotiate these changes within their professional practices. They are required to balance the traditional auditory strengths of radio with the rising expectations for visual and interactive engagement, thereby redefining their roles and professional competencies in a more convergent media environment.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of communication and media studies. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on media convergence by addressing the increasingly integrated media environment. Specifically, this study explores the transformation of broadcasters' practices following media convergence. It examines how broadcasters reconceptualize the "theater of the mind," traditionally rooted in auditory imagination, into the practice of visual radio. By situating this transformation within everyday broadcasting practices, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how media convergence operates not only at the structural and technological levels but also at the level of professional practice and performativity. Practically, the

findings provide insights for the radio industry, particularly media organizations, in responding to an increasingly digital and visually oriented media landscape. This study highlights the importance of adapting to more flexible, integrative, and multi-platform broadcasting formats and practices to sustain radio's relevance amid evolving media consumption dynamics.

Accordingly, this study poses two main research questions: (1) How does radio broadcasting practice transform in the era of media convergence? and (2) How do broadcasters negotiate the shift from auditory to visual performance?. Through these research questions. This study contributes to contemporary radio studies by providing a conceptual understanding of how visualization practices reshape the traditional auditory identity of radio within the broader framework of media convergence.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative method using a Grounded Theory approach, which emphasizes data generation and theory building derived directly from fieldwork rather than from predetermined assumptions or theoretical frameworks (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Holt et al., 2022). This approach is considered particularly appropriate for exploring in depth the transformations occurring within the radio industry as a consequence of media convergence. (Busetto et al., 2020). The selection of research objects focused on radio stations located in Surabaya. Surabaya was chosen as the research site based on the decision of the National Congress of PRRSNI, which identifies Surabaya as one of the cities with the highest radio listenership in Indonesia, after Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Solo (PRSSNI, 2023). An initial observation was conducted on more than 52 radio stations operating in the city. To ensure a rigorous and relevant selection of research objects, several key indicators were applied during the preliminary observation stage, including: (1) the integration of radio with new media, particularly the active use of social media platforms; (2) the presence of independently managed websites; (3) the availability of active radio streaming services; (4) the implementation of live visual broadcasting or radio visualization practices; and (5) the existence of independently managed mobile applications. In addition, this study specifically focuses on news-format radio stations. This focus is based on the consideration that contemporary audiences increasingly turn to radio as a source of information, particularly in relation to immediacy, credibility, and proximity to local issues.

Informants were selected using a theoretical sampling strategy, where the process of selecting participants evolved in tandem with the ongoing data collection and analysis. Initial informants were selected based on their active involvement in radio broadcasting practices within a media environment that has undergone convergence, and informants will continue to be selected until saturation is reached. The study involved 19 informants with varying durations, including radio presenters, human resources managers, media teams, and chief executive officers (CEO) within the radio industry. A total of 597 minutes of semi-structured interviews were conducted. This interview format was chosen to allow the researcher to explore the informants' experiences in depth, enabling responses that were transparent and grounded in their lived professional practices. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, that is, when no further significant categories or information could be identified from the additional data. This method was chosen to produce data that is more focused on the research topic (Roberts et al., 2025). In addition to interviews, direct observation was conducted to examine changes in newsroom structures and broadcasters' professional behaviors in relation to multi-platform broadcasting and radio visualization practices. Observation served as an important method for enhancing data credibility. Furthermore, document analysis was employed as an additional strategy to ensure data validity. This involved comparing and cross-checking interview data with observational findings and relevant institutional documents. Through this process of triangulation, the study aimed to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and trustworthiness of the collected data. This aligns with the methods of (Creswell, 2009).

2.2. Coding Data & Data Analysis

After the interview process was completed, the researcher transcribed the data verbatim. The next stage involved open coding, which aims to systematically identify, break down, and classify the field data based on meanings that emerge from the informants' narratives. During this stage, each unit of meaning, whether in the form of words, phrases, or sentences, was assigned a code that represents specific phenomena, experiences, or perspectives related to media convergence and radio visualization practices. Open coding was conducted inductively, without relying on predefined categories or prior assumptions, ensuring that all codes were generated directly from the empirical data. The open coding process resulted in 202 initial codes. The relatively large number of codes reflects the complexity and richness of the field data. Rather than indicating redundancy, this extensive coding facilitated a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the observed phenomena, enabling the researcher to capture diverse experiences and interpretations before

proceeding to data reduction and category development in the subsequent stages of analysis. After completing the open coding stage, the researcher identified recurring patterns and underlying connections across the codes, indicating the need for further data reduction and conceptual grouping.

Table 1. Open Coding Example

No.	Initial	Senses	Open Coding
1	DN	“RRI also has an app called RRI Digital. We also offer live streaming on the RRI Digital app.”	The implications of digitalization
2	AP	“So it’s not just about fulfilling obligations; he has to be creative in promoting RRI through social media.”	Personal and Organizational Branding
3	SW	“You have to be ready at a moment's notice, Miss. We're a dynamic team, after all.”	Adapting to Change
4	YP	“Personally, I haven’t really experienced any major culture shock, because I think times have changed.”	Changes accepted
5	YP	“Actually, public speaking should be the top priority, shouldn’t it... People can speak, but if they have no thoughts, no ideas in their head, that’s going to be difficult too.”	Public Speaking Skills
6	SW	“Well, multitasking is a must, isn’t it?”	The broadcaster’s multitasking
7	BR	“When the audience has seen the presenter’s own visualization, does it change? No, it doesn’t, does it?”	The Existence of Radio Stabil
8	DN	“When you imagine a radio presenter, you picture them using your imagination. You think, “They must have a lovely voice, a high-pitched voice, a beautiful voice, and so on.” But when you actually meet them, oh, it turns out...”	The imaginative appeal of radio

Rather than being predefined, these categories were grounded in the empirical data, reflecting how broadcasters experience and interpret changes in their professional practices within a convergent media environment. The axial categories in this study emerged through an iterative process of constant comparison, in which initial open codes derived from interview data were grouped based on conceptual similarities and recurring patterns. The open codes, such as “personal and organizational branding” and “implications of digitalization,” indicate various forms of transformation occurring at the institutional level, particularly in relation to internal systems, organizational structures, and strategic practices. These codes reflect how media organizations respond to the demands of media convergence by restructuring workflows, redefining branding strategies, and adapting to digital environments. Through the process of constant comparison, these conceptually related codes were grouped into the axial category Institutional and Organizational Transformation, as they collectively represent changes that extend beyond individual practices and are embedded within organizational and systemic contexts. This process was applied across all data, resulting in eight interrelated axial categories that collectively explain the transformation of broadcasting practice from an auditory-centered model to a hybrid, platform-based, and audio-visual form.

Table 2. Axial Coding

No	Axial Coding Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Reconfiguration of Broadcasting Modality	9	4%
2	Platform Convergence and Expansion	16	8%
3	Transformation of Broadcasting Practice	49	24%
4	Audience Reconfiguration and Engagement	25	12%
5	Performative Transformation of Broadcasters	28	14%
6	Adaptive Process of broadcasters	25	12%
7	Institutional and Organizational Transformation	35	17%
8	Continuity of Radio Identity	15	7%
	Total	202	100%

Axial coding does not represent the outcome of the study; rather, it functions as an intermediate analytical stage that assists the researcher in organizing and clustering data according to conceptual relationships among categories. At this stage, the field data are systematically structured to reveal clearer patterns and connections among the identified phenomena. Based on the axial coding framework, not all categories were treated equally in the subsequent analysis. This study selectively focuses on categories that are most relevant to the research objectives, particularly those related to the shift from the theater of mind toward radio visualization practices. In contrast, this study demonstrates that the quality of theory cannot be separated from the process through which it is generated (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

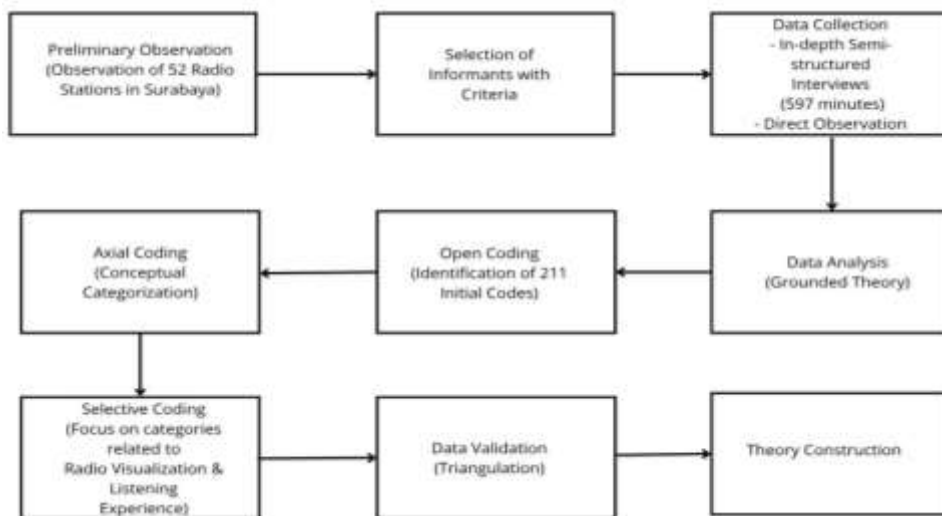


Figure 2. Flowchart of the Research Methodology

Triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from interviews and observations to identify both consistencies and variations in emerging patterns. Data from each source were not only used to corroborate one another, but also to reveal potential discrepancies, which were subsequently subjected to further analysis. When contradictions were identified between interview, observational, and documentary data, the researcher did not eliminate any single source; instead, the contextual conditions under which these differences emerged were carefully examined. These contradictions were treated as part of the dynamic nature of broadcasting practices, thereby enriching the interpretation and the development of categories within the coding process.

3. Results

3.1. Transformation of Broadcasting Practices in Media Convergence

The findings of this study indicate significant changes in the radio industry, particularly in Suara Surabaya and RRI. These changes are primarily reflected in broadcasting practices. Broadcasters in both institutions recognize that radio can no longer operate within a conventional framework. They understand that the development of digital technology, social media, and changing audience behavior requires radio to continuously adapt. This awareness is also followed by institutional efforts, as both organizations have begun implementing media convergence for some time. This is reflected in the statement of one informant: “So everything will change, especially traditional media such as radio and television, therefore they must follow the development of the times” (YP). This transformation indicates a fundamental shift in the logic of radio media distribution, from a frequency-based broadcasting system toward a more convergent digital ecosystem. In addition, convergence has also reshaped broadcasters’ perspectives on their professional practices, requiring them to adapt to these evolving dynamics.

The radio stations under study each provide access through websites, online streaming, radio on-demand, and even visual radio. This is reinforced by an informant’s statement: “Listeners can tune in via a live stream, so not via the radio frequency, but via the internet” (AP). In addition, the researcher found that Suara Surabaya and RRI have also implemented convergence through digital applications accessible via mobile phones, as reflected in the statements: “RRI also has what is called the RRI digital application” (DN) and “it is available on the digital application” (YI). The use of a centralized digital application enables audiences to access content across different regions, thereby transforming radio into a networked medium. This expansion of services also requires broadcasters to adapt to the use of digital technologies as well as to multiplatform content distribution patterns in on-air broadcasting.

As a result, radio listening has become more flexible, mobile, and detached from fixed frequency-based infrastructures. In addition, the expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and online news portals has broadened the reach and visibility of radio institutions. This is reflected in an informant’s statement: “Finally, the scope for convergence is widening again... there’s Instagram, Facebook... it’s gaining momentum. That’s where the opportunities are expanding” (NA). These efforts aim to expand the radio industry’s communication ecosystem into a more interactive and interconnected digital space. The findings also indicate that this transformation extends the scale of

broadcasting beyond local or regional boundaries toward a national and even global reach. The emergence of digital platforms has enabled radio to move beyond its traditional reliance on terrestrial frequency. As noted by one informant, “In fact, with the RRI digital app, we can listen to all RRI stations across Indonesia” (DP). At the same time, another added that “convergence can further expand the reach for Suara Surabaya” (NA). These findings align with Jenkins (2006), who argues that media convergence assumes old and new media will interact in increasingly complex ways, with new media potentially transforming all forms of media. This shift not only expands audience reach but also redefines the scale and scope of radio broadcasting within a convergent digital environment.



Figure 3. TikTok Live Streaming by Suara Surabaya Media

The integration of visual platforms further accelerates this shift. Broadcasters are now required to engage in live streaming practices, particularly through platforms such as TikTok: “Now we broadcasters are required to go live on TikTok” (DN). The figure illustrates a broadcaster

conducting a live session via TikTok within a studio setting. The broadcaster is equipped with a headset and microphone, indicating that a radio broadcast is taking place while simultaneously being captured on camera for live streaming. Broadcasters explained that the presence of cameras transforms the broadcasting environment into a more open and closely observed space. Activities that were previously considered natural in radio broadcasting, such as body movements, facial expressions, or personal habits, now require greater control, as they can be visually captured by the audience. This is reflected in the statement: “The challenge is to act as naturally as possible. So we sit there, the camera is focused on us, we don’t scratch ourselves because that might be distracting, but we stick to the principle that this isn’t television. There are still boundaries. We always emphasize that this is not television, this is visual radio” (Informant RJ, Suara Surabaya, 2025). Indicate that the integration of visual elements reconfigures the professional competencies required of broadcasters. The primary skill now involves the ability to operate simultaneously across two formats, traditional radio and visual radio, highlighting the increasing complexity of broadcasting practices in a convergent media environment (Zhuravleva, 2019).

The interface displays real-time audience comments, reactions, and engagement metrics (e.g., viewer count and likes), indicating active audience participation during the broadcast. In addition, the visual framing highlights the studio environment, including lighting, background setting, and the broadcaster’s physical appearance, all of which are now visible to the audience, elements that were previously absent in traditional audio-only radio. The incorporation of these visual elements enhances the overall media value and enriches the audience experience (Freixa et al., 2021).

This indicates a transition from purely audio-based broadcasting to visualized radio practices, in which content is consumed simultaneously through listening and viewing. Moreover, content is no longer restricted by the time constraints of on-air programming. As noted by one informant: “If it’s too long for the broadcast... we can cover the in-depth stuff on the podcast” (WQ). Thus, podcasting and other digital formats extend the depth and continuity of radio content beyond live broadcasting. These technological transformations have direct implications for the role of broadcasters.

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content distribution. In this context, podcasting and other digital formats enable the extension of content depth and continuity beyond live broadcasting. These technological transformations have direct implications for the role of broadcasters, requiring them to manage content across multiple formats and platforms within a convergent media environment.

In RRI practice, this transformation is institutionalized through specific targets and responsibilities for content production. Broadcasters are required to regularly produce fillers, public service announcements, and other creative materials. This is reflected in the statement: “Every month, presenters must prepare four filler segments... basically, our job is to produce four that fit our aesthetic” (DP). Another informant added, “The broadcaster must produce a ‘base cut’... the best highlights from the broadcast” (AP). In addition, broadcasters are tasked with producing derivative content such as best cuts, which are short segments extracted from live broadcasts for redistribution on digital platforms. This requirement is accompanied by an emphasis on creativity and differentiation, as indicated by the statement: “We need to come up with creative ideas to make the ILM and the filler stand out from the usual” (DP).

Others’ jobs are beyond content production; broadcasters are also positioned as on-screen talent in digital media environments: “It is his duty to become a talent... he will be included in the SKP” (AP). This indicates a formal institutional recognition of the broadcaster’s expanded role as a content performer. In this context, broadcasters are not only audio presenters but also visual subjects who must engage audiences through appearance, expression, and interaction. Furthermore, the operational structure of broadcasting has also shifted toward a more integrated and self-managed system. Broadcasters are increasingly required to handle technical aspects independently: “We run it ourselves... we’re the ones running the YouTube channel... we already have a camera” (YI).

This reflects the emergence of a single-operator model, where broadcasters simultaneously perform technical, editorial, and performative roles. In addition, the boundaries between editorial and broadcasting roles are becoming increasingly blurred: “All presenters are gatekeepers” (NA). This indicates a restructuring of professional roles within radio institutions, where broadcasters are involved in content selection, production, and dissemination.

These findings confirm that the implementation of convergence in the two radio stations under study has undergone a comprehensive transformation, integrating audio, visual, and interactive elements within a convergent media environment. The transformation of radio in the

context of media convergence is primarily driven by technological expansion, which subsequently reshapes broadcasting practices as well as the role of broadcasters themselves

3.2. Negotiating “The Theater of the Mind” in Visual Radio from Broadcasters' Perspective

The findings of this study reveal a recurring narrative among the broadcasters interviewed: despite shifts in media convergence practices, sound remains the core of radio. Informants consistently asserted that the identity of radio has not fundamentally changed, but rather adapted to technological developments. This is evident in the repeated emphasis throughout the interviews, where broadcasters position voice as the primary element in message delivery. As one informant stated, “Because the bottom line is the voice” (RJ). This statement indicates that, amid the integration of visual and interactive elements, the auditory aspect continues to be maintained as the fundamental foundation of radio broadcasting. Analytically, these findings suggest that convergence does not entirely eliminate the essential nature of radio, but instead encourages an ongoing negotiation of media identity. Radio does not fully transform into a visual medium; rather, it evolves into a hybrid form that incorporates visual affordances while remaining rooted in the power of sound as its defining characteristic.

The primary strength of radio in its earlier form lay in its ability to rely on the auditory dimension to foster emotional intimacy and stimulate listeners' imagination. This underscores that sound functions not merely as a medium for conveying information, but also as a means of constructing symbolic experiences that characterize radio as a communication medium. This is reflected in the concept of the theater of the mind, in which listeners actively construct meaning and imagery through the sounds they receive. In practice, this requires broadcasters to possess strong communication skills, particularly in terms of vocal delivery, including tone, intonation, articulation, and the ability to create an engaging on-air atmosphere. Broadcasters do not simply deliver information; they create auditory experiences that evoke listeners' imagination, enabling audiences to mentally visualize the messages being conveyed. Furthermore, music selection plays a crucial role in shaping this experience. Broadcasters are expected to choose music that aligns with the context of the broadcast, as music helps reinforce the intended mood and emotional resonance. As noted by Watson (in Botstein), evocative classical music is capable of generating rich visual and emotional imaginative experiences for listeners.

Broadcasters are redefining the form of broadcasting practices in order to support listeners in constructing listening experiences that are now

also complemented by visual cues. In practice, broadcasters no longer focus solely on audiences who engage through audio, but also actively consider those who access broadcasts via streaming platforms. One informant stated, “Visuals allow our listeners to send videos, which we can then display by changing our visual radio content. However, we must not forget that not all of our listeners are watching; some engage with audio only” (WQ). This statement indicates broadcasters’ awareness of the diversity of audience consumption modes, where audio and visual experiences coexist within the same broadcasting environment.

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However, the emergence of visual radio has made broadcasters’ identities increasingly visible to audiences. Whereas broadcasters were previously “invisible” and primarily recognized through their voices, the presence of visual elements now allows audiences to directly identify them. In addition, the broadcasting production process has become more transparent, as audiences can observe in real time how broadcasts are conducted, including interactions within the studio. Despite these changes, broadcasters do not perceive this condition as a burden. Instead, they emphasize that such visibility is part of media development that must be adapted to. As one informant stated, “Radio is still radio. Even when it takes on a visual form, the essence of radio must remain intact” (YP). This statement indicates that, although changes have occurred in terms of presentation and distribution, broadcasters continue to maintain the understanding that radio remains rooted in its auditory strength. Analytically, these findings suggest that broadcasters actively attempt to preserve the essential identity of radio amid the pressures of media convergence.

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This perspective is expressed because radio is perceived as inherently different from television. Broadcasters consider visual elements as complementary components rather than the primary focus of broadcasting practices. This is emphasized in the statement of one informant: “There’s something called the theatre of the mind... we encourage our listeners to let their imaginations run wild” (BR). At the same time, informants explicitly reject the idea that visual elements fundamentally alter this experience: “Once the audience has seen the visualization... does it change? Not really” (BR). The contrast between discourse and practice reveals an underlying tension. On the one hand, broadcasters assert that radio remains unchanged in its essence. On the other hand, their everyday practices demonstrate an increasing adaptation to visual and digital formats.

Further analysis shows that this ideological stance is supported by the continued effort to maintain communicative competence, particularly in terms of vocal quality. Informants highlight the importance of vocal training, communication skills, and emotional control, as reflected in the statements: “The ability to maintain a positive atmosphere... communication skills... empathy” (DN) and “Vocal training must be properly maintained” (HI). In addition, one informant emphasized the uniqueness of voice as a defining characteristic, stating that “our voice is our personality” (NA). These efforts are undertaken to maintain the stability of broadcasters’ on-air performance, particularly by preserving vocal quality, delivery consistency, and emotional control. Analytically, this indicates that despite the increasing demands on visual performance in contemporary broadcasting practices, the auditory dimension remains the core of professional radio broadcasting.

This suggests that broadcasters continue to anchor their professional identity in the intimacy and familiarity traditionally associated with radio. However, when these claims are juxtaposed with the observed integration of visual and digital practices, it becomes evident that

radio is not simply “remaining the same.” Rather, it is undergoing an ongoing process of negotiation, in which continuity is discursively maintained while transformation unfolds in practice.

3.3. Broadcasters as Performative and Convergent Agents

The findings reveal a significant shift in the role of radio broadcasters, from merely functioning as voice-on-air performers to adopting more complex and performative roles as content creators. This shift is reflected in the statement of one informant: “Back in the day, a presenter was just a voice on air... now they’re almost like an influencer... a content creator” (HI). This transformation requires broadcasters to operate across multiple platforms and formats, not only within audio broadcasting but also in digital content production. Furthermore, this shift is accompanied by changes in broadcasters’ visibility. Whereas audiences previously did not need to know the individual behind the voice, broadcasters are now increasingly visible and even positioned as public figures (BR).

In practice, broadcasters also develop various additional professional roles related to voice, such as voice-over talent, dubbers, moderators, and public speakers, while actively producing content on social media (RJ). This finding indicates that contemporary broadcasting practices involve multidimensional skill sets that extend beyond conventional radio broadcasting. Analytically, this shift suggests that media convergence has transformed the role of broadcasters into a more hybrid form, combining the functions of communicator, content creator, and public figure within a single professional role. This transformation marks a transition from traditional broadcasting models toward the logic of the digital media industry, which emphasizes visibility, interactivity, and personalization as integral components of contemporary communication practices.

In addition, the integration of visual elements also affects broadcasters’ performance, as one informant stated that “visual greatly influences the broadcaster’s performance itself” (DN). The presence of visual components requires broadcasters not only to deliver content verbally but also to manage nonverbal aspects such as facial expressions, gestures, and on-camera appearance. Furthermore, this condition demands the development of a stronger professional attitude, as broadcasters are positioned at the forefront of media institutions and are subject to public visibility (YP). These findings indicate that media convergence expands the performative dimensions of broadcasting, encompassing not only vocal but also visual and interpersonal aspects. Broadcasters are required to integrate technical skills, communication competence, and self-representation within a single professional practice,

making their role increasingly complex within a convergent media ecosystem.

The shift in broadcasting practices requires broadcasters to operate across multiple platforms and modalities simultaneously. This is reflected in the statement of an informant: “Broadcasters must now be able to work across two channels” (RI), emphasizing that broadcasters can no longer focus on a single broadcasting channel but must manage multiple communication channels at once. In practice, broadcasters are expected to integrate audio broadcasting with other digital platforms, such as social media and streaming services, making the broadcasting process more complex and dynamic. In addition, broadcasters are positioned as multifunctional figures in carrying out their roles. As one informant noted, “...broadcasters must be multifunctional because that is the rule in our broadcasting practice” (NA). This statement indicates that the ability to perform multiple roles simultaneously has become part of the norms and professional standards in contemporary broadcasting. Broadcasters are not only responsible for delivering content but also for managing audience interaction, organizing the flow of information, and adapting to the demands of various platforms.

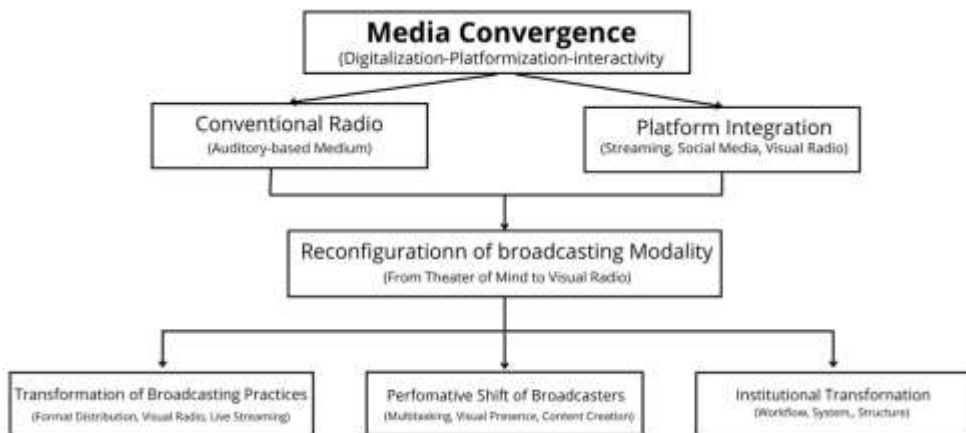


Figure 4. The Mapping of Results

These findings suggest that media convergence drives a redefinition of the broadcaster’s role into a more flexible and integrated form. Multifunctionality is no longer an added value but a fundamental requirement in an increasingly interconnected media environment that demands cross-platform adaptability.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that media convergence has fundamentally reshaped radio broadcasting practices through the integration of digital platforms, visual technologies, and interactive audience engagement (Albadri, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Furthermore, (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) Although audiences have traditionally been accustomed to consuming content passively, radio is increasingly transforming from a purely auditory medium into a hybrid. This phenomenon reflects the participatory dynamics described in convergence culture theory, where audiences become active participants in media production and circulation (Jenkins, 2006). The presence of live streaming and visual interaction enables audiences to observe studio activities, submit visual content, and engage with broadcasters in real time. As a result, radio broadcasting increasingly operates within an interactive communication environment where audience participation shapes the flow and structure of broadcasting practices.

However, rather than representing a simple technological transformation and changing audience consumption (Setiadarma & Rizkiansyah, 2021) The result indicates that convergence operates as a complex socio-cultural process that reconfigures professional practices, media identity, and the communicative logic of radio itself. This demonstrates that media convergence does not lead to the disappearance of traditional media forms, but rather drives their transformation into hybrid configurations. In this context, radio can no longer be understood merely as an auditory or visual medium, but rather as a dynamic form of communication that continually negotiates among imagination, visibility, and interactivity (Bidang; (Piñeiro-Otero & Pedrero-Esteban, 2022).

In contrast to previous studies that primarily focus on changes in conventional media following media convergence, such as challenges, transformations, and adaptive strategies within the radio industry (Albadri, 2023; F. Magnaye & E. Tarusan, 2023). This study offers a different perspective. Research by Li et al. (2021) further suggests that media convergence is also influenced by power structures, where media organizations under certain authorities tend to demonstrate higher levels of innovation. Furthermore, Mark Poster (in Littlejohn et al., 2017) also argues that the impact of media does not merely expand human capabilities or create technological dependency, but also brings significant transformations to human identity and culture.

This study reveals the transformation of broadcasting practices experienced by radio broadcasters at Suara Surabaya and RRI Surabaya. The difference lies in the main focus of the research: previous studies tend to emphasize institutional changes, whereas this study focuses on changes

at the individual level, particularly among radio broadcasters. Therefore, media convergence not only transforms technological aspects but also reshapes ways of working, professional practices, and how broadcasters adapt to ongoing changes. Aligned with the study by Zhang et al. (2025), which also focuses on the dilemma of changing practices in conventional media, the findings highlight new demands placed on media professionals in the era of media convergence under the influence of new media. Broadcasters and presenters are no longer only required to perform routine tasks such as planning, writing, broadcasting, and hosting, but are also, at times, expected to carry out photography, video recording, audio recording, editing, and content distribution. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the overall competencies of broadcasters and presenters.

In addition, there has been a significant transformation in the practices of radio broadcasters. This study finds that the role of radio broadcasters has shifted from being solely voice on-air performers to becoming multi-skilled professionals who continuously integrate themselves across various new media platforms. As a result, their workload has increased, along with responsibilities that extend beyond on-air activities. The consistency of these findings with Zhang et al., (2025) indicates that the changing role of broadcasters in the context of media convergence has also been recognized by other researchers. This shift in roles and responsibilities appears to be a consistent phenomenon across different contexts, driven by the industry's need to enhance audience engagement on digital platforms.

Zhang et al.'s (2025) The study also indicates that broadcasters and presenters are becoming increasingly prominent, which may lead to imbalances in professionalism, ideology, morality, and personal development. The findings of this study further show that this shift poses a challenge for broadcasters in redefining the concept of the “theater of the mind,” as broadcasting practices continue to evolve. In addition, Botstein (as cited in Watson, 2024) argues that auditory media possess a strong capacity to evoke vivid visual and emotional imagination in listeners.

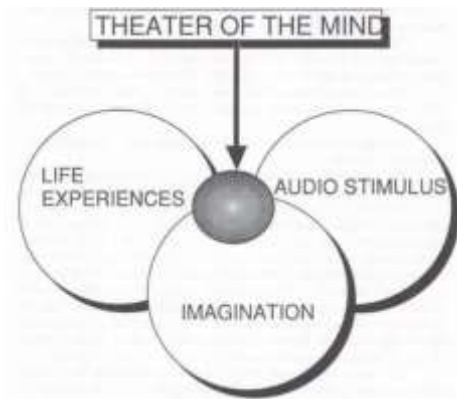


Figure 4. Theater of The Mind Mapping

Traditionally, conventional radio relies on sound, voice, and narrative structures to stimulate listeners' imagination, allowing audiences to construct mental images of events, characters, and situations, and to imagine reality solely through the human voice (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2024). Listeners will construct their own "visual" details. For example, the gender and body size of a person walking down a hallway, their style of clothing, the architectural form of the space where the scene takes place, and even the smell of gunpowder. All of these elements are built within the listener's mind. 1994) argues that effective audio production can expand human experience by leveraging the mind's capacity to generate imagery. Thus, audio does not merely convey information; it also profoundly activates the listener's imagination and subjective experience.

Furthermore, the study by (Barrios-Rubio, 2021) states that radio continues to prioritize sound over other multimedia components, while also incorporating exclusive web-based content as a space for expression and for presenting opinions on particular issues. Thus, the integration of visual elements into radio broadcasting does not merely represent a technological addition but also signifies a transformation of the sensory environment of radio communication, expanding the ways audiences perceive and engage with radio content (Griffin, 2012). Because of the transformation in broadcasting, researchers found:

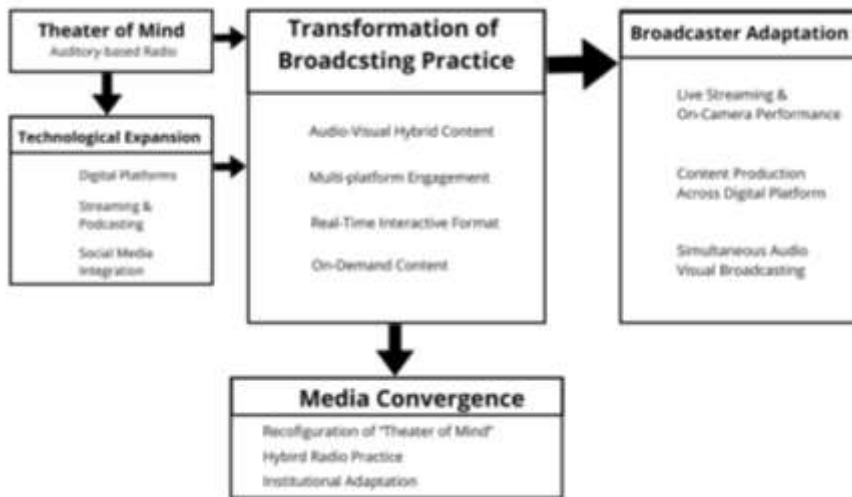


Figure 5. Transformation Broadcasting Practice Structure

Consequently, broadcasters are required to simultaneously serve and manage two audiences: those who consume content visually and those who remain dependent on audio. This study shows that radio broadcasters not only focus on delivering content on-air but also simultaneously monitor and respond to comments on the live broadcast screen. This interaction is carried out actively by integrating audience responses into the broadcast flow, thus creating a more dialogic relationship between broadcasters and listeners. As a result, the broadcasting process becomes more interactive, both in the context of on-air transmission and through digital streaming platforms. Broadcasters are no longer limited to delivering content through voice, but are required to perform multiple roles, including content production, platform management, and visual performance.

Furthermore, the emergence of visual radio and multiplatform content production supports Zhuravleva (2019), who argues that media convergence increases the complexity of media practices by requiring professionals to operate across multiple formats simultaneously. The article also says (Priana et al., 2025) that broadcasters often fulfill a dual role during a broadcast, namely delivering content on air whilst simultaneously interacting with listeners via social media. This requires constant monitoring of comments and questions posted during live broadcasts. Consequently, the ability to use social media is an essential skill for broadcasters to maintain effective communication and provide a good service to listeners in real-time interactions. These developments signify the emergence of new media characterized by multimedia integration,

intertextuality, interactivity, digital archiving, and virtuality (Barrios-Rubio, 2021).

Broadcasters actively maintain a narrative of stability to preserve their professional identity, even as their practices undergo significant transformation; thus, amid these changes, they do not lose sight of the fundamental role of radio as a sound-based medium. Interestingly, broadcasters also resist the full assimilation of radio practices into television-style broadcasting. They emphasize that visual radio cannot be equated with television, reflecting a conscious effort to maintain symbolic boundaries between media. The expression “radio remains radio” underscores this stance, highlighting the persistence of radio’s core characteristics, such as auditory intimacy, emotional connection, and the power of imagination.

In addition, the findings of this study indicate that transformation is not only driven by individual adaptation but is also embedded within institutional and organizational structures. The emergence of content production targets, platform integration strategies, and increasingly autonomous work systems demonstrates that media convergence has reconfigured organizational logic. Overall, these findings suggest that radio convergence cannot be understood simply as a technological evolution, but rather as a broader process of media transformation involving institutional adaptation, professional renegotiation, and conceptual redefinition of broadcasting practices.

5. Conclusion

Radio, as a sound-based medium, is currently undergoing substantial change and facing structural pressures to adapt and sustain itself. While convergence opens new opportunities for content expansion, it also raises questions about how radio can retain its distinctive characteristics amid these changes. Based on the empirical context of two radio stations in Surabaya, this study highlights a localized transformation in radio practices, suggesting a potential shift that may also be observed in similar urban and digitally convergent broadcasting contexts.

The integration of audio and visual elements across digital platforms has redefined how radio is produced, performed, and experienced, without entirely displacing its core auditory identity. The findings indicate that broadcasters tend to negotiate a balance between audio and visual elements, although no uniform strategy was observed. The findings also demonstrate that visual convergence reshapes broadcasting practices by introducing new professional demands for broadcasters. While vocal quality remains central, broadcasters are now also evaluated based on visual appearance, bodily presence, and on-camera behavior.

Nevertheless, the core communicative style of radio, characterized by spontaneity, intimacy, and voice-centered interaction, largely remains intact. This indicates that convergence alters the context of performance rather than transforming the fundamental communicative function of radio.

Visual elements provide contextual cues that may guide or limit imagination, yet they do not fully replace listeners' imaginative engagement. Instead, visualization creates a negotiated space where audio-based imagination and visual representation coexist. Broadcasters actively maintain symbolic boundaries between radio and television by positioning visuals as supportive rather than central, reinforcing radio's distinct media identity.

Theoretically, this study contributes to media convergence scholarship by extending the understanding of convergence beyond technological integration toward experiential and symbolic dimensions. Convergence is shown to reshape not only platforms and distribution, but also professional identity, audience engagement, and the meaning-making process of radio consumption. Methodologically, the findings highlight the value of qualitative, meaning-oriented approaches in capturing the nuanced negotiations that emerge in convergent media practices.

In practice, the results imply that radio institutions should develop convergence strategies that prioritize balance over visual dominance. For policymakers and media practitioners, maintaining radio's auditory while embracing digital innovation is crucial to sustaining relevance without eroding radio's identity as a voice-centered medium.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Empirically, it is based on a small number of informants from two radio stations in Surabaya, limiting broader applicability. Methodologically, the use of Grounded Theory prioritizes meaning-making but provides limited insight into structural dynamics such as power relations and institutional constraints. Epistemologically, the study relies on broadcasters' narratives, which may reflect professional discourse rather than actual practice, and does not include audience perspectives. Therefore, the findings should be understood as context-specific and interpretive rather than universally generalizable.

Future research should address the limitations of this study by incorporating audience perspectives to examine how radio visualization and auditory identity are experienced by listeners. Comparative studies across different contexts and platforms are also needed to assess the broader applicability of these findings. In addition, further research should explore structural dimensions such as media ownership and platform

algorithms, as well as employ mixed-method approaches combining qualitative analysis with digital audience metrics.

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