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Understanding the Role of Converging Media: Shaping Migrant Narratives and the Paradox of Co-Creation in a Digital Era

Zhixi Zhuang, Mariam El Toukhy, Jack Krywulak, & Cyrus Sundar Singh

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Abstract

In the digital age, technology-enhanced media has significantly transformed various aspects of global migration, transcending physical borders that impact both the processes of migration and migrants' experiences. In order to capture the multifaceted and complex processes of migration, displacement, settlement, and integration, researchers have been exploring technology-enhanced media, such as social media, visual communications, and digital storytelling to deepen our understanding of migrants' evolving narratives related to identity and belonging. The creating, sharing, and archiving of these narratives is also directly connected to and affected by the evolving nature of old and new digital media. As such, this paper posits the term converging media. However, it remains unclear to what extent migrants use converging media and technology to advocate for their rights, drive social change, and foster a sense of belonging. What is the role of converging media in creating and disseminating these narratives, along with the profound meanings associated with migrants' identities and sense of belonging? How do converging media's innovative and distinctive features, such as interactivity, networkability, and accessibility support and empower migrant agency in decision making, social and political engagement, coping strategies, and resistance and resilience? What are the potential pitfalls and risks of using converging media in framing migrants' identity narratives? Focusing on the convergence of media, technology, and migrant communities, this paper investigates how migrants leverage these technology-enhanced media platforms to shape their narratives of identity and belonging, and advocate for social and policy change.

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1. Introduction

Accelerated globalization and human mobility in a digitalized world has revolutionized how we connect across distances and cultures. Within this context, international migration has given rise to new forms of migration patterns and mobility, generating dynamic narratives and transforming social relationships, senses of identity, and citizenship (Triandafyllidou, 2024a). On one hand, migrants on the move experience greater connectivity across virtual transnational spaces, which facilitates migration passages, enables a sense of belonging, enacts citizenship, and enhances their health and well-being, as evidenced by studies with refugees and older immigrants who are part of more vulnerable diasporas (Georgiou, 2019; Millard et al., 2018; Palmberger, 2022). On the other hand, scholars caution the use of advanced digital technology, such as social media, in fostering neo-tribal nationalism that instigates exclusivity and anti-social division (Triandafyllidou, 2020), as well as the performative dimension of engaging with technology “for seeing and representing one’s self and others and enacting citizenship digitally” (Georgiou, 2019, p. 602).

This new era of digital technology, characterized by the hyperconnection of users using internet-enabled portable devices, has facilitated the seamless flow of information, enabling greater global mobility between hybrid (digital and physical) spaces (de Souza e Silva, 2023). Yet, the unprecedented transformation has also introduced complex interpretations and (mis)representations of identity and belonging, creating ambiguous spaces that challenge traditional notions of community, placemaking, and citizenship. Fundamental questions around digital citizenship, such as “Who belongs and who does not?” (Triandafyllidou, 2024b) and “Who has the right to have rights?” (Georgiou, 2019), have been raised to contextualize the contested grounds of the digital realm. Researchers have been exploring the role of social media, visual communications, and digital storytelling to capture the multifaceted and complex processes of migration, displacement, integration, and placemaking, hoping to enhance our understanding of migrants’ evolving narratives related to identity and belonging in a digital era (Ahmed et al., 2024; Andersson, 2019; Brigham et al., 2018; Campion & Dieckmann, 2024; Faye & Ravneberg, 2024; Festa, 2023; Hancox, 2011; McMorrow & Saksena, 2020; Miled, 2020; Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022; Wilf et al., 2023). However, the extent to which migrants use media and technology to advocate for their rights and social change remains unclear.

Within this context, this article aims to understand how media and technology have evolved and intersected not only with each other, but also with migrant communities, and to what extent the convergence of media, technology, and community has enhanced, restricted, or both, the expressions of identity, the exercise of agency, and the reinforcement of citizenship and belonging. Specifically, the article aims to address the following research questions: What is the role of media and technology in creating and disseminating these narratives, along with the profound meanings associated with migrants’ identities and sense of belonging? How do technology-enhanced media’s innovative and distinctive features, such as interactivity, networkability, and accessibility support and empower migrant agency in decision making, social and political engagement, coping strategies, and resistance and resilience? What are the potential pitfalls and risks of using media and technology in framing migrants’ identity narratives?

To begin, we conducted a comprehensive literature review focused on publications that explored the characteristics, applications, and interactions of new media, digital technology, social media, visual communication and methods, and digital storytelling in migration studies. We used a combination of the aforementioned themes as keywords along with additional terms identified, such as migrant identity, migrant agency, advocacy, belonging, citizenship, photovoice, and multimedia. The term ‘migrants’ refers to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented, or non-status migrants in this article. Data from the selected literature were then synthesized using thematic analysis to identify common themes emerging from previous studies, highlighting how different components of new media, technology and community members contribute to the broader understanding of digital narratives of citizenship and belonging that have transcended

both physical and virtual borders. Focusing on the complex relationships between media, technology, and migrant communities, this article provides an overview of the literature to investigate how migrants leverage these technology-enhanced new media platforms to shape their narratives of identity and belonging, and advocate for social and policy change.

This article starts with an introduction to the evolving nature of media and related technology and the proposal of an alternative definition of 'converging media' that appropriately speaks to its applications in migration studies, pointing to the tools used to generate migration narratives, the co-creation process, the voices and representations in the production and dissemination of migration narratives and the impact of technology-enhanced media on migrant agency, identities, belonging, and citizenship. The investigation also reveals how storytelling through converging new media and technology evokes emotion and change, igniting public and political discourses, and creates digital third spaces. It also calls for a more nuanced and conscientious approach to understanding the limitations of using converging media in a digitized world and the paradoxical effect it may have on creating more equitable and meaningful engagements with migrants. It draws on issues related to safety, access, privacy, and consent to highlight digital humanities, which aim to make the humanities more relevant in an increasingly digital world.

2. Defining Converging Media

As migrants navigate through the virtual and physical borders, documenting mobility patterns and migration narratives becomes increasingly crucial, yet intricate. The use of digital media for producing, consuming, and disseminating these narratives provides unprecedented opportunities to either promote or hinder citizenship and belonging. This digital realm opens up new, accessible spaces for communication, representation, and imagination, which can particularly benefit migrants who are often excluded from or marginalized in physical spaces or host societies to use these digital 'third places' to connect with each other and enhance their visibility (Marino, 2015). This article contributes to a nuanced understanding of that convergence of media, digital technology, and digitally connected communities and how their interaction captures these narratives, reflecting the evolving constructs of home and identity in a fluid, digitalized, and interconnected world. As such, we offer the term *converging media*, which will be used throughout this paper to better encapsulate the rapid, ever-evolving technological advancements, the dynamics of users, and their digital interactions and impact on shaping migration narratives.

We opt for the intransitive (as opposed to the transitive) definition of 'converge' (Oxford University Press, n.d.), as it asserts the lack of concrete point of origin which functions as the given cause for the changes in media and its use. We use the verb 'converging' in the present progressive to emphasize the term's temporal nature, highlighting the ongoing overlap of variables such as media, cultures, and communities as they evolve during the phases of intransitive convergence. The use of intransitive converging media suggests a focus on the processes and effects of convergence that are not directed towards a final state or specific outcome. Instead, it addresses the dynamic nature of convergence that continuously evolves without a direct, defined path or trajectory.

Understanding affordances is crucial when examining the hyper-linked, interactive, and cross-contextual nature of converging media in the digital realm. These features enable users to generate content that can be integrated across various media platforms, enhancing the way information is interconnected and disseminated (Jensen, 2011). Digital platforms, such as social media, are dynamic tools with structures and rules that are frequently reshaped by their users, leading to diverse uses that often diverge from the intentions of the original designers (Costa, 2018). The affordances of these platforms, such as persistence (the length of time content is shared), visibility (how accessible content is), spreadability (the potential reach of content), and

searchability (how easy it is to find content), allow users to explore and create new ways to engage with new and traditional media content. It is crucial to understand how users use these digital platforms as a tool for collective problem-solving, public deliberation, and creative collaboration (Chen et al., 2011; Costa, 2018; Jenkins, 2006;). The resulting 'collapse of context,' as described by Costa (2018), underscores the importance of understanding the media within the specific cultural and contextual nuances of the creators as affordances in practice. Thus, within existing, emerging, and potential digital third spaces, the convergence of media, technology, and users occurs, enabling them to co-create their narratives (Costa, 2018; Couldry, 2004). One key outcome of this 'collapse of context' is that users, especially migrants, gain agency over their digital narratives, despite the inherent biases that may emerge in digital spaces (Chen et al., 2011, Friedman & Friedman, 2008; Loos & Ivan, 2022). The significance of users' agency and influence as a result of these affordances cannot be understated, with literature documenting how corporate media, which often polarizes migrant narratives, has recognized both the value and threat of increased user participation, prompting them to create stories that either invite consumer involvement or shape user opinions (Jenkins, 2006).

Ethnographic research suggests the need to rethink the relationship between user agency and the structuring power of social media platforms, calling for a more nuanced understanding of affordances (Costa, 2018). This moves away from merely focusing on how converging media and technology shapes our society and how users drive technological convergence (Friedman & Friedman, 2008; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Manovich, 2003). Scholars argued that these aspects are not mutually exclusive or simple cause-and-effect relationships (Kahne et al., 2015; Manovich, 2003), addressing the intransitive character of converging media and the 'collapse of contexts' that blur traditional boundaries and social structures within media, communication, and technology due to convergence, and lead to new forms of interactions and meanings. In this light, the term 'converging media' becomes a more comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving dynamics between users, technology, and media formats that reshape migration narratives. The following sections will delve deeper into the use of converging media in migration studies.

3. Converging Media and Its Affordances in Migration Studies

When we reorient the definition of converging media from a focus on new digital communication and media technologies to a broader understanding of its affordances in shaping modern communication and society, it becomes a powerful umbrella term that speaks to numerous relevant topics, including migrant agency, digital storytelling, and the empowerment of marginalized voices (Lievrouw, 2023). As such, literature suggests that converging media is not only a technical tool that influences our culture, but instead is an active creator of new convergent cultures as a result of the collapsing contexts and affordances in practice (Chen et al., 2011; Costa, 2018). The interconnectivity of the internet and the introduction of the user-oriented Web 2.0 can be argued as the introduction of converging media, allowing for affordances that facilitated the active participation of and the direct influence on online users who now have the ability to use various forms of media, and their personal narratives to design, produce and distribute to content across the globe (Chen et al., 2011; Marshall, 2011). Instead of only asking what this converging media does to people, we should also ask what people do with this media — this allows us to reflect on the interplay between digital media and communication and better understand their relationship as collaborative, unidirectional, rapid, and perpetually evolving (Friedman & Friedman, 2008).

Mass media, in its traditional forms, has been heavily criticized for failing to appropriately represent immigrant groups since the 90s as it often deepens otherness, projects Eurocentrism, and worsens exclusion (Arapoglou et al., 2016). In tandem with the downturn of written media,

the internet's growth continues to provide a platform for voices traditionally othered or suppressed by mainstream media (Festa, 2023, p. 29). Despite this opportunity, the translation and interpretation of migrant identities often fail to convey their complexities, not just because of linguistic barriers but also because migrant identities are deeply rooted in intertwining histories, conflicts, religions, politics, and diverse worldviews, which are often oversimplified by mass media creators that produce narratives primed for for-profit participation, often reducing migrants to entities with little agency or voice, using polarization to increase visibility and consumer participation (Georgiou & Leurs, 2022; Jenkins, 2006).

Therefore, it has become imperative to examine the role of converging media in amplifying migrant experiences, identities, and narratives. The innovation of converging media lies within its hyperlinked accessibility which enables ordinary users to construct, co-construct and reconstruct content, rendering them actively engaged participants in the exchange of information as opposed to static receivers (Chen et al., 2011). This user-generated, bottom-up production process, typically facilitated by social media (Benick, 2012), emphasizes the integral role that communication through converging media plays in migration studies, contributing to supporting and amplifying migrant experiences, identities and narratives (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). This support is facilitated by digitization, a cornerstone of converging media, which makes creating, sharing, and editing content an accessible process, thus promoting creativity, exploration and connection building (Friedman & Friedman, 2008). For example, mobile phones, a convergence of the internet and the telephone, have been a crucial tool that supports refugees and undocumented immigrants seeking to gather resources to help them integrate into their new host societies (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Festa, 2023; Weibert et al., 2023). These digital tools provide access to digital maps, resource platforms, and social networks through which migrants can connect with their support network, share their experiences and learn from other migrants' experiences to help them better cope with their often hostile new environments (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024, Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022).

Literature reveals that connected migrants have a stronger ability to integrate into host societies while maintaining their transnational lives, often using converging media to communicate with the familiar while navigating the unfamiliar (Festa, 2023; Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). Through online networks and digital storytelling campaigns, migrants can amplify their voices, raise awareness about their experiences, and mobilize support for social and political causes relevant to their communities (LeBuhn, 2018). For instance, Somali refugees in Dadaab camps in Kenya received support through friends and family from abroad, through converging media including text messaging, e-mail, and user organized funding campaigns to support their transition (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). In addition to enabling open communication, converging media's interactive nature creates a fruitful ground for sharing migrant narratives through digital storytelling, allowing them to be active creators, participators and disseminators of their own experiences (Alexandra 2015; Brigham et al., 2018; Miled, 2020; Svoen et al., 2019; Weibert et al., 2023). Through co-creative processes, which will be explored later in the paper, converging media supports individuals who use their faces and voices to tell their stories, effectively directing attention towards marginalized voices who struggle to enter Western societies (Festa, 2023). But with such attention, it is pertinent to interrogate the prevalent issues of access, representation and migrant agency that may arise when migrants participate in digital storytelling via converging media.

4. Converging Media and the Co-Creative Digital Storytelling Practice

4.1 Contextualizing Co-Creative Practice

Originally evolving from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation and Manzini's (2015) dual axis of collaborative and active involvement, co-creative practice has been celebrated for its interactive and intentional design that can empower migrants in their journeys of digital storytelling (Joshi, 2018). Co-creation is an iterative, non-linear and collaborative knowledge generation process (Moser & Korstjens, 2022), which similar to converging media, has been difficult to define, often interchangeably referred to as co-design or co-production (Joshi, 2018; Praag, 2021). However, some literature suggests a distinction between co-creation, which refers to collaborative planning and preparation of a digital story, and co-production, which refers to the editing and dissemination of a digital story (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). The co-creative process has been the framework for interaction between institutional actors including academic researchers and arts-based practitioners, and marginalized communities including migrants and people of colour, enabling them to support migrants in producing and disseminating their narratives (Agundez Del Castillo et al., 2024; Hill, 2019).

4.2 Issues of Access and Literacy

With the prevalence of digital devices in almost every household, and users across multiple age groups including young children, converging new media facilitated by digital technology has become ubiquitous with modern life (Sine, 2019). This does not, however, acknowledge key issues of access and the widening digital divide that can result when we consider groups who either do not have access to digital technologies, are constrained in their use of social media or similar platforms, or do not have the necessary literacy, safety, or desire to participate in an increasingly digital world (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Three considerations must be taken into account when discussing converging media and its role as a facilitator of information and communication sharing: 1) Access—who has it and who doesn't? 2) Literacy—who knows what? and 3) Representation—who says and does what in relation to whom? (Jensen, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2013).

To effectively dissect issues of migrant representation in converging media, we must begin with the issue of physical access. Access to the physical infrastructure of converging media, such as internet linked devices and a working internet connection is not yet considered an essential service, thus disproportionately excluding migrants who are amongst the communities often unable to access these basic services (Yazici, 2024). For example, in Britain, those who are least likely to have internet access are those who are financially vulnerable, with migrants and people of colour being 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Yazici, 2024). Additionally, migrants of older generations who have not learned to use digital technologies during their formative years' experience difficulty learning these new skills, or have no desire to, thus excluding them from participating in converging media and global knowledge sharing (Loos & Ivan, 2022). Physical exclusion from participation thus widens the digital divide, better understood as the inequalities experienced in the use of information and communication technologies (Wei & Hindman, 2011). Studies have shown that socioeconomic status, race, and gender are closely associated with how one uses the internet, leading us to the bridge that connects the divide: digital and media literacy (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Madianou & Miller, 2013).

Digital literacy is key knowledge for individuals to use digital technologies once they have access, but media literacy is necessary for rendering a user of converging media an active participant, rather than a static receiver (Chen et al., 2011; Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). Having media literacy can be better understood as a continuous relationship between being a consumer of media and a prosumer of media (Chen et al, 2011). A consumer can access converging media messages and understand them, while a prosumer converges their experience, perspective and opinions with the messages they accessed to produce and share their own narratives, effectively

participating in digital communities as an actor with agency (Baines et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2011; Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Yazici, 2024).

Media literacy is a key component of participating in the 21st century, especially since messages disseminated using converging media tools are subjective interpretations of the users who generated them, rendering those messages inherently biased (Chen et al., 2011; Jaramillo-Dent & Perez-Rodriguez, 2019). If one does not feel safe participating in consuming or creating converging media, they risk being underrepresented, a fate many migrants and marginalized communities still face (Yazici, 2024). As converging media can never be neutral, foundationally co-constructed with embedded values and experiences of its creators, it stands to complicate migrants' lives as they have less access and literacy to share their own narratives in the digital space, thus remaining unable to counteract negative stereotypes (Chen et al., 2011; Svoen et al., 2019). This exclusion from participation in and consumption of converging media inevitably exacerbates their physical and social exclusion and further highlights the importance of adopting participatory design methods such as co-creation to rebalance the scales of representation and narrow the digital divide, ensuring accessibility and adequate media literacy for migrants.

4.3 Co-Creative, Reflexive, and Emotive Storytelling for Change

Co-creation in its essence must be interpreted as a reflexive exercise that swings between product and process, where development of projects does not progress linearly and representation is constantly in flux (Campion & Dieckmann, 2024). Often a collaboration between researchers and citizen participants, co-creative processes may involve frequent meetings including sharing circles, learning workshops, creation sessions and most importantly, continuous discussion and reflection (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). This process is underpinned by allowing the community with which project teams are collaborating with to exercise their agency, share their strengths, and contribute to the creation and production of a project, ensuring constant inclusion (Moser & Korstjens, 2022). For instance, in an arts-based collaborative project with refugees in the UK, musical composers collaborated with asylum-seeking students over the course of six workshops to co-create a multimedia performance showcasing the migrant students' transitional experiences in the UK that included sharing narratives, retelling them through drawings, combining narratives through video and ultimately producing a collection of performances of varying mediums to be performed and disseminated digitally (Campion & Dieckmann, 2024). This reflexive practice allowed the students to become active participators in the creation process, as they had to reflect on their experiences, absorb the experiences of others, and ultimately foster a new connection with their community, thus enhancing their representation and agency (Campion & Dieckmann, 2024).

There are various forms of converging media typically used to co-create these powerful narratives, including interactive documentaries (convergence between film and performance art), photovoice (convergence of photography and audio recording), social media posts (convergence of written text and images) (Benick, 2012; Mitra, 2019; Weibert et al., 2023). For instance, photovoice using digital cameras or camcorders were typically followed by workshops, group discussions or interviews of the creators (Bilgin, 2021; McMorrow & Sakesena, 2020). These participatory visual methods provided a platform for participants to express their opinions, experiences and identities, showcasing the efficacy of converging media tools in facilitating self-expression and the open discussion of complex intersections of identity and belonging (Miled, 2020). These co-creative processes ensured that creators experienced an open, recursive, and collaborative experience (Bilgin 2021; Del Vecchio et al., 2017; McMorrow & Saksena, 2020; Pienimäki, 2021). Migrants are given a platform to document their experiences and assert themselves as primary authors of their narratives that bring attention to issues such as structural violence and power relations while fostering a sense of recognition and agency among

marginalized groups (Alexandra, 2015). In particular, digital storytelling has served as an opportunity for migrant and refugee youth to develop digital literacy skills, thus effectively supporting them when they identify support needs, or find that they need non-lingual methods to more accurately express themselves (Johnson & Kendrick, 2017).

When migrants are given the capability to express themselves without imposed restraints, emotionally provocative stories emerge to evoke change and decentre the predominant Western narratives. Hancox (2011) facilitated a digital storytelling project on the *Forgotten Australians*, a group which consists of 500,000 children who were displaced from their families between 1930 and 1970 in Australia. Hancox (2011) found that putting the full emphasis on the displaced individuals to tell the stories from their perspectives created what she described as “chaos narratives,” stories which are fixated on uncertainty and can often be “too painful to be heard by others.” Hancox highlights the fact that the project was connected to provoking action from the Australian federal government. Similarly, LeBuhn (2018) found online content which was emotionally provoking and narrative-rich was more successful at raising awareness of refugees. However, LeBuhn is keen on emphasizing that online content and campaigns often fail to address root causes. Krause and Gubrium explored young mothers’ experiences of migration and movement facilitated through workshops which featured “talking and writing prompts, individual and group script work, a story circle, script editing, voiceover recording of scripts, storyboarding, image selection, digital editing, and assembling” (Krause & Gubrium, 2019, p. 425). The stories created a “narrative shock,” which proved incredibly valuable for cultivating dignity.

4.4 How Co-Creative Digital Storytelling Amplifies Migrant Agency & Identity

Co-creation as a practice acknowledges the lived experiences of communities, such as migrants, who typically experience a stripping of agency and representation, recognizing them instead as participating multidimensional beings capable of action and critical analysis, as opposed to just entities in need of constant support (Baines et al., 2024). This interlinked relationship between agency, capacity building and representation is central to the co-creative process (Campion & Dieckmann, 2024). The aforementioned converging media tools can build a meaningful bridge between migrant storytellers and their audiences. For instance, photographs made, collected or shared by migrants during the co-creation of a project and later displayed alongside exhibition material have functioned as an empathetic bridge between storyteller and story listener, allowing the audience to better grasp the complicated experiences of the migrants who chose to share their stories (Agundez Del Castillo et al., 2024). These photographs also acted as bridges between researchers and participants, as they deepened their understandings of each other while allowing the participants to shape the outcome of their projects, effectively rendering them not just co-creators, but co-producers as well (Agundez Del Castillo et al., 2024; Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). Although the co-creative practice has been an innovative enabler for migrants to share narratives using converging media, it still suffers from dynamic imbalances of power and various other challenges (Hill, 2019).

4.5 Critiques of Co-Creative Practice

As with any recursive practice, participators in the co-creative process must continually assess the dynamics of power between one another throughout the development of a project, as co-creative production is primarily a public and social endeavour (Hill, 2019). Contextualizing the roles of the researcher and the participator are paramount in order to properly assess co-creative practice through the lens of accessibility, agency and representation.

To start, many researchers who spearhead co-creative digital storytelling projects are products of Western education and practices, effectively constraining them to Western narratives and structures (Hill, 2019). This may inadvertently silence migrants and further exclude them from integrating into host societies by identifying them as incapable or in need of support (Lember et al., 2019; Wright-Brough, 2020). Researchers inadvertently reproduce oppressive power structures when they seek out and ask migrants to re-share their migration narrative to fulfil the researchers' predefined pursuit of knowledge, thus spotlighting only one aspect of migrants' identities, effectively ignoring their individual dynamism (Campion & Dieckmann, 2024). This coincides with findings in literature that showcase that most studies engage participants as co-creators, who only provide their narratives, rather than also engaging them as co-producers, who collaboratively create, edit, finalize and share their narratives—rendering this practice inaccessible to the very participants who made the projects possible (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Joshi, 2018).

There is no standardized approach to addressing power dynamics since migrants' intersectional identities and socioeconomic contexts are often not considered (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). Researchers must reorient their positioning from researcher to collaborator and ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and that each step of the co-creative process is explained and accessible (Lember et al., 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2022). For instance, gathering migrants' narratives through social media may have the potential to empower them, but only if they are involved in the co-production process as well, which many will not be due to lack of media literacy, lack of resources to attend meetings, language barriers, feeling unsafe sharing or collaborating, or lacking clearly defined expectations and roles by the researchers (Chen et al., 2011; Lember et al., 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2022).

Due to these ever-present power imbalances, research suggests that individuals asked to participate in co-creative digital storytelling projects need to build trust over time (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024; Hill, 2019). As such, collaborators must work to prepare safe, open, inclusive spaces for their participants that consider their diverse social, economic and cultural contexts that go beyond their identity as a migrant in need (Fay & Ravneberg, 2024). This trust building is especially crucial as collaborators, often also the project managers and final editors, will need to provide guidance, feedback and final editing support to migrants' stories (Wright-Brough, 2020). They must grapple with the inevitability of changing the authors' voices to ensure publish-ability or to risk having the migrants' voices remain unheard due to an unfinished piece (Hill, 2019; Wright-Brough, 2020). This brings us to the crux of the co-creative process and how at its core, collaborative practice hinges on the continued influence of everyone in the co-creative process, as such there may not be such a thing as an individual story. Instead, co-created narratives can instead be accepted as convergences of personal experiences, external expectations, editorial influence, and project constraints (Hill, 2019).

Consequently, it becomes necessary to adopt reflexivity in co-creative practice and allow the open and networked characteristics of converging media to facilitate fluid communication between researcher and participant, giving participants the opportunity to exercise agency and self-represent while participating in the digital storytelling process (Agundez Del Castillo et al., 2024; Baines et al., 2024).

5. Whose Voice and For Whom: Knowledge Production and Dissemination

As with many critical topics of online discussion, migrants and their migration processes are increasingly trivialized and fetishized in the media spotlight as just another reactionary topic. A narrow understanding of the topic, often informed by brash political stances as opposed to a coherent understanding, contributes to the paralyzation of real change and what has been coined as the paradox of digitalization (Leurs et al., 2018). A paradox in which advancing technology and converging media are increasingly becoming a necessary tool which has antithetical effects. As

migrants are increasingly required to navigate spaces both physically and virtually, the consequences of media use should be carefully observed. This section wrestles with the interplay between migrant identity and narratives and converging media's complex role in the process.

5.1 The Inner Voices: Migrant-initiated Digital Narratives

Digital narratives initiated by and created solely by migrants, are primarily disseminated through social media (if disseminated at all). In the present day, converging media often serves as the medium for immigrants to stay connected to their origin countries; immigrant youth heavily rely on different forms of converging media (primarily social media) to form their identities (Wilf et al., 2022). In some cases, independently initiated use of converging media can affirm identity: Yoon (2018) found that 1.5 generation Korean immigrants (born in Korea and immigrated with their parents) in Toronto use “digital media as a tool for facilitating multicultural senses of identities.” However, the affirmation of identity through social media does not guarantee a smooth transition into host societies, because “Their media use and identity work may vacillate between integration (into the dominant cultural norms of the host society) and dis-integration (from the host society)” (p. 164). Veronis, Tabler, and Ahmed (2018) interviewed Syrian refugees (between 16 and 25 years old) about their social media use and found that social media helped refugees cross linguistic-cultural barriers, find a sense of belonging, and bolster their agency within Canada. Shuva (2021) interviewed Bangladeshi immigrants (average age 30 and 49 years) and found that social media can connect skilled immigrants to work.

While converging media can function as a tool for identity affirmation (Yoon, 2018) and aid integration into host countries (Veronis et al., 2018), the impact of converging media on immigrants' ability to provoke and create social change is much more in question. Through 52 in-depth face-to-face interviews with Chinese immigrant women, Chen, Tian and Chang (2021) found that while social media provides the tools for forging steady intersectional identities, social media did not help them in combatting or taking action to change discriminatory social life. Rather, social media problematizes migrants' strategy to strive for social equality (Chang, et al., 2021). For example, newcomer women avoided sharing their political views online in fear of harassment, or refugees feared the use of social media as it put their immigration status at risk (Zaher, 2020). Furthermore, limited linguistic and media skills have been shown to create miscommunications, reinforcing pre-existing divides in second-generation adolescent immigrants (Ranieri & Bruni, 2012). Migrant literacy (linguistic and technological) “appears as both an empowering and an exclusionary force” (Weibert et al., 2023, p. 24) during the arrival process. These obstructions can take simple forms, such as the inability to access e-services (an increasingly common platform for social services) directly impinging on agency and social capital (Alam & Imran, 2015). These studies show how converging media and technologies can both provide and limit agency within host countries and, in turn, affect migrant identities.

In terms of disseminating migrants' ideas into the greater online space, online echo chambers pose a threat to erasing social divides. Analysis of social media hashtags on imperative immigration topics has proved as an example of this: Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez (2021) studied 105 posts related to the Mexican border wall (including those posts by those trying to pass the wall) and found that algorithms delivered posts almost exclusively to those with a similar or the same political viewpoint, which suggested that “social media platforms such as Instagram are fertile grounds for political manipulation and polarization” (Jaramillo-Dent & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2021, pp. 136–137).

Migrant-initiated narratives through converging media can benefit social connections, cross linguistic and cultural barriers, and create work opportunities. However, as discussed in section 4.2, access to converging media is not equitable across all migrant groups, and some disadvantaged groups have serious barriers preventing them from accessing these benefits.

Concurrently, consuming and creating content can increase migrant agency, the impact of their content on the broader social narrative is in question — this reaffirms the trends of social media where it functions as a tool for status-seeking or identity affirmation but does not necessarily shift existing narratives (Van Bavel et al., 2023), exemplifying the paradoxical nature of narrative creation, which simultaneously brings together yet further divides. Migrants find themselves in a unique position; with the concept of borders becoming increasingly digitized, the converging media realm presents a rapidly changing and relatively unstable space in which migrants are increasingly obliged to participate. Still, the use of converging media shows potential for innovating space which stands entirely outside of ‘politics proper,’ where often oppressed voices are refused a space within the allegedly democratic ethos (Chee, 2022).

5.2 The Outer Voices: External Influences on Migration Narratives

An imperative concern in the present day is the rapid spread of false information which has followed the evolution of media (predominantly on social media) (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). The impact of misinformation on migration narratives and their political outcomes is no exception to this prominent symptom of social media. The rise of the Far Right in Europe and North America, fuelled by anti-immigrant misinformation, has been intensifying since the refugee crisis in 2015. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has been normalized thanks to the increasing distrust of mainstream media, which has allowed algorithmically fuelled uncritical attitudes to take flight (Culloty & Suiter, 2021). Stories from the media shape *single stories* (narrow perspectives), which remove the humanity of migrant groups (Festa, 2023, p. 33). Migration as a topic has been a particularly polarizing political topic within the media space (Ekman, 2019; Farkas et al., 2018). Disinformation and media manipulation tactics have been linked to far-right anti-immigration policy-making (Culloty & Suiter, 2021). Ahmed et al. (2024) studied Singaporean adult social media use in relation to their perceptions of migration and found those with higher social media use and greater threat perception often displayed negative outlooks toward migrants. With countries (the U.S. as a prime example) increasingly reaffirming their population's safety through anti-immigration narratives and using technology to do so (Nyabola, 2023), the problem is increasingly becoming more imperative for pro-immigration scholars. We are now faced with the challenge of effectively integrating immigrant stories into a polarizing international climate. As Nyabola (2023) points out, the groups most needing their stories disseminated often have the most obstructed relationships with power. Integrating these identities into the Western media machine without subsuming and altering the original message has proved difficult, as evidenced in the projects led by groups of “researchers, directors, authors, cultural operators, and mediators” (Cati & Piredda, 2017, p. 632) that failed to involve migrant participants in the communication style of the project and did not embody the migrant storytellers' ideas or initiatives. It points to the critical co-creation practices as discussed in section 4.5.

Notes of McLuhan's “The medium is the message” (1994, p 7) resonate here, a sporadic evolution of converging media has produced a necessarily incohesive political dialogue. Narratives on the topic of migration tend to promote a binary—the right as anti-immigration and the left as pro-immigration—removing the nuances of the conversation. Converging media's increasingly popular short-form content is often crude, as evidenced in TikTok, YouTube shorts, Instagram reels, affirming existing politically binary opinions. Established critiques on mass media hold true to contemporary media: Integration through media integrates culture in a repressive way, promoting conformity to limited options (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007). Migrant narratives tend to be crafted with the intention of captivating the largest audience, following suit with the media outlets existing political orientation.

The advance of converging media and ever-changing technologies are inevitable and therefore require a willingness to constantly adapt. This section does not imply that individuals

should stop spreading their views on the topic or that immigration narratives should not continue to be disseminated. The topic now requires serious critical engagement with what it means to disseminate an idea. Scholars need to innovate this process, further exploring the tension between a need for improved immigrant media accessibility and avoiding conforming to existing binary narratives. The Western media machines insistently are all too powerful under the all encapsulating and constant reproducing guise of capital. Our media is consistently attempting to consume the message through the medium's power, and thus far converging media is failing to escape this trend.

6. Taking up Digital Third Places

6.1 Outside Looking in: Physical and Digital Third Places

The concept of third place, first introduced by Oldenburg (1989) identifies three key places that act as connective tissue between an individual and their surrounding society, effectively relating them to their context and heightening their sense of belonging and integration (Bosman & Dolley, 2019). The first place is the home, the second place is the workplace, and the third place is any informal public gathering place that provides a neutral and accessible opportunity for individuals to meet, interact, and develop a sense of relationality and belonging to a place and each other (Bosman & Dolley, 2019; Koliska & Roberts, 2021). These practices effectively enable migrants to turn new space, like an unfamiliar new city, into a place, defined by personal meaning and connection (Koliska & Roberts, 2021; Zhuang, 2017; Zhuang & Lok, 2023).

6.2 The Co-Production of Digital Third Places

Since media literacy skills are often required to navigate new unfamiliar physical and digital spaces, digital storytelling has emerged as a tool that contributes to the creation of digital third spaces that enable individuals to practice processes of placemaking in the digital realm (Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Marino, 2015; Vecchio et al., 2017). When migrants share their narratives using converging media, cyberspace emerges as a new type of placemaking environment where groups geographically unbound can find and form cohesive communities by producing and sharing narratives, therefore disrupting the conventional understandings of space, place, border and territory (Marino, 2015). Examples of such digital third places include online gaming communities, social media groups, and personal blogs which are integral in fostering and sustaining the user-generated, informal, creative economy that allows migrants to independently share their experiences outside spatial, institutional or formal constraints, thus exercising their agency while increasing their visibility and representation (Dovey et al., 2016; Roudometof, 2023). Due to the hyperlinked nature of converging media and the rapid spread of information, such places are created at hyperspeed thanks to ubiquitous technologies like mobile phones, converging into a third culture built using converging media that anchors migrants to a digital community while they simultaneously attempt to anchor themselves to a physical one (Roudometof, 2023).

As outlined by third place theory, individuals' experiences continue to be shaped through new experiences and interactions in these online spaces (Vecchio et al., 2017), providing ample opportunity for personal reflection, affirmation of identity, and a new avenue towards connecting with that identity beyond one's status as refugee, asylum seeker, or another othering status within their host community (Biglin, 2021). This fluidity offers migrants some power in shifting dominant stereotypes that categorize them one dimensionally (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022), instead allowing them to create a digital sense of place, a sense of identity, and increase their representation by

connecting with others who relate to them, supporting the facilitation of grassroots movements, starting conversations and digital storytelling (Roudometof, 2023).

6.3 A Space to Make Place: Digital Placemaking Informing Physical Placemaking

Although digital third places allow for migrant voices to be heard despite hostility from mainstream media (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022), there remains a necessity to identify a bridge between the digital and the physical to ensure migrants integrate and make place for themselves in their new environments—this bridge can be digital placemaking (Dovey et al., 2016). In the past five years, digital placemaking has been emergent in literature and described as a strategy that uses converging media to enable individuals to engage in activism, meet new people, and establish meaningful connections that begin digitally and culminate in a physical space (Basaraba, 2023; Yazici, 2024). Typical strategies and tools that enable digital placemaking using converging media include geolocal tagging, capturing and sharing images of the self on social media, sharing videos of self or place on social media, ultimately using social media processes of recording and displaying one's social life as a means to make meaningful connections with the physical place while remaining in contact with the digital communities that empowered them to explore those physical spaces (Hurley, 2023; Koliska & Roberts, 2021; Slingerland et al., 2022).

In congruence with converging media, digital placemaking affords migrants the bottom-up, user-led ability to create narratives about the places they interact with through their own intersectional lens (Hurley, 2023). As such, digital placemaking allows migrants to use digital storytelling to express themselves, collaborate with others, and effectively create a sense of place for themselves (Halegoua & Polson, 2021). For example, TikTok, a popular short-form video social media platform which allows user generated uploads, has been the primary digital third place for immigrant domestic workers in the Middle East (Hurley, 2023). In their attempts to create a sense of belonging, they post videos that showcase the relatable banality of their daily lives, their experiences, their places and their politics that are shared and interacted with by members of their community around the world who all use the same hashtags, follow the same accounts, and interact in the same digital third place that results (Hurley, 2023). Since the digital storytellers have agency over their stories and can avoid alterations by the mainstream, this strategy emphasizes migrants' self-description, self-legitimation and authentication while allowing them to cross digital borders in these online spaces. (Festa, 2023; Katz & Winegardner, 2010). The sense of belonging cultivated in this digital third place may support the transitioning of those connections and experiences into the physical realm where migrants may begin to adjust to their host societies (Andersson, 2019; Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Marino, 2015). For example, documented experiences of refugees in the UK reveal that these digital third spaces allow migrants to meet others who can provide them with key resources that enable integration by providing their experiences with finding employment, legitimizing status, or simply introducing them to new places in the city (Yazici, 2024). This convergence of digital and physical placemaking efforts renders these activities more sustainable and supportive to migrant integration (Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Marino, 2015; Mitra & Evansluong, 2019).

As outlined, the use of converging media creates a liminal space in which migrants can produce their digital narratives, subsequently informing their identities in relation to each other and their new environment (Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Labayen & Guitierrez, 2021; Mitra & Evansluong, 2019). The focus on the banality of the everyday allows audiences to interact with the narratives of the creators not just as migrants, but as individuals with universal emotions, desires, and ambitions, thus awarding them an opportunity to find their place in their physical communities (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022).

6.4 Digital Citizenship: The Convergence of the Digital and the Physical

Through participation in digital third places facilitated by converging media and exercising digital placemaking, migrants are continuously networked with their transnational communities, sharing their narratives and assuming the roles of not only users, but participants, producers and editors of converging media and the narratives produced therein (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022). One is no longer bound by the confines of borders or boundaries, as participators in these spaces can be involved in digital third places that expand over the entire globe and offer a space unconstrained by mainstream stereotypes, demonization or othering, allowing migrants to break free of social confines and begin to explore what it means to have their rights to their city and the power and legitimacy of their digital citizenship (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022). This emboldened spirit can facilitate political mobilizations, encourage civic discourse, and allow for the creation of initiatives such as digital advocacy organizations that can support causes relevant to migrant communities (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). For young migrants especially, interactions in these spaces, often built using location specific social media platforms, offer opportunities for identifying themselves beyond their status as migrants, encouraging them to connect with like-minded individuals near them, thus equipping them with a sense of belonging and citizenship (Lepanen et al., 2009; Najafi et al., 2022). The notion of digital citizenship celebrates the dynamism of the individual, instead of confining them to the label of migrant—they become an individual with memories, skills, values and ambitions that translate into cultural converging media assets including websites, community groups, or grassroots initiatives (Dovey et al., 2016). One no longer interprets themselves as only local, or only global, but instead an intermingling of both identities as converging media enables migrants to remain connected to their existing communities, while offering them the avenues to create new ones based on their intersectional identities (Roudometof, 2023). This evolved ambiguity allows participants to embolden their agency, to share their narratives, and to access the necessary resources from their shared community to converge with their physical spaces, finally exercising their rights to the city in which they live (Yazici, 2024).

7. Conclusion

This paper explores the convergence of media, technology, and migrant communities to provide a nuanced understanding of migrant narratives and the paradox of co-creation practices. It introduces the term ‘converging media’ to capture its intransitive nature, the collapse of contexts within the digital realm, the rapid and ever-evolving uses of technology-enhanced media, the affordances in practice, and user dynamics related to migration narratives. The paper reveals how converging media amplifies migrant agency and narratives, and evokes emotive storytelling for change. However, challenges around access, literacy, and representation persist. Co-creative practices are considered a decentring tool to prioritize migrants’ perspectives and agency. However, trust building and power dynamics between researchers and migrant participants can create barriers that hinder the effective representation of migrants’ voices, thus revealing the paradox of co-creation. Public and political discourses are also ignited due to the dominant Western narratives and control of media. By converging with these power dynamics and transcending virtual spaces through content production and dissemination, migrants are actively creating digital third spaces to forge a new form of digital belonging and citizenship.

This paper offers several takeaways for migration scholars and recommends the following future research directions. First, migrant-initiated narratives through converging media can differ from those initiated by non-migrants. Migration scholars should develop a nuanced understanding of the differences, especially when migrants’ narratives regarding identity, belonging, and agency are underrepresented. Comparative studies can be further developed to investigate the narrative tools, structures, and contents between the two approaches. Second, it is crucial to recognize

both the empowering potential of converging media as well as the risks and inequality associated with it. Future studies could further explore the effects of converging media in amplifying migrant voices while exposing them to potential risks such as surveillance, misinformation, disinformation, and cyberbullying. Questions such as “Who benefits? Who gets harmed? Who is left out?” should be addressed. Third, co-creative, reflexive, and emotive digital storytelling is powerful, authentic, and representative. Migration scholars need to ensure active, meaningful, and reciprocal engagement of migrants as the creators, not merely study subjects, of migration narratives through the use of converging media. Lastly, a critical examination of whose voices are amplified or suppressed through converging media is crucial to enhance our understanding of agency, identity, and citizenship. Future research should explore how digital third places enable migrant agency and foster digital belonging and citizenship.

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