



Mexican Media: Internet drives digital convergence but not plurality



The media ensemble in any given country is distinct in its composition and behavior. In Mexico, without a truly plural restructuring of the major media the remarkable opportunities of the “Internet Age” will be largely wasted, helping neither the transition to political democracy or to market opportunity.

Let’s take a step back, and ask how do we understand the dynamic of an ensemble of media in a given period? Are the media formats for providing information and entertainment in competition? Do they function in complementary fashion? Is the answer different in countries where there is a manifest pluralism in media offerings as against a country such as Mexico where there is a clear lack of pluralism?

While much of our focus is on specific media policy questions in Mexico, my review of general media history and our study of current media data has led me to formulate a general hypothesis: when there is a media mix, the introduction of a dramatic new mass media format at first appears to be in competition with other media, but has historically become the motor force for the overall expansion of media formats, and tends toward possible new forms of pluralism.

1) Early 1930s and the introduction of sound film. When the “talking pictures” first appeared they were seen as a threat to radio and to the record industry, especially as the “talking pictures” immediately became “singing and musical pictures.” While some film studios, notably Columbia, took a competitive stance for a time, most film production quickly and happily embraced the integration of radio, records and film – not only in terms of content but also new forms of joint production and financing. There was a tendency to media concentration, abetted by the economic realities of the Great Depression, but overall there was an enormous expansion of media capacities with film as the media driver.

As more films were produced for more film markets, there were more films of all kinds – more bad films, more good films, and a greater variety of perspectives in the films. This leads us to a simple truth in regard to the market. The production of quality in original content has been a function of having more original content. Anything that restricts the markets of production and consumption tends to restrict original content and therefore quality.

2) Late 1940s through late 1950s, the introduction of television. As relatively inexpensive television sets became a household necessity (late 1940s in the US, late 1950s in Mexico), film producers sensed a crisis. The immediate response was to focus on doing the kinds of movies that couldn’t “fit” on the television screen – more color, multi-star blockbuster films, big visual formats, 3D and even film enlivened with odors in special theaters.





Nonetheless, the transition period was relatively quick, and television quickly learned how to use films, film production and film talent. The motion picture industry integrated at first awkwardly then comfortably with television as a new platform and a strong new source of financing. By the 1960s, the driving force of media expansion was in television.

While USA FCC head Newton Minnow saw most television in the early 1960s as a "vast wasteland", others noted the attractive power of live news coverage, occasional deep news analysis¹, live drama and live variety. As with film, the more television that was produced for a growing market demand the more good television appeared along with the bad. Public television in several national markets found more of an audience than anyone would have predicted at the time.

- 3) Early 2000s and the proliferation of digital formats through the Internet and related platforms. Film and television are increasingly carried forward as integrative media by the Internet and digital convergence. Whether or not these new possibilities stimulate more production, more plurality and more quality remains to be seen.

The details of the specific developments and reform possibilities in Mexico will be analyzed in MUND Bulletin No. 29 next week, and subsequent bulletins.

For now, let us consider the public opinion basis in Mexico for how conscious media consumers are of the problem of restrictions on the production of original content in the Mexican media.

The notion explored above in the expansion of film and television offerings depends on the periodic "breaking" of monopoly conditions in production and distribution. There have been tendencies to create monopolies in film production, but the long term dynamic is to open the market at an international level. Film in Mexico is nonetheless restricted by the ownership of "4 wall" exhibition and the limitations of electronic viewing opportunities.

Electronic viewing on open television, cable television and the emerging convergence platforms is likewise limited by electronic media ownership here. Consumers in Mexico tend to be confused by the seeming multiplicity of options on the radio dial and the television screen. A current study by survey research colleagues in Mexico illustrates some of the confusions, which inevitably condition the coming discussion over convergence and media reform.²



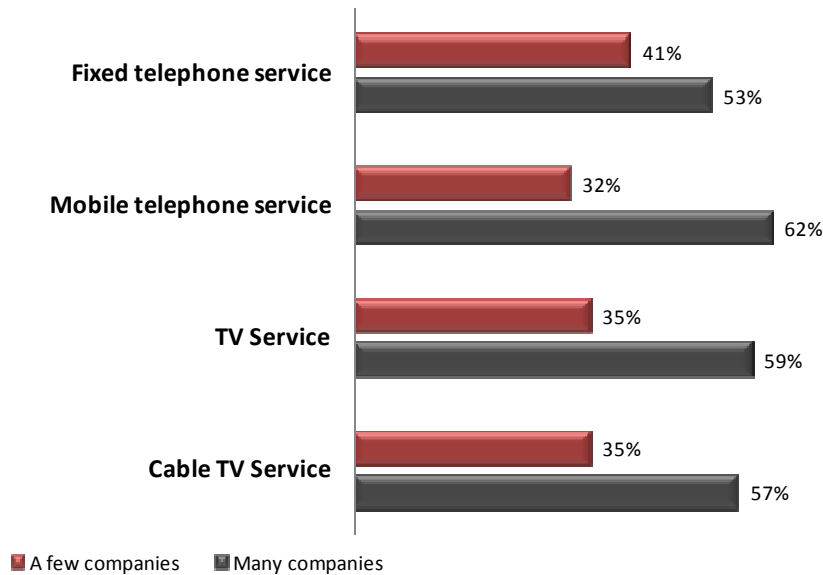
People in Mexico appear to want a lot of offerings for their telecommunications and television demands.

¹ Edward R. Murrow's "Harvest of Shame" documentary on the plight of migratory farm workers in the US did as much as anything to create the basis for an ending of the Bracero Program (guest worker program) between Mexico and the US at the end of 1965.

² 1,200 household face-to-face interviews in late April, 2010.



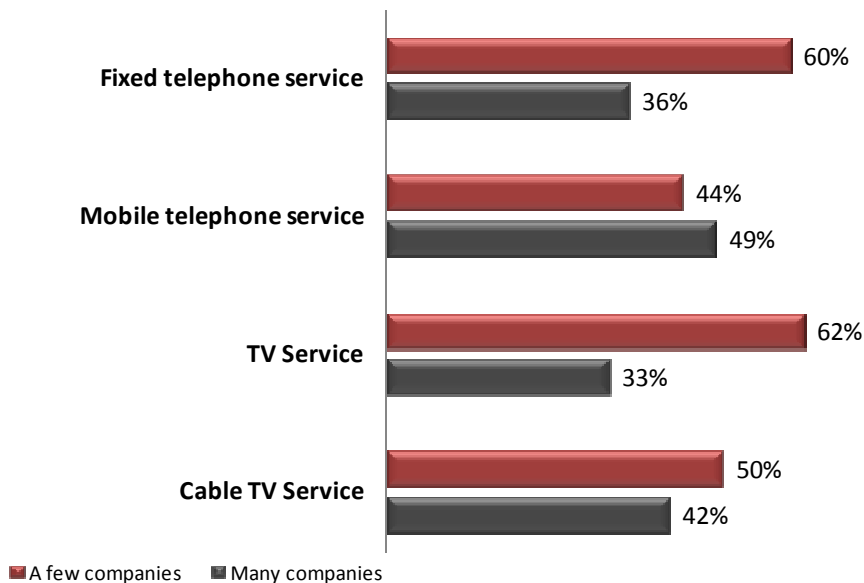
For the following products or services, please tell me what do you prefer: a few enterprises offering them, or many?



Parametría. Household survey . April, 2010.

However, it appears that a third to a half of the surveyed population currently think they may already have many companies offering these telecom and television services.

And, based on what you know or have heard... In the Mexican market of (...) are there currently a few companies or many of them?



Parametría. Household survey . April, 2010.



As we consider reform proposals and reform possibilities in the coming weeks, we will try to identify the critical data in the air: how many companies offer telecom services and what is the share of each? How many companies offer television and cable services and what is the share of each?

Dan Lund, President, The MUND Group, México

Research: Estefanía Ruiz and Rubén Ibarra

Bulletin Mailing and Contact Coordination: Angélica Puente

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