

NEWSPAPERS ADOPTING NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES: ANALYSIS
OF WEBSITES OF LEADING NATIONAL ENGLISH DAILIES

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Abstract:

A publication's website is usually an indicative of the importance accorded by it to the new media. Many Indian mainstream newspapers nowadays use online medium to supplement their print versions and have achieved impressive online readership. The current study aims to assess this trend in India as to why and how newspaper organisations have embraced online journalism. It endeavours to analyse the new media features of the websites of ten leading daily English newspapers published from India. The study concludes that national newspapers do not seem to take any chance of losing their audience. That is why, the publications offer numerous features of the online media and update news on regular basis on their websites, which many a time include breaking news alerts.

Key Words: New Media Technologies, Newspaper, Online Edition, Online Media & Website

1. Introduction:

Media have come a long way since their inception. From old to new and from unilateral to participatory, 'media' has undergone a drastic change both in its meaning and practice. Media (plural of medium) are the means of sending information. Traditionally, the role of media had been confined to a few functions including information, education and entertainment. However, in modern society, media have several and bigger roles to play. Now the responsibility of media is not restricted to merely informing people, but to provide them with broader perspectives on varied subjects. Media are broadly classified into two categories, that is, traditional media and new media. Former refers to older forms of media that have existed since centuries. The US-based online dictionary Ask.com defines traditional media as the archaic way of disseminating information usually involving one-way communication [1]. It may also refer to the media used before the advent of technological advances, such as Internet. New media, on the other hand, is a twenty-first century catchall term used to define all that is related to the Internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound. Socha and Eber-Schmid discuss that the definition of new media changes daily, and will continue to do so. It evolves and morphs continuously [2]. New media are virtually unpredictable, but they will continue to evolve in fast and furious ways.

1.1 New Media: The term 'new media' is a broad term in media studies that includes a group of advanced computer-based services that will compete in the environment and information industries. These services include high-definition television, digital radio broadcasting, multimedia computers, handheld data banks, wireless cable systems, CD-ROM (computer disc-read-only memory), laser discs, direct broadcast satellites, advanced facsimile machines, intelligent telephones, consumer computer networks, portable electronic newspapers and national videotext services. The ultimate mechanism for delivering many of these advanced media services to homes may be the telecomputer, a fusion of television and computer technology in a single box. The telecomputer offer a full range of video, voice and print services [3]. Pavlik and Powel (2003) have defined new media in terms of the convergence of telecommunications, computing and traditional media [4]. This conceptual definition, therefore, embraces a set of ever-changing technologies, ranging from the Internet and World Wide Web to Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and omni-directional cameras. At an operational level, new media include a variety of technologies that perform the following five functions, viz., information gathering, searching, sorting and communicating, production, editing and design, storage, representation and retrieval, distribution, and access, design and display. Some definitions of new media focus exclusively upon computer technologies, while others stress the cultural forms and contexts, in which technologies are used; for example, art, film, commerce, science and, above all, the Internet [5]. Webopedia Online Computer Dictionary defines new media as a generic term for the many different forms of electronic communication that are made possible through the use of computer technology. Use of the term new media implies that the data communication is happening between desktop and laptop computers and handhelds, such as PDAs, and the media they take data from, such as compact discs and floppy discs. The term is in relation to traditional media forms, such as newspapers and magazines in printed form, which are static representations of text and graphics [6]. Thus, the term 'new media' can be defined as interactive forms of communication that use the Internet, including podcasts, RSS feeds, social networks, text messaging, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds and so on.

1.2 New Media Technologies and Print Media: It has been observed for past some years that print media industry in the West has been switching to online journalism featuring new media technologies after facing a sharp decline, with their print ad revenue falling steeply. Pew Research Centre (2016) found that both weekday and Sunday circulation of newspapers in the United States experienced a decline not seen since the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession. Average weekday circulation fell 7 percent, while Sunday circulation fell 4 percent, showing their greatest declines since 2010. This drop was entirely due to decline in print circulation by 9 percent [7]. Similarly, Lee (2016) argues that advertising revenues have continued to deteriorate even amid a healthy overall economic situation. For instance, in *New York Times*, the print advertising decreased 19 percent in quarter 3 of 2016, while *Wall Street Journal* announced that it was consolidating some sections of the newspaper to cope with dwindling advertising sales. Lee further notes that the newspapers have also been losing their audiences, that is why big newspaper organisations like *New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, and *the Wall Street Journal*, have focussed on strengthening their online editions [8]. Media researchers have found that in the light of newspapers' struggle to maintain readers and viability in the digital era, newspapers in America are responding to this shift by embracing new media technologies, and user-generated and multimedia

content. It has been seen that the Internet has dramatically expanded these newspapers' audiences. As per the Pew report of 2016, most of the newspaper websites in the US have experienced growth in traffic, and mobile traffic in particular, with digital circulation increasing by 2 percent. Bachmann and Harlow (2011) found that newspaper websites are bringing citizens into the virtual newsroom, though on a limited basis, thus allowing them to interact with each other and with the newspaper. Using a content analysis of 19 newspapers from throughout Latin America, the researchers found that while all newspaper websites have some multimedia content and most have *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts, some allow readers to report errors, submit their own content, or even contact reporters directly [9]. Many newspapers in the West have either closed down their print editions and shifted to online versions or have closed down their ventures entirely. *Buenos Aires Herald*, an English-language newspaper in Latin America announced its closure in 2017 after more than 140 years of publication. The move came less than a year after the newspaper switched from a daily to a weekly print edition, blaming tough economic conditions and a broad shift among readers to digital media [10]. American journalist, Ross Barkan (2017) writes that it is financial woes and declining revenues that pose a huge threat to the news industry [11]. In Britain too, various newspapers have closed down that include *The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* newspapers, which ceased their print editions, leaving only an online edition [12]. *The Independent* became the first significant British newspaper to shutter its print edition in March, 2016 [13]. Besides, numerous local newspapers operating in Britain, from Saddleworth to Whitstable and from the Wirral to Cleethorpes, have also been closed down. Some of these include the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, the *Canterbury Times*, the *Enfield Advertiser and Gazette*, the *Barnet Press*, the *Newmarket News*, the *Kensington* and *Chelsea News*. Besides, the number of journalists working on local basis has been halved over the past 10 years [14]. The trend of replacing newspapers with online editions is in other countries as well. In November, 2017, South Africa's largest national English publishing group, Tiso Blackstar Group, announced that it is closing down the print edition of *The Times*. The media company said the newspaper could be replaced with a digital version [15].

1.3 New Media in India: Tracing the history of new media in India, Joseph reveals that the first dial-up email network in India was set up in 1987, but it was only in 1995 that commercial Internet access became available. He refers to the National Readership Survey carried out in 2002, as per which access to the Internet in India had increased to six million in 2002, with growth having stabilised at two million per annum. Approximately 20 percent of users were believed to surf the Internet from home, while 43 percent accessed it from a cybercafé. The 2002 Asia Pacific Internet Handbook puts the number of websites focusing on India in 2002 at around 150,000 sites, majority of them registered under the .com (dot com) domain name and the largest number in English, followed by Hindi, Tamil, Telgu, Bengali, Gujarati and Kannada. Some sites had been dedicated to specific cities and states. Most English-language newspaper and magazine groups in India had an online presence. The gap between online publishing in English and other Indian languages seemed to be closing, with newspapers in most regional languages available on the Internet. The top Indian news sites had been running by major English newspapers, which scored high in terms of both content and advertising revenue. A few web-only publications and news portals in English also established a reputation for content related to news and current affairs. In addition, portals emerged in most major Indian languages. A website called *Samachar.com* offered single window access to a cross-section of Indian news media windows through links to several leading Indian newspapers and other news sites. The number of Internet users in India has increased to a large extent since then, though various people are yet to avail the facility [16]. As Internet users in India have become more familiar with the web, its role in consumers' lives has expanded and changed. Internet vies more and more for consumers' attention, not only when looking for information or communicating with friends and family, but also for purposes of entertainment, taking eyes away from television, as well as other traditional media [17]. There were 137,000,000 Internet users in India, representing 11.4 percent of the population, at mid-year 2012, that is June 30, 2012, according to Internet World Stats [18]. Internet penetration in India remains quite low, at just under 9 percent of the population, but due to the country's massive population, it trails only the United States and China in terms of total Internet users, according to a *eMarketer* report, '*India Online: Defining the New Digital Class*'. According to a latest round of research, the number of computer literates in rural India by June 2013 has risen nearly two-fold to 125 million. The research has been conducted by the multi-national market research and survey company, IMRB International, and the association of online and mobile VAS industry in India, Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). As per their I-Cube report titled, '*Internet in Rural India*', there are 59.6 million users in rural India who have accessed Internet at least once in their lives as of June 2013. Further, the report finds that there are 21 million active mobile Internet users in rural India—a huge 5.3 times growth in 2013 over 2012 and nearly 47 times over 2010. Although a steady growth is being witnessed, the penetration of 6.7 percent among the total rural population is still low considering huge rural population of 889 million [19]. While recent economic growth has helped develop a wider middle class, a sharp divide remains between India's haves and the have-nots, with the economies of the most populous cities, often referred to as the 'metros', outpacing those of rural areas. This gap is reflected in the Internet usage. As per the New Media Trend Watch (2013), Internet users and penetration in India for 2011-2016 is as follow:

- ✓ 2011: 83.2 million (7.0% of the population; +31.4% change)
- ✓ 2012: 107.3 million (8.9% of the population; +28.8% change)
- ✓ 2013: 133.1 million (10.9% of the population; +24.1% change)
- ✓ 2014: 155.8 million (12.6% of the population; +17.1% change)
- ✓ 2015: 175.2 million (12.5% of the population; +14.0% change)
- ✓ 2016: 193.8 million (15.3% of the population; +10.6% change)

1.4 Indian Newspapers Adopting New Media Technologies: In India, for past some years, there has been a trend among mainstream newspapers to supplement their print versions with online media. Noor and Ahmad (2015) state that doing so, the publications have achieved impressive online readership. Usually, a publication's website is indicative of the importance accorded by it to the new media. A well maintained website is seen to improve brand image of a newspaper, while a poorly managed web version reflects a rather passive approach on its part. The web offers many additional features not found in traditional print media including immediacy, interactivity, multimedia products, memory, permanence, flexibility and mobility [20]. That is why Indian

newspapers are adopting this new trend of the digital era. Haneefa and Nellikka (2010) found that the online versions of the newspapers were initially formed as a complement to the existing print versions of the newspapers. However, given the increasing capability of information and communication technology, the authors predicted that online newspapers shall attract and engage more readers “by delivering their products and services in real time, increasing the quantity of information, upgrading news with photographs, audios and videos, enhancing the richness and timeliness of news, and application of Web 2.0 technologies to engage readers.” As per the authors, the tools and utilities like e-mails, RSS feeds, web postings, live chat rooms, online polls and surveys, discussion forums, etc., can provide interactive communication to make the online newspapers a public sphere of discussion [21]. This is exactly what can be seen happening nowadays. In 2015, an online survey was conducted among 3,183 online news consumers of India in order to know about the reading habits of online readers. It was found that around half of the respondents have the subscription of online newspapers, while *The Times of India* is the most readable online news source among the respondents [22].

2. Objectives:

- ✓ To assess how national newspapers strive to stay in competition with new forms of media.
- ✓ To analyse the new media features of the websites of leading daily English newspapers of India.
- ✓ To draw comparison between the sample newspapers in the light of the various new media features.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Content Analysis: The study used Content Analysis method. It was relevant for the study in view of the limited time and resources. The method was also found to be suitable for addressing the objectives that underpinned the research. The study analysed the new media features of the websites of sample newspapers, viz., social media sharing, RSS feeds, infographics, hyperlinks, archives, news updates and so on. A comparison was also drawn between the websites of various newspapers in terms of usage of new media technologies. The units of analysis included the six basic characteristics of online media. The analysis was made in terms of various parameters falling under these characteristics, which include interactivity, hyperlinks, multimedia, immediacy, memory and personalization.

3.2 Sample: The study used a sample of ten websites of the leading English daily newspapers published from India. The reason for selecting these newspapers was that these are the top ten circulated English newspapers in the country. According to latest readership data for 2017 released by Indian Readership Survey (IRS), which is the world's largest continuous study and the currency for print media, *The Times of India* leads English dailies by a huge margin. The total readership (in December, 2017) of *ToI* stands at 1,30,47,000, while the number 2 publication, *Hindustan Times* recorded a total readership of 68,47,000. *The Hindu* is the third largest read English daily in the country followed by *The Economic Times*, the English business daily from *The Times Group*. *Mumbai Mirror* and *The Indian Express* are at number 5 and number 6, respectively. *The Telegraph*, *The New Indian Express* and *The Tribune* are separated by a total readership of a few thousands at number 7, 8 and 9, respectively. *Deccan Chronicle* sits at number 10 among English dailies.

4. Findings:

4.1 Interactivity in Newspaper Websites: During the content analysis of the websites of ten newspapers under study, it has been found that the newspapers use various features to interact with their audiences. These interactive features include general contact form or contact address, comments to stories and articles, poll or survey, feedback and letters to editor, and social media sharing option. *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times* offer all these features, while *Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *The Telegraph*, *New Indian Express*, *The Tribune* and *Deccan Chronicle* offer all except for one feature, viz., poll. *Hindustan Times* and *Mumbai Mirror* offer three out of the five features, as evident from Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Interactivity of various kinds in newspaper websites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
General Contact Form/ Contact id	A	A	A	A	NA	A	A	A	A	A
Comments to Stories/ Articles	A	NA	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Poll/ Survey	A	NA	NA	A	A	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Feedback/ Letters to Editor	A	A	A	A	NA	A	A	A	A	A
Social Media Sharing	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

(A=Available, NA=Not Available)

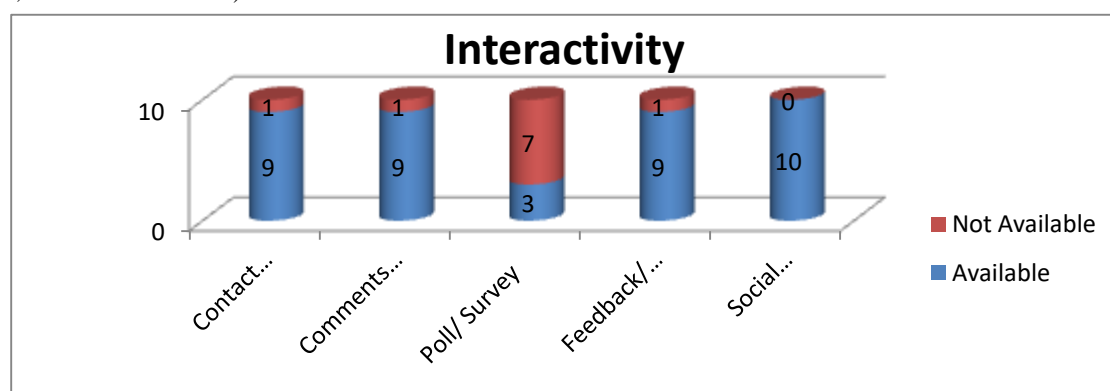


Figure 1: Interactivity in various newspaper websites

4.2 Hyperlinks on Newspaper Websites: It has been found that newspaper sites use hyperlinks that lead a reader to other pages on the particular website. All the newspapers have been found to offer related links that provide different aspects related to a

topic. Besides, most of the newspapers offer embedded links for selected words that lead to previous stories published by the newspapers. Embedded links, also referred to as hypertext links, are found within the story text. One of the newspapers, *viz.*, *Tribune*, provides sidebar links, which are located outside of the story text, to its side, instead of embedded links (Table 2, Fig 2).

Table 2: Hyperlinks available on newspaper websites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
Embedded Links	A	A	A	A	NA	A	NA	NA	NA	A
Sidebar Links (Link-lists)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	A	NA
Related Links	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

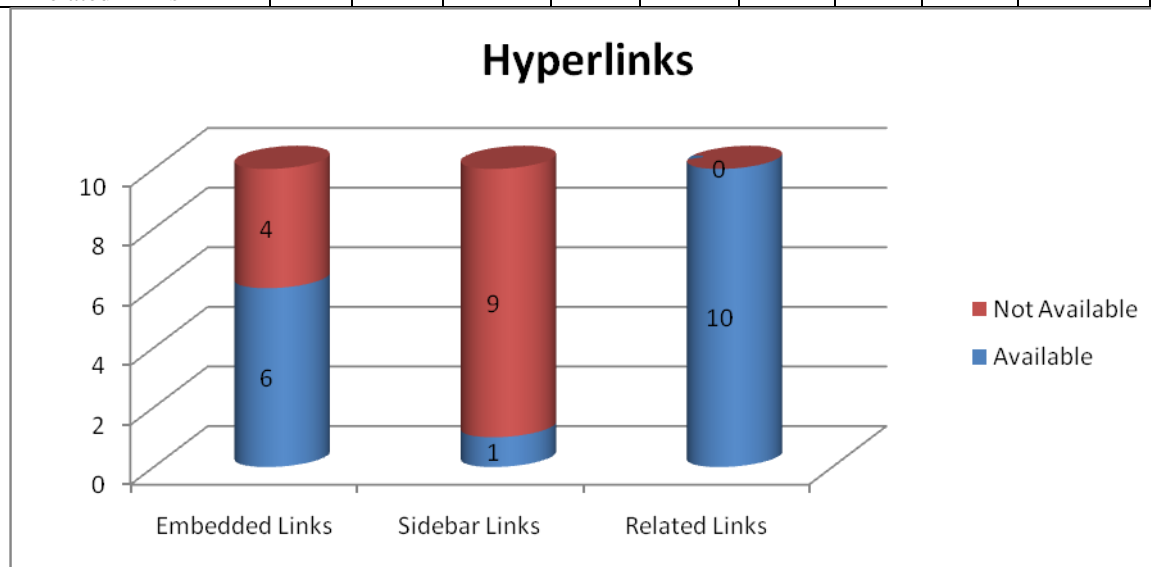


Figure 2: Types of hyperlinks on newspaper sites

4.3 Multimedia: Three of the newspapers, *viz.*, *Hindu*, *The Economic Times* and *Indian Express* have been found to offer all the multimedia features under study that include infographics, photo-gallery, videos, e-paper and mobile app facility. *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Mumbai Mirror*, *The Telegraph* and *New Indian Express* provide four out of the five features, while *Tribune* and *Deccan Chronicle* provide three features, each, as evident from Table 3 and Fig 3.

Table 3: Multimedia features offered by newspaper sites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
Infographics	A	A	A	A	NA	A	A	NA	NA	NA
Photo-gallery or Slideshow	NA	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Videos/ Live TV	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
E-paper	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Mobile Apps	A	NA	A	A	A	A	NA	A	NA	NA

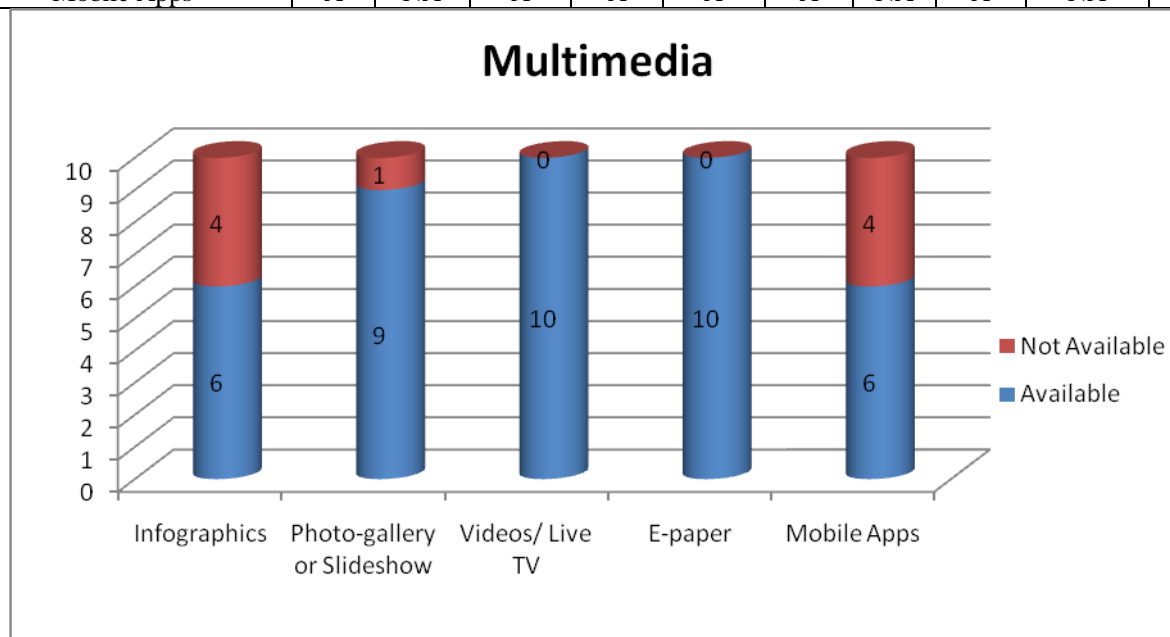


Figure 3: Availability of multimedia products on newspaper sites

4.4 Immediacy: Table 4 and Fig 4 reflect immediacy of news updates on newspaper websites. All the sample newspapers have been found to update news on regular basis.

Table 4: Periodicity of news updates on newspaper websites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
News updates	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Periodicity of news updates	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg	Reg

Reg=Regular

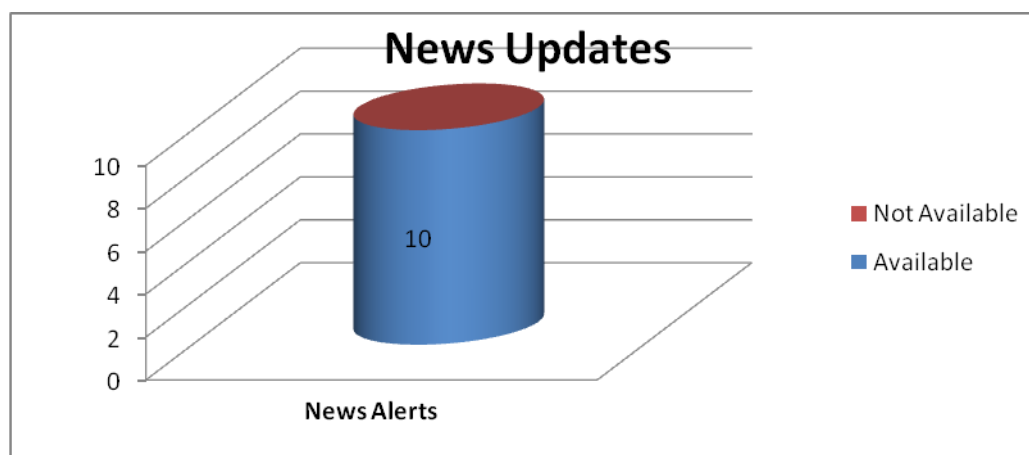


Figure 4: News updates on newspaper sites

4.5 Memory: All the sample newspapers maintain archives and organise them according to dates and content categories. Besides, all newspapers feature an internal search box that helps a reader to search for matter published by the particular website previously. Four of the newspapers, viz., *The Economic Times*, *Indian Express*, *New Indian Express* and *Deccan Chronicle* also provide tags (key-words) to stories and articles so as to find a bridge between them and other write-ups published on the same topic (Table 5, Fig 5).

Table 5: Archival features available on newspaper websites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
Overall archives	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Archives organised by dates/ categories	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Internal search box	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Tags associated to each write-up	NA	NA	NA	A	NA	A	NA	A	NA	A

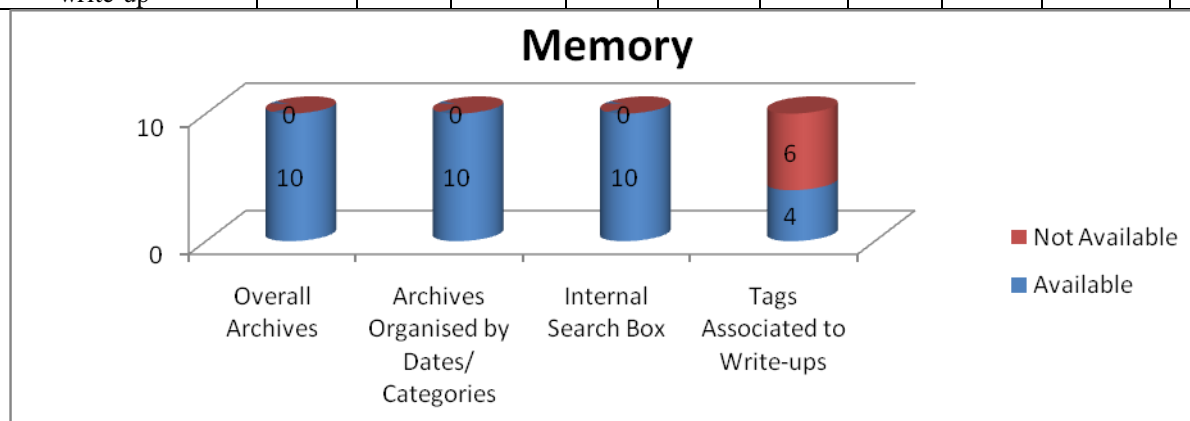


Figure 5: Memory stored on newspaper sites

4.6 Personalisation: Table 6 and Fig 6 show that not many newspaper sites offer personalisation features like RSS feeds and updates sent through emails and SMSes.

Table 6: Personalisation features available on newspaper websites

Publications	TOI	HT	Hindu	ET	MM	IE	TT	NIE	Tribune	DC
Updates sent through E-mail/ SMS	A	NA	A	A	NA	A	NA	NA	NA	A
General RSS feeds	A	NA	NA	A	NA	NA	NA	NA	A	NA
Section-wise RSS feeds	A	NA	NA	A	NA	NA	NA	NA	A	NA

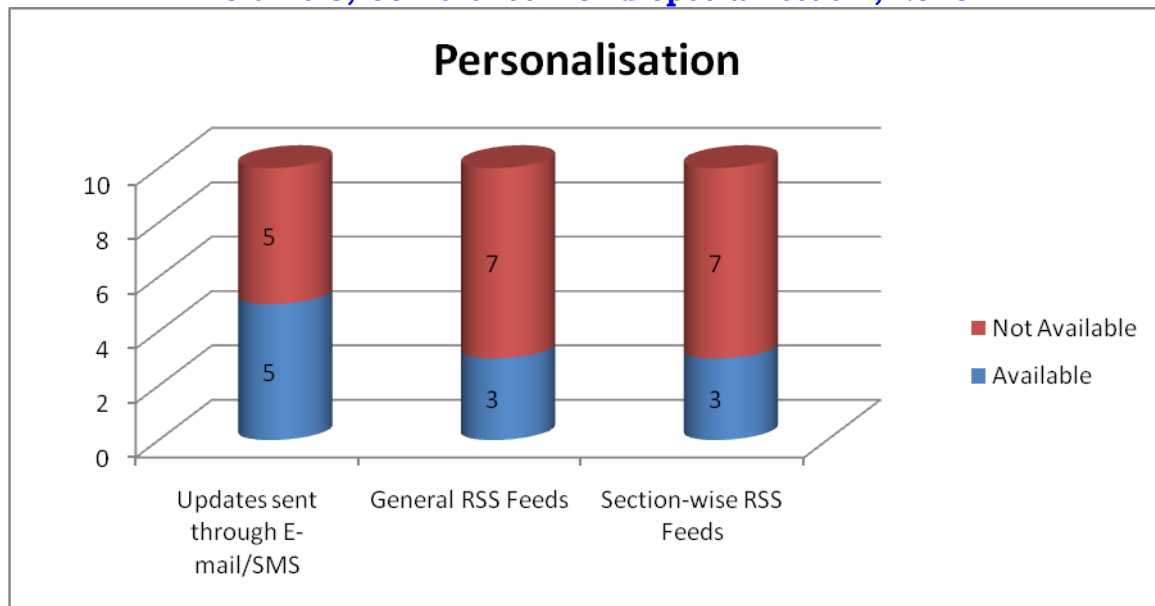


Figure 6: Personalisation features on newspaper websites

5. Conclusion:

The leading national English daily newspapers of India have adopted online media featuring new media technologies so as to stay in competition with the ever growing new media. Since many newspaper organisations in the West have brought down the curtain on their print editions, Indian newspapers do not seem to take any chance of losing their audience. That is why, they provide them with numerous features of the online media, including the service, which online and television media are known for, that is, news updates. The newspapers update news on regular basis on their websites, which many a time include breaking news alerts. Therefore, nowadays, it cannot be said that newspaper audiences have to wait for 24 hours to get updated news and information. National newspapers try to be as interactive with their readers as possible by providing them with features like social media sharing, feedback and live comments options on their online editions. This indicates that the newspapers are striving hard to stay in business given the advances in new media technologies. Earlier, newspaper journalism would be more or less unilateral, with audiences merely posting letters to editors with little hope of getting them published. Nowadays, however, innumerable comments can be posted online by readers instantly to the stories and articles they read besides feedback to overall performance of the publication. They also share the same on social networking sites, thus circulating the content like never before. The newspaper sites also offer multimedia products to their audiences, which include videos in the form of recorded visuals or live television, photo-galleries, infographics and e-paper. Thus, unlike in the past, newspapers do not offer only text, but audio and visuals as well. This has reduced the dependability of the audiences on television media for video updates. The newspapers also send news alerts to mobile devices through their respective apps, which also makes it possible for them to break news before other forms of media. The archive feature of the newspaper sites has made it possible for readers to go through the previous editions while sitting at home. Since archives are arranged according to dates, it has become hassle-free to search for the required matter. The hyperlinks provided by the newspaper sites help readers explore the background of the topic, which was not possible for newspapers to do before.

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