Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers: A content analysis

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Checklist and data sheet were used to collect data on web 2.0 applications used in one hundred top-ranked online English language newspapers. Analysis shows that blogs, RSS and social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) are the most prevalent Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers. Upper right side of the homepages of the newspapers is the most preferred location of the Web 2.0 applications.

Introduction

Availability on Internet and the increased reliance on digital information have revolutionized online newspaper journalism and online publishing. Compared to their paper counterparts, online newspapers have remarkable advantages including their ability to frequently update news contents, rapid access to their archives without additional expenses, the possibility to bookmark, print, save and edit the contents, and the advantages of being interactive and paperless[1]. There are a number of online newspapers on the internet, some of them have only extracts while others being complete newspapers with archives. Newspapers may have online versions that may not be mirror images of print versions instead ones that may offer something extra, such as interactive interfaces that could not fit in their paper counterparts[2]. The important characteristics of online newspapers include hyperlinks, interactivity and multimedia. Hyperlinks enable navigation through online contents and to connect to related documents. News contents of online newspapers can be complemented and supplemented with background information, graphics, photographs, animations, audio streams, video footages and links to other e-resources. Interactivity can be made available on online newspapers in order to make them interesting.

The Internet has surpassed all other media except television as a leading source of news. The developments in the World Wide Web constantly change the news consumption habits of online readers. The Web has become a collaborative interface for communication of information. The web 2.0 applications have attracted the attention of readers of online newspapers around the world as a means of sharing news contents interactively. To strive and to retain readers, online newspapers are inevitably forced to enhance interactive tools such as citizen journalism, audio blogging or podcasting, video blogging or vodcasting, wikis, blogs, RSS feeds, instant messaging, mashups, multimedia sharing, virtual study group rooms, social bookmarking, social networking sites and other social networking activities. There is no online newspaper without at least one Web 2.0 application on their homepage.

Review of literature

The review of related literature shows that there are a number of studies that assess the contents of online newspapers and news websites. However, there are few studies on the Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers. In a study, Belam found that most of the British newspapers have adopted most of the Web 2.0 technologies to some extent[3]. In another study,

Haneefa and Shyma found that online English newspapers in India have a common pattern of contents, coverage and design. Majority of the newspapers use Blog, RSS and social networking site Facebook to connect with their readers[1]. Gul and Islam revealed that most of the vernacular online newspapers of Kashmir have adopted social media technologies to some extent and they are more in need of evolving and existing media structures and practices[4]. Hong shows that adoption of social media is positively associated with an increase in their online readership, and this association increases in the size of the newspapers' social media networks[5]. Rasmussen also found the increasing utilization of social Web features by the thirteen main Danish online newspapers[6].

In another study, Williams and Nicholas found that American newspapers were exploiting the advantages of Web information very well[7]. Massey and Levy analyzed 44 English-language online newspapers from 14 Asian countries and revealed that the newspapers were focused on news contents but did not take advantages of immediacy, inter-sites hyper linking, or communication between readers and the newspapers[8]. Dibean examined the extent that U.S. daily newspapers are using available technologies, including multimedia and interactivity, for development of World Wide Web sites. It is revealed that most of the online newspapers had adopted innovations such as links to related information, and consumer services such as searchable classifieds[9]. Chyi and Lasorsa reported that websites produced by larger newspapers performed better in terms of structure, content, presentation and interactive features[2]. In a study, Massey found that market-based variables predict only certain facets of an online newspaper's interactivity[10]. Hashim, Hasan and Sinnapan found that content availability and choice were found to be the most significant element of interactivity. They found that majority of Australian online newspapers offered interactive functionality for expressing opinions, blogging, contests and polls. Only one online newspaper provided genuine interactivity gaming[11]. In another study, Schultz found that online newspapers in U.S generally offered few and token interactive options[12]. Kenney, Gorelik and Mwangi indicated that online newspapers have low levels of interactivity and they provide few token interactive interfaces[13]. Rahman found that contents availability and access to the contents were the most

prevalent options in the online newspapers in Bangladesh[14]. Chung shows that interactive features are generally used infrequently, especially the features that facilitate human-to-human communication and the features that allow audiences to express their views[15]. Nozato found that the contents of online and printed newspapers were similar to each other[16].

From the foregoing review, it can be seen that there is little research that focuses specifically on the applications of Web 2.0 in online newspapers. This paper gives an informative preview of the application of Web 2.0 in online newspapers.

Objectives of the study

- To analyse the contents and Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers; and

- To identify the location of Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers.

Methodology

This study used website content analysis in terms of quantitative approach to assess the Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers. The *4 International Media and Newspaper*[17] was used to identify the URLs of the one hundred top-ranked English global daily newspapers (Annexure 1). This website is based upon an algorithm including three unbiased and independent Web metrics extracted from three different search engines, i.e., Google Page Rank, Alexa Traffic Rank and Majestic Seo Referring Domains. The investigators used a checklist and a data sheet as the main tools to assess and evaluate the Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers. In preparing the checklist, different online newspapers were observed and the literature related to the content analysis of online newspapers and websites were consulted.

The methods used by Shaikh and Lenz[18], and Raju and Harinarayana[19] were used to identify the locations of the Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers. A data sheet of 5 x 5 horizontal and vertical grids with blue coloured shades to represent Web objects was used (Appendix 1). The darker the shade of the blue, the greater the number of times the particular Web objects were found in the particular location. Based on this method frequency of Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers were calculated. The percentages are represented by increasingly darker shades of blue (white is <1% and dark blue is >33%) (Figure 1).
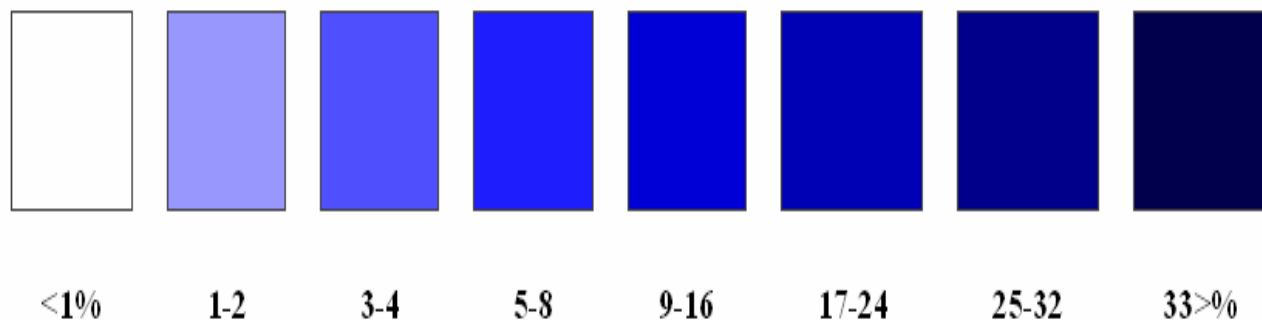
Fig. 1—Each grid (colour) represents the frequency of Web 2.0 applications found in particular locations in online newspapers

Table 1—Homepage features of online newspapers

Sl. no.	Features	No. of online newspapers
1	About us	74
2	Address/phone/fax	92
3	Index	14
4	Comments/Suggestions	61
5	Copyright	79
6	Digital archive/ Digital edition	49
7	Discussion group	12
8	E-mail	54
9	E-mail group	17
10	E-mail news service	22
11	Feedback	15
12	Help	26
13	Jobs	85
14	Log in/Register now	73
15	My account	43
16	Mobile	70
17	Online games	64
18	Online purchase	59
19	Sitemap	50
20	SMS	12
21	Subscriptions	63
22	Survey	2
23	Web apps	29

All the selected online newspapers were carefully scanned and analyzed based on the checklist and data sheet. Microsoft Excel was used for the consolidation and statistical analysis of the data.

Results

The data collected through the checklist and data sheet were organized and presented using various statistical techniques.

Homepage features

Homepage is considered to be the most important and often visited webpage of a website. It is the front page at which most the Web features are implemented. The homepage of an online newspaper should be appealing, helpful and informative to the reader. The contents of the homepages of the online newspapers were analysed and the results are summarized in the Table 1.

The analysis reveals that a large majority of the newspapers (92 per cent) have given the contact information like address/phone/fax on their homepage. Majority of the newspapers provide a link for jobs (85 per cent), copyright (79 per cent), about us (74 per cent), login (73 per cent), mobile (70 per cent), subscriptions (63 per cent), and comments/suggestions (61 per cent). Majority of the newspapers have a link for online purchase (59 per cent) in their homepage.

Contents and coverage

The validity, uniqueness, novelty and purpose of information are some of the major points on which the contents of online newspapers are to be analyzed. Coverage of online newspapers gives an indication of the context in which the work is situated. Table 2 shows that the newspapers have a common pattern of contents and coverage. The newspapers provide access to various categories of news contents as in the case of their paper counterparts.

The analysis shows that the most prevalent option available in these newspapers is the availability of contents and access to it. Almost all the newspapers have the features like technology, sports, life style, international news, health, business, entertainment, jobs, most read news and information about weather on their homepage. Majority of the newspapers showed the features like arts, columnist, editorial, education and travel on the front page of their website.

Web 2.0 applications

Web 2.0 applications in online newspapers have great importance as it will increases the interactivity of the newspapers. Many of these applications consist of a social add-on, and are connected to popular social media services such as article commenting, journalist blogs, Facebook-recommending of articles, and other additional services[20]. It allows newspapers to share, collaborate and communicate news contents. The Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers were identified and the results are shown in the Table 3.

It is found that at least one Web 2.0 application can be found in each newspaper. Web 2.0 has promoted the appearance of specialised services in the diffusion of contents with a specific format. It is found that a large majority of the newspapers have links for Blog

Table 2—Contents and coverage of online newspapers

Sl. no.	Features	No. of online newspapers
1	Arts	67
2	Astrology	34
3	Business	80
4	Cartoon	41
5	Classifieds	67
6	Columnists	54
7	Culture	42
8	Editorial	63
9	Education	61
10	Entertainment	81
11	Environment	40
12	Fashion	27
13	Health	87
14	International	87
15	Jobs	85
16	Law	44
17	Life style	87
18	Magazine	22
19	Matrimonial	8
20	Media	34
21	Most commented	41
22	Most read/viewed	80
23	Movies	47
24	Music	33
25	Nation	47
26	Online dating	46
27	Politics	74
28	Recipe	19
29	Science	40
30	Society	14
31	Sports	94
32	Stock/market	87
33	Technology	92
34	Theatres	21
35	Travel	54
36	Weather	73
37	Weird news	7
38	Wild life	9

(96 per cent), RSS (88 per cent), Facebook (84 per cent) and Twitter (82 per cent) in their homepages. The newspapers also have the Web 2.0 applications Vodcast (30 per cent), Podcast (20 per cent), GooglePlus (34 per cent), Poll/Opinion (45 per cent), Pinterest (14 per cent) and Meebo (10 per cent) in their homepages.

Table 3—Web 2. 0 applications in online newspapers

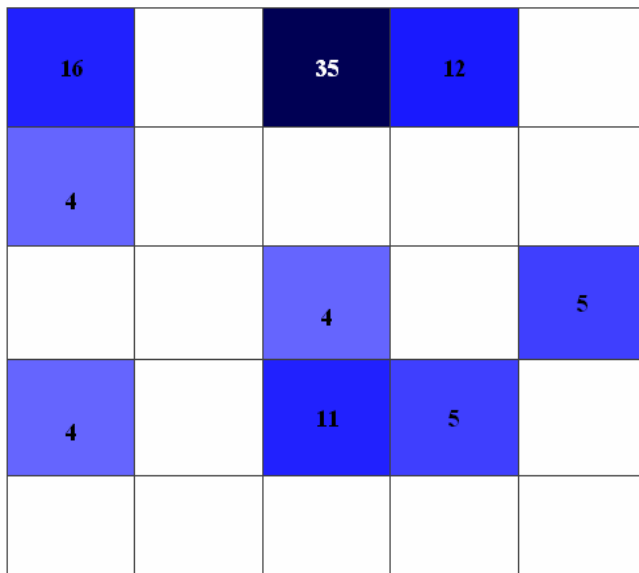| Sl. no.	Features	No. of online newspapers
1	iGoogle	3
2	Instant message/Chat	3
3	Foursquare	8
4	LinkedIn	8
5	Tumblr	8
6	Web forums	9
7	Meebo	10
8	Social reader	10
9	Pinterest	14
10	Podcast	20
11	Vodcast	30
12	Google plus	34
13	Poll/Opinion	45
14	Twitter	82
15	Facebook	84
16	RSS	88
17	Blog	96

Fig. 2—Location of Blogs in online newspapers (n=96)

Location of Web 2.0 applications

Online newspapers use the Web 2.0 applications with collaborative interfaces which allow readers to interact and cooperate with each other both as creators and consumers of information. Each reader is now able to generate content, to comment on and to search for information from many different sources[21]. This study used a data sheet to examine the location of the Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers and the results are summarized in the following sections.
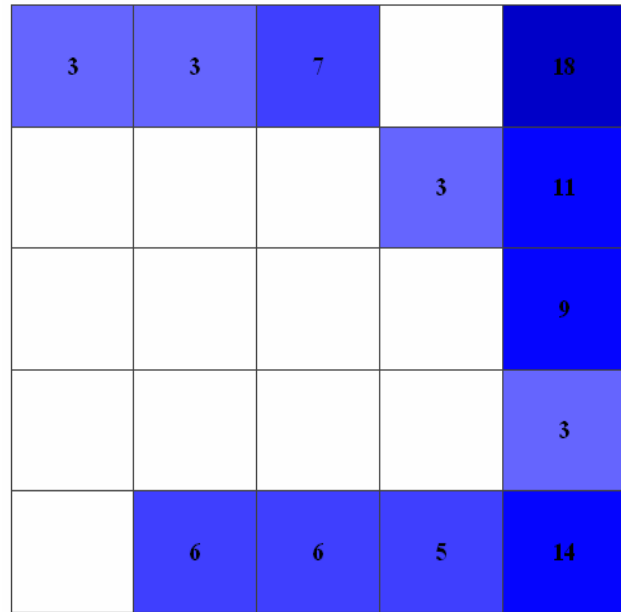

Fig. 3—Location of RSS in online newspapers (n=88)

Blog

Online newspapers use blogs to give contents and to allow readers to give feedback in the form of comments. It was found that 96 per cent of the newspapers have a link to blogs in their homepages. Fig. 2 shows that thirty-five newspapers have the links at the top centre of their homepages. Sixteen newspapers have placed it at the upper left side of their homepages. Twelve newspapers have it at the upper right side and 11 newspapers have it at the bottom centre of their homepages.

RSS

Technically, RSS is an XML-based data format for websites to exchange files that contain publishing information and summaries of the site's contents. A Web feed is a data format used for providing users with frequently updated content. Content distributors syndicate a Web feed, thereby allowing users to subscribe to it. A Web feed is also sometimes referred to as a syndicated feed. It is an indispensible feature of online newspapers. Online newspapers use RSS to push headlines and summaries of news directly to readers via dedicated RSS readers. It is revealed that 88 per cent of the newspapers provide RSS. As seen in figure 3 the link to RSS is found to be located in the upper right (18 newspapers) and bottom right (14 newspapers) side of the homepages of the newspapers.

Facebook

Overall use of social media for news consumption is increasing day by day. As such online newspapers use social networking sites like Facebook to attract readers. It shows that 84 per cent of the newspapers have used the social networking site Facebook in their homepages. Figure 4 depicts that the link to Facebook is seen in different locations in the newspapers, but mostly towards the upper right side (18 newspapers), the upper left side and the extreme right side (12 newspapers) of the homepages of the newspapers.

Twitter

Twitter is one of the most used micro blog. Some people also consider it as a social networking site. Through Twitter, users can update their events, provide coverage of events and they can ask questions to the Twitter community. Online newspapers use Twitter to achieve greater visibility and to make the newspapers rank for competitive queries. The analysis shows that 82 per cent of the newspapers have a link for Twitter in their homepages. Figure 5 shows that a good number (43 newspapers) of the newspapers have the link at the extreme top right corners of their homepages. Six newspapers have it at the bottom right corner and bottom left of their homepages.

Poll

The opinions of readers are generally gathered using a link 'Poll' in online newspapers. It can be seen that 45 per cent of the newspapers have a link for Poll in their homepages. The figure 6 shows that 12 newspapers have the link at the right centre of their homepages. The placement of the Poll varied from newspaper to newspaper. Sometimes it may be located at the top centre (6 newspapers) or at the bottom centre (7 newspapers) or may be at the upper left side (5 newspapers) of the homepages.

GooglePlus

GooglePlus is one of the social networking sites found in the homepages of online newspapers. It is a multilingual social networking and identity service owned and operated by Google Inc. Unlike other conventional social networks which are generally accessed through a single website, Google has described Google+ as a social layer consisting of not just a single site, but rather an overarching layer which covers many of its online properties. It is found
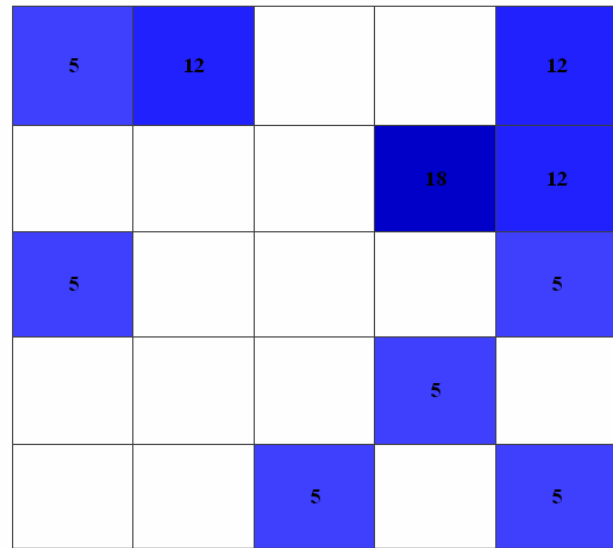

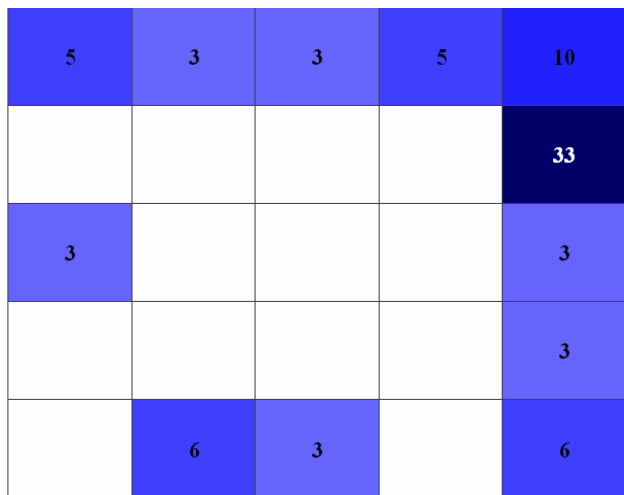Fig. 4—Location of Facebook in online newspapers (n=84)

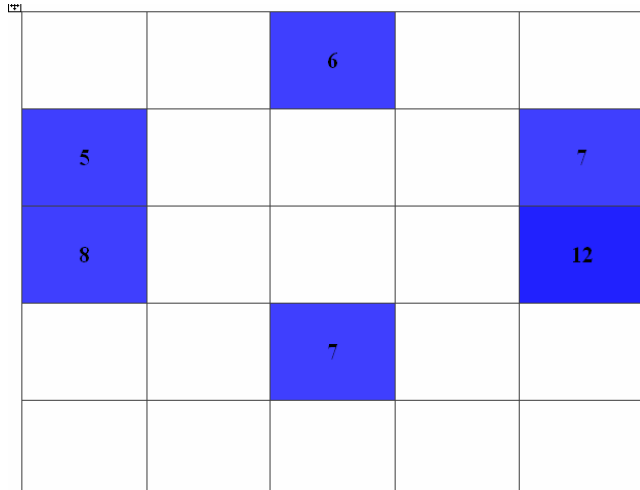Fig. 5—Location of Twitter in online newspapers (n=82)

Fig. 6—Location of Poll in online newspapers (n=45)

that 34 per cent of the newspapers have a link to the social networking site GooglePlus in their homepages. Figure 7 show that 12 newspapers placed the link to GooglePlus at the upper right side of their homepages. Nine newspapers have it at the bottom right side of their homepages.

Vodcast

Video and photo sharing tools work as a combination of things. They serve as online storage spaces for videos and photos, with the ability to tag and organize each photo, as well as publishing images and videos. Online newspapers use Vodcast for video delivery of contents on demand. Information is available when the reader wants as Vodcast is cheaper and easier than its broadcast counterparts. It is revealed that 30 per cent of the newspapers have a link for Vodcast in their homepages. Figure 8 show that 10 newspapers have the link at the centre of their homepages. Six newspapers have it at the top left and top right side of their homepages.

Podcast

Podcast is an audio file that a reader can listen to on a website or download for playing later on a computer. Though podcast websites may also offer direct download or streaming of their content, a podcast is distinguished from other digital audio formats by its ability to be downloaded automatically. Online newspapers use podcasts to broadcast their audio contents like interviews. It is found that 20 per cent of the newspapers have a link for podcast in their homepages. Figure 9 depicts that 8 newspapers have the link at the centre of their homepages. Seven newspapers have it at the upper left and five newspapers have it at the bottom right corner of their homepages.

Pinterest

Pinterest is a pinboard-style social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies, and more. Users can browse other pinboards for inspiration,'re-pin' images to their own collections or 'like' photos. Pinterest's mission is to connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting via a global platform of inspiration and idea sharing. The site is managed by Cold Brew Labs and funded by a small group of entrepreneurs and
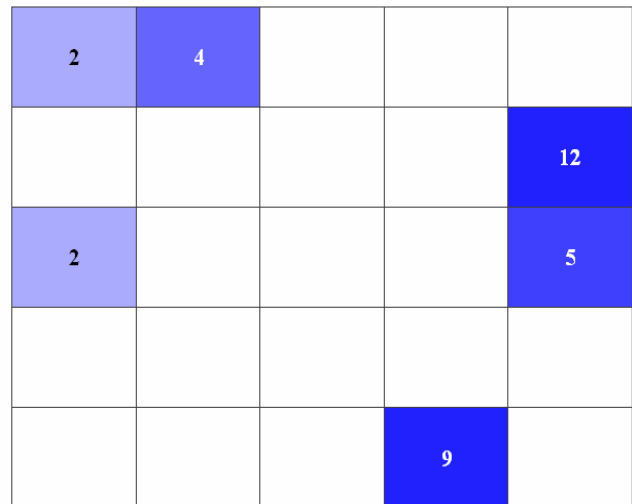

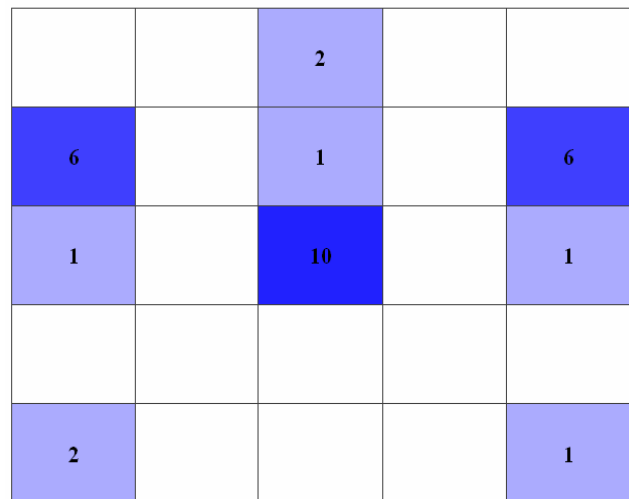Fig. 7—Location of GooglePlus in online newspapers (n=34)

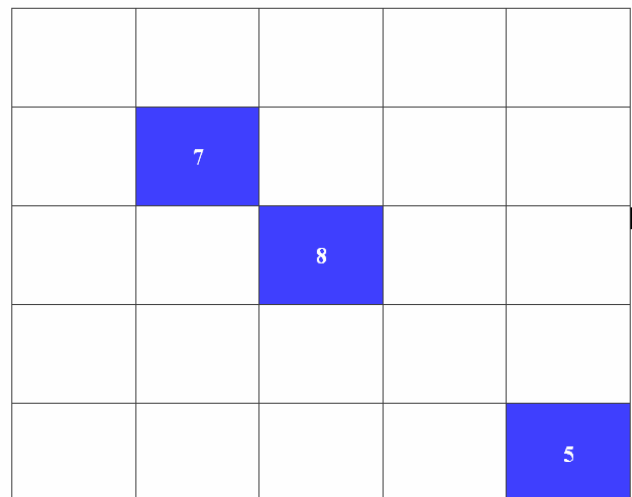Fig. 8—Location of Vodcast in online newspapers (n=30)

Fig. 9—Location of Podcast in online newspapers (n=20)

inventors. Online newspapers can explore Pinterest as an attractive platform for sharing photos and videos. Each post will provide a link back to the original resource encouraging readers to explore the photos and videos in their original context. The analysis shows that 14 per cent of the newspapers have a link to Pinterest in their homepages. Figure 10 depicts that 6 newspapers have the link at the upper right side of their homepages. It can be seen at the upper right corner of the homepages of four newspapers. Two newspapers show it at the upper left side of their homepages.

Meebo

Meebo is an advertising-supported embedded social media platform found in the homepages of online newspapers. It began in 2005 as a browser based instant messaging program which supported multiple IM services, including Yahoo Messenger, Windows Live Messenger, MySpace IM, Facebook Chat, Google Talk, CafeMom, Zorpia, and others. Meebo also developed a version for use on iPhone and a native application that runs on Android mobile phones. Fig. 11 shows that ten (10 per cent) newspapers have a link for 'Meebo' at the bottom right corner of their homepages.

Conclusion

The use of online newspapers has increased tremendously as conventional news media face a new challenge to create a distinctive value among online readers. However, it is revealed that the online newspapers provide access to various categories of news contents as in the case of their paper counterparts. The newspapers have a common pattern of contents and coverage. It is found that Blogs, RSS, and Social Networking Sites Facebook and Twitter are the most prevalent Web 2.0 applications in the newspapers. Upper right side of the homepages of the newspapers is the most preferred location of the Web 2.0 applications.

Web 2.0 applications can be used for collaborative and participative communication of information. These applications offer many opportunities to enrich the news contents of online newspapers and improving reader experience. Many of these applications are connected to popular social media services such as article commenting, journalist blogs, Facebook recommending of articles, and other

Fig. 10—Location of Pinterest in online newspapers (n=14)

Fig. 11—Location of Meebo in Online Newspapers (n=10)

additional services. These applications allow readers to interact and cooperate with each other both as creators and consumers of information.

Looking at the increasing capabilities of the Web 2.0 applications, the online newspapers should try to attract and engage their readers. They can provide news contents and other products in real time, upgrading news with photographs, audio, video and interactive interfaces. They can exploit Blogs, RSS, Web Postings, Live Chat Rooms, Online Polls, Surveys, Discussion Forums, etc to engage their readers. These applications provide interactive communication in the way to make online newspapers a public sphere of discussion. Online discussion forums are one of the most effective ways to turn online newspapers into a public platform of debate.

Online newspapers can also use mobile platforms to expand their audience and connecting with readers using social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The growing power of social networking is evident from the time spent by readers on sites such as Facebook. The time spent on social networking sites is growing three times faster than that spent on other sites. As such online newspapers can use social networking sites to increase the chances of survival. The online newspapers should exploit the emerging Internet and mobile platforms especially the Web 2.0 technologies to attract and increase their readers.

This study presents an overall picture of the application of Web 2.0 in online newspapers. One hundred top-ranked online newspapers were selected for the study based on whether the newspaper was in English. However, this type of study can analyse online newspapers or news sites in other languages also. Newspaper reader studies can be undertaken in order to understand the performance of each online newspapers.

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Appendix 1

5 x 5 Horizontal and Vertical Grid Data Coding Sheet

Name of the online newspaper: _____

URL: _____

Country: _____

Date of data collection: _____

Time: _____

Schematic presentation of the Webpage in 5 X 5 grids

Web objects:

1. Blog
2. RSS
3. Facebook
4. Twitter
5. Poll
6. GooglePlus
7. Vodcast
8. Podcast
9. Pinterest
10.   Meebo

Notes:

Annexure **1**

List of Selected Online Newspapers

Sl. no.	Name of Online Newspaper	URL
1	New York Times	http://www.nytimes.com
2	The Guardian	http://www.guardian.co.uk
3	The Daily Mail	http://www.dailymail.co.uk
4	The Wall Street Journal	http://india.wsj.com
5	The Washington Post	http://www.washingtonpost.com
6	The Daily Telegraph	http://www.telegraph.co.uk
7	USA Today	http://www.usatoday.com
8	Los Angeles Times	http://www.latimes.com
9	The Times of India	http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com
10	The Examiner	http://www.examiner.com
11	The Independent	http://www.independent.co.uk
12	Financial Times	http://www.ft.com
13	The Sydney Morning Herald	http://www.smh.com.au
14	Daily News	http://www.nydailynews.com
15	Chicago Tribune	http://www.chicagotribune.com
16	The Sun	http://www.thesun.co.uk
17	New York Post	http://www.nypost.com
18	The Age	http://www.theage.com.au
19	The Philadelphia Inquirer	http://www.philly.com
20	The Washington Times	http://www.washingtontimes.com
21	The New Zealand Herald	http://www.nzherald.co.nz
22	The Onion	http://www.theonion.com
23	The Chicago Sun Times	http://www.suntimes.com
24	The Hindu	http://www.thehindu.com
25	Houston Chronicle	http://www.chron.com
26	The Seattle Times	http://seattletimes.nwsource.com
27	The Globe and Mail	http://www.theglobeandmail.com
28	The Irish Times	http://www.irishtimes.com
29	The Toronto Star	http://www.thestar.com
30	The San Jose Mercury News	http://www.mercurynews.com
31	The Australian	http://www.theaustralian.com.au
32	The Denver Post	http://www.denverpost.com
33	The Christian Science Monitor	http://www.csmonitor.com
34	The Atlanta Journal Constitution	http://www.ajc.com
35	Bangkok Post	http://www.bangkokpost.com
36	Star Tribune	http://www.startribune.com
37	The Hollywood Reporter	http://www.hollywoodreporter.com
38	Daily Mirror	http://www.mirror.co.uk

Sl. no.	Name of Online Newspaper	URL
39	Dawn	http://dawn.com
40	The Miami Herald	http://www.miamiherald.com
41	DNA Daily News Analysis	http://www.dnaindia.com
42	Pittsburgh Post –Gazette	http://www.post-gazette.com
43	Detroit Free Press	http://www.freep.com
44	The Sacramento Bee	http://www.sacbee.com
45	China Daily	http://www.chinadaily.com.cn
46	The Baltimore Sun	http://www.baltimoresun.com
47	Boston Herald	http://www.bostonherald.com
48	The Dallas Morning News	http://www.dallasnews.com
49	The Times	http://www.thetimes.co.uk
50	The Newsday	http://www.newsday.com
51	Orlando Sentinel	http://www.orlandosentinel.com
52	St. Lois Post-Dispatch	http://www.stltoday.com
53	The Hindustan Times	http://www.hindustantimes.com
54	The Economic Times	http://economictimes.indiatimes.com
55	The Observer	http://observer.guardian.co.uk
56	South Florida Sun Sentinel	http://www.sun-sentinel.com
57	The Kansas City Star	http://www.kansascity.com
58	The Plain Dealer	http://www.cleveland.com
59	The Orange County Register	http://www.ocregister.com
60	The Star Online	http://www.thestar.com
61	National Post	http://www.nationalpost.com
62	Seattle Post-Intelligencer	http://www.seattlepi.com
63	The Vancouver Sun	http://www.vancouversun.com
64	Herald Sun	http://www.heraldsun.com.au
65	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	http://www.jsonline.com
66	The Indianapolis Star	http://www.indystar.com
67	Independent Online	http://www.iol.co.za
68	Express News	http://www.mysanantonio.com
69	Austin American Statesman	http://www.statesman.com
70	The News and Observer	http://www.newsobserver.com
71	The Hill	http://www.thehill.com
72	Hartford Courant	http://www.courant.com
73	Deseret News	http://www.deseretnews.com
74	The Daily Telegraph	http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au
75	Toronto Sun	http://www.torontosun.com
76	Gulf News	http://www.gulfnews.com
77	Las Vegas Review Journal	http://www.lvrj.com
78	Indian Express	http://www.indianexpress.com
79	St. Paul Pioneer Press	http://www.twincities.com

Sl. no.	Name of Online Newspaper	URL
80	The Columbus Dispatch	http://www.dispatch.com
81	Arizona Daily Star	http://www.azstarnet.com
82	Khaleej Times	http://www.khaleejtimes.com
83	Business Standard	http://www.business-standard.com
84	Las Vegas Sun	http://www.lasvegassun.com
85	The Irish Independent	http://www.independent.ie
86	Salt Lake Tribune	http://www.sltrib.com
87	The Montreal Gazette	http://www.montrealgazette.com
88	Mail & Guardian Online	http://www.mg.co.za
89	Metro	http://www.metro.co.uk
90	The Morning Call	http://www.mcall.com
91	Richmond Times-Dispatch	http://www.timesdispatch.com
92	Belfast Telegraph	http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk
93	Investor's Business Daily	http://www.investors.com
94	Los Angeles Daily News	http://www.dailynews.com
95	The Province	http://www.theprovince.com
96	The Hindu Business Line	http://www.thehindubusinessline.com
97	San Francisco Chronicle	http://www.sfgate.com
98	New Jersey Online	http://www.nj.com
99	Philly.com	http://www.philly.com
100	Deccan chronicle	http://www.deccanchronicle.com