



SUNIL SAXENA



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То

My wife Ranjana, my daughter Aavishi and my son Eshaan who have given me so much joy

## Preface

*Breaking News* was published in 2004, the year when the term Web 2.0 came into existence. Untill then, most websites were built on the principle of communicating from "one-to-many". The website owners or publishers decided what should become news and how it should be communicated to the end-users. The end-users had no say in the way the content was generated or distributed. They only consumed information that was thrust down upon them.

Web 2.0 introduced the principle of "many-to-many", empowering users to create, distribute and share content. This did not happen because the internet infrastructure was reinvented. It happened because of the free tools and applications that the Web 2.0 pioneers developed and deployed on the World Wide Web.

These free tools revolutionised the way we use Internet. Individuals could develop their own blogs free of cost, share their writings with likeminded bloggers by using RSS feeds and insert Google AdSense scripts, and make money.

YouTube took content creation and sharing to another height by allowing web users to upload, watch and share videos. Wikipedia was even more dramatic. It empowered users to create content that other web users could edit and improve. The result: creation of the world's largest encyclopedia by not a few editors but millions of editors.

Then came social networking sites like Orkut.com, MySpace.com and Facebook.com. They gave individuals an opportunity to not only chat and share information, but also to showcase their talent. User experience improved and the net became richer in terms of the variety of content that millions of networkers created.

These developments came at a breathless pace and had a cascading effect on media too. Traditional media, especially the newspapers were hurt the most in the US and Europe. The Indian media managed to buck the trend largely because of the low internet connectivity and computer penetration. But, it did upgrade its internet offerings and adopted most of the Web 2.0 tools.

By 2012, it had become clear that the book *Breaking News* had been overtaken by events. It had to be rewritten if it was to be relevant anymore. This is what I have attempted to do in the revised edition which has been so aptly titled *Web Journalism 2.0* by the publishers.

The book now records the developments that occurred in the Indian Internet space from the early 1990s to 2012. These developments include the launch of e-paper, the arrival of tab-based design, the growing popularity of blogging in Indian languages, the setting up of Indian Registry, the launch of broadband connections, the entry of media houses in classified verticals like jobs, the launch of Indian social networking sites and many more.

Extensive changes have been made in the chapters too. The chapter on *News Writing* defines the characteristics of an Internet report much better. It also has two new sections: one, on online sources, and the second on the structuring of a news report. Similarly, the chapter on *Headline Writing* now includes a four-step process of writing internet headlines. It also has a section on how to write headlines for blogs.

An important addition is the chapter on *Writing News for the Mobile*. This is a new medium, and is still evolving. But its potential is mind boggling. The number of mobile phone connections in India in June 2011 had crossed the 800 million mark, and Indians who were using their mobile phones to access the Net had reached 26 million. In contrast, the Internet connections were yet to touch 18 million.

The gap clearly shows that India has taken to mobile phones more enthusiastically than it did to Internet. The future, therefore, lies in developing content for the mobile devices, and this is what the chapter attempts to do. It describes the different formats in which content is being developed for the mobile, and the skills that are needed to work in this medium.

Another important addition to the book is the chapter on Social Media. This chapter enlarges upon the concept of build, share and participate: the three pillars on which the 21st century media is being built. It also explains what Social Media is and the ways in which it is impacting the way journalists work and communicate.

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Chapters 11 and 12 describe the three key skills – blogging, podcasting and multimedia storytelling – that every student of media must acquire to stay relevant. These skills may not have taken root in India, but it is only a question of time before they become an essential part of every journalist's repertoire.

Another challenge for web journalists is to know technology related to web publishing. This is why a chapter has been added on *Content Management System*, popularly known as *CMS*. It will enable students to understand the basics of web publishing.

This chapter is complemented by the changes that have been made to the chapter on Website Design. *Breaking News* did not explain the mechanics of website development fully. This gap has been plugged in *Web Journalism 2.0*. The students of media can now understand the different processes involved in website creation, and their relative costs.

The technology section also includes chapters on *Hyperlinking* and *Search Engines*. These two chapters have been retained with minor modifications because of their importance in day-to-day work. The chapter on *Search Engines* now has a brief section on the top search properties in India.

Any book on web journalism will be incomplete if it does not shed light on ethics and style. This book explores the grey area of style, and critically examines the issues related to privacy, defamation, misinformation and enforcement of intellectual property rights on the Net.

The book also makes an attempt to comprehend the impact of new technologies on media. The key issues that have been examined are: changing news delivery vehicles and their impact on the news cycle, and changes in the working of newsrooms and the emergence of new job profiles. The phenomenon of computer programmes working as editors, of locating and mailing stories to web users and harnessing the power of crowds is another area that the book talks about. An attempt also has been made to explain why the Indian experience on the Net has been different so far.

Yet another major change is the inclusion of Assignments. In *Breaking News*, the chapters ended with a brief summary. In *Web Journalism 2.0*, the summary has been replaced by exercises. The purpose is to encourage students to log on to the Net and find for themselves online news sources,

design trends, Web 2.0 tools, search methodologies, mobile content formats, styles of audio and video reporting, etc. This should increase their familiarity with the Net, and make them better journalists.

The only constant in the book is the focus. The book is based on the way India and Indians have turned to the Net universally to create, share and distribute content after 2004. The idea once again is to ensure that the Indian students are able to relate to the book. This is why *Web Journalism 2.0* uses over 100 screenshots taken from Indian websites to illustrate the different points made in the book. These screenshots represent the myriad ways in which Indian media companies are imbibing changes brought about by Web 2.0 tools and technology.

Incidentally, these screenshots were taken at different points of time from 2009 to 2012. Many of the websites from where these screenshots were sourced have undergone a design change in the last few years. Some pages have even expired over the course of time. So, don't be surprised if a few screenshots produced in this book do not match the "look and feel" of the website today.

An academic effort must document these changes. This is the only way the uniqueness of the Internet and the virtual products it creates can be preserved for posterity.

However, I must acknowledge that it is very difficult to write a definitive text on Internet Journalism. The medium continues to evolve and impact the way we communicate. New technologies continue to be developed, and adopted every year. It is not possible to include them in a physical book.

But I do hope that the revisions made in this edition have made this book more current and representative of what is happening on the Net today.

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# INTERNET IN INDIA

T was around 1996–97 that Indians started talking about Internet and its likely impact on news. Before that, the Internet was an unknown entity for most Indians. The few, who were aware of Internet, were the ones who worked in Education and Research Network (ERNET), a division of Department of Electronics that was funded by the Government of India and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). ERNET set up the first Internet hubs in India in the early 1990s (Fig. 1.1). However, these hubs had limited range and offered limited connectivity. The few institutes that benefited from such a connectivity were high-end education and research centres.

The National Informatics Centre (NICNet) and the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) provided impetus to the growth of the Internet in India. The charter of NICNet was to wire ministries and state governments and that of the STPI was to interconnect the technology parks located at Bangalore, Hyderabad and Noida through dial-up connections and lease lines. But, it was only in August 1995 that India launched its first public Internet service. The service, which was named as the Gateway Internet Access Service (GIAS), was provided by Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), a Government of India (GOI) undertaking.

This service was initially limited to Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai. Later, points of presence were set up in cities like Bangalore and Pune. These nodes enabled people to acquire dial-up connections and to log on to the Internet. The connections were painfully slow and unreliable in the beginning. Subscribers had to dial in several times to set up the connection and then there was no guarantee that the connection would remain stable.



## Fig. 1.1 The home page of ERNET, the organisation that set up the first Internet hubs in India.

*Source:* http://www.eis.ernet.in/index.htm

Despite this seemingly painful scenario, the demand for dial-up connections started growing. The Indian media too took notice of the arrival of the Internet, and made its first tentative foray into cyberspace in 1996. *The Hindu* (Fig. 1.2), *The Times of India* (Fig. 1.3) and *The Indian Express* (Fig. 1.4) were among the first major newspapers to set up websites of their own. These were low-tech websites and did not carry all the news stories run in the newspaper.

The reports were invariably hosted late by one day; that is, after the newspaper had been put to bed. No round-the-clock updates were available. But even these limited efforts brought results. There was great excitement when these first-generation media websites started attracting traffic.



#### Fig. 1.2 Screenshot of the home page of *The Hindu* website. The site was launched in the mid-1990s.

Source: http://www.thehindu.com/



Fig. 1.3 The home page of *The Times of India* website, which was redesigned after the introduction of tab-based design.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/



Fig. 1.4 The home page of *The Indian Express* website. *Source:* http://www.indianexpress.com/

The traffic came almost exclusively from overseas, largely from the Indians settled in America, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia and parts of Europe. This was not surprising. The state-owned VSNL, which was the sole Internet service provider (ISP) then, lacked the necessary infrastructure and the bandwidth to connect all Indian cities to the Internet or to provide higher bandwidth to those who had bought dial-up connections.

In October 1998, the government took away the monopoly status of VSNL. The private sector was given the mandate to set up Internet facilities. The following two years, 1999 and 2000, witnessed frenzied activity as the dotcom boom fuelled by venture capital, hope and hype filled the world. It had its impact in India too. However, this misplaced enthusiasm subsided when the dotcom boom went bust in the United States. The shock waves affected the websites in India too. The mood swung from one of wild excitement, anticipation and expectation to that of caution, anxiety and deferred plans.

This did not mean that media websites stopped growing. On the contrary, the media sites continued to evolve and attract more traffic. But these gains were not matched by revenue growth. The websites continued to be dependent upon the parent companies for survival despite the companies not favouring investment online.

The first few years of the new millennium were particularly discouraging for the media sites. It was only around 2004 that the tide started turning, and the interest in the Internet got a fresh boost. A big push was given by the success of Web 2.0 sites in the West. Social networking sites, like YouTube, Flickr, Orkut and later Facebook and Twitter, became household words in India.

A wave of 'me-too' Web 2.0 sites came up in India in 2006–07. The period also saw the mobile Internet drawing the attention of news companies. The interest largely stemmed from the staggering number of mobile phones that were sold in India.

However, unlike the West, Indian media continues to be dominated by traditional media. The newspaper and television channels are still the dominant source of news dissemination. They are also the first choice of advertisers. This is not so of media sites, which are still struggling to generate sufficient revenue to stay afloat. Most websites would have shut down but for the support extended by the parent companies.

#### **THE EARLY YEARS (1996–1998)**

Internet took off in India on a very low key. Traditional media houses were not enthused at all about the online medium, and rightly so. The web was still evolving and very few Indians, living in India, had access to the Internet. The few that did have access were using it as a source of information and as a mailing system. No wonder that even those newspapers, that set up a website, looked upon the Internet as an appendage of mainstream newspaper work, and not as a full-time activity.

The common opinion was that Internet journalism held tremendous potential, but its time was yet to arrive. It, therefore, made sense to set up a website only to make your presence felt, but not to do anything other than that. The cost of setting up a website, which usually was negligible as compared to launching a newspaper edition or setting up a television channel, made the proposition even more attractive.

There were only a few journalists who were willing to move from print media or television newsrooms into the untested waters of Internet journalism. Most of them considered taking up Internet journalism as a step backward. The few, who did, were literally forced to reinvent their job profile and acquire new skills based upon the software applications that their sites were using. These ranged from Front Page Editor to Adobe Photoshop to File Transfer Protocol, and many more.

The first Internet journalists were forced to draw upon their print experience to decide what should go in the online newspaper. Obviously, this was not the right solution. Media websites became dumping grounds for news that was generated for newspapers, an activity that sarcastically came to be referred to as 'shovelling'. But, it will be most unfair to blame these sites for the solution they devised. They were severely hampered in terms of resources; they neither had sufficient manpower nor technical resources. Even if they wanted to, they could not have come up with a better solution.

So, in the initial years of the Internet, newspapers were not willing to invest on in-house development teams. Instead they preferred to outsource development work. This may have reduced costs, but it did not lead to an integrated operation where the journalists could sit down with the development team and work out a strategy suited to the Internet.

Media houses also avoided setting up their own servers. They preferred to hire servers based in the United States and pay monthly rental and bandwidth cost. The media houses cannot be blamed for adopting this strategy. India, at that point of time, lacked the necessary infrastructure. It would have been too expensive for newspapers to set up own servers in the United States; not only the cost of maintenance teams would have been prohibitive, but also the rate at which technology was upgrading most servers would have been rendered obsolete within months of being set up.

The first media steps on the Internet were thus purely exploratory in nature. And, not surprisingly, once the websites became functional, most media houses did not pay attention to their Internet operations. They were far too involved with the day-to-day business of newspaper empires to worry about the Internet. The investment in the Internet had been made for the future, not for the present. The logic was to have an Internet presence, and to wait and watch how it develops.

Interestingly, the most notable website to be set up during this period was Rediff.com (Fig. 1.5). It was set up in 1996 and became a trendsetter for several years. Some of the concepts it introduced were web search, content in multiple languages, e-mail, e-commerce, among others.

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### Fig. 1.5 The home page of Rediff.com website, a portal that introduced several new trends in India.

Source: http://www.rediff.com/

Another noteworthy development during this period was the launch of Hotmail, an e-mail service developed by an Indian engineer, Sabeer Bhatia. It was a free e-mail service and provided options for everyone to set up free personal e-mail accounts. The service became so popular that it was acquired by Microsoft.

#### **BOOM TIME (1999–2000)**

Perceptions started changing by 1999. The boom in technology stocks set in an expectant mood. Suddenly, the Internet revolution did not seem so far away. It seemed nearer, tantalisingly closer, but still not close enough. Publishers started waking up to the new reality. Their websites were not forgotten or dead investments. They were the future. Much of the excitement flowed from the dotcom boom and the NRI traffic started flowing into the Indian media sites.

The purchase of India World (which ran the high traffic Samachar.com) by Satyam Infoway, which later also set up the popular portal Sify.com (Fig. 1.6), added to the excitement. Everyone went wide-eyed at the sale price, which was said to be over ₹ 400 crore. The fact that the Samachar.com sale came close on the heels of Microsoft buying Hotmail.com for \$400 million made Internet a prized business opportunity.



Fig. 1.6 The home page of Sify.com that was set up by Satyam Infoway in the initial days of the Internet in India. Source: http://www.sify.com/

There was a rush to get on to the Internet. This rush was fuelled by venture capitalists who showed interest in funding dotcoms. Investment bankers added to the madness by giving crazy valuations of the Internet sites.

The newspapers were flooded with advertisements released by dotcoms that were flush with cash. Some of the major dotcoms that set up shop during these crazy years were Baazee.com, Indya.com, Indiainfoline.com, Indiainfo.com, Hungama.com, MyIris.com, and Naukri.com. These websites splurged money as they tried to attract eyeballs. Indya.com, for instance, was reported to have spent over ₹ 4 crore on its launch campaign.

The period also saw the setting up of Tehelka.com (Fig. 1.7), a media site that shook the NDA government with its sting operation on the country's defence deals. Equally exciting was the arrival of the Internet giants Yahoo! and MSN to India, which set up India portals using the .in extension.



Fig. 1.7 The Tehelka website, which shook the NDA government with its story on defence deals through a sting operation.

Source: http://tehelka.com/

The websites that offered an array of services became more popular. These ranged from web search, e-mail, content in multiple languages, e-commerce, e-cards, job postings, tender listings, etc. The excitement was not limited to English. A popular Hindi portal that came up around this time was Webduniya.com. It provided both e-mail and news in multiple languages.

Most of the changes occurred quite fast and at an unimaginable speed. The hype was particularly intoxicating. An air of urgency gripped the newspapers and there was fear that they may miss the technology bus if they did not react fast enough.

For the first time since the arrival of the Internet in India, newspaper houses started looking at the web with more seriousness. An important spin-off was the setting-up of independent companies to handle the Internet operations. *The Times of India* was the first to set up an Internet company; the *Hindustan Times* and *The New Indian Express* followed suit. There was a whiff of venture capital and the lure of going public.

Website traffic figures became the topic of debate in media offices. More than the excitement of owning news sites that attracted large volumes of traffic, a new worry crept in. The questions that came to be asked repeatedly were: Is the Internet revolution going to change the communication industry? Can established media houses allow start-ups to run away with their empires? Will traditional revenue sources, like classified advertising, move to the Internet and away from newspapers? These were serious questions. The proposition changed. It was not enough to be present on the web; it was more important to look at the web as a new medium.

The issues involved were quite complex. Among the questions that begged answers were the following: Should newspapers charge for the content that they host on the Internet? Should stories be 'broken' on the Internet and then followed up in print? What will be the implications of such a move? Will this lead to a decline in circulation? Will it enable rivals to scoop exclusives? And more important: Should it be an integrated operation? That is, the traditional journalists work hand-in-hand with new media professionals. Or should it be two different operations altogether?

The change had a great impact on job profiles and job definitions of media professionals. New media jobs with a completely different work focus and skill set came into being. The work group that was affected the most was newspersons. Technical skills that were considered inessential suddenly became vital. Media houses were faced with two options: (1) organise in-house training courses to update the technical skills of staff members, who were ready to work on websites; and (2) hire fresh men and women with knowledge of Internet technology (IT).

Both the options had in-built problems. Fresh Internet-ready graduates had no experience in journalism. It was difficult for them to judge and edit stories or write headlines. On the other hand, those with a journalism background found hosting a complicated exercise. Initially, a kind of hybrid model emerged. Newspersons chose stories, rated them on news value, edited and transferred them to their more technology-savvy colleagues, who hosted them on the Internet. This, however, was a painful division of work.

This situation created two categories of workers within the Internet newsroom, both dependent on each other. From the purely human resources point of view, this was quite a serious issue. The question was: Who should be rated more important? Obviously, the answer was that there should be no walls in the newsroom. So, refreshment courses in technology and newsroom skills were called for. The second work area, that called for a new orientation, was design. In contrast to broadsheet newspaper design, that had the luxury of size, website design was limited by the size of the computer screen. Even more critical was the subject of bytes. Newspaper designers could play around with images, but on the Internet the download time is directly proportional to the file size, popularly referred to as weight of the images. So, web designers needed to have an extra dimension. They needed to know the value of bytes and use new measuring scales, like pixels. Designing also called for one more attribute: the ability to section pages. No website could afford to cram its pages with information. Each site had to section its contents in a user-friendly manner.

Newspapers had two options in this area. Train their present designers in the art of web or hire fresh, Internet-ready designers. The first option had limitations. One, it meant relocating a designer, who was good at his work to an area where he might not prove to be suitable. Two, find a replacement for him. The obvious and easy choice was to hire a web designer with the requisite skills. But, this was easier said than done; the field was too new and availability of talent with the required skill set was low. Taking advantage of the situation, the Internet-savvy designers charged exorbitant fee for their services.

The third work area, where media websites needed to hire fresh talent, was programming. Here, too, media houses had the option of diverting their software staff to write programs or hire new programmers. Both options were equally viable, as the programming language is the same whether you work on old media or new media. But, definitely new positions were required to be created, and highly talented, technical workforce needed to be hired to conduct Internet operations efficiently.

The fourth area, that was impacted by new technology, was revenue generation. Advertising professionals, used to traditional methods of marketing space, were unfamiliar with terms like pixels, banners and clickthroughs. Fortunately, web advertising was in its nascent phase and the Indian ad spend on the Internet was not even a fraction of television and print advertising. This gave media houses some breathing space to hire and train web advertising professionals.

For newspersons, the web revolution was an unexpected blessing. Websites were willing to pay high salaries to hire journalists. The result was a dramatic thinning of media newsrooms. A few media companies reacted by hiking salaries and perks, bringing them at par with salaries being offered by dotcom companies, to stem the outflow. The others waited for the dotcom mania to subside and prayed that they did not lose their most talented staffers in the interregnum.

These worries, however, were limited to content and, to a certain extent, to software and marketing staff. The large body of newspaper employees was not affected by the arrival of Internet journalism. This was largely because the situation was dramatically different from the catharsis that media houses witnessed when they transited from the hot metal to the photo-typesetting and the desktop publishing era.

At that time, a host of job categories just vanished. Proof readers became extinct. The same happened to semi-skilled workers used to hot metal systems. Foremen, typesetters, page makers and a few others found that they were suddenly not needed. From being key people, they became redundant and virtual appendages. They were either phased out, given a golden handshake or relocated to positions that were extremely demeaning. There was widespread dissatisfaction or unrest and a feeling of being let down overwhelmed these employees.

#### THE CRASH AND THE DEPRESSION

#### (2001 - 2003)

The hype and hoopla of 2000 vanished in 2001. The dotcoms went bust and the Internet slowed down; the innovations lost pace. It was as if the new economy had lost its way and the innovative spirit had been buried under the debris of dotcom failures. The key words were no longer innovation and user satisfaction, but survival and consolidation. Each failure drew a huge cheer from the old economy enthusiasts and the tribe of 'I-said-so' clairvoyants swelled.

Fortunately, the hope did not die. The belief that Internet journalism is the future persisted. What disappeared was wide-eyed excitement and the inexplicable attitude that new media is superior to old media. The death of high-profile dotcoms and the shrinking of many start-ups led to the drying of highly paid jobs of content editors. A reverse process started; journalists who had fled newsrooms for dotcoms started returning with their tail between their legs.

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Worried media houses put their ambitious expansion plans on hold; a few even retrenched some of their Internet staff to make their operations more viable. Restraint became the keyword. However, what must be kept in mind is that media houses only changed policies, but not their track; they did not abandon the Internet operations, but became choosier about investment online.

An interesting development during this period was the charging of subscription fee by thenewspapertoday.com, a news website set up by the India Today Group, in 2001. This was a brave move and was watched with great interest by other media companies. But, the move did not pay off and the website was shut down by the group.

The turn of the millennium also witnessed media companies developing content for transmission on mobile phones. This content was not limited to news, but included delivery of cricket scores, forecasts, ringtones, jokes, wallpapers, Bollywood gossip, etc.

Media companies adopted three strategies in the mobile world. The first was to supply content to telecoms directly and the second was to obtain short codes. The first media companies to get a short code were The Times of India Group (8888, now 58888), Aaj Tak (2424 now 52424), *The Hindustan Times* (4242, now 54242) and NDTV (6858, now 56858)<sup>1</sup>. The short code enabled media companies to deliver content directly to subscribers. They also launched several interactive schemes, where mobile phone owners could transmit SMS messages to the media firms. This was useful branding, because companies came to be identified by their short codes.

The third strategy, that the media firms adopted, was to set up WAP sites. These sites were text-only-sites, and often limited to headlines only. Their content could be accessed by those mobile phone users whose phones were Internet-enabled.

Another exciting development was the launch of e-papers. *The Times* of *India* was the first to launch an e-paper. This was a great improvement on the 'pdf-papers' that many newspaper houses published on the Internet. The pdf-papers, which were made by converting print-ready pages into pdf files, were not user-friendly products. First, they took a long time to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> More details in chapter on mobile phones.

download, and second, web users had to scroll up and down to find news of interest.

The e-papers were like a breath of fresh air. They were an exact replica of the print newspaper, easy to read and did not take a long time to download. Further, the search tool allowed web users to locate stories of interest not only from that day's edition, but from earlier editions also.

The newspaper industry was upbeat about the new technology. It found in e-paper the perfect technology to extend the shelf life of the physical newspaper. Several newspaper houses, like *The Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times*, even levied a fee initially to allow access. However, barring *The Hindu*, almost all media houses have made e-papers free for web users.

The reason for this is not hard to understand. The e-paper may have been a great innovation, but it was not an Internet product. The news, that it carried, was one day old. Only those web users who could not access a physical copy of the newspaper or who were scholars researching old content, browsed e-papers.

The fact that the same content was available on the website of the newspaper was another reason why the web users did not pay subscription fee. They could access the same content free. The advertisers too were not ecstatic. They did not see in e-paper a medium to extend the reach of their message.

However, this did not deter newspapers from launching e-papers. They began with their flagship editions and then added satellite editions. *Dainik Jagaran* (Fig. 1.8), for instance, publishes close to two dozen e-papers everyday. The *Hindustan Times* (Fig. 1.9) publishes nine of its editions as e-paper; *The Times of India* makes available 11 of its satellite editions as e-paper while *The Economic Times* has four of its editions available as e-paper.

The news agencies did not warm up to the Internet initially. They clearly saw a conflict of interest between their business model and the Internet, where all content was free. The first agency sites were elementary. They published a small section of their content online, and this too was replaced as the day wore on and new stories came up.



### Fig. 1.8 The drop-down box used by *Dainik Jagaran* to direct visitors to its e-papers.

Source: http://in.jagran.yahoo.com/epaper/



**Fig. 1.9** The e-paper launched by the *Hindustan Times*. *Source:* http://paper.hindustantimes.com/epaper/viewer.aspx

But, they did realise that the Internet was a different medium. They were not pleased to see newspapers and television channels using agency content on their websites. Both Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) issued circulars demanding that newspapers and television channels pay separate subscription fee for using their content online.

One news agency that made a mark in this period was Asian News International (ANI). It became the first Indian news agency to syndicate news video. Web users may have had difficulty in watching these videos because of low bandwidth connections, but the videos definitely brought a flavour of multimedia to news sites.

But, the most significant developments occurred in the field of technology. The most important was the introduction of Active Server Pages (ASP) technology. This made it possible for news sites to move from the era of static HTML pages to dynamic ASP pages. The sites were no longer constrained by the limitation of hosting five stories on a web page or constantly worried about broken links. They could now publish hundreds of pages in a day and be sure that all pages would be automatically hyperlinked. The archiving became better and so did page retrieval and downloads. This brought some amount of user-friendliness to online newspapers.

The Internet infrastructure, despite depression and a stagnant economy, too improved. The number of Internet connections doubled from 1 million at the start of 2001 to 2 million by the middle of 2002. The private ISPs extended their range of operations and began offering a host of value-added services (VAS).

Several ISPs, like VSNL and Sify Technologies, even set up web farms and private gateways and bought international bandwidth to make browsing a more pleasurable experience. Server farms came up in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Delhi. This made it possible to host websites on Indian servers.

#### **THE TIDE TURNS: 2004 AND BEYOND**

The tide began to turn by 2004. The effects of depression began wearing off, and the confidence in the Internet business started returning. The change in mood, to a large extent, was triggered by two big ticket sales that happened in 2004. The first was the purchase of Indian auction site

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Bazee.com by the Internet giant, eBay, and the second was the sale of Indian jobs site JobsAhead.com to Monster.com, the largest job portal in the world. The two deals, like the Samachar sale in the late 1990s, charged up the sluggish Internet space.

Close on the heels of these deals came the launch of airline and travelticketing sites. These sites caught the fancy of the nation, mainly because of the convenience they offered to users. Technically, the credit for ushering this revolution should go to Air Deccan (Fig. 1.10), which set up the country's first airline booking site in 2003. But, its effects started showing in 2004 and after, largely because the Year 2004 saw the official launch of broadband for home users in India. Till then, broadband connections were being sold largely for offices at steep rates.



#### Fig. 1.10 The website of Deccan Airlines (earlier Air Deccan), which introduced a revolution in airline ticketing in India.

Source: http://www.deccanairlines.in/

#### Broadband

Interestingly, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), a public-sector company, which launched broadband connections, defined broadband

as an Internet connection with 256 kilobyte per second (kbps) speed. This was very low by international standards, but for Indians, who had been surfing the Internet at speeds of 56 kbps and less, this speed itself was like getting on a speedboat.

It was not long before private players, like Airtel, Reliance and Sify Technologies, launched home broadband plans. The country registered its first million broadband connections in 2005. Their number in June 2011 stood at 12.35 million (Table 1.2), according to data published by Internet Service Providers Association of India (ISPAI).

Year	Subscribers (in lakhs)	Growth (%)
Mar-03	36	
Mar-04	45	25
Mar-05	56.5	26
Mar-06	69.4	23
Mar-07	92.71	34
Mar-08	110.09	20
Mar-09	135.4	22
Mar-10	161.8	6.17
Mar-11	196.7	5.29
Jun-11	203.3	3.33

**Table 1.1** Growth of Internet subscribers including broadband subscribers

Source: http://www.ispai.in/Stat1-InternetSubsIncludingBroadban.php

#### **Dial-Up Connections**

The number of the dial-up connections did not register satisfactory growth during this period. This lack of progress in dial-up was not surprising, because the main focus of ISPs was to sell broadband. The total number of Internet connections in India in June 2011 stood at 20.3 million, (Table 1.1) and the users—if one uses the yardstick of five users per connection—at 100 million.

#### **Television Sites**

The arrival of broadband, however, did inject a great deal of hope and excitement in the environment. NDTV, India's leading television

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Year	Subscribers (in lakhs)	Growth (%)
Mar-03	0.08	
Mar-04	0.19	138
Mar-05	1.8	847
Mar-06	13.5	650
Mar-07	23.39	73
Mar-08	38.7	65
Mar-09	62.17	61
Mar-10	87.7	35.70
Jun-10	94.7	7.97
Sept-10	100.31	8.79
Dec-10	100.99	6.64
Mar-11	110	8
Jun-11	123.5	4

**Table 1.2**Growth of broadband subscribers

Source: http://www.ispai.in/Stat2-BroadbandSubscribers256Kbps.php

channel, launched NDTV Convergence (Fig. 1.12) to take advantage of the rapidly developing Internet space. The objective of this new company was to exploit the synergies that television, the Internet and mobile provided. IBNlive.com and Timesnow.com were two other television sites that took full advantage of improved surfing speeds and began posting a large number of their news videos, adding a new dimension to Internet journalism in India. Portals, like Indiatimes.com (Fig. 1.11), Rediff.com and MSNIndia.in (Fig. 1.13), also started featuring videos prominently. There was a fresh interest in multimedia content with Sify.com launching Sifymax, a specialised multimedia section on its site.

#### Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content

Interest in the Internet jumped several times with the launch of Web 2.0 sites in the United States. Sites, like YouTube, Orkut, Facebook and Wikipedia, became a rage in India. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to state that these sites acted as a trigger in pushing more Indians to get on to the broadband.



Fig. 1.11 The home page of Indiatimes.com, the service portal set up by *The Times of India* Group.

Source: http://www.indiatimes.com/



Fig. 1.12 The home page of NDTV.com, which introduced the concept of convergence on the Internet.

Source: http://www.ndtv.com/



Fig. 1.13 The home page of MSN India portal. *Source:* http://in.msn.com/

Blogging was another activity that gained currency during this period. Initially, Indians turned to American blog providers, like Wordpress. com and Blogger.com, to set up blogs. But then, portals, like Rediff.com, Sify. com, Sulekha.com, and Indiatimes.com, provided blogging options on their websites, encouraging Indians to set up blogs using Indian sites.

A new lift was given to blogging in 2007 in India, when WordPress offered blogging options in Indian languages. This was followed by Rediff.com, which also empowered their users to blog in Indian languages. Thanks to these initiatives, blogging took off in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu.

However, outside of Indiatimes.com, no Indian media site, at present, provides blogging tools to its visitors. The focus of media sites is to encourage their own staffers to blog. Some of the major newspapers and television channels that encourage their staff to blog are the *Hindustan Times*, *The New Indian Express*, *DNA*, *Live Mint*, *The Times of India*, NDTV.com, and IBNlive.com.

In fact, most of the blogging activity takes place outside the traditional media. Individual bloggers have taken the initiative to set up blog directories to help web users locate good Indian blogs. The popular blog directories

are Blogstreet, Labnol.org, India Blogs, India Bloggers Ring, Technorati India Blogs, Blogwise India, Blogflux India Directory, Blogdup India, and Desi Blogs<sup>2</sup>.

The post-2006 period also witnessed the launch of several Indian social media sites. The promoters of these sites were largely influenced by the success of American social networking sites. They hoped that they could wean the Indians away from American sites and hook them to their *desi* versions<sup>3</sup>.



Fig. 1.14 The home page of *BharatStudent.com*, the social networking site, which was one of the several social media sites launched in the second half of the first decade.

Source: http://www.bharatstudent.com/

#### Tab-Based Design and Wave of Redesigns

Another important development was the introduction of tab-based design in 2007. This design tool made it possible for websites to group stories under different tabs on the same page. The big advantage was that a web user could find these stories by clicking on the tabs without leaving the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See chapter on Blogs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Some of the notable Indian social networking sites that came up were Minglebox.com, Fropper.com, BharatStudent.com (Fig. 1.14), Ibibo.com, and BigAdda.com.
page. Almost every major newspaper and television website went in for a design makeover. These included popular sites, like Timesofindia.com, Hindustantimes. com, Indianexpress.com, Newindpress.com (which was renamed as ExpressBuzz.com in 2008), LiveMint.com (Fig. 1.15), Indiatimes.com, Rediff.com, Yahoo.in, Dinamani.com, KannadaPrabha. com, The Hindu.in and Deccanherald.com. One of the exciting redesigns to happen at this time was that of the PTI website (Fig. 1.16). With the redesigns, the PTI website became one of the most vibrant and exciting sites online.



Fig. 1.15 The home page of *Live Mint* website, which came in with several fresh ideas including tab-based design.

Source: http://www.livemint.com/

## **New Verticals**

The runaway success of sites, like Naukri.com, a job vertical, and BharatMatrimony.com (Fig. 1.17), a matrimony vertical, encouraged Times Internet and HT Media, the Internet companies of *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* groups, to launch their own classified verticals.



## Fig. 1.16 The PTI website that was redesigned in 2008 is one of the more vibrant Indian sites online.

Source: http://www.ptinews.com/

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• Main www.bharatmatrimony.com					TT T C	P 🔶
	Matrimony Services 👻	Mobile /	ops   Eite Matrimony   P	rivilege Matrimony   160+ Mat	trimany Outlets Lagin	1
		24x7 HELP: INDIA 1-800-42	5-3344 (BGNL/MTNL)   1	-800-3000-3344 (Other)   All	Countries -   Live Chat	
	bharat matrimony	Register	Search 🗉	Upgrade	Help 💌	
	Regional Sites: Bengali   O	ujarati   Hindi   Kannada   Malay	alee I Marathi I Marwadi	Oriya   Punjabi   Tamit   1	felugu   Urdu   More 🛩	
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Fig. 1.17 The home page of BharatMatrimony.com which became a trendsetter in the matrimonial space. Source: http://www.bharatmatrimony.com/

Indiatimes launched Timesjobs.com (Fig. 1.18) to take on Naukri.com, and then launched two more classified verticals—Simplymarry.com and Magicbricks.com. HT Media followed this trend in 2008 with Shine.com, a jobs portal.

🕑 Jobs in India   Se	earch Best Jobs Online	e   Employment	Vacancy  Care	ers in India - TimesJobs.com - I	Mozilla Firefox		- 6 ×
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+ in www.timesjo	ibs.com					습 = C [생- Google	PA
	India Jobs Outr Jobs	IT Jubs BPO Ju	bs Retail Jobs Go	vernment Jobs Advertising Jobs	Login	to view recommended jobs (Recruiter's Zone)	1
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	ciber	HDFC	A alled dight	, Wizard	Cooper Corporation     Tide Water India	Admissions	
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Fig. 1.18 The home page of Times Jobs, a jobs portal launched by Times Internet.

Source: http://www.timesjobs.com/

## INRegistry

The government took two important decisions during this period. The first was the setting up of National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) in 2003. Its main purpose was to streamline the flow of domestic Internet traffic. Till then, the domestic traffic was being routed through international hops. This added to the bandwidth consumed by the ISPs, and also brought in latency in the system.

The second and equally significant step was the creation of INRegistry to manage the *.in* domain name, which is the top-level domain name, allotted to India by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Before the setting up of INRegistry in 2004, the Indian domain names were being registered and maintained by the National Centre for Software Technology (NCST) through Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).

The INRegistry was also authorised to manage the allotment of toplevel domain names, such as .co.in, .net.in, .org.in, firm.in, gen.in and .ind. in. Besides this, the National Informatics Centre (NIC) was authorised to register sites in the gov.in domain, ERNET to register res.in (research institutes) sites and ac.in (academic sites), and the Ministry of Defence to register the mil.in (military) domains. The management of Internet operations was further integrated in 2005, when INRegistry was brought under the purview of NIXI.



Fig. 1.19 The home page of NIXI, the National Internet Exchange of India, which was set up to facilitate exchange of domestic Internet traffic.

Source: http://nixi.in/

The INRegistry does not register the domain names itself, but has authorised several domestic and international registrars to register Indian domain names on its behalf. The number of these registrars in January 2010 stood at 68, and together they recorded a registration of over 6 lakh .in and .co.in domain names till then.

## **Internet Advertising**

The Internet generated great interest and curiosity among advertisers largely because it was the first medium to provide measurable metrics. At the same time, it also disappointed them. The money spent on Internet advertising in India in 2008–09 was ₹ 325 crore, according to a report released by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) (Fig. 1.20) and Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB). In 2009–10, it was expected to go up to ₹ 430 crore. This may be a big increase compared to ₹ 6 crore, that were spent on the Internet advertising in 1999 or

₹ 30 crore, in 2001. But, it was not enough. No media site could hope to break even on revenues that were this small. They also compared very poorly with the total ad spend in India in 2007–08, which stood around ₹ 16,000 crore.

There were four important reasons why online advertising failed to take off in India. The first is the most important one. A large percentage of traffic to Indian media sites—rough estimates put it at two-thirds still comes from abroad. This traffic is not of much interest to Indian advertisers.



Fig. 1.20 The home page of IAMAI website, a not-for-profit industry body, whose mandate is to expand and enhance the online and mobile value added services sectors.

Source: http://www.iamai.in/

The second is the low penetration of the Internet in India. The total number of the Internet connections in March 2011 stood at 19 million. Of these, almost 5 million were dial-up connections. In contrast, the number of mobile phone users in January 2011 stood at 771 million, and the TV connections were estimated at 134 million. Clearly, the Indian advertiser realises that the Internet is yet to become a mass medium capable of delivering results.

The third reason is the time spent by users on Indian news sites. The I-Cube report on the Internet in India, 2008 showed that only 13 per cent of the Internet users visit news sites. In contrast, 91 per cent of the users access e-mails; 76 per cent conduct general search; 49 per cent conduct

education-related search; and 46 per cent chat online. Online job search, online gaming, online booking and online banking were the other four major activities that scored over online news.

The fourth reason is the low volume of Internet advertising committed by the Indian companies. This has discouraged advertising agencies from setting up special teams to generate Internet creatives or sell the Internet as a medium. The vicious circle that has come into existence has further stymied the growth of Internet advertising in India.

Another factor that cannot be overlooked, is Google Ad Words. Ever since its launch in India in 2004, Google Ad Words has attracted Indian publishers. They find the Google interface very easy to integrate into their sites, and a good source to earn money.

Similarly, advertisers find Google Ad Sense the best medium to advertise. There are several reasons for this mindset: (a) they need no admen to start advertising; (b) they can target their ads to their audiences by using keywords; and (c) Google advertising, which is based on cost per clicks, is very lucrative for advertisers. Outside of Google, very few agencies have worked hard to build the advertising market. Most of the advertising is still being sold on cost per click or cost per sale models. These models do not generate sufficient revenue for publishers. Hopefully, as the Internet penetration grows in India, advertisers will start looking at the Internet as a medium to build brands. This would pave way for revenue generation on the Internet.

## **Useful Sites**

1. http://www.afaqs.com

An Indian site that provides latest information on online and offline advertising.

- http://www.easymedia.in
   A website that tracks Indian media trends, and gives useful media tips.
- 3. www.thehoot.org

A media review site that is neutral and incisive.

4. www.exchange4media.com

A media website that covers the latest happenings.

5. www.trai.gov.in

The website of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which prepares white papers on telecom issues and makes recommendations on electronic media.

6. www.nixi.in

The website of National Internet Exchange of India (NIEI) that is a clearing house for ISPs and governs registration of Indian domain names.

7. www.coai.in

The website of Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), an important trade body.

8. www.iamai.in

The website of Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), an organisation of website owners that monitors the growth of the Internet in India.

9. I Cube report 2008

The report, which is available at http://www.iamai.in/Upload/ Research/I-Cube%202008%20Summary%20Report%20 %28Modified%29\_31.pdf, is part of a syndicated study conducted annually by IMRB International in association with IAMAI. It provides useful information about the state of the Internet in India.

## Assignments

- 1. List the full website addresses of:
  - (a) Five English language newspaper websites
  - (b) Five Indian language newspaper websites
  - (c) Three Indian television websites
  - (d) Three Indian magazine websites
- 2. List the name of two Indian websites that provide the following facilities:
  - (a) Blogs
  - (b) Multimedia
  - (c) e-paper
  - (d) Mobile alerts
  - (e) Chat
  - (f) e-mail
  - (g) e-commerce

- 3. Write a brief note on the evolution of the Internet in India from 1996 to 2000.
- 4. What were the questions that worried newspaper owners in the initial years of the Internet?
- 5. Write a short note on developments that took place in the Indian Internet space from 2003 to 2009.
- 6. Visit the e-papers of two Indian newspapers. List their strong and weak points.
- 7. List the organisations authorised to register domain names in India and the domain name extensions that they administer.
- 8. Why did Internet advertising fail to take off in India?



# NEWS WRITING

Internet journalism is still evolving, but its contours are becoming clear. Online journalists are increasingly becoming aware of the need to develop a new lingo for the medium. They realise that the Internet cannot be treated as an extension of the print medium despite several similarities that result from the fact that both these formats are text-based. They also understand that it is a medium, where a story can be told in four different formats: text, audio, video and multimedia. The medium further demands that stories be communicated in different forms: as a mobile news alert, as a wireless story and as a multimedia report. The medium calls for skills that go beyond traditional reporting and editing skill sets.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INTERNET STORY**

1. *Short and sweet*: An Internet story must be short and sweet if it is to retain the attention of the web user. News reports that run across three or more computer screens are unlikely to be read in full. The chances of the web user navigating away from the story are high if it involves plodding through endless lines.

The print reporters were the first to grasp this reality. They inferred early that the readability of a news report is inversely proportional to its length. The same is true of the Internet stories. Reporters must learn to limit their stories to 300 words or less. The goal should be to ensure that the story fits into a single screen, or at best in two screens. For any story to go beyond two screens, it has to be very compelling.

2. *Clarity*: The best Internet reports have short sentences and are crafted with simple, common, everyday words that a web user can understand easily. Such reports have short paragraphs, with each paragraph usually dealing with one point. Paragraphs that wind interminably across the screen introduce fatigue and force web users to move to another page.

3. *Format*: The best story-telling format is the inverted pyramid format. The news story starts with the most important news point; the less relevant points follow. This saves the Internet user the trouble of reading through to the last paragraph to learn what the story is about. The information is available in the first few paragraphs, with facts arranged in order of decreasing importance.

4. *Accuracy*: The Internet report must be accurate and focus on facts. Comment and hearsay must be avoided. Also, there should be no hedging or speculation. Direct speech or quotes used in the report must be accurate and within the context. This not only keeps the report brief and in focus but also helps in building the credibility of the website. The facts that need to be checked are the following:

- (a) Names and their spellings.
- (b) Designations.
- (c) Incident details. In case it is an accident, the reporter must know the exact number of people who were injured or died.
- (d) Statements. The quote reported in the news report must be accurate and in context. It should not be misinterpreted to imply another meaning.
- (e) If it is a science story, the reporter must make sure that all scientific names are correctly spelt and explained.
- (f) If it is a sports story, then the reporter must make sure that the number of runs made or goals scored are mentioned accurately.

5. *Frequency*: Internet journalism is instant. The story must be published as soon as it breaks. This is in sharp contrast to print journalism, where the deadlines are relatively easier. A newspaper reporter is under no pressure to file a report instantly unless the news breaks close to print deadline. Also, the news cycle does not depend on the number of editions. It is a

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grinding task–24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. In this respect, Internet journalism is similar to wire journalism, where a copy is generated, edited and moved instantly to subscribers.

6. *Updation*: The Internet story must be updated as it develops. This has two dimensions: collection of latest information and weaving of this information into the story. Both are equally important. The first gives the web user a reason to return to the website and the second ensures that the web user does not feel cheated.

One of the criticisms made against 24-hour television news channels is that they repeat visuals when handling a developing story. In the process, they introduce weariness among viewers, who get tired of the same images being telecast repeatedly. The Internet reporters must avoid falling into the same trap. They must recast the story every time a significant development happens.

7. Use of hyperlink: One of the greatest tools available to an Internet reporter is the hyperlink. It empowers the reporter to narrate a story simply and with no overloading. Of course, the reporter needs to be careful while visualising the story. The main story must include the key news points. The support story should bring out interesting facets or nuggets that would have otherwise been lost in a single story.

There were five follow-up reports carried on Silda ambush in which 24 West Bengal paramilitary jawans were killed in a Maoist (also known as Naxals) attack. Hyperlinks were used to connect the related stories (Fig. 2.1).

(i) Silda ambush: Unprofessional jawans were sitting ducks for Naxals

The main story brought out how the jawans were caught unprepared by the Naxals.

- (ii) Cobra-eyed woman led attackA side story profiled the woman who led the attack.
- (iii) Cruel killer? Not me, says Maoist leader Kishenji The profile of the man, who was said to be the key leader of the Naxals, also known as Maoists.
- (iv) With locals on their side, Maoists now striking at will The report explained how Maoists could strike at will.
- (v) Jawans saw rebel leader but didn't question her This report narrated the shocking story of negligence.

lated Coverage				
News	Blogs			
Silda a	mbush: Unprofessional jawans were sitting ducks for Naxals			
Cobra	eyed woman led attack			
Cruel	tiller? Not me, says Maoist leader Kishenji			
With l	ocals on their side, Maoists now striking at will			
Jawar	s saw rebel leader but didn't question her			

#### Fig. 2.1 Hyperlinks used by *The Times of India* to connect five news reports related to the attack on an Eastern Frontier Rifles Camp in West Bengal in February 2010.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/

It is unlikely that the Internet reader would have browsed through 2,000 words to get a feel of the mood and stakes. The website, therefore, did a smart thing. It kept all stories short, readable, and hyperlinked to give the web users a 360-degree view.

8. *Reach*: The Internet story is not limited by boundaries. Its reach is global. That is why no story can be considered a small story online. It will have an audience at places that are thousands of miles away.

9. *Attribution*: All news reports, with a few exceptions, must be attributed to a source. The source can be identified as follows:

- (a) Individual: An individual, who witnessed an accident or survived an earthquake, can be quoted by name as an eyewitness.
- (b) Organisation: A spokesperson is authorised by an organisation to brief the media on its behalf. The spokesperson can be referred to by
  - (i) his or her name and designation (*Mr. N. Radhakrishnan*, *Police Commissioner, told the media* ...),
  - (ii) his or her designation (*The Police Commissioner told the media* ...)
- (c) Anonymous sources: There are occasions when a news source, who happens to be a senior government official or an important leader, does not want his or her name to be used. In such cases, the reporter can attribute the story to *informed* sources, *well-connected* sources or *official* sources or sources who do not wish to be named.

However, the reporter must know the source well and should trust that the information provided is correct.

(d) Exceptions: The reporter need not worry about attribution in stories in which he or she was a direct witness. For instance, the reporter can report a cricket match or a rally stating what happened. This is because these are statements of fact that have occurred in public domain and have been witnessed by scores of people. The same applies to the swearing in of a new government or historical facts.

### **NEWS SOURCES**

Journalists have traditionally used three sources of information. These are: (1) direct observation, (2) human or secondary sources and (3) documents or tertiary sources. The Internet has added a fourth source of information—online sources.

1. *Direct observation*: There is no better way to report a story than direct observation, especially for a good storyteller. The description of the event, be it a rally, a protest, a *bandh*, a lathi charge or a scene outside a hospital, can be both evocative and powerful. The reason why sports writing is so lively is because it is based on direct observation. The sports journalists report what they see.

Similarly, good journalists prefer to visit sites of action and see for themselves an event unfold than obtain information over the phone or from officials. For instance, a journalist can stand outside the emergency ward and observe how the victims of a blast are being handled. Are the stretchers in good condition? Are there enough doctors and nurses to handle the stream of patients? How are the relatives of patients behaving? What is the effect of the activity on the hospital patients who were already undergoing treatment? What happens when the VIPs start arriving?

Good Internet journalists do not depend upon memory alone. They take notes of what they see, especially of anything that strikes them as unusual. They use an audio recorder to capture sound bytes and a digital camera to take photographs, especially if they are not accompanied by a photographer. A few even shoot a video of the event.

2. Secondary sources: The bulk of Internet reports are based on secondary sources, that is information provided by authorities, eyewitnesses or

individuals directly associated with an incident or event. This information is obtained through the following modes:

(a) Interviews: A reporter gets to know about rioting in a city market and visits the police official, who is in charge of the area. The information that the reporter needs to obtain to file the first report are: the number of people who have died or injured in the rioting, what has the administration done to control rioting, what are the possible reasons of rioting, and where are the victims being treated.

The reporter can limit the report to information provided by authorities, or visit the site of the riots and obtain more information through direct observation and by interviewing residents of the area, who have witnessed the riots. The reporter can also speak to the policemen who were involved in bringing the riots under control. The reporter can call or visit higher officials, if he or she is not satisfied with the official version of the event. Much depends on how good the contacts of the reporter are and how far they are willing to provide information.

Interviews can also be conducted under sterile circumstances. In such cases, the reporter fixes a time with a well-known public figure, and visits his or her home or office at the appointed hour. The reporter then asks probing questions that may have been prepared beforehand or framed on the spur of the moment. A news report is then prepared based on answers to these questions. These reports can be exciting or boring based on the answers given by the subject.

- (b) Press conferences: These are staged news events. A minister, a government official, a corporate chief or any celebrity may call a press conference to present his or her point of view. These may be the achievements of the government or of a corporate house or steps the local administration may be planning to tone up law and order. But, the information flow is controlled by the individual, who has called the press conference.
- (c) Press notes: These are official statements issued by organisations and individuals. They provide information that the organisation wants to communicate to the common man through media outlets. The reporters find it a convenient, and at times a useful source of information. However, like press conferences, the press notes only carry information that an individual or an organisation wants to

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communicate. It is for the reporter to use that information on face value or dig up more information before writing a story.

3. *Documents*: These are reports of inquiry commissions, research material, documents, newspaper clippings, copies of judgements, hospital records, etc. They provide detailed information and are most sought after by investigative reporters. They spend days, sometimes weeks, going through these documents and culling newsworthy information.

4. *Online sources*: The Internet has added several new sources of information. They need to be monitored and mined regularly by Internet journalists. However, great care needs to be exercised when using information published on websites, blogs, discussion forums or chat rooms. Not all the information online is reliable. In fact, a great deal of it is partial, partisan, misleading or mischievous.

Some of the online sources that a journalist must monitor are the following:

- (a) Blogs: These are much more than personal diaries available online. Several bloggers publish personal experiences and can be good eyewitness accounts. For instance, several citizens of Mumbai recorded their experiences of the Mumbai train blasts in 2006 on their personal blogs. These blogs were first-person accounts and were picked up by newspapers and news agencies.
- (b) Discussion boards: Several portals have set up discussion boards that allow users to record their impressions and opinion of important events, happenings and issues. These opinions are a useful tool to gauge public mood on issues like reservation, terrorism, etc.
- (c) User comments: Several newspaper sites, such as those of the *Hindustan Times* (Fig. 2.2) and *The Indian Express* (Fig. 2.3) allow site users to publish their comments. These comments portray the public mood and can be mined by reporters to write reaction stories.
- (d) Government sites: The Internet hosts hundreds of government sites. Most of these sites carry useful year-wise data on government projects. A reporter can visit these sites regularly to obtain fresh data and get ideas for new stories. One such site that is sought by all Indian journalists is that of the Election Commission of India (Fig. 2.4). The website is literally an encyclopedia of election data. What makes it unique is that the data is authentic and is updated regularly.

More related stories+	
lote: By posting your comments here you agr	ree to the terms and conditions of www.hindustantimes.com
	DISQUS COMMEN
Type your comment here.	
News	
Name	Website (optional)
Name Email	Website (optional)

## Fig. 2.2 The Comment Box, which is published at the end of news reports by Hindustantimes.com, allows users to post their comments.

Source: www.hindustantimes.com

Obama appeases dragon, says Tibet a part of China	
<b>Beijing:</b> Describing Tibet as part of China, US President Barack Obama on Tuesday supported the early resumption of talks between Beijing and representatives of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama. "We did note that while we recognise that Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China, the URead more	
Comments E 1	2 Comments   Post comment
Might is Right By: Prof. Ritu Anand   Tuesday , 17 Nov '09 13:26:19 PM If we turn the pages of history, we will find that Tibet is not atall part of China. After Chi British Empire way back in 1950's, Tibet got defacto independence. And US President ablind eye to this strong evidence. In my opinion this is high time, a spitual nation has six decades. Sir,you have not made a wrong statement. Once again world has proved to	Reply   Forward na got independence from Barack Obama has turned been suffering for the past that " Might is Right"
Obama bows By: abhishek   Tuesday , 17 Nov '09 13:07:40 PM Why are the americans so petrified from China? I can understand Indian politicos chike Anywya hats off to the chinese diplomats	Reply   Forward
Never trust the US By: shyam kishore   Tuesday , 17 Nov '09 13:06:56 PM Once again its proved that the Americans are the most deciteful people in this world f Paper tiger Obams choose to lick its feet .US is afraid of China and and fearing a chine	Reply   Forward

Fig. 2.3 Comments posted by web users on *The Indian Express* website. *Source:* www.indianexpress.com



Fig. 2.4 Screenshot of the website of the Election Commission of India. It is the most credible and authentic source of all election-related data since Independence.

*Source:* http://eci.nic.in/eci\_main1/index.aspx

- (e) Wikipedia: The Wikipedia (Fig. 2.5) has emerged as an invaluable source of information online. Few could have imagined that this project, which was based on contributions from millions of Internet users, will become as valuable or as authentic. The Wikipedia not only encourages contributions, but its editors also flag articles where information is incomplete, partisan and unreliable.
- (f) Utility sites: Websites like HowStuffWorks.com (Fig. 2.6) or eHow.com provide information that can add great value and depth to science and technology reports. They explain complex subjects in an easy-to-understand format, and make knowledge gathering easy for any reporter. They are current and useful for any reporter, who wants to get a deeper understanding of a complex subject.
- (g) *Verticals*: There are several sites online that provide a wealth of information on their respective subjects. These sites, also referred to as verticals, are a goldmine for any journalist. They can be used by reporters to research stories that range from the current weather situation in Thailand (www.weather.com) to cyclones (http://www.tropicalstormrisk.com, Fig. 2.7) to cricket (www.cricinfo.com, Fig. 2.8).



Fig. 2.5 The home page of Wikipedia.org, one of the most informative websites on the Internet.

Source: http://www.wikipedia.org/



Fig. 2.6 Screenshot of the website HowStuffWorks.com. It is a great resource for any journalist who wants to obtain background material for any technology or science story.

Source: http://www.howstuffworks.com/internet/basics/internet-infrastructure.htm



Fig. 2.7 The home page of Tropical Storm Risk Tracker. The site provides real-time information about cyclones, hurricanes etc., and is a great resource for coastal newspapers to get updates on cyclones in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

Source: http://www.tropicalstormrisk.com/tracker/dynamic/main.html



Fig. 2.8 The home page of cricinfo.com. The site is the dream of any cricket lover. It not only tracks all live matches but has the best database on every cricket match ever played. Cricket writers can find any data related to cricket or cricketers on this website.

Source: http://www.espncricinfo.com/

(h) *Company sites*: These websites are an invaluable source of information for any business reporter. They provide detailed information about a company, its top officials, its product range, etc. A few of them also list the names, addresses and phone numbers of officials who can be contacted (Fig. 2.9).



Fig. 2.9 The home page of the website of Tata Motors. It is a useful resource base for any journalist covering the automobile sector.

Source: http://www.tatamotors.com/

(i) *Micro blogs*: Today, millions of people, including celebrities, tweet (post messages on the microblogging site Twitter). These tweets may be less than 140 characters in length, but they reflect the popular mood. Every Internet reporter must follow the tweets on Twitter (Fig. 2.10) or other microblogging sites. They make great news leads and can be a very useful source to string together reaction reports.



Fig. 2.10 The home page of Twitter.com, the website that publishes the tweets of more than 500 million web users.

Source: https://twitter.com/

## DATELINE, TIME STAMP, CREDIT LINE, TAGS

1. *Dateline and time stamp*: Few newspaper readers notice the dateline. Their eyes jump from the headline to the text, rarely noticing the city name and the date published at the start of every story—the two coordinates that are used to anchor the story. It is only the discerning ones who make the connection: the name of the city is the place where the story originated and the date is the date on which the story was written.

This date is different from the date published on the newspaper mast. It is yesterday's date. For instance, the stories in a morning newspaper, dated October 10, will be datelined October 9, because they were written on that date. The date on the mast is the date on which the newspaper is distributed, which is invariably the next morning. This is not so in the case of afternoon or evening newspapers. They are released on the same day as the story is written. That is why the newspaper date, and the date used in dateline are the same in these newspapers.

The dateline is an integral part of all Internet reports too, but the format is different. Instead of the date, news sites use the time stamp (Fig. 2.11), which gives the day, date, year and the time of publication. So, you know to the last second when the report was published.





Source: http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report\_solar-power-sops-set-to\_1313073

Several websites, like Expressbuzz.com (Fig. 2.12), use two time stamps. The first one states the time at which the report was first published online, and the second one gives the time when the report was updated. This is a great tool for returning users. They will read the story only if the time stamp indicates that the content of the report has been changed. Otherwise, they will move on.

The name of the city is generally used at the start of the Internet report. However, some websites, like the beta version of *The Hindu* (Fig. 2.13) merge the city name with the time stamp. It is important to identify the city correctly. Sometimes, a news event may occur in an obscure place. In this case, it is important to mention the name of the city or the state that is readily identifiable. For instance, a massacre may happen in a small village, like Ramauli, that no one has heard of. The site users will understand where Ramauli is if the district name is mentioned in the dateline.



It is a good way of telling web users that they need to read the report again because there is fresh content.

Source: http://expressbuzz.com/

#### RAMAULI (Sitapur)

Some news reports are filed from moving locations like a press conference addressed by the Prime Minister aboard his aircraft. In this case, the place name is given as

On board the PM's aircraft:

The time stamp will give the time when the report was published.



Fig. 2.13 The time stamp used by *The Hindu* includes the city name with the date. *Source:* http://www.thehindu.com/

2. *Credit Line*: The credit line gives the name of the reporter or the agency that has filed the report. Most websites publish the credit line in between the headline and the body. However, some websites publish credit line in the dateline or at the end of the report.

3. *Tags*: The tags, also known as topics, are keywords that connect all related stories. The tags are very useful navigation tools. On a single click, they

enable a user to access all stories related to the tag. The tags are generally decided by the content editor but smart reporters, who are aware of the utility value of these navigation aids, now enter the tags themselves. The tags or topics are either displayed on top of a news report as done by *The Times of India* (Fig. 2.14) or at the end of the news report (Fig. 2.15) as done by NDTV.com



## Fig. 2.14 The topics or tags displayed on top of the news report published on the timesofindia.com website.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/tennis/french-open-2012/indianchallenge/Mahesh-Bhupathi-and-Sania-Mirza-win-French-Open-mixeddoubles-crown/articleshow/13909650.cms

Comments	On Facebook
Posted by <b>hemant</b> on Feb 16, 2010	NDTV on Facebook
dont mean offence to anyone, but curious about this. Why sportsman parents	Become a Fan
should walk in the opening ceremony ? They can go as private spectators, I dont	
mind even if the stay and travel is paid by IOA. But walking in the flag parade ???	NDTV has 14,306 fans
Fosted by <b>Deepak</b> on Feb 10, 2010	
Our so-called intelligent journos spend most of their time talking about TRP issues	
like Shiv Sena. Will you come up with at least one good documentary about the state	Rajat Snoma Suboon Sudnendu Dinesh
of our athletes? Ask the sports minister, who is there because of favoring a political	
party while on constitunal position, what is the excuse this time.	
	Prajesh Priya Charismatic Vidya Ketan

## Fig. 2.15 The website of NDTV places the tags or keywords at the end of the news report.

*Source:* http://www.ndtv.com/

## **NEWS LEADS**

The best Internet leads, more simply known as news intros, are the direct leads. They are short and crisp and sum up the story in one or two brief sentences. A few Internet writers use soft or delayed leads for events that are unusual or strange. However, such leads are limited to feature or soft stories.

(a) *How to write a direct lead:* There are two ways to write a direct lead. The first is the traditional 5W's-and-an-H approach and the second is the subject-verb-object (SVO) approach.

1. *The 5W's-and-an-H approach*: In this approach, the reporter finds out what the 5W's—who, what, when, where, why and how (H)—of a story. He then compiles them to write the news lead.

#### Example 1

The reporter learns that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today paid a visit to All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi. The reason for the visit was to meet dengue patients and review the treatment being provided to them.

The reporter now organises this information in the 5W's-and-an-H format: Who: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh; What: Visits hospital; Why: Review treatment being given to dengue patients; Where: All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi; When: Today; How: Not known.

**Direct Lead in 5W's-and-an-H format** NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today visited the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi to review the treatment being given to dengue patients.

The lead is complete because it uses all the five W's. The H is not relevant to this story and has, therefore, been left out.

2. *Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) approach*: The same lead can be written using the SVO method:

S: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

V: Review treatment

O: Dengue patients

However, this approach does not provide answers to When and Where. These have to be filled up by the reporter. That is why the SVO approach is not always suitable for Internet leads.

**Direct lead in SVO format** NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reviewed the treatment being provided to dengue patients at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi today.

Another example of a direct lead written using the two methods.

#### Example 2

The reporter is told by the army authorities that a young Chennai boy, who was commissioned in the Indian Army in March this year and was posted to Jammu and Kashmir had died in an encounter with militants while taking part in anti-terror operations near the Line of Control (LOC) on Saturday.

The information can be categorised in the 5W's-and-an-H format thus:

Who: Chennai boy who was commissioned in March in the Indian Army

What: Killed

When: Saturday

Where: LOC in Jammu and Kashmir

Why: Performing his duty

How: In an encounter

**Direct lead in 5W's-and-an-H format** CHENNAI: A young Chennai boy, who was commissioned in the Indian Army this year, was killed in an encounter with militants near the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday.

- S: Chennai boy, who was commissioned in March in the Indian Army
- V: Killed in encounter
- O: Anti-terror operations

**Direct lead in SVO format** CHENNAI: A young Chennai boy, who was commissioned in the Indian Army this year, was killed in an encounter with militants near the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday.

(b) *How to write a delayed lead*: There are no rules for writing a delayed lead. They are written for feature stories and can appear later in the story. For instance, the tragic killing of the Chennai boy could have been written as a soft feature with a delayed lead.

CHENNAI: The usually bustling Chennai airport fell silent as the J&K Li jawans placed the coffin on a raised platform. The jawans saluted the coffin draped in the national flag, and stepped back.

There were tears in several eyes. Most army officers, who had assembled to receive the coffin, had bid goodbye to the young man only six months ago.

No one had thought that the 21-year-old Chennai boy, who had been commissioned in March, will return in October—in a coffin.

Lt A.N. Swamy had paid the highest price for his country. He had been killed while fighting militants on the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday last.

The writer has to be highly skilful when writing a delayed lead. It uses more words and needs careful crafting. That is why it is more suited for feature or soft stories.

## STRUCTURING THE STORY

The best way to write an Internet story is to use the inverted pyramid format. This writing style was developed by print reporters to write hard news stories. It is also suited for online reporting.

The inverted pyramid format follows a simple structure as outlined below:

- 1. The most important point appears in the first paragraph.
- 2. The subsequent paragraphs provide details about the main point.
- 3. Secondary facts, and less important points, come in the end.

This is what the Internet users want. They want to learn the main points of a news story quickly. So, the best way to write online is to use a direct lead with the facts arranged in the decreasing order of importance.

## Three Steps to Write the Internet Report

Let us assume that an Internet reporter learns of a blast in the Chandni Chowk market in New Delhi. This is how the reporter must go about writing the report.

#### Step 1

*Gather information*: The first step is to collect information. For this, the Internet reporter needs to visit the blast site, and take notes regarding the following points:

Where exactly was the blast triggered?

What is the impact of the blast on the buildings?

Are there any signs of people leaving their belongings and fleeing?

What does the reporter see in the area cordoned off by the police?

The reporter next needs to speak to shopkeepers and other eyewitnesses present on the site to get first-person accounts:

When did the blast occur?

What were they doing then?

What was their immediate reaction?

When did the police arrive?

Did they notice anything suspicious?

The reporter also needs to speak to the police officials to ascertain statistics and details related to the event:

How many people were killed in the blast?

How many people were injured?

Where have the injured been taken?

What kind of explosive was used in the blast?

Who could have planted the bomb?

Has anyone claimed responsibility for the blast?

What are the immediate steps that the police plan to take to restore normalcy?

#### Step 2

Write the lead: This is a hard news report, and needs a direct lead.

#### Lead

New Delhi: Four people were killed and 15 injured in a bomb blast in the busy Chandni Chowk area of New Delhi this afternoon.

#### Step 3

*Structure the body*: The body should be based on information that the reporter has gathered from the site. It should include the observations of the reporter, eyewitness accounts and official comments.

The online reader needs to be informed as to where the blast took place and when. The damage caused by the blast and its impact is equally important. The sequence that needs to be followed is as follows:

- (a) Pinpoint the exact place of the blast;
- (b) Explain how it was triggered;
- (c) Use direct observation to describe the impact of the blast;
- (d) Use eyewitness accounts to narrate the scene at the blast site; and
- (e) Use accounts given by the policemen and other officials to describe what was done, and is being done at the blast site.

#### Para 2:

The bomb went off at the entry of Parathe Wali Gali around 11 a.m. It had been kept in a scooter that was parked next to a sweetmeats shop.

### Para 3:

Splinters from the blast tore through passersby, who happened to be within a four to five feet radius of the scooter killing three men and a woman. Another 15 persons were injured, three of them seriously.

### Para 4:

The blast created panic in the crowded area. Azim Ali, a 15-year-old car mechanic, said, "There was shock and horror. I saw a man with blood streaming down his face screaming in terror. Another woman was sitting on the ground clutching her knee."

### Para 5:

Sayyad Khan, a butcher by profession, is still to get over the shock of a torn limb that landed next to his feet. "Allah, I have never seen anything like this in my life," he wailed.

#### Para 6:

The blast scene was littered by shattered glass, scooter parts, blood and mutilated flesh. The first cops, who arrived on the scene, had a tough time controlling the hysterical mob.

#### Para 7:

It was only the arrival of the ambulances that brought a hushed sanity. People helped the injured get into the ambulances. The bodies were covered with a white sheet supplied by a shop owner and taken to the morgue.

Para 8:

The entire area was cordoned off, and the entry to the Parathe Wali Gali sealed. Police Commissioner R.P. Singh informed the press reporters gathered at the site that RDX had been used in the bomb.

#### Para 9:

Mr Singh said the injured had been taken to the Ram Manohar Lohia hospital. The police is now in the process of finding out who could be behind the blast.

Para 10:

This is the second blast in the Chandni Chowk area in the last six months. The April blast, which had occurred about 300 m. away from today's blast site, had taken two lives.

*Para 11:* 

The police are yet to trace the people responsible for the April blasts.

## **NEWS FEATURE**

The news feature should be used sparingly in online reports. This is because a feature needs more words and takes a longer time to get to the main point of the story. At the same time, good news features can be very evocative and lead to greater reader involvement. Ideally, a news feature should be attempted for a news report that has a human face.

The five points that should be kept in mind while writing an Internet news feature are:

(1) *Lead*: The lead should be a delayed lead. Ideally, it should bring out the human point that can grip the imagination of the online reader.

- (2) *Theme*: The theme or the news point of the story should be introduced by the third or the fourth paragraph.
- (3) *Body*: The body has no structure as such. It can be built by using quotes and background material available on the theme.
- (4) *Style*: The news feature should be written in a relaxed, informal style.
- (5) *Conclusion*: The feature should not end abruptly as the straight news reports do. It should be rounded up with a quote, an anecdote, a sentence that sums up the theme in a few words.

## **Useful Sites**

- http://mediahelpingmedia.org
   The site provides free training resources for those involved in the
   media in transition states, post-conflict countries and areas where
   the media is still developing.
- 2. http://www.poynter.org/

A website set up by Poynter Foundation. It carries excellent articles on media.

- http://www.ijnet.org/ijnet/list/training\_materials
   IJNet provides information on the latest media innovations, online journalism resources, training opportunities. It also gives expert advice
- 4. http://www.journalismnet.com/search/tutorials.htm The write ups provide great insight into journalism and media related issues.
- http://www.useit.com/alertbox/ The site hosts columns written by Dr Jakob Nielsen. The columns provide deep insight into web and the way it is used.

## Assignments

- 1. List the web address of three important Indian sites that you will visit if your beat was:
  - (a) Social issues
  - (b) Economic issues
  - (c) Health
  - (d) Environment
  - (e) Defence

- 2. List the web address of three Indian corporate sites that you found useful. Give their strong and weak points.
- 3. Write a note on the characteristics of a good Internet report.
- 4. List the points that you must keep in mind to ensure accuracy.
- 5. What are the basic rules regarding attribution? Give two examples of Internet reports where the attribution was not proper.
- 5. Write a short note on the traditional sources of obtaining information.
- 6. Write a short note on the online sources of information.
- Imagine that you are a reporter assigned to cover rioting in your city. Your chief reporter gives you the following facts: *There are reports of violence in Old City area. Several vehicles have been burnt. Eve teasing is said to be a cause of flare up.* Based on this, draw up the questions that you need to ask to get full information to write the story.
- 9. Imagine that you are a reporter assigned to cover a shopping mall fire in your city. Your chief reporter provides you with the following facts:

There is a report of a major fire in the Store India shopping mall. The cause of fire is uncertain but there is considerable loss of property. Based on the facts provided to you, draw up the questions that you need to ask to get full information to write the story.

- 10. What is a dateline and what purpose does it serve in a news story?
- 11. What is a direct news lead? Explain the two ways used to write a direct news lead.
- 12. What is a delayed news lead and when is it used?
- 13. Find five examples of direct news lead on the net. Analyse each lead to find out which of the 5W's-and-an-H are used in the lead.
- 14. Find three examples of indirect or delayed lead online.
- 15. What is an inverted pyramid format? Why is it most suitable to write an Internet story?



# Editing for the Internet

The first prerequisite for Internet editing is economy. A story must be reported in as few words as possible. The sentences should be short, and easy to read and understand. The paragraphs too must be short. They should comprise two or three sentences. These are some of the rules that print editors follow. They are also suitable for editing Internet reports.

*Rule 1*: Use short sentences. Online editors must learn to insert full points after approximately 20 words. The shorter the sentence, the higher is the readability.

**Remember**: The attention span of the online reader is limited. Long sentences with multiple clauses can turn off these readers.

*Rule 2*: Avoid modifiers. Adjectives and adverbs are as unwanted in online reports as in print reports. However, it is unfortunate that this rule is rarely followed. Both newspapers and Indian media sites are full of expressions such as *totally destroyed*, *absolutely conclusive*, *seriously considering* or *end result*. Online editors must guard against such usage.

**Remember**: Every unnecessary adjective or adverb that is deleted is one word less in the sentence.

**Note**: There are some adjectives and adverbs that work like a safety net, especially when the news is based on partial information. These are: *possibly, perhaps, probably, reportedly, on the whole, almost, approximately,* 

*presumably, allegedly.* They should be used to provide a cushion, especially in speculative or developing stories.

*Rule 3*: Substitute wordy phrases with short words. Wordy phrases should be changed to simple words. For example, the leaders *held a meeting* can easily be substituted with *met*; and the Chief Minister *submitted his resignation* can be changed to the Chief Minister *resigned*.

**Remember**: A sentence becomes shorter and more readable when wordy phrases are suitably edited.

*Rule 4*: Remove relative clauses. Often clarity is lost if relative clauses are used. They should be removed or delinked, even if it means breaking a sentence into two. Here is an example of how a relative clause can be edited.

*The ticketing clerk, Mr Rajaresh Reddy, who belongs to the same village, from where the Railway Minister hails, dislikes using computers.* 

**Corrected sentence**: The ticketing clerk, Mr Rajaresh Reddy, dislikes using computers. He belongs to the same village from where the Railway Minister hails.

**Remember**: Unnecessary, secondary detail clutters a sentence; it must be removed and used separately.

*Rule 5*: Avoid starting a sentence with a subsidiary clause. A subsidiary clause delays the news point. It wastes words, occupies valuable space and reduces clarity. That is why it should not be used in news stories. It can certainly be used in interpretive stories, where the writer wants to bring out the consequences of an action.

Example: In a bid to curb arbitrary digging of roads in Bangalore city by various public utility services, a committee, under the chairmanship of Bangalore City Corporation Commissioner, has been constituted for effective coordination, Bangalore City Development Minister Anant Nag said.

**Corrected sentence**: A committee headed by Bangalore City Corporation Commissioner has been set up to monitor digging of roads by government agencies, Bangalore City Development Minister Anant Nag announced.

**Remember**: A news sentence must start with news.

Rule 6: Always use "one sentence, one idea" format. A sentence should convey only one point. This enhances clarity and also achieves the

most important objective of Internet editing—keeping sentences short. Sentences with multiple news points lack clarity.

Example: In a case of high-handedness, the Mysore police, in their bid to favour a local businessman, allegedly detained five Tamil Nadu policemen, who came to the city on Sunday last to arrest the businessman in a cheating case.

**Corrected sentence**: *Five Tamil Nadu policemen, who had come to Mysore to arrest a businessman, were placed behind bars.* 

**Remember**: The best way to edit a sentence to be used online is to limit it to a single news idea.

*Rule 7*: Use active voice. Passive voice has no place in good, racy copy. Use active verbs; they make the sentences crisp and less wordy. They also lend immediacy, a prime requisite for any Internet copy.

Example: The Lok Sabha proceedings were marked by confusion on Monday. (Passive)

**Corrected sentence**: Confusion marked Lok Sabha proceedings on Monday. (Active)

*Rule 8*: Delete clichés. They have become stale with repeated use. Sentences that talk of *the tip of the iceberg* or of *ideas vanishing in thin air* are stale and boring for the reader. We cannot continue to *hammer the last nail in the coffin* or allow *the rumour to spread like wildfire* forever.

Remember: Clichés make a sentence stale. Avoid them.

*Rule 9*: Often, a sentence loses rhythm because simple things like names and designations are not put in the right order.

*The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, met Ms Benazir Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, in New Delhi today.* 

The writer should have used the name either before the designation or after the designation instead of adopting both the styles.

Remember: Use connected phrases in the same order.

*Rule 10*: The words that a reader best relates to are simple, short and familiar. Clarity will improve if an online editor uses the word '*improve*' instead of '*ameliorate*'; *pay* or *salary* instead of *remuneration*; and *poor* instead of *underprivileged*.
**Remember:** Whenever possible, replace an unfamiliar and less used word with a small and familiar word.

*Rule 11*: Avoid abstract nouns. They convey generalities and consume more words. An online editor must learn to use specific words. They add clarity to the copy and make it readable.

There is no point in starting a report by saying that "The Tamil Nadu government plans better *facilities* for tourists." The story will gain clarity if the online editor turns the abstract noun *facilities* into a concrete noun and says, "The Tamil Nadu government plans to set up another *airport* in Chennai and three *hotels* in Madurai and Coimbatore."

Remember: Specific words add clarity to a sentence.

# FACTS AND OBJECTIVITY

An Internet editor must learn to detect and correct factual errors. Nothing can be more embarrassing for a website than to let mistakes slip through. The online users have access to scores of information sources on the Internet. They are not going to be happy if they find the names spelt wrongly or well-known dates and data furnished inaccurately. All media sites must religiously follow the newspaper dictum "when in doubt cut it out".

Accuracy alone is not enough; objectivity is also important. The online editor must remove words that convey opinion, bias, innuendo or subtle hints. All online editors must remember that the attention span of online readers is extremely limited. They want to read news and that too quickly. They are not interested in a writer's opinion or comment.

There is no place for statements of advocacy or valuation. Even more damaging are labels applied casually. Officials accused of misdemeanour are often referred to as controversial or tainted. This is most unfair to individuals, who may be victims of a trap or a set up. All editors must remember that these labels stick for lifetime. In the case of the Internet, the damage is even more severe. Such damaging insinuations can be read across the world.

Objectivity also suffers when a website encourages unsourced attribution. Stories based on "it was learnt" or "it was reported" statements often throw up a question mark. It is important that such stories are double checked for authenticity and credibility. Online news sites should not take advantage of technology that allows them to delete a story from a server to avoid litigation. The effort should be to introduce accountability in the first place.

## **WORKING WITH QUOTES**

The best way of building credibility is to use quotes. It shows the trouble taken by the reporters in obtaining information. It also shows how far the website is willing to go to provide authentic and credible news. Quotes also serve another useful purpose: they impart a distinct flavour to a news report.

However, for the quotes to be effective, an online editor must learn to edit them. Any quote, that is more than two sentences long must be trimmed. No quote should be allowed to run across two or more paragraphs, even when it is taken from a landmark judgment or a party manifesto. It must be paraphrased to enhance meaning.

Also, words within a quote should not be changed. The corrections that an online editor should make should be limited to the tenses or to verbs that do not agree in number with the subject. This too should be avoided if the speaker has developed his own distinctive style of speaking. In the case of long quotes, intervening words or sentences can be eliminated and the change indicated by an ellipsis.

However, the online editor must also ensure that the meaning is not distorted when part of the quote is deleted. Partial or fragmentary quotes should be handled with even more care. They must be used only if they are unusual.

### THE DILEMMA OF ONLINE NEWS DESKS

The Indian newspaper sites access news from two main sources: wire copy and stories filed by the reporting team of the newspaper. Wire copy, which comprises the stories creded by news agencies, flows into media servers through the day. In contrast, staff copy generated by the reporters of a newspaper becomes available only after the newspaper has been put to bed. This is because Indian newspapers are yet to move into the online mode. A story has to be very big to be reported live by the newspaper reporters.

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This causes duplication of work on online desks. Online editors use wire or agency copy to run stories as they break. Later, at night, they delete these stories and host copies generated by the organisation's staffers. Great care is taken not to burn staff copy by hosting it early. The fear is that rival newspapers may scoop their exclusive stories if they are placed online before the newspaper hits the stands.

In India, the two premier news agencies are the Press Trust of India and the United News of India, popularly known by their acronyms PTI and UNI, respectively. Besides this, Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) and Asian News International (ANI) have emerged as important players in the online news space. These agencies have tie-ups with foreign news services and supply international news stories filed by them. Thus, PTI credes news filed by Associated Press (AP), which is an American news agency, and Agence France Press (AFP), which is a French news agency. UNI supplies news filed by Thomson Reuters, a Canadian news agency, while IANS distributes news supplied by Xinhua, the Chinese News Agency.

Both UNI and PTI have an extensive network of reporters spread across the country. They have built-in filters to ensure that a news copy is quickly screened, forwarded to regional bureaus, which are generally located in state capitals, and then moved to Delhi for onward distribution to newspapers. The screening is done both at the state bureaus as well as at the national office in Delhi by an army of subeditors and senior newsmen working round the clock.

Once the copy is cleared for publishing, it is transmitted on high speed, dedicated networks to the media offices. The speed of transmission is at an awesome rate of almost a million characters a minute. The PTI, like its international counterparts, has added satellite transmission also. It now beams stories and photographs directly into media offices. The transmission is instant, making it possible for media houses to obtain news reports, photographs and graphics almost instantaneously as they are filed by the press agency.

On landing in a media office, the stories and photographs are transferred into file servers, which are electronic storehouses and function like command terminals that route stories. The file servers are programmed to sort the copy electronically using the copy slugs as markers. The slugs are the identity tags of news reports; they indicate whether the copy deals with national or international news, or business or sports subjects. The file server reads the slug marked on top of the story and moves it to the respective basket. If the copy slug says FN, the story is moved into the foreign basket and if the slug says SPD, the story is routed into the Sports basket. Great care is taken to programme the file server correctly; otherwise copies will end up in the wrong baskets.

The electronic department of a media company routinely clears file servers every 48 or 72 hours to create space to store the latest stories. This entails deleting all stories creded 48 or 72 hours ago. If the stories are not deleted periodically, the possibility of the file server getting clogged is very high.

In small newspapers, with a small workforce, wire copy may constitute as much as 90 per cent of news used every day. But, in large newspapers like *The Times of India, The Hindu*, and the *Hindustan Times*, the percentage of wire copy used is much less. This is not surprising. Large newspapers lay great stress on obtaining stories directly and have scores of reporters working at the publishing centre, in state capitals and in important towns of the country; most have staffers deputed in international capitals too.

The soft copy on which editing is done is called a file. It is given an identity tag called file name. The online editor entrusted with the task of news management scans all copies flowing into news baskets. A news story that needs to be hosted immediately is copied as a word file and given to another online editor for editing and then hosting on the website.

The news management becomes difficult in the evening when the copy filed by newspaper's own reporters starts landing. The online staff has to ensure that there is no duplication of news reports on the site, with both agency and staff copies running side by side. The online staff also needs to ensure that the staff copy is not overly delayed in being hosted on the site. As far as possible, the two operations—that is availability of story on the site and in the newspaper—must be simultaneous.

It will take considerable time before Indian newspapers start placing staff copy on the site as and when it is filed. American newspapers have started the practice, but they are using their own online staff to do the work. Indian portals like Rediff.com, which also provide news, do not have to worry. Since they do not have offline newspapers in India, they place the stories generated by their staffers immediately on the site. This is what the Indian newspapers will also have to do at some point of time or the other.

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This dilemma does not arise for a television website. Unlike newspapers, the 24-hour news channels telecast news every hour. They can, therefore, run a breaking story on the site and telecast it simultaneously. That is why most television sites carry original copy generated by their staffers.

The same applies to the sites run by wire services. News stories and photographs transmitted to subscribers are hosted simultaneously on the site. The wire services sites also offer some more advantages. The stories are organised section-wise. They can also be searched using keywords. In contrast, an online editor has to mechanically open each story that is creded by wire services to learn the contents. Very often, the wire service runs a news story in two or three parts, or even more. The online editor, then, has the arduous task of locating all these news items and combining them as a single news report.

In fact, sites run by wire services are becoming important entry points for users. They are increasingly becoming aware that the first site to host a breaking news story is a wire service site. They are also learning that the same story can then be found on scores of sites across the world. It, therefore, makes sense to visit the primary source of news like www.reuters.com and www.ptinews.com (the website of PTI) than a secondary source that runs the same story a little later.

### **NEWS SELECTION**

For long, the Indian media has been obsessed with politics. Political stories have dominated the front pages and also filled up the inside pages. The print and television editors have believed, and continue to believe, that this is what their readers want. This belief, irrespective of whether it is based on fact or not, certainly has become the cornerstone of the news policy adopted by all Indian media houses.

The absence of scientific surveys that can gauge reader interest has only reinforced this belief. The offline editors have rarely listened to reader complaints that their world extends beyond politics also. Internet is the first communication medium that may change news priorities. The reason for this is the ability of the medium to track user preferences.

All media sites use the site server analysis tool, which goes through each and every entry in the log files and collates it into easily understandable metrics like the number of visitors who accessed the site, the number of pages that were downloaded, the time spent by visitors on different pages or the browser used to open the site. This is not all. The web metrics include the Internet address of the sites from where the visitors arrived, the countries from where the visitors logged onto the site as well as the operating system they used.

It is almost like entering the minds of the readers and finding out what they want to read. That is why good online editors scan the site server analysis with the same passion with which a neurosurgeon reads a CT scan of someone dear to him. Some of the findings that the site editors have made by scanning the site logs are truly amazing.

It is not the political story that is the hottest story online, but it is the breaking story. Internet users want to read the news first. Major news breaks like the Gujarat earthquake, arrest of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M. Karunanidhi in 2001, Godhra carnage, and the War on Iraq are invariably the most read stories. These are followed by crime and cinema stories.

There is also a big appetite for sports stories and photographs of celebrities, especially film stars, and major events. Political statements and political analysis are the least read stories. Environment or developmentrelated stories too are a big no-no. However, business and infotech stories do reasonably well, especially when they focus on new developments.

Samachar.com publishes the list of the Top 25 stories that are downloaded on its site every day (Fig. 3.1). This list is a useful indicator of what web users are reading or want to read. Another tool that websites now use to understand the reading preferences of their visitors is the most e-mailed and most downloaded tool (Fig. 3.2).

It is also educative to understand how sites measure traffic. Three different methods are used by sites to monitor and measure traffic:

- Sites ask their programmers to write a code to analyse the log files that faithfully record each and every activity that occurs on the web server;
- Media houses buy a site server analysis tool from Microsoft or Webtrends or half a dozen other software companies to do the analysis of their website;
- Links are provided to a third party that owns the site server analysis tool to process the log files.

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Most Read Headlines	Most Read >> SPORTS		
TODAY   WEEK   MONTH	TODAY   WEEK   MONTH		
Senior citizen held for rape in Mumbai	Laxmans anniversary gift for his wife		
<u>DNA India</u>	<u>The Hindu</u>		
<ul> <li>Hyderabad airport wins global laurel <u>Hindustan Times</u></li> </ul>	Caxmans love affair at Eden continues		
<ul> <li>Laxmans anniversary gift for his wife</li></ul>	Last-ball heroics take Afghanistan home		
<u>The Hindu</u>	<u>Cricinfo</u>		
Large inflows may help rupee rise Rangarajan Money Control	Dhoni worlds most destructive batsman Laxman     NDTV		
Unprofessional jawans were sitting ducks for Naxals	Rain threatens to spoil Indias chances at Eden		
<u>Times Of India</u>	<u>NDTV</u>		
IAF MiG-27 fighter jet crashes in Bengal pilot killed	Most Read >> BUSINESS		
<u>Hindustan Times</u>	TODAY   WEEK   MONTH		
Laxmans love affair at Eden continues	Hyderabad airport wins global laurel		
The Hindu	Hindustan Times		
Its raining sops grants for Muslims in UP	C Large inflows may help rupee rise Rangarajan		
<u>Times Of India</u>	Money Control		
<ul> <li>Unwell Ash visits grandma-in-law!</li> <li><u>Times Of India</u></li> </ul>	Jet Airways to start daily flights from Mumbai to Johannesburg Minduct as Times		
Vew jihadist group claims responsibility for Pune attack	Jaypee speeds up yamuna expressway		
<u>The Hindu</u>	Hindustan Times		
<ul> <li>Farah misses Shah Rukh</li></ul>	Dont beg Maran tells textile firms		
Times Of India	<u>Hindustan Times</u>		
Jet Airways to start daily flights from Mumbai to Job appedunce	Most Viewed » VIDEOS		

# Fig. 3.1 Screenshot of the Samachar.com page that lists the 25 stories that were downloaded the highest number of times during the course of a day.

Source: http://www.samachar.com/mostread.php



Fig. 3.2 The tab-based box used by the timesofindia.com to display the stories that were most read, most e-mailed, most shared and most commented upon.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/

The methods may be different, but the end result is the same. It is a brilliant insight into the minds of the readers. Online editors can only ignore this information at their own peril.

# **Useful Sites**

1. http://www.poynter.org

A site run by Poynter Institute, USA, that looks at different aspects of offline and online issues.

- http://www.ojr.org
   A Web-based journal. Provides useful insights into the evolving craft of Internet.
- 3. http://www.naa.com

The website of Newspaper Association of America (NAA).

- 4. http://www.samachar.com/mostread.php A useful indicator of what Internet users are reading. The site gives a list of the 25 top stories clicked by users. The list is updated every hour making it current and topical.
- 5. *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White The book lays down the fundamentals of writing in elegant 21 clear-cut rules.

# Assignments

- 1. List the 11 golden rules of Internet editing.
- 2. Find three sentences in news stories hosted on the net that you think are too long, and need editing. Copy and edit those sentences to improve clarity.
- 3. List the five methods by which you can reduce the number of words in a sentence.
- 4. Find five sentences in online reports that have used modifiers unnecessarily. Edit these sentences to make them sharper.
- 5. Find five sentences in online reports that start with a subsidiary clause. Rewrite these sentences to make them shorter without losing the news point.
- 6. Find five sentences on the net that have used multiple ideas. Edit these sentences to improve clarity.
- 7. List the main functions of a quote.
- 8. When should quotes be edited? When should they be paraphrased?
- 9. Explain the different tools available to an Internet editor to decide which stories are being read.



# HEADLINE WRITING

Internet headlines are like signposts. They can motivate a reader to proceed to a story or turn him off. This is in contrast to a newspaper headline, where a reader can be expected to read a story even when the headline is dull or boring, because the text of the story is right beneath the headline; the reader has to make no special effort to reach it.

# **CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNET HEADLINES**

The following are the main characteristics of Internet headlines:

1. *Virtual gateway*: The number of news headlines displayed on the home page of a news website varies between 30 and 50. These are the headlines of the best news reports of the moment. They have been chosen carefully by the editors of the website, who want to showcase their best products for the visitors.

The visitors, having arrived on the home page, can move forward only when they click on a headline. There is no other way for them to reach the news reports that are stored in the database of the website. This is why Internet headlines are called virtual gateways (Fig. 4.1).

It is only when the visitors click on the headlines that the story pages get displayed.





Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/cityarticlelist/-2128932452.cms

2. *Point size*: The computer screen, on which content is displayed, is not even half the size of a standard broadsheet page. It is, therefore, important to write headlines in a point size that is in proportion to the screen size. The most common practice is to use a point size that is two or three points larger than the point size used for body text. This helps the reader to separate body text from headlines, and the page looks visually pleasing. The small point size brings one more advantage.

It allows more characters to be squeezed into the same space, enabling editors to use more words in the headline (Fig. 4.2).

3. *Concise and informative*: These are two contradictory requirements. How can a headline be informative if it has to be concise? But, that is how Internet headlines have to be structured.

The headlines have to be short and concise, because web users are found to spend little time on online news and the space available to write headlines is limited. At the same time, Internet headlines have to be informative. Otherwise, they cannot capture the interest of the readers.

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This point comes out clearly when you examine the following two Internet headlines:

Kareena, Saif romance Down Under Examine RIL bid evaluation

The Kareena, Saif headline written by a *Times of India* web editor is a good example of a concise as well as an informative headline. The headline uses only five words, but it communicates so much. The possibility of the headline being clicked is very high, because it arouses the curiosity of web users to find out more about the two Bollywood stars.

In contrast, the headline about RIL is concise, but not informative enough to grab the attention of web users. It does not tell the web user as to who has ordered the examination of RIL bid and in what context. The headline is incomplete.

4. *Capture the mood of the story*: The Internet headlines must bring out the drama in a story. They should communicate the mood of a story to generate user interest.

A good example of such a headline is the one that was written for the story that captured the grief of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan when he discovered that the *sarod* he had been playing for 25 years had been broken because of the carelessness of an airline handler. The incident happened on a flight from Mumbai to Delhi, and left the star musician heartbroken (Fig. 4.3).

Air India breaks sarod, Ustad Amjad Ali's heart



Fig. 4.3 The headline on Amjad Ali Khan in the timesofindia.com has a lot of emotion in it and is guaranteed to capture the attention of web users.

*Source:* http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-01-15/india/ 28142594\_ 1\_sarod-instrument-ustad-amjad-ali-khan

5. *Context as keywords*: The Internet headline must grab the attention of search engines if it is to attract new users. For this, they need to include keywords or tags that will enable search engines to index the headlines.

### Youth stabbed in fight over kite

#### Drunk Adnan Sami creates a ruckus!

The headline about youth getting stabbed in a fight over a kite is unlikely to feature in any Internet search. It has no keyword that can be indexed, not even the name of the city where the incident occurred.

In contrast, the Adnan Sami story run on *The Times of India* website would figure regularly in searches for Adnan Sami (Fig. 4.4).



Fig. 4.4 Thetimesofindia.com headline writer has used the name Adnan Sami in the headline to improve indexing by search engines.

*Source:* http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-01-16/news-interviews/28140379\_1\_chance-pe-dance-ruckus-cops

The indexing would have been better if the headline writer had also explained where the ruckus occurred. In this case, the trouble happened during the screening of the film *Chance Pe Dance*. The headline may have taken more space, but it would have got context and an extra keyword if the headline writer included the film name in the headline.

Adnan Sami creates a ruckus at Chance Pe Dance screening

The story would have featured in searches for two different keywords: Adnan Sami and *Chance Pe Dance*.

6. *Contrast and visual appeal*: The Internet headlines make a web page more readable by breaking chunks of text, and providing contrast. They are mostly set in a typeface that is slightly bigger and bolder than the body text. Websites, now, also experiment with colour to make the page look more dramatic.

7. *Two masters*: The Internet headline is written for two masters. The first master is the "human being" or the web user. The headline must arouse the interest of the reader. Otherwise, the web user will proceed to another headline. The second master is the search engine. Eight out of ten new visitors on a site come from the search engine. Headlines, therefore, need to use popular keywords or tags if they are to catch this traffic.

# DIFFERENCES WITH PRINT HEADLINES

1. *Placement vis-a-vis body text*: A newspaper headline is placed directly over the news report, enabling the reader to go through the story without any special effort. There are times when the headline may make no impression upon the reader's mind; still the reader will go through the story.

This is not so in the case of Internet headlines. Web editors display scores of headlines on the home page hoping that at least some of them shall catch the attention of web users. However, the web users click only on those headlines that excite them or arouse their curiosity. The headline, therefore, becomes the key element in any web strategy.

2. Use of typeface to establish relative importance: A newspaper reader uses the typographical attributes of a headline to judge the relative importance of a news story. These attributes are point size, width and weight of the print headline. Every newspaper reader knows that the larger the point size used to write a headline, the more important is the news. The reader also knows that a headline spread across multiple columns signifies that the news story is relatively more important than a headline run in small points across a single column.

In contrast, the majority of Internet headlines are not used to establish the news value of a story. They are formatted in single-point size, and run across pre-defined column widths. They are mostly displayed in chronological order (Fig. 4.5), with the last headline published right on top of the page. The placement is automatic and there is no manual intervention in most sections.

Only the top two or three stories of the day carry headlines, whose point size is larger than the rest of the headlines. These stories are invariably positioned on top of the page and are either the most important stories of the day or the latest stories (Fig. 4.6). These stories are also manually selected and published.

3. *Size of headlines*: The print headlines are set in large display type. This limits the number of words available to an editor, especially when the headline is run across multiple columns and set in more than 30 points.

In contrast, the Internet headlines are written in a small point size. This allows the online editor to use more words to convey the important points in a story.

FIR against AP Singh for embezzlement TNN 16 Jan 2010, 04:30	= E
During the period of crime (2003-2006), Singh, a 1967-batch IAS officer, was posted as the agriculture production commissioner (APC) with the UP government.	= F 3 = F
Return gift: Additional 5% DA on CM's birthday eve TNN 15 Jan 2010, 04:44	= (
Chief minister Mayawati on the eve of her birthday conceded long pending demand of state employees by announcing an additional instalment of 5% dearness allowance to them with retrospective effect from July 1, 2009.	S
Man gets death for killing daughters, father-in-law Ravi Singh Sisodiya 15 Jan 2010, 04:29	An
A sessions court awarded death sentence to a man who killed three persons including his two daughters for a piece of land.	k
Ominous onset of new year for big cat Manjari Mishra 15 Jan 2010, 04:26	200 yea
Even as investigations into the cause of death are still under way and officials predictably rule out foul play in at least two cases, experts feel that warning sounded off by the minister for forest and environment Jairam Ramesh could be coming true sooner than expected.	M
LU springs to life as convocation draws near TNN 15 Jan 2010, 04:37	dis bu
No wonder, excitement has rubbed on on all and sundry at the campus. Preparations are in full swing for a series of cultural and academic activities which will begin on January 28 and conclude with the convocation day on	Wł give adr
February 3.	= ( F

# Fig. 4.5 The stories published in the timesofindia.com website are in chronological order with the last story on top.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/



# Fig. 4.6 The headlines used to write the headlines of the top three stories on the home page of expressbuzz.com are larger than the other breaking news headlines.

Source: http://expressbuzz.com/

4. *Use of props*: The print headlines at times use a shoulder headline or a flag to prop up the main headline. The shoulder or flag is a small headline that is placed on top of the main headline. This gives the print editor a few more words to bring out the main points in a headline.

Internet headlines, by and large, do not use props. They save the online editor the trouble of deciding which part should be hyperlinked—the shoulder or the main headline.

## HOW TO WRITE AN INTERNET HEADLINE

In six to ten words or maybe even less. That is the number of words that a craftsman uses to catch the attention of web users. Much depends on the words the headline writer selects, and the action, mood or drama that the headline writer decides to convey. It is not an easy task and needs great skill. An Internet headline must be written (and rewritten as many times) till it captures the gist of a news story accurately and precisely.

So, how does one find the right words to create a powerful Internet headline? More so, how does one ensure that the headline will grab eyeballs?

There are two ways of writing a headline. One is by instinct. A headline writer reads a report and forms a headline. He then works and reworks on the headline till it best reflects the theme of the story. This approach is most suited for senior Internet editors and experienced headline writers.

The beginners must use a four-step approach to craft a headline. These four steps are the following:

- 1. Locate the news point
- 2. Identify keywords
- 3. Write the first headline
- 4. Polish the headline

#### Step 1: Locate the news point

The first step is to locate the news point. In nine out of ten Internet stories, the news point is stated upfront—right in the first paragraph of the story. The less important points follow in decreasing order of importance. This style of news writing, popularly known as the inverted pyramid format, makes the work of a headline writer easier.

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January 2010 did not start on a good note for Indian Railways. Two train accidents occurred, one after the other, leading to the death of 10 passengers and injuring 35. The following news report was filed by ANI, a wire service:

Kanpur, Jan 2 (ANI): Two train accidents took place in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday morning due to intense foggy conditions, leaving ten dead and over 50 others injured.

*The first accident took place at Etawah near Kanpur, where the Litchvi Express rammed into the Magadh Express.* 

*The collision killed the driver of the Litchvi Express, and left around 25 others injured in the mishap.* 

Both trains were en route to Delhi from Patna.

The second accident took place in Panki, where the Prayagraj Express and the Gorakhdham Express collided with each other.

One does not have to be a news veteran to identify the news point in this report. The news point, clearly, is that 10 persons have died and another 50 injured in two train accidents.

#### Step 2: Identify keywords

Having identified the news point, the next step is to identify the keywords that best express the news point. A good strategy is to think like the reporter, who wrote the story. The reporter must have broken down the information into the 5W's-and-an-H before writing the lead. The headline writer needs to do the same.

The 5W's-and-an-H in this report are:

Who: Train passengers, including a train driver

What: 10 killed, 50 injured

How: Two train accidents

Where: Etawah and Panki in Uttar Pradesh

When: On January 2

Why: Because of fog

These 5W's-and-an-H that the reporter used to craft the lead constitute the keywords, around which the headline writer needs to weave the headline. They sum up the action and can be listed as:

Train passengers, including a train driver 10 killed, 50 injured Two train accidents; Etawah and Panki in Uttar Pradesh On January 2 Because of fog

#### Step 3: Write the first headline

The headline writer now needs to decide which W is the most important, because this W or the keyword forms the subject of the headline. In this case, the keyword that is most important is the *death of ten persons, including a train driver*. Clearly, this W is going to be the subject of the headline.

The second important keyword is *how the deaths occurred*. The answer is *because of two train accidents*. This keyword, therefore, becomes the object of the headline.

The third important keyword is the place where the accidents took place. These are *Etawah and Panki in Uttar Pradesh*.

Finally, every reader will be curious to know why the trains collided. This is answered by the keyword 'fog'.

The headline writer now needs to construct the headline like the way a sentence is written, that is the subject comes first followed by the action. The first draft of the headline, if it includes the relevant keywords in the right order, will read:

Ten persons including train driver killed in two train accidents in Etawah and Panki in Uttar Pradesh due to fog

Clearly, this headline is too long. It needs to be pruned. To do so, the headline writer needs to identify the words whose removal will not dilute the headline but will make it leaner and more effective.

The headline writer needs to ask the question: How important it is to mention that a train driver was killed in the accident? Is it not enough to say 10 killed? Two, is it essential to identify the cities where the accidents took place or is it enough to mention the state where the two cities are

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located? The two cities, in any case, are not too well known outside the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The answer to both the questions is that the headline will not be affected. The modified headline can, therefore, read:

Ten persons killed in two train accidents in Uttar Pradesh due to fog

#### Step 4: Polish the headline

The kernel is now ready for polishing. The objective should be to make the headline shorter and more specific. The headline writer can easily knock out the noun 'persons' as it is understood and use numerals in place of numbers to save space.

#### 10 killed in 2 train accidents in Uttar Pradesh due to fog

The word 'accident' is too generalised. It is better to use the word 'collision' to be specific.

#### 10 killed in 2 train collisions in Uttar Pradesh due to fog

The headline can be further polished by converting the phrase *due to fog* into an adjectival phrase and used with the noun Uttar Pradesh.

#### 10 killed in 2 train collisions in fog-hit Uttar Pradesh

The headline writer has one more option. Since the state of Uttar Pradesh is well known by its acronym UP, the headline writer can save some more space by using the acronym UP in place of the full name of the state.

#### 10 killed in 2 train collisions in fog-hit UP

The headline is now ready for use. It is short, crisp and informative. Most important, it captures the main points of the story.

# DO'S AND DON'TS OF NEWS HEADLINES

Online editors need to follow some essential do's and don'ts for writing an Internet headline for a news story. These are the following:

(1) Use of simple and specific words: The best Internet headlines are the ones that use simple, specific, concrete words. There is no point in saying that the government plans to increase subsidies by a huge sum; it is better to indicate the amount if it is available in the story.

Weak: Govt plans to earmark huge sum for subsidies Better: Subsidies may go up by ₹ 8,000 crore Weak: Major gold haul at Delhi airport

Better: Gold worth ₹ 1 crore seized at Delhi airport

(2) *Use of verbs*: The best headlines are built around active verbs. Headlines that lack verbs are bland; they convey little meaning. That is why there is no place for them online.

Weak: Vigilance team in Noida over land scams

Better: Vigilance team reaches Noida to probe land scams

Weak: Police drive to refurbish image

Better: Cops launch drive to refurbish image

A verb should be used after the noun, as in a sentence. It makes the headline stronger.

Weak: Alarming flood situation in Assam

Better: Flood situation turns alarming in Assam

(3) *Auxiliary verbs*: The print editors were the first to drop the use of auxiliary verbs *is/are* and their past tense form in headlines. This is a good rule and should be applied online too. The content editor saves some valuable space, which can be used to add more relevant words and more meaning to the headline.

(4) *Articles*: Another good print rule, that needs to be observed online, concerns articles. The print editors dispensed with the articles *a*, *an*, and *the* in the headlines a long time ago. Their reasoning was impeccable. They argued that articles are implied in headlines. They can, therefore, be dropped and the space so saved can be used to add another word. The online editors too should adopt the rule. The exception to the rule are headlines that will look awkward without an article.

Awkward: I am only tenant: Vajpayee

Correct: I am only a tenant: Vajpayee

(5) *Abbreviations*: Abbreviations must be used sparingly in online headlines. There is nothing wrong in using abbreviations like PM or UN; they are well known. But, an abbreviation like ABCD, which is quite popular among Indians living in the United States, will leave quite a few Indians living in India blank.

Four other forms of abbreviation that must be handled carefully in online editing are the following:

- (i) Abbreviated words: It serves no purpose to arbitrarily shorten words and use *edn* for education, *fin* for finance or *devp* for development. If this trend continues, then most words will be mauled beyond recognition.
- (ii) Interchangeable abbreviations: There are a few organisations whose abbreviations are the same. For instance, EC stands for Election Commission as well as European Community, and WB refers to both West Bengal and World Bank. Such abbreviations should either be avoided or written in a context where their meaning becomes clear.
- (iii) Names of celebrities: There are several public figures who are popularly identified by their initials, like MGR, NTR, JFK, etc. Similarly, some celebrities come to be known by different names. Thus, Sunil Gavaskar is known as Sunny to millions of his fans, and Pete Sampras as Pistol Pete. These names can be used in headlines, as long as the headline writer is confident of their popular use.
- (iv) Names of cities, states or countries: Online editors should not ape newspapers and abbreviate Mumbai to M'bai or Karnataka to K'taka. These are ugly and lazy ways of writing headlines and indefensible.

(6) *Attribution*: The individual who has made a statement, comment or accusation must be identified in the headline. This attribution can be made either by using the name of the individual, if he or she is well known, or by using his or her designation. In case the speaker happens to be the spokesman of a party, corporate house or the government, then the name of the institution should be used. But, the source must be identified for clarity.

#### Ultras are on the run, asserts Advani

#### Jamshedpur police chief plans war on Maoist guerillas

#### BJP accuses Rao of corrupt practices

The statement was made by L.K. Advani when he was the Home Minister of India and he could be identified easily by his name. However, the Superintendent of Police in Jamshedpur would not be known by name outside the Steel City and so his designation should be used. Attribution is not needed when a statement of fact is made. It is, therefore, not necessary to indicate the agency that seized heroin or the number of pilgrims who took a holy dip on the occasion of *Kumbh Mela* in Allahabad. The same holds true of a statement made by the government.

Heroin worth ₹ 1 crore seized Over 50 lakh devotees take a holy dip on Magh Purnima Interim Budget to be presented on December 19

(7) *Each deck as a unit*: This rule comes into play when a headline is run across two lines. Mostly, this happens on the home page of a newspaper site or on special pages. Online editors then need to ensure that designations or names are not broken as the line changes.

America wants to destroy Islam, says Bin Laden in a newly released tape

(8) *Present tense*: An online report is written in the past tense because it describes events that have already occurred. However, online headlines must be written in the present tense. This helps provide immediacy to the user. It also imparts freshness to the site and helps save space because the past tense forms of verbs are invariably longer than the present tense forms.

#### Past tense: Parliament attacked by terrorists

Present tense: Terrorists attack Parliament

For events that are to take place in future, the infinitive form of the verb should be used.

#### AIDS bill to be tabled next week

(9) *Punctuation*: Punctuation marks should be looked upon as avoidable ornamentation. They make the headline look cluttered. They also occupy space and can sometimes force a headline to be changed because it goes past the allotted space. That is why there is no place for a full stop in a headline.

However, this does not mean that punctuation marks should not be used at all in headlines. On the contrary, there are occasions when the punctuation marks save space and also add meaning to a headline. Commas when used in place of the conjunction save useful space.

Mulayam and Advani to visit UP

Mulayam, Advani to visit UP

Similarly, colons can be used in place of the attributive verb to save space.

Centre eager to hold polls in October: Gupta

However, colons should not be used to introduce a subject in online headlines. Such usage makes the headline look awkward and clumsy. The objective should be to build a headline around a single thought.

Weak: Cauvery: Opposition moves protest motion

Better: Opposition moves protest motion on Cauvery

Semi-colons are more useful than colons in separating two related points.

Advani inducted as home minister; Fernandes gets cabinet rank

When it comes to quotation marks, single quotes should be used on the site. They reduce clutter in a headline. Single quotation marks should also be used for partial quotes. Care should, however, be taken not to use too many quote marks in a headline. Also, to make headlines look cleaner, apostrophes should be used sparingly.

Avoid: Jaipur Mayor's 'AIDS' campaign under fire

(10) *Numerals*: Numbers should be used as numerals as far as possible. This helps save space. However, when a number is too big, it should be spelt out. Thus, it makes more sense to use one lakh instead of 1,00,000.

(11) *Factual errors*: The most embarrassing headlines are those that introduce factual errors. Very often, injuries are converted to deaths in the headline; Imphal becomes Agartala and July becomes August. The headline writer cannot hide behind the excuse that the figure or name was correct in the story.

(12) *Question headlines*: There is nothing wrong in posing a question in the headline. But, it does not reflect too well on the headline writing skills of an online editor. It conveys an air of uncertainty. It is always better to rewrite a question headline.

Weak: France to sell advanced Mirages to Pakistan?Better: France may sell advanced Mirages to PakistanWeak: Will Alexander be the Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission?

Better: Alexander tipped to head Planning Commission

(13) *Feature headlines*: News features, unlike news stories, are timeless. They are rarely written in an inverted pyramid format where the headline writer can pick up the main point and write a headline. News features very often have a multiplicity of points, and any one of them can be used to write a headline. That is why the rules for writing a feature headline for the print are very different. The best feature headlines are those that are written by punning on words or by using clever turns of phrases. Some good feature headlines run in the print are the following:

Three jeers for democracy	Eat, blink and be merry
True lies	Bawdy builders
Stable manners	Lie for an aye
Let the tough get going	Futility in diversity
When the centre is on edge	BJP tries to divide and woo
Disunited front	National Affront
Left makes right turn	Backward Front
House of common's	Give it all you've GATT

However, such headlines have no place in online news. The headlines must be descriptive. They must convey the full meaning. A headline like *Futility in diversity* is undoubtedly a smart pun, but it is unlikely to enlighten the user as to what the story is all about.

(14) *Headline props*: Print editors have traditionally used a shoulder headline or a flag to prop up the main headline. This may be a good principle for print. But, this is one print practice that should not be adopted online. It unnecessarily wastes space. Also props introduce the hyperlinking dilemma; the online editor has problems deciding which part should be hyperlinked—the shoulder or the main headline.

(15) *Subhead and side-head*: A subhead, also known as a crosshead, is a small headline placed in the middle of a long story by print editors to break the monotony and sustain reader interest. It is set in a small point size,

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and bold typeface. Because it breaks the greyness of text, it also helps in providing typographical relief. A side-head performs a similar function, but is used on the side of the column.

Subheads and side-heads cannot be strictly called headlines, but they do perform a role akin to headlines. However, neither of them should be used in online writing. If a story is too long, it needs to be broken into two parts and hyperlinked; and if a story is made of too many minor news items as one sees in city briefs or crime briefs, then they should be run as separate items.

## HOW TO WRITE HEADLINES FOR BLOGS

Blog writers have pioneered a new genre of headlines. These headlines are more personalised and friendly. Most important, like news headlines online, the blog headlines too are written for two masters. The first master is the blog reader. The headline must interest this master. Otherwise, the chances of the blog being read are slim. The second master is the search engine. This master does not look for angles or controversy. It mines headlines for keywords. That is why headlines that are front loaded with keywords have a higher possibility of figuring on top of search results. The others are lost.

(a) *Headlines that catch reader attention*: There are five kinds of headlines that bloggers use to please the 'human master'.

1. 'How to' headlines: These headlines generate reader interest. They motivate them to find out how a particular task is performed. Budding cricketers, for instance, will love all those blog posts that teach them how to improve their game. They are most likely to click on blog titles that tell them the following:

How to hold a cricket bat How to turn the wrist to make the ball spin and bounce How to make a diving stop

2. List headlines: List headlines use numbers to arouse interest. They are precise and informative.

*3 ways to hold a cricket bat* 

5 tips to make the ball spin and bounce

7 scientific ways to make a diving stop

3. Question headlines: Question headlines evoke curiosity. They persuade online readers to click on blog headlines to find out the answer.

Why do pinch hitters have a high backlift? Why do fast bowlers have a high release action? Why do coaches tell players to slide on hands while diving?

4. Personalised headlines: The best blogs are those that use a conversational tone. These blogs "talk to you". Similarly, headlines, that use the second person, connect better with blog readers.

You should keep your head straight while batting

You should prefer a high arm action

You should slide on your hands while diving

5. Headlines that use power words: There are some words that are more equal than others. They tell you 'stunning' secrets, help you 'discover' new things or provide 'quick' and 'easy' solutions. These words are attention grabbers.

Discover the right way to hold the bat

Little known ways to bowl well

Learn to make stunning cricket dives

(b) Headlines that catch search engine attention: There are two kinds of matches that search engines perform. The first are matches for names of individuals, places, actions, etc. The second are phrasal matches. Both are equally important and a good place to find out what people are searching for is the Google Adwords search tool.

It tells bloggers the keywords that are being currently searched. This is invaluable intelligence because it is current and can be obtained from the following URL:

https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

Bloggers can use this input to write two kinds of headlines for their blog posts.

(i) Proper nouns: The most common searches are for celebrities or travel destinations or of places that are in news. A blogger can take advantage of this and use the name of the celebrity in a way that adds value to the headline. A cricket blogger can write a post that refers to a star cricketer, especially when he is in news. For instance, Virender Sehwag had the entire nation enthralled when he came close to scoring the fastest 300 runs in world cricket during a Test Match played against Sri Lanka in 2009. This triggered an avalanche of searches for Sehwag, and a blog post that used the name of Sehwag in the headline would also have benefited.

However, the names should be used in context. A headline should not mislead the reader. There is no point in using the name of a cricketer for a film blog unless there is a connection.

(ii) Phrases as search words: The maximum searches are for phrases and so it makes sense to find out the phrase that is being searched most. For instance, a blog on tips to clean a house found that the phrase "tips to clean house" had been searched only 260 times in the past month (Fig. 4.7).

In contrast, 9,900 searches were made for the phrase "house cleaning tips" (Fig. 4.8). Clearly, the phrase to use in the blog headline is house cleaning tips.

	Advertiser Competition @	Local Search Volume: January	Choose columns to display: 🕐	)	
Keywords			Show/hide columns	*	
			Global Monthly	Match Type: 🧿	
			② Search Volume ②	Broad 💌	
Keywords related to term(s	) entered - sorted by n	elevance 💿			
tips to clean house		Not enough data	260	Add 🗧	
tips to a clean house		Not enough data	46	Add 🗧	
tips to clean your house		Not enough data	73	Add 🗧	
tips on how to clean your house		Not enough data	12	Add 🗧	
tips to keep house clean		Not enough data	58	Add 🗧	
				Add all 5 »	
		Dov	vnload all keywords: <u>text, .csv</u>	(for excel), .csv	

# Fig. 4.7 The search result for the phrase "tips to clean house". The search was done using Google Adwords search tool.

*Source:* https://adwords.google.com/o/Targeting/Explorer?\_\_c=100000000&\_\_ u=100000000&ideaRequestType=KEYWORD\_IDEAS

	Advertiser	Local Search	Global Monthly Search Volume ②	Match Type: 📀	
Keywords	Competition ②	Volume: January @		Broad	
Keywords related to term(s)	entered - sorted by	relevance ②			
cleaning house tips		8,100	9,900	Add	\$
how clean is your house cleaning tips		1,300	1,300	Add	×
cleaning tips from how clean is your house		Not enough data	110	Add	$\approx$
free house cleaning tips		140	210	Add	÷
house cleaning tips		8,100	9,900	Add	*
green house cleaning tips		Not enough data	28	Add	\$
house cleaning tips and		Not enough data	390	Add	*
simple house cleaning tips		Not enough data	12	Add	$\approx$
easy house cleaning tips		Not enough data	91	Add	*
best house cleaning tips		Not enough data	46	Add	*
quick house cleaning tips		Not enough data	210	Add	×
professional house cleaning tips		Not enough data	110	Add	~
tips on house cleaning		320	590	Add	~
tips for house cleaning		590	720	Add	~
fast house cleaning tips		Not enough data	110	Add	\$
house cleaning business tips		Not enough data	110	Add	*
cleaning tips for house	1	590	720	Add	$\approx$
cleaning tips for the house		Not enough data	110	Add	3
cleaning the house tips		Not enough data	210	Add	*
tips on cleaning house		320	590	Add	$\approx$
tips on cleaning the house		Not enough data	28	Add	*

# Fig. 4.8 The search result for the phrase "house cleaning tips". The search was done using Google Adwords search tool.

*Source:* https://adwords.google.com/o/Targeting/Explorer?\_\_c=100000000&\_\_ u=100000000&ideaRequestType=KEYWORD\_IDEAS

Avoid: 11 tips to clean your house

Use: 11 house cleaning tips

# **Useful Sites**

- http://www.poynter.org
   A site run by Poynter Institute, USA, that looks at different aspects
   of offline and online issues.
- 2. http://www.easymedia.in

A blog that provides useful tips for writing Internet headlines.

- http://www.copyblogger.com/magnetic-headlines/ Headline writing tips by a blogger.
- 4. http://www.jprof.com/onlinejn/webjn-headlines.html A good article on the craft of writing headlines online.
- http://condomunity.com/your-brand/headline-writing-googlesocialmedia-readers/

A useful article that gives good tips on headline writing.

### Assignments

- 1. What are the main characteristics of an Internet headline?
- 2. How do Internet headlines differ from print headlines?
- 3. Write a brief note on the four steps of writing an Internet headline.
- 4. Locate five Internet headlines that you think are good and give reasons why you think so.
- 5. Locate five Internet headlines that you think are poor and give reasons why you think so.
- 6. Write a headline for any five of the following seven news leads using the four headline writing steps explained in the chapter.
  - (a) NEW DELHI: Brushing aside concerns of the Left, the Indian government said on Monday that the nuclear-powered USS *Nimitz*, one of the world's largest aircraft carriers, would be allowed to dock at Chennai early next month.
  - (b) NEW DELHI: Unfazed by the numbers against him, Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat on Monday filed his nomination papers as the NDA-backed independent candidate in the Presidential election for probably a straight fight with UPA-Left nominee Pratibha Patil.
  - (c) MOTIHARI: Maoists on Monday blew up the Mehsi railway station's control room at Motihari in East Champaran district. Railway sources here said two people were seriously injured in the explosion that occurred at around 630 hrs. They were rushed to a nearby hospital.
  - (d) RANCHI: Former Union minister Shibu Soren's convoy came under a bomb attack in Jharkhand on Monday while he was being escorted to a jail where he is serving life imprisonment in a murder case, police said. No one was injured. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha chief was being taken in a convoy of four cars when three people appeared and hurled four bombs near Dumaria village in Deoghar district, around 350 km from here, at 1 p.m., police said.
  - (e) LONDON: Harbhajan Singh's flagging international career has received some much needed boost with English county club Surrey signing him up for the latter part of 2007 season.

Harbhajan, who was axed from the Indian squad for the England tour following his continuous bad patch, will join the county team on July 2 and will play till the end of the summer in place of Pakistani all-rounder Azhar Mahmood.

- (f) HYDERABAD: Three days on and relief is yet to reach many of the victims of the torrential rains, which so far have claimed the lives of 38 persons and left a trail of destruction in several districts in the state including Prakasam and Kurnool, which bore the brunt of nature's fury.
- (g) KOCHI: Cooperation Minister G. Sudhakaran said on Sunday that the government would start more professional colleges within five years to end the monopoly of private managements in the education sector.
- 7. Spot the errors in the following 10 Internet headlines and correct them:
  - (a) Buddhist monk files suite
  - (b) Maoists abduct twenty five Chhattisgarh tribals
  - (c) Army Chief leave for France, UK
  - (d) Hunger strike by staff in JNU
  - (e) Soldier convicted to life imprisonment for killing army captain
  - (f) Devise to counter car theft
  - (g) Rains play havoc: 20 killed; hundreds evacuated; property worth crores destroyed in AP
  - (h) Sena chants' Pratibha mantra
  - (i) Countrys biggest uranium processing plant inaugurated
  - (j) Numbers in my favor, says Shekawat
- 8. How should attribution be used in headlines?
- 9. List the important do's and don'ts of using punctuation in the headline.
- 10. What are the points that must be kept in mind while writing headlines for blogs?
- 11. Find five blog headlines that you think are unlikely to get traffic. Give reasons why you think so.



# News on Mobile

here may be no consensus on the longevity of traditional media, but there is near unanimity on the future of mobile media. Pundits, both within and outside the media, are certain that it is only a question of time before all content will be transmitted digitally on wireless devices.

The device that excites them the most is the mobile phone, which, in less than a decade, has emerged as the most powerful tool for communication in India. Initially, the mobile phones were an urban phenomenon. But now, mobile phone towers have started dotting the rural landscape. It is impossible to travel in the countryside without spotting advertisements of mobile phone providers painted on mud walls that earlier played host to fertiliser and seed advertisements.

The growth has been truly phenomenal. Between 1996 (when the first mobile phones were sold in India) and January 2011, the number of mobile phone subscribers grew to 771 mill, but the market is far from saturated. This is reflected in the March 2012 data released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). According to this, the number of wireless connections in March 2012 had climbed to 919.17 million. In other words, in the 14-month period (January 2011 to March 2012) India, on an average, added 10 million subscribers every month.

In contrast, the broadband connections in March 2011 stood at 19.6 million and the total Internet users around 100 million. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the Indian media has been looking expectantly at the mobile phone market.

There is a clear realisation that mobile phones, as a medium, have both numbers and scale. Even more gratifying is the fact that the mobile phone users pay upfront for the services they consume. This is not so on the Internet, where the web user wants everything free.

The flip side is the size of the screen. It makes both reading and navigation difficult. There is also the challenge of technology. The cheaper phones come with lower functionality. They can be used to make phone calls, but they cannot receive pictures or video messages.

The lack of literacy in rural areas also curtails the utility of text messages. Another complication is the absence of a uniform standard. There is no one single browser that works across mobile phones and this makes life difficult for content providers.

However, despite these constraints, Indian media has been targeting mobile devices as an important component of their digital strategy. The content is being transmitted through websites that use wireless application protocol (WAP) and through the short messaging service (SMS) facility provided by mobile phone operators. A section of the media has also started providing content for high-end phones that can accept picture and video messages.

### WAP-ENABLED SITES

The first WAP-enabled sites made their appearance around 2000. These sites were rudimentary, and listed the top headlines of the day. A few of them provided two or three paragraphs of text at the most.

The headlines were delivered to the mobile phone of the user as hyperlinks. On clicking, the user could browse the news report using the scroll keys on the phone. However, only the phones that came bundled with mobile browsers could be used to access content from the Internet.

The transfer of content took considerable time as even the best of phones at that time had slow processors. For the users, this was a double disadvantage; one, the user had to wait patiently for the content to download. Often, the connection would break and the user had to make several attempts before succeeding to restore the connection. The second disadvantage was cost. The mobile browsing tariffs were too high for most people to afford.

It was the launch of Blackberry mobile phones in India in 2006–07 that sparked fresh interest in mobile content. The big advantage that Blackberrys brought was empowering users to access e-mail on the go. Soon after, a whole range of phone makers like Nokia, Samsung and Sony Ericsson launched phones in India that made browsing easier and faster.

One should also not forget the revolutionary changes that iPhone introduced, though it did not become as ubiquitous in India as it did in the west. Mobile browsing received another boost with the integration of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter with the mobile phone.

The changes followed the introduction of General Packet Radio Services (GPRS) technology. This made it possible for the mobile phone to communicate with a wireless router using radio waves. The router then moved the data packets using the Internet backbone.

Besides this, the telecom operators have also been aggressive in promoting the Internet using the browsers that come embedded with mobile phones. The slogan has been to get "news on the go" and more and more users in India are turning to mobile phones to log onto the Internet.

The renewed interest in mobile browsing after the introduction of smartphones encouraged companies to redesign their WAP sites. The layouts became better, and the information well organised for browsing on mobile phones. Two websites, where this was particularly noticeable, were the WAP sites of *Times of India* and Cricinfo. Both these websites were redesigned keeping in mind the needs of two different kinds of users: one using the 1024 × 760 screen and the other using the tiny mobile phone screen.

# How WAP Sites, Now Also Known as Mobile Sites, are Different

It is important here to understand the points that should be kept in mind while designing a WAP-enabled website.

(1) *Home page*: The home page of WAP or m-sites has a simple and clean interface. There is no crowding of images, graphics or advertising blocks.

The site sectioning is minimal, and the information is displayed primarily as text links. The stress is on functionality, and not on visual appeal.

Figure 5.1 is a screenshot of the home page of the WAP site of *The Times of India*, while Fig. 5.3 is a screenshot of the home page of the newspaper's website developed for desktops and laptops. The screenshots

7 Jan 10 1030mm IST Full ste	
THE TIMES OF INDIA	
Home   More Sections   Cricket   Scorecard   Most Read   Videos   mPaper	-
PLoan Against Property	
Top Stories	
Free to criticize religions but not with hate: Court In a significant ruing, the Bombay HC on Wednesday held that in India, criticism of any religion is permissible under the fundamental right to freedom of speech and that a book cannot be banned on those grounds alone.	
• Dawood is a terrorist, has 'strategic alliance' with ISI, says US US has identified D-company as a 'syndicate operating mostly in Pakistan, India, and the UAE,' which has a 'strategic alliance' with ISI and has 'forged relationships with the Islamists, including LET and a-Daida'.	
Post26/11, insurance firms pay out claims of Rs 500 cr in the last one year, after the 26/11 attack, insurance companies have made good terror claims amounting to over Rs 500 crore. The claims received by the Taj, Oberoi and Triden thotels amounted to Rs 210 crore.	
Other Top Stories 3	>
Latest • Gunmen kill at least 7 at Egypt church after Christmas Mass	
Tata Motors to take Nano to Detroit	
<ul> <li>United States grand jury indicts Nigerian in airline bomb plot</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>Zardari drops Kashmir-bomb, says ready for "DDD-yr ideological war' with India</li> </ul>	
More 2	2
INDIA	
- Dyn Least children, on retinistic apport	

# Fig. 5.1 Screenshot of the WAP site of *The Times of India* (http://m.timesofindia. com). The site is text-based and uses content economically.

Source: http://m.timesofindia.com/



Fig. 5.2 The M-paper of *The Times of India* as accessed on mobile phone. *Source:* http://mobilepaper.timesofindia.com



#### Fig. 5.3 Screenshot of the website of *The Times of India* (www.thetimesofindia. com) published for viewing on desktops and laptops. It uses images, and is more content-intensive.

Source: www.thetimesofindia.com



**Fig. 5.4** *The Times of India* mobile story page as viewed on a cell phone. *Source:* http://m.timesofindia.com/india/Nitish-attacks-Modi-puts-BJP-on-notice/articleshow/14286904.cms



Fig. 5.5 *The Indian Express* places section links prominently at the bottom of news reports to assist mobile phone users to navigate easily from one section to another.

*Source:* http://m.indianexpress.com/news/india-may-not-be-called-to-inject-10-bn-for-eurozone-crisis/964322/

were taken within minutes of each other on January 7, 2010. They display the same information, but in dramatically different formats. A similar difference can be noticed on the WAP site (Fig. 5.6) of cricinfo.com and its website for desktops (Fig. 5.8).



Fig. 5.6 Screenshot of the WAP site of Cricinfo (http://m.cricinfo.com). The site uses a large image on top of the page. But, after that, all content is displayed as headlines.

*Source:* http://m.cricinfo.com


Fig. 5.7 The Sports page of *Indian Express* as viewed on the mobile phone. *Source:* http://m.indianexpress.com/section/sports/785/



Fig. 5.8 Screenshot of the website of Cricinfo (www.cricinfo.com) published for viewing on desktops and laptops. It uses images, and is more content-intensive.

Source: http://www.espncricinfo.com/

(2) *Story display*: The WAP sites avoid publishing photographs with stories. The stress is on using words to narrate the story (Fig. 5.9). The photographs, when used, are small and placed right beneath the headline (Fig. 5.10). The text is not run around the image.



## Fig. 5.9 Screenshot of the story page of the WAP site of Cricinfo. The image is small and the text is placed beneath the image.

Source: http://m.cricinfo.com



Fig. 5.10 Screenshot of the website of Cricinfo story page. The photograph is bigger and is placed next to the text.

Source: http://www.espncricinfo.com/

(3) *Display of advertisements*: The advertisements are not intrusive. They are small in size, and placed either above or below the text.

(4) *Navigation*: The mini browser used in mobile phones cannot open multiple windows. The mobile phone reader, therefore, needs to be

provided hyperlinks at the end of the story to navigate to another story or to return to the main menu.

## Limitations of WAP Sites

The launch of hi-tech mobile phones, like iPhone and Blackberry, has made mobile browsing less frustrating. But, several issues still remain. The most disappointing limitation is the screen size of mobile phones. It limits innovative display.

The failure to open multiple windows while browsing news content is another dampener. The user has to scroll back to the top of the screen to locate a new report. This greatly reduces the benefits that touch screen commands have brought.

Monetisation is another issue. The beneficiary of WAP content is the mobile phone operator and not the media company. This is because the payment is made by the phone user directly to the mobile phone operator for content that is downloaded using the browsing facility provided by the telecom company.

However, the media companies cannot shut down WAP sites because the new generation of news consumers is turning more and more to digital content, especially content on the go. They are also aware of the dangers of charging a subscription fee. The chances are that the mobile phone user will start patronising those WAP sites that are free.

So, the media companies continue to be present in the WAP space. But, their main focus is on creating content for SMS users. This is one mobile space, where the phone operator is willing to share revenue with the media companies. The revenue share, of course, depends on the volumes that media companies can generate.

## SMS ALERTS: TELLING A STORY IN 160 CHARACTERS

It is interesting to note how the media companies have taken to Short Messaging Service (SMS). The SMS is more like the telegram of yesteryears. It is short, brief and to-the-point. But, this is where the similarity ends.

Telegram was used to convey news of import, and its arrival was invariably met with concern and anxiety. The receivers braced themselves for the worst when the postman called out the dreaded word 'telegram'. It was rare that telegram brought cheer. Mostly, it brought unpleasant news.

The SMS is different. It brings personal messages, news, forecasts, jokes, greetings, commercial offers, and much more. Its arrival is marked by a beep that can be customised. Most users are curious to know the contents of the message and open it immediately. Others prefer to browse SMS messages at leisure. Some respond to the message, few forward it, but most delete SMS messages once they have read them.

Very few SMS messages are stored. This is because SMS messages rarely communicate information that needs to be stored for use at a future date. An SMS, by its very nature, has very low shelf life. It becomes stale once the user has read it. The mobile phone users, who do not delete SMS messages, run the risk of clogging the Message Inbox on their phones. When this happens, the phone cannot receive fresh messages.

The maximum number of characters that an SMS message can have is 160. Most mobile phones make it easy for the user to compose an SMS message by displaying the character count. Some phones display the number of characters used, while others display the number of characters left before the 160-character limit is exhausted.

However, there are some phones that do not provide this facility. In this case, the SMS sender should know how to count the characters manually. The count for the characters is as follows:

Alphabets: 1

Punctuation marks: 1

Numerals: 1

Symbols: 1

Space between words: 1

Any SMS message that is over 160 characters is automatically broken into two, and the sender has to pay for two SMS messages instead of one. There is no human intervention to decide where the SMS message should end. The programme counts the first 160 characters and mails the message even if it means that the break happens in the middle of a word.

Also, the first part of the message is transmitted first. The second part is transmitted next, and lands in the destination inbox as another SMS. Since

the truncation is arbitrary, the second SMS often conveys little meaning. The user has to browse the two SMS messages separately to get the full meaning. This is why it is important to compose SMS messages, where the full meaning is expressed in 160 characters.

## SMS Language

The pressure to communicate in 160 characters has given birth to 'SMS language', also referred to as 'SMese'. This language has found wide acceptance among teenage phone users across the world. Many believe that the growing popularity of SMS language may change the way English is spoken or written.

Some of the popular 'SMese' can be categorised under the following heads:

- Abbreviation of phrases
   ASAP: As soon as possible
   BTW: By the way
   CUL: See you later
   ILU: I love you
   ATB: All the best
   RUOK: Are you OK?
   CU: See you
   BTDT: Been there, done that
   ICCL: I couldn't care less
   MOF: Matter of fact
   Ppl: People
- 2. Contraction of words
  - U: You
  - b: Be
  - r: Are
  - c: See
  - y: Why

3.	Phonetic representations using alphabets and numerals	
	2dA: Today	
	2moro: Tomorrow	
	2nite: Tonight	
	b4: Before	
	G2G: Got to go	
	Gr8: Great	
	H8: Hate	
	L8: Late	
	L8r: Later	
	NE1: Anyone	
	W8: Wait	
	W84M: Wait for me	
4.	Use of numerals	
	Won: 1	
	One: 1	
	To/too/two: 2	
	For: 4	
5.	Symbolic	
	:) Original smiley	
	:-) Classic smiley	
	;-) Wink	
	-) Hee-hee	
	:-o Amazement	
	{} No comment	
	%-) Confused	
	:-@ Screaming	
	#:-) Hair in a mess	
	<i></i>	

>;-(' I am spitting mad

## Use of SMS in Media

SMS was initially introduced by telecom companies as a value-added service (VAS) for retail customers. But, it was not long before the media companies realised its potential. They collaborated with the telecom companies to provide content as SMS messages.

The content was not limited to news. There was a scramble to provide specialised content, like daily and weekly forecasts, cricket scores, weather updates, jokes, stock rates, wallpapers, etc. SMS also became a channel to conduct opinion polls on topical issues and a medium to invite subscription and advertisement queries.

The biggest beneficiaries of SMS have been the television channels. They have used SMS to increase viewer participation and generate revenue. Some of the iconic television programmes, like *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, have generated millions of SMS responses even though the contest SMS messages, at one time, were priced as high as  $\overline{\mathbf{x}}$  6 per message.

In the initial years, the media companies sent the SMS feed in the format prescribed by the telecom company. The feed was retrieved by the servers of the telecom company and routed as SMS alerts to all its subscribers. The process was fully automated and there was no manual intervention.

Later, a new player—the mobile facilitator—entered the field. The mobile facilitator offered two services: (1) a mobile Internet platform (MIP), which was a web-based interface that allowed media companies to transmit SMS alerts; and (2) a short code that allowed SMS alerts to be transmitted across platforms and across operators.

Several media companies also tied up with telecom operators and obtained exclusive short codes. Among the first to do so were Indiatimes, *India Today* and NDTV. Later, many more obtained their own short codes (Table 5.1 gives list of short codes being used in India), and started using them to receive and transmit messages.

č ,
52424—Aaj Tak / India Today
52525—Sony Entertainment Television
52622—TV18
52742—Cricinfo
53434—Webdunia.com
53650— <i>Mid Day</i>
53776—ESPN
54242—Hindustan Times
54321—Sakal Papers
54545—Sify
54567—DNA Networks
54646—Hungama
54664—Google
54848—Deccan Herald
55050—Bharat Matrimony
55454—Big FM 92.7
55858—Sun TV Ltd
56388—NDTV
56397—The Hindu
5676744—All India Radio
56776—Malayala Manorama
56882—MTV
56886—eBay
56969—Rajasthan Patrika
57272—Jagran Prakashan
57333—Rediff.com India
57337—MAA Television
57474—MSN
57575—ZeeTV
57827—STAR India
58243—Yahoo Web Services
58888—Indiatimes
58990—Neo Sports
59995—UTV

<b>Table 5.1</b> Short Coues Deing Osea by Indian Media Houses
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The short codes initially were of four digits, and companies came up with numbers that were easy to remember. For instance, 8888 was the short code of Indiatimes, 2525 was the short code of Sony Entertainment Television, 3434 was the short code of Webdunia and 4242 was the short code of *The Hindustan Times*.

However, in 2007 the government issued an order, under which all short codes were to start with the numeral 5. This increased the number of digits in all short codes to five. It also took away the uniqueness of the four-digit short codes, and the effort that had gone into creating them. But, even then the recall value of short codes is superior to that of ten-digit mobile numbers.

## **Kinds of SMS Alerts**

The media companies initially used SMS to transmit news. But gradually, they added several Value Added Services. The goal was to generate small revenue streams. Among others, the SMSs, that are currently being offered by media companies, are the following:

- (a) News: Breaking News, Regional News, International News, Business News
- (b) Astrology: Daily forecasts, weekly forecasts, personal forecasts
- (c) Cricket: Live scores, schedules, trivia
- (d) Finance: Stock updates, Forex rates
- (e) Devotional: Gurubani, Ganesha chants, Krishna chants, Bible alerts, etc.
- (f) Humour: Jokes
- (g) Movies: Bollywood movie reviews
- (h) Health tips, beauty tips
- (i) Games: Tic tac toe, Hangman, Shrek the third, Bar Top Field Goal, etc.
- (j) Contests: Based on films, sports, travel, etc.
- (k) Fun zone: Love meter, love quotes, love couplets
- (l) Ringtones: Bollywood, Indipop, devotional, classical, etc.
- (m) Picture messages: Based on themes
- (n) Wallpapers: Based on a variety of themes

There are two ways in which the SMS alerts are routed:

(a) Pull-based: In this case, a cell phone user sends an SMS to the media company using the short code. The SMS mentions the service code that has been published in the newspaper or on the website.

For instance, to get breaking news alerts from Rediff.com, the user needs to SMS 'NEWS' to 57333. To get sports news, the user needs to SMS 'SPO' to 57333.

The news headlines of that moment are transmitted to the message inbox of the user instantly (Fig. 5.11).



Fig. 5.11 An SMS alert that was transmitted to the mobile phone of the user who sent the request by typing NEWS to 58888, the short code used by Times of India Group.

(b) Push-based: In this case, the user is required to either provide his mobile phone number or else send a request using his number. The phone number is stored in the numbers field of the MIP, also known as Outbound Dialler (OBD). Every day, at the designated time, an SMS message is transmitted to the user. The message may be news, personal forecast, jokes, spiritual chant or any other service subscribed by the user.

## MULTIMEDIA MESSAGING SERVICE

The Indian media is still to tap the potential of multimedia messaging service, popularly known as MMS. There are two primary reasons for this. The first was the delay in allotment of 3G spectrum to mobile phone operators. This delay affected the plans of private mobile phone operators to ramp up their offerings. They need large bandwidth pipes to transfer multimedia content to mobile phones, and this can happen only if they start transmitting content on 3G frequencies.

The second reason is the lack of sufficient number of MMS-enabled phones in India. According to "Cisco Visual Networking Index: Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update, 2009–2014", only 4 per cent of Indian mobile phone owners have smartphones. This is too small a number to target for any media house. Most media companies are waiting for the number of MMS-enabled phones to go up before they jump on the MMS bandwagon.

#### **How MMS Works**

MMS, as the name suggests, enables the transmission of messages that have been created by mixing text, images, audio or video from one mobile phone to another. This involves three processes: (1) creation of an MMS message; (2) transmission of the message; and (3) message playback.

The first requirement for a subscriber is to own a mobile phone that can create a multimedia message. The phone enables a user to insert text or audio byte on top of a photograph. The phone can similarly be used to create an animated picture message or to shoot a video.

Once the message is ready, the subscriber is ready to transmit the message. The transmission command is simple. The subscriber has to enter the mobile number of the receiver and send the message. The receiver will get a new message alert. On opening, the picture will be displayed on the screen of the receiver. If there is sound, then the audio will play; if there

is text accompanying the picture, then this text will be displayed on the screen.

Subscribers, who do not own an MMS-enabled phone, get a message on the following lines: "You have been sent a picture message." They cannot open the message since their phone is not equipped with MMSreading technology.

Audio messages are similarly delivered on MMS-enabled phones. The user, on getting a new message alert, opens the Message Inbox, and clicks on the audio message. The phone plays the message. Since the message is stored in the Inbox as an audio file, the user can listen to it as many times as he or she wants. The message can also be forwarded to other users who have MMS-enabled phones.

Airtel, a leading mobile phone operator, has been encouraging users to move to MMS. In 2009, it even lowered the rate of sending an MMS message to an attractive ₹ 1 per message. Airtel team also sends promotional MMS message (Fig. 5.12) to its subscribers in a determined bid to popularise the service.



Fig. 5.12 An MMS sent by Bharti Airtel Ltd to its subscribers to promote MMS usage in India.

Media too is watching the developments with interest. It realises that an MMS news alert, that combines text, audio and photographs, is a far superior way of communicating information than bland SMS text messages.

## Auction of 3G Spectrum

The auction of 3G spectrum in 2010, which makes it possible to deliver video content on mobile phones at fast speeds, has given a new dimension to the development and movement of content on wireless devices.

The auction that was conducted over 34 days—from April 9, 2010 to May 19, 2010—evoked great interest across the country. Its scale and size can be gauged from the fact that nine telecom players paid ₹ 67,719 crore, to earn the rights to develop and deploy 3G services.

The first big push happened in 2011, when India hosted the World Cup cricket. Almost all telecom operators went into an overdrive, and rolled out applications to bring live action from the field onto mobile phone screens. The media companies also warmed up to the challenge, and made special efforts to deliver content for mobile phones. Unfortunately, the delivery was not as good as the expectations.

**Table 5.2** indicates the data transfer speeds available under different spectrum bands. It also gives the kinds of content that can be transmitted under each spectrum band.

Stage	Speed	Features
1G	NA	Voice only
2G	<20Kbps	Voice, SMS, Conference calls, caller ID
2.5G	30-90 Kbps	MMS, web browsing, short audio, video clips, games, applications
3G	144 Kbps-2Mbps	Full-motion video, streaming music, 3D gaming, faster browsing
3.5G	384 Kbps-14.4Mbps	On demand video, video conferenc- ing
4G and beyond	100 Mbps-1 Gbps	High quality video, VoIP

But it did give India its first taste of things to come. More and more media companies are now developing mobile applications to streamline transfer of content. There is a buzz in the air, and the belief is that it is only a question of time before all content will be available "on the go".

## **Useful Sites**

- http://globalmojo.org/ A site that tracks developments in the field of mobile journalism.
- 2. http://www.trai.gov.in

The website of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). It provides latest data on the number of mobile phone subscriptions in India. It also publishes study papers on the mobile phone industry.

3. http://trak.in/

The website provides useful information on mobile phones and the telecom sector in India.

- http://www.telecomindiaonline.com/ The website provides information about the telecom industry in India.
- Cisco Visual Networking Index: Global Mobile Data Traffic Forecast Update, 2009–2014

This report can be accessed at

http://www.cisco.com/en/US/solutions/collateral/ns341/ns525/ ns537/ns705/ns827/white\_paper\_c11-520862.html. It projects the growth of the mobile market across the world from 2009–2014.

## Assignments

- 1. List the web addresses of five Indian WAP or mobile sites.
- 2. Visit the websites developed by a media company for full-screen users and for mobile phone users. List the differences in the way content is displayed by the two websites.
- 3. List the main characteristics of WAP sites. How are they different from full-screen sites?
- 4. How is the alphabet count calculated for SMS messages?

- 5. Write a short note on the use of SMS by Indian media.
- 6. Describe the two ways in which SMS alerts are sent by Indian media.
- 7. What is MMS and how does it work?



# Style Makes a Site

Style is as much a casualty on the Internet as it is in the print media, because almost all media sites have adopted the style being used by their print cousins. The absence of a standard style is attributed to the fact that most Indian newspapers do not have a style book. Invariably in most Indian newsrooms, style decisions are taken at the spur of the moment. These informal decisions are then conveyed by word-of-mouth from one news shift to another. Very rarely, newspapers compile them as a document for common use. The few style books that are available in newspaper libraries date back to the middle of 20th century, sometimes even early 20th century.

The few newspapers that have updated their style books rarely see them used. The nebulous state of newspaper style compounds the problem of online editors. They have two options. One is to accept the inconsistent style rules used by newspaper editors and publish the edited copy in the way it has been provided; or two, develop a style book tailored for online editing. The second option is somewhat difficult though it is certainly more preferable. Online journalism needs to grow beyond the shadow of print journalism and evolve a distinct flavour of its own. However, while doing so, online editors must ensure that the variations in style rules between the print and web versions are minimal. This will eliminate delays and make it feasible for media houses to bring uniformity across all their offline and online versions. For instance, a few newspapers do not use the title Mr or Mrs before the names of individuals. Senior newsmen provide three possible reasons for the non-use of the title: (1) in the hot metal days, it saved time for the typesetting operator, who was not required to type Mr or Mrs before each name; (2) it saved space; and (3) it fitted with the image of those newspapers that had an anti-establishment image. The same style should be adopted on the newspaper websites of such newspapers, because the readers of such papers, who migrate to the website, are used to the newspaper style and are unlikely to mind the missing title. It also saves online editors valuable editing time since they do not have to add the title before each name.

But, the adoption of this style rule also has a flip side. A large number of readers may not like names to be used without proper titles. Moreover, all of us in India are brought up on a tradition where elders are always addressed with respect. This is not the only dilemma that style introduces.

There are many more instances like this. They range from the mundane, like the important principle of capitalisation, to sensitive and volatile issues, like the use of religious or caste identities while reporting incidents of violence and rioting. Even simple forms like euphemisms can trip Internet desks. Should a woman in Indian context be called a lady or a woman? After all, a man is always a man and not a gentleman.

And what about feminism? Should web editors be more gender conscious and talk about mankind as humankind and chairman as chairperson? That is why style is referred to as a major grey area; a usage minefield that every editor needs to manoeuvre with care. A site will end up getting a bad name if it does not ensure consistency in usage. *Jihad* can be spelt as *jihad* and *jehad*; and guerilla can be spelt in four different ways. All variations are correct, but the site must choose one and stick to it.

The confusion does not end here. Internet has injected American spellings into popular Indian writing. More Indians have started spelling colour as color and defence as defense. Online editors have to decide which form of English they must use—British or American.

Names, of course, are the nightmare of every Internet editor, especially in a country like India. A North Indian is lost when he comes across names like Venkatnarayan, Venkatnaraynana and Venkatnarayanan. Similarly, a South Indian is clueless as to how to spell the surname Tiwari; should it be Tewari, Tewary or Tiwari. The list is endless. News events throw up names of people and places that have never been heard of before and are unlikely to be heard of again. It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon sites to use a single spelling while referring to these leaders and places.

Style sheets must also update the names of cities and roads as and when they are changed, though it is easier said than done, given the penchant of Indian politicians to change names. One hopes that Bombay will now continue to be Mumbai, Calcutta will not change to something else from Kolkata and Trivandrum will always be identifiable as Thiruvananthapuram.

The same optimism cannot be expressed with regard to the names of roads. In Lucknow, the main thoroughfare is still referred to as Vidhan Sabha Marg and not by its new name, which is Ambedkar Marg; and in Chennai, Mount Road is still the popular usage though Anna Salai is also used frequently for the same road. Style editors must decide which name to use—the old name or the new name.

An area of concern is the shortening of city names and long words. Bangalore is now used in headlines as B'lore, development has been shortened to devp and education to edn. For some business papers, Finance Ministry has become Finmin. Should editors encourage this or should they put their foot down at this abuse of English language? This is also a style question for which no easy answers are available.

The Internet, which has spawned its own lingo, is likely to make this issue thornier. Style questions also extend to basic grammar. Should colon be used before a quote or should comma be preferred? Should age be put in brackets when it follows the name of an individual or should commas be used to set off the parenthesis? What about italics? Latin words, like *sine die, modus operandi, status quo* are used frequently in news reports. Should they be italicised or printed in straight characters, popularly referred to as roman? And what about *idlis, dosa, dharna* and *gherao*? All of them have made it to the English language, but their roots are still Indian.

There are so many variations in English language and Indian usage that even a full book will not be enough to lay down all style rules. Several grey areas are discussed in this chapter, which need to be addressed by every website. Readers must note that this is not a style sheet, but a style guide. For several grey areas, I have given possible options, including my preferred one. Students of Internet style can adopt these according to their requirements.

## CAPITALISATION

Newspapers have used capitals sparingly. The common reasons put forth by editors are that a keystroke is saved when a word is used in the lower case, saving composing or data entry time; capital letters take more space; and too many capital letters in a single line of text affect visual appeal. We must also remember that the most difficult style question in English is to decide when to use capital letters. Some of the common problems encountered are as follows:

(1) Designation

Usage 1: When designation comes before the name of an individual. There are two possibilities:

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has cancelled his trip to Mumbai.

Indian *prime minister* Atal Behari Vajpayee will not be going to Mumbai.

Preferred: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has cancelled his trip to Mumbai.

Usage 2: When designation follows the name of an individual. Thus,

Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister,

Atal Behari Vajpayee, the prime minister,

Preferred: Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister

Rider: The style rule will hold good for positions that command respect.

However, a complication arises when designation is that of a junior employee. Most websites will find it hard to use the designation 'peon', 'constable' or 'senior teacher' in capitals. This is not because sites wish to treat only senior officials with respect; it is more because of our social environment where we have traditionally used designations of lower-level functionaries in the lower case.

Preferred: Each site must evolve a capitalisation style of its own. Ideally, all designations must be in capital when accompanying the names of an individual. However, this may not always be practically possible. Therefore, sites may arrive at a policy that is realistic and can ensure uniformity. Usage 3: A designation used on its own is equally contentious.

The Prime Minister said

The prime minister said

The Chief Justice ruled

The *chief justice* ruled

The Head Clerk was found cheating

The head clerk was found cheating

- Preferred: All constitutional positions and designations of politicians and senior bureaucrats in the government or private sector must be used in capital when used as a proper noun. The standalone designations of lower-level functionaries should be in lower case.
- Usage 4: When designation is not recognised as an official title but is used to designate a trade or occupation name. In such cases, the designation should not be capitalised irrespective of its use before or after the name of an individual.

The defence counsel, S.P. Singh

The captain of the Indian team, Saurav Ganguly

Avinash Sahay, the company doctor

Neelima Venkataswamy, the government spokesman

Usage 5: A designation used to refer to a group of individuals holding the same position. The designation should be treated as a common noun, and should not be capitalised.

Several *members of parliament* were absent.

The *heads of state* met on Monday.

The *directors-general of police* will be meeting soon.

- (2) Names of ministries, departments, institutions, boards, commissions, committees, etc.
- Usage 1: The names should be capitalised when they are used in full and represent the officially registered name.

Ministry of Home Affairs, Archaeological Survey of India, University of Bangalore

Khadi and Village Industries Commission

Karnataka State Electricity Board

Use Board of Control for Cricket in India; Tipu Sultan Bi-centenary Committee

Usage 2: When the name of a ministry or a department is not the official one, but is the one that is popularly used.

The *home ministry* said in a statement.

The Home Ministry said in a statement.

Bangalore university examinations will start from October 25.

Bangalore University examinations will start from October 25.

The cricket control board will elect its office-bearers tomorrow.

The Cricket Control Board will elect its office-bearers tomorrow.

Preferred: No special abilities are required to capitalise proper nouns when they form a part of a commonly used name. The difficulty arises when the name is made of common nouns alone, like home and ministry. In such cases, the thumb rule should be to capitalise the name of an organisation when it constitutes a popularly accepted name. A better way to handle this grey area would be to provide a list of such organisations in the style guidelines and the way they should be capitalised.

Usage 3: Use of Centre and Union.

Use of the terms *Centre* and *Union*: Both words should be capitalised when they refer to the Central Government, because the Central Government is the fountain of Indian authority.

Usage 4: Use of government as part of state government or Central Government.

The Tamil Nadu Government

The state government

The Central Government

Preferred: The word government should be capitalised when it is suffixed to the name of a state. Otherwise, it should be in lower case. The Central Government should always be in capitals. This will make life easier.

#### (3) Courts

In India, the final court of appeal is the Supreme Court. It should always be in capitals. Names of high courts should be capitalised when the name is used in its full and official form. High Court should also be in capitals when it forms a part of the popularly used name of a high court.

The High Court of Allahabad was set up by the British.

Ten new judges were appointed to Allahabad High Court today.

When only high court is used it should be in lower case. In the case of lower courts, special courts or tribunals the lower case should be used.

A *high court* lawyer was penalised for rash driving.

The *district and sessions court* was the scene of a violent clash today.

The backlog of cases is growing in *civil courts*.

Few Chennai couples prefer to take their complaints to the *family court*.

(4) Ideologies and their advocates

Usage 1: When referring to ideologies and their followers, it is best to use lower case.

George Fernandes is one of the few *socialist* leaders, who are still in government.

West Bengal is probably the last surviving citadel of *communism*.

Usage 2: When the ideology is based on the name of its founder then it should be in capitals.

Most geneticists still swear by Darwinism.

Mulalyam Singh Yadav takes pride in calling himself a Lohiaite.

For diehard communists, Marxism will live forever.

The violent cult of *Naxalism* grew up in Naxalbari.

- (5) Divisions or groups based on economic, administrative or political criteria.
- Usage 1: When a group is clearly defined on the basis of political, economic or administrative reasons it should be capitalised.

The lack of literacy in *Third World* nations is a continuing cause of concern.

The Group of Seven nations will meet in Tokyo.

Peace in West Asia hinges on the fate of Palestine.

A dozen flyovers have been built in North Delhi.

Usage 2: Divisions based on purely geographical factors should be in lower case.

The rains have been excessive in north India.

The government unveiled a new development package for residents of *east Uttar Pradesh*.

(6) Army titles

Usage 1: Designations that come before the name must be capitalised.

The press will be briefed by *Commodore A.S. Rathore*.

*Flying Officer M.S. Daitonde* died with his co-pilot when their test flight crashed.

Usage 2: When the titles are used without the name they should be in upper case when referring to commissioned officers.

The Lieutenant Colonel was not present at the accident site.

The Air Marshal walked into the flight centre.

The sergeant walked into the briefing centre.

Usage 3: When the title is abbreviated it should be in capitals. However, abbreviated titles should not be used without names.

The tank is commanded by Capt S. Ram.

Gen S.S. Dhawan was given a fond farewell.

(7) Festivals, national days, commemorative days and historical events.

These should be treated as proper nouns and capitalised.

Rains are expected to dampen Holi festivities this year.

The IAF will display its latest planes during the *Republic Day* parade.

The Children's Day is losing its charm with every passing year.

UN must be complimented for designating this year as the *International Year of the Aged*.

Ramakrishnan, who was a leading light of *Quit India Movement*, died yesterday.

(8) Religious communities and caste

Names of religions, including sects and sub-sects, should be in capitals. The same rule should ideally be applied to the names of castes and sub-castes. However, castes take different shapes and forms in different parts of India

making it very difficult to devise a single, standard rule. It is, therefore, advisable not to get into the mechanics of caste, but use capitals for all castes and sub-castes.

The Nawabs of Avadh were Shias.

You will find several practitioners of the *Mahayana* form of Buddhism in this city.

Mulayam Singh and Laloo Prasad are well-known Yadav leaders.

The late Phoolan Devi was a Pasi.

The two dominant Brahman castes in Tamil Nadu are Iyers and Iyengars.

(9) Regional communities

When communities are referred to on the basis of their city or regional links they should be used in capital.

The Kannadigas take great pride in their culture.

Most Lucknowites are unhappy at the way the city is getting crowded.

(10) Names of halls, auditoriums, stadiums, legislature

Usage 1: This is another nagging style issue. The problem arises from the countless memorial halls spread across India. The easiest style rule is to capitalise the proper noun that forms part of the name; everything else should be in lower case.

Bangalore's best known auditorium is Chowdaiah memorial hall.

The stage settings at *Tagore hall* leave much to be desired.

Usage 2: When the name of the stadium or memorial hall has no proper noun, then all words must be in capitals.

The pitch is live and bouncy at Eden Gardens.

Green Park is no longer a favoured Test venue.

The British troupe will be performing at *Music Academy*.

Usage 3: When part of a hall's name is in an Indian language, then it should be in capitals.

The police cordoned off Rabindra Bharati Sangeet Academy.

Usage 4: When the legislature is referred to by its official name, then it should be in capitals. Otherwise it should be in lower case.

The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day.

There was pandemonium in the *upper house*.

Usage 5: Often the noun house is used to refer to proceedings in the assembly. This should be used in lower case.

All hell broke loose in the *house*.

(11) Names of books, poems, songs, plays, films

All names should be in capitals. However, articles, prepositions and conjunctions that form part of the name should be in lower case.

I still rate *Gone with the Wind* as the best novel that I have read.

Scores of generations have marvelled at Bachchan's Madhushala.

The best martial arts film made so far is *Enter the Dragon*.

(12) Names of civilian and military projects, honorifics and titles given to individuals

Once again, all names should be used in capitals barring articles, prepositions and conjunctions; they should be used in lower case.

Operation Bluestar will forever haunt the Sikhs.

The gains of *Project Tiger* are still to be established.

Most Indian politicians misuse the name of Mahatma Gandhi, *the Father of the Nation*.

During his lifetime, Jawaharlal Nehru was better known as Pandit Nehru.

There has been no better run accumulator in Indian cricket than *Little Master*.

(13) National and international awards

Awards invariably have long names. It is, therefore, advisable to capitalise the proper noun that forms part of the award name. The rest should be in lower case.

The committee that administers the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for international understanding has some distinguished names on its panel.

Every Indian rejoiced at the awarding of *Nobel Prize* for literature to V.S. Naipaul.

(14) Languages and dialects

With the dialect changing every hundred miles, and sometimes less, Indians are very sensitive about the issue. The easiest style rule to adopt is to capitalise all the languages designated as official by the Government of India. The remaining languages and dialects should be used in lower case. International languages should be in capitals.

Some of the best plays have been written in Marathi.

Several Indians are proficient in French and German.

The most popular dialect in east Uttar Pradesh is avadhi.

(15) Compound designations

Designations made of compound words. In such cases, the word following the hyphen should not be capitalised.

Lieutenant-general S.M. Avatar was given a grand farewell party.

The Attorney-general Radhey Shyam was summoned by the court.

#### Abbreviations

(1) The name of an organisation should be used in full when it first appears in a report. It must be followed by its abbreviation placed in brackets. Subsequently, the abbreviation can be used on its own.

The annual general meeting of the *Board of Control for Cricket in India* (*BCCI*) will be held on October 28. This is the second time that the *BCCI* officials have chosen Bangalore as the venue to hold their meeting.

Exception: The abbreviation should be dropped if the name of the organisation is used only once in the report.

(2) No full stops should be used in an abbreviation. They take unnecessary space and constitute a visual eyesore.

Exceptions:

In initials, to separate the letters.

Thus, A.K. Das, R.K. Hegde

In abbreviated forms of academic degrees.

Thus, *B.A.*, *Ph.D*.

(3) No full points should be used when names of roads and colonies are used in an abbreviated form. This is because the abbreviation is not the initials of the individual in whose honour a road or a colony has been named. Examples: *MG Road* (where *MG* stands for Mahatma Gandhi) *RT Nagar* (where *RT* stands for Rabindranath Tagore).

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(4) When abbreviating a designation that is a compound word, hyphen should be dropped.

The director-general of police should be abbreviated as DGP

The sub-inspector as SI

The vice-chancellor as VC

(5) In the case of acronyms that are made up of five or more letters, only the first letter needs to be capped. The remaining letters should be in lower case. For example: *Unicef, Ignou, Iskcon.* 

This is a useful style rule. A printed sentence loses its visual character when it uses long abbreviations in capitals.

(6) There can be no greater abuse of English language than the arbitrary shortening of words. Yet, Indian newspapers and websites continue to play havoc with words, especially in headlines. Finance is used as *fin*, secretary as *secy*, education as *edn*, deputy general manager as *dy. gen.* manager, association as *assn*, Bangalore as *B'lore* and Maharashtra as *M'rashtra*. This is most unfortunate. Online editors must remember that the point size used online is much smaller, making it possible to write informative headlines without arbitrarily truncating long words.

(7) Names of days and months should be used in full in the body. In the headline, months that have more than five alphabets in their name can be abbreviated as follows:

January:JanFebruary:FebAugust:AugSeptember:SeptOctober:OctNovember:NovDecember:Dec

The months of March, April, May, June and July should not be abbreviated. Also, there is no need to use full points after these abbreviations.

(8) Supreme Court and High Court should not be abbreviated in the body, but in the headline they can be abbreviated as follows:

Supreme Court: SC High Court: HC

## **TITLES AND REFERENCES**

(1) Should the address Mr, Mrs, Master or Miss be used with the names of individuals? The answer to this question depends on the image that a website wishes to convey. If it wants to be conservative, respectable and traditional, then it surely must use the prefix Mr or Mrs. However, if it wants to portray a radical, anti-establishment image, an image that is no respecter of people's sensibilities, then it should address individuals by their bald names and surnames, howsoever offending such usage may be.

Preferred: My preference would be to use the prefix Mr or Mrs with each individual's name. This will be in keeping with the media's role in society—of being a medium that faithfully captures a society's adequacies as well as inadequacies. Newspapers that do not use the address Mr or Mrs before an individual's name generally assign the following reasons for it: everyone is treated as equal; data entry time is saved as the address Mr is not entered before each name; and the space so saved is used to write a few more words. It also gives them a more radical image.

Fortunately, space is not an issue in online reports. The new technology also allows faster data entry. It, therefore, makes sense to use the address Mr or Mrs in online reports. However, media websites, that are shovelling print content onto the Internet, should continue to follow the print style till such time that they start looking at Internet as a different medium—a medium that is not an extension of the print. The media websites, that consciously decide to adopt the prefix Mr/Mrs before names, should also resolve the following questions: Should the archaic address Master be used for students? Should the full point be used after Mr or Mrs? Should attenders or taxi drivers be addressed with the prefix Mr in news stories?

Preferred: The address Mr should be used for all working men. Students should be addressed by their names and the address Master must be dropped; it is too outdated and serves no useful purpose today. In the case of women, the American form Ms should be used. It saves the bother of establishing whether a woman is married or not. However, in rape cases, where it may be important to establish the marital status of a woman, Miss or Mrs should be used.

The use of full point is optional. It neither adds nor detracts from the style adopted by a website. However, all individuals must be treated as

equal. A website must not shy away from addressing an individual with respect simply because his port of calling is not high enough.

(2) A baffling style rule relates to the way the media addresses actors, writers, sportsmen and artists. Their names never carry the respectable prefix Mr or Mrs. The explanation commonly advanced for this oddity is that artists and actors formed the lower rung of society in the medieval times; they were there to entertain the monarch and his nobles. They could, therefore, not have enjoyed an exalted status in society. Interestingly, the newspapers too continued the tradition. Even today, the world's greatest batsman Sachin Tendulkar is referred to as Tendulkar even when he is away from the cricket field.

Preferred: It will look very awkward if a website reported that Mr Ganguly hit a six off a rising ball hurled by Mr Donald or the performance of Mrs Madhuri Dixit in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* can never be forgotten. Websites should continue the tradition of addressing sportsmen and creative artistes by their names when they are giving a performance related to their particular field. However, when they are performing a different role, then they should be awarded the same respect. The Little Master should be referred to as Mr Sunil Gavaskar, a Star Sports commentator, and the filmstar Vinod Khanna should be addressed as Mr Vinod Khanna, the Minister of State for Tourism.

In the case of honorifics, two style rules need to be addressed:

(a) Abbreviation: This should be limited to those honorifics whose abbreviated form is popularly accepted.

Here are a few examples:

Pandit:PtReverend:RevProfessor:ProfDoctor:Dr

However, this should not be a limiting rule. Today, most engineers in India have started using the honorific Er before their names. A good style sheet is one that is alive to these societal changes.

The second abbreviation rule that needs to be followed is that an honorific should be abbreviated only when it precedes a name.

(3) The name should always be used in full on its first occurrence. After that, surnames should be used. In case, two individuals carry the same surname, then their names should always be used in full in the second and later references to identify the individuals clearly.

(4) Titles, such as Padma Shri and Bharat Ratna, conferred on distinguished individuals should not be prefixed with the name of the awardee. If need be, this fact can be brought out separately in the story. This rule should be applied to defence personnel also. Awards like AVSM, PVSM should not be prefixed or suffixed to their names.

## NUMERALS

(1) Numbers in a sentence

Usage 1: A sentence that starts with a number looks very awkward if that number is used as a numeral. As a rule, a number used to start a sentence should always be spelt in full.

*Fifteen* students were selected for the National Science Talent Scholarship Scheme.

However, online editors should avoid starting a sentence with a number that is too long.

*Fifteen hundred and eighty five* necklaces were stolen from the jewellery shop.

This sentence should be rewritten as:

Robbers stole 1,585 necklaces from the jewellery shop.

Usage 2: A different style rule needs to be followed for numerals used in the middle of a sentence. This style rule is based on the belief that a single digit numeral looks awkward when it is used as part of a running sentence. Print editors have, therefore, insisted that numbers from one to nine should be spelt out while numbers above nine should be used as numerals. This is a useful style rule and should be continued on the Internet too.

The woman ate *five* apples.

The man bought 25 mangoes.

(2) Currency

Usage 1: When the currency name is used as a prefix, then the currency amount should be in numerals. This should be followed irrespective of the amount.

The cost of the book was fixed at  $\gtrless 2$  after much haggling.

A sum of ₹ 20 crore has been sanctioned.

The visa applicant is required to pay a flat fee of \$250.

Usage 2: When the currency name is used as a suffix, then the currency amount should be in numerals from one to nine and in words from ten onwards.

The boy was initially reluctant but finally paid the fine of *five rupees*. Goods worth *200 pounds* were damaged in the fire.

(3) Distances, weights and measures

Three style rules need to be kept in mind: (1) numbers denoting distances, weights and measures should be used as numerals; (2) they should be used as a prefix before the appropriate metric units; and (3) no full point should be used with the abbreviated form of the metric unit. This makes the copy look visually neater.

Each bag carries 5 kg of rice.

Coke is also available in 150 ml bottles now.

The town stretches over 200 sq km of dry land.

(4) Roman numerals

The style rule regarding roman numerals is simple. It should be used as a suffix after names of wars, kings, queens and civil or military operations.

The 2001 Afghan War has brought back memories of trench warfare used in *World War I*.

The Indian Government has declared Operation Milk II a great success.

(5) Percentages

Usage 1: Percentages must always be expressed in numerals when used in headlines, while the percentage symbol should be used as a suffix. The space thus saved can be used to add one or more words, and make the headline more potent.

55% Indians cast vote.

Usage 2: In the body, percentages must be in numerals. However, the percentage symbol should not be used. Instead the word per cent should be used as the suffix. This makes the copy look cleaner, especially when a report gives several figures as percentages.

At least, *55 per cent* Indians are expected to have cast their vote in the Lok Sabha elections.

(6) Fractions and decimals

When using fractions, two style rules should be kept in mind: (1) They should be spelt out; and (2) they should be hyphenated.

Almost *four-fifths* of the students in this course are likely to opt for engineering.

In the case of decimals, use numerals.

A sum of ₹ 14.50 is still due.

The pole was 7.83 m long.

(7) Five digit numbers and above

Numbers above one lakh should be compressed to the nearest decimal point and expressed in lakhs or crores as the need be.

In 1980, 1.52 lakh students appeared for the civil service examination.

(8) Anniversaries and centuries

The best style to follow is the simple numeral rule; use words for periods ranging from one to nine and numerals from 10 onwards.

Jail is certainly not the place to observe your *first* wedding anniversary.

The *20th century* will go down as the most eventful century in the history of mankind.

(9) Age

Usage 1: When age is used as an adjectival phrase, it should be in numerals and hyphenated.

The *20-year-old* Afghan woman broke down repeatedly as she related her war experience.

Usage 2: When age is used on its own then it should be in words from one to nine and in numerals after that.

She is *nine* today and will be turning 10 two months from now.

(10) Time spans

Usage 1: Numerals should be used when a time span, be it a century or a decade, is referred in full.

The 1990s will always be known for the rise of the Indian middle class.

The British spread their hold over India in the 1800s.

Usage 2: When a time span is referred to in an abbreviated form then it should be spelt out.

The *eighties* were a period of turmoil.

#### SPELLING

In the last century, the famous English playwright George Bernard Shaw observed that England and United States are two countries separated by a common language. This observation finds an echo on Indian websites too, though in a different form. This is a pity, because the Indian newspapers had for almost half a century sworn by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. However, the arrival of software programmes, like Microsoft Word, that come loaded with an American spell check programme have gradually changed this preference. Indian media sites are now a sad example of one word spelt in two different ways.

Preferred: Indian schools still prescribe *Oxford English Dictionary* and Indian books still use the British form of English. The media websites should, therefore, continue the tradition. There are two more style rules that need to be observed with regard to spellings. Whenever the dictionary lists two spellings for a word, use the first spelling. Use *fulfil* and not *fulfill*, which is listed as the second spelling by the Oxford dictionary.

Secondly, decide whether words should be spelt with s or z. Do not use both the forms, even if they are correct. The preferred usage in India should be s.

#### **ITALICS**

(1) Indian words

Usage 1: All Indian language words, barring a few, should be used in italics. Also when the words are not popularly used words, then an English translation must be provided.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is a well-known Indian kavi (poet).

The students beat the steel *thalis* (plates) to draw the attention of the teacher.

- Usage 2: There are many Indian words that have been assimilated in English language. These words like *dosa, idli, pandit, mullah*, need not be italicised.
- (2) Latin words

There is a general tendency to italicise Latin words and phrases. This must be avoided because Latin terms, like *sine die, de facto, de jure*, etc., are very commonly used in English language.

(3) Words from non-Indian languages

English is a language that has taken words from several languages and literally made them its own. It is, therefore, very difficult to say which non-English word must be italicised and which should be used in roman. The best is to go by instinct. When an online editor comes across a word that he or she considers is unlikely to be known to most readers, he or she must italicise it and provide an English translation. Sometimes, foreign words acquire a clear English meaning within months as happened with *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The two Russian words were initially italicised; but as the Soviet empire crumbled their usage assumed an everyday familiarity that needed no explanation. Now, they are part of the English language and are no longer italicised.

(4) Names of books, films, plays, paintings, ships

The print media has traditionally italicised names of books, films, paintings or plays. If they have not used these names in italics, then they have placed them within inverted commas to set them off from the rest of the sentence. The same style can be continued online too. However, online editors must choose one of the two possible usages: either italics or inverted commas. The first choice must be italics. Words set in italics look more pleasing, and can be easily spotted.

The same rule should be applied to ships that have traditionally been given human names.

## **Useful Sites**

- http://www.bbctraining.com/pdfs/newsstyleguide.pdf
   The BBC News Style Guide is a great resource for all journalists.
- 2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide The style guide of the *Guardian* is another very useful web resource for all journalists working in print or online.
- 3. http://stylemanual.ngs.org/intranet/styleman.nsf/ The National Geographic Style Manual is available at this web address.

## Assignments

- 1. Why do media sites need a style book?
- 2. List the advantages and disadvantages of having a common style book for a newspaper and its website.
- 3. What are the important issues that a style book should address?
- 4. What are the different ways in which designations can be used?
- 5. What are the style issues that editors face when it comes to capitalisation?
- 6. List the important points regarding abbreviation that a style book should address.
- 7. What are the grey areas that a style book should address when it comes to the use of numerals?
- 8. List the important points regarding italics that a style book should address.



## Social Media and Web 2.0

## **BUILD. SHARE. PARTICIPATE.**

The 21st-century media is being built on these three pillars. This media, which is variously known as new media, participatory media, Web 2.0 media or digital net media, has democratised the information flow. It has shaken and destabilised the traditional media, and challenged the way information has been created and disseminated in the last hundred years or so.

The world of traditional media, where the publishers and editors decided what to publish, is gradually crumbling. For the first time, the power to create and distribute content is available to everyone. This is what the traditional media that has thrived on the principle of 'one to many', where the end consumer had no say in the generation and dissemination of content, finds most disconcerting.

The media that has been hurt the most is the print media, especially in the West where newspapers have literally fallen off the cliff. A large number of small and medium newspapers have stopped publication and the giant ones are struggling to stay afloat.

Low Internet penetration has saved the Indian media from going the same way. But, there is consensus that this situation will not last forever. Everyone acknowledges the power of Web 2.0 tools, and most Indian media houses are trying to warm up to them, albeit a little slowly.
#### WEB 2.0 GENRES

There is great interest in the different genres of Internet powerhouses that have piggybacked to stardom on Web 2.0 tools. These include such hallowed names as Wordpress.com (blogging), Flickr.com (picture storage), YouTube.com (video streaming), Wikipedia.com (knowledge creation), Facebook.com (social networking), Digg.com (social bookmarking), Twitter.com (microblogging) and GoogleNews (aggregation). Each of them, in their respective areas, empowers users to create, distribute and share content.

These names may be the flag bearers in their respective genres, but there are many other sites that provide similar facilities. Together, they harness the collective intelligence and creativity of hundreds of thousands of Internet users. The result is creation of web properties where millions of users converge.

The best of traditional media can neither rival the reach of these sites nor can they ramp up their offerings to match the millions of contributions that populate these sites. They can argue that much of the content that is being generated lacks credibility or is questionable. But, they cannot make the same users congregate to their sites.

(1) Social networking: If there has been a killer application on the Internet after e-mail, it is social networking sites, also known as SNS. These sites have attracted, and continue to attract, millions of users who create and share content. Their success has shaken the traditional media, which finds itself in the unenviable position of leveraging social network platforms to garner traffic.

These sites perform three functions: (1) They provide web space to individuals to build their profiles; (2) they help individuals connect with friends or people, who share similar interests; and (3) they enable members to build conversations around interests they share.

The members are allowed to upload text messages, photographs, audio and video files free of cost. All content is published in real time and can be browsed and commented upon by all members, who form part of the community. Content can also be tagged from third-party sites on subjects that interest the group.

Each file or comment published on the site has a time stamp, and all posts are arranged in descending order with the last post coming first. The

same is true of comments, where the last comment can be read first. These sites also provide live chatting facilities, and members, who are logged in, can use the built in chat clients to share notes.

E-mail alerts go out to members whenever they are tagged in a post, which may be a photograph or a text message. Members also get an e-mail alert whenever a comment is made on their posts. Such alerts ensure that members stay connected and interested. Now social networking sites allow access as well as posting of content from mobile phones. This has added yet another dimension to their soaring popularity.

The success of the sites arises from the 'connections' they provide. Each member at the time of registration is asked to provide personal details. These editable details become the public profile of the member. The social networking sites then mine the profiles to find 'connections', based on information like schools attended by members, companies where they worked, cities where they lived, interests or hobbies that they have.

The members are then shown lists of names with whom they can connect. Often, the lists throw up names with whom members may have lost touch after leaving school or college. They can now reunite. Also, as conversations grow, members get to know friends of friends and their friends. The chain continues to grow.

Further, at the time of registration, members are requested to share the names and e-mail addresses of friends with whom they would like to connect. They are asked to provide access to their e-mail accounts so that mails can be sent to all those who are listed in the address book. This is a quick and smart way to build a buddy list, and simultaneously expand the reach of the social networking site.

Members are even allowed to create pages where they can post articles or photographs. They can also integrate their Twitter or blog feeds, and create an integrated web presence. Most important, their personal space has an address; a web address that they can share with their friends and acquaintances.

There are two kinds of social networking sites that have evolved over the last decade. These are as follows:

(a) Friends and contacts: These sites encourage friends, relatives and acquaintances to build an online forum, where they can share and comment upon information that is of personal interest. The purpose is to build a community of like-minded people known to each other. The first such site was Sixdegrees.com. Later Friendster.com acquired popularity. But, the killer sites in this genre have been Facebook.com (Fig. 7.1), Orkut.com and MySpace.com. The first social network site to gain traction in India was Orkut.com. This happened around 2005, when a horde of youngsters set up Orkut accounts. For almost two years, Orkut was the number one social networking site in India.

But from 2008 onwards, Orkut users started to desert this site for Facebook. The years 2007 to 2009 also saw the setting up of Indian social networking sites (see Table 7.1). Several of them were funded by venture capitalists and ran high-profile media campaigns to gain popularity. These sites are, however, yet to achieve the cult status of Facebook.com, which has emerged as the top social networking site in India. However, three Indian social networking sites that have been able to make a place for themselves are BharatStudent.com, Fropper.com (Fig. 7.2) and Indyarocks.com (Fig. 7.3).

Table 7.1         Top Social Networking Sites in Inc
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July 2010 vs. July 2009

Total India - Age 15+, Home & Work Locations\*

Source: comScore Media Metrix

India	Total Unique Visitors (000)			
	July 2009	July 2010	% Chang <b>e</b>	
Total Internet: Total	35,028	39,562	13	
Audience Social Networking	23,255	33,158	43	
Facebook.com	7,472	20,873	179	
Orkut	17,069	19,871	16	
Bharatstudent.com	4,292	4,432	3	
Yahoo! Pulse	N/A	3,507	N/A	
Twitter.com	984	3,341	239	
LinkedIn.com	N/A	3,267	N/A	
Zedge.net	1,767	3,206	81	
Ibibo.com	1,562	2,960	89	
Yahoo! Buzz	542	1,807	233	
Shtyle.fm	407	1,550	281	

\**Excludes visitation from public computers such as Internet cafes or access from mobile phones or PDAs.* 

*Source*: comScore.com http://comscore.com/Press\_Events/Press\_Releases/2010/8/ Facebook\_Captures\_Top\_Spot\_among\_Social\_Networking\_Sites\_in\_India



## Fig. 7.1 The page set up by the Delhi Traffic Police on Facebook.com, the social networking site with the largest number of followers in the world.

Source: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Delhi-Traffic-Police/117817371573308



### Fig. 7.2 A screenshot of the Home page of Fropper.com, a popular Indian social networking site.

*Source:* http://www.fropper.com/index.php



Fig. 7.3 A screenshot of the Home page of Indyarocks.com, which has emerged as a popular social networking platform for Indians. *Source:* http://www.indyarocks.com/

The social networking site that is being leveraged extensively by Indian media is Facebook.com. Virtually every Indian newspaper, television and radio channel has a Facebook page that they promote aggressively both offline and online.

The Facebook page is used to post a selection of stories only, the goal being to transfer Facebook users to the newspaper or television sites by creating a fan following. This is a good strategy because the majority of Indians have a Facebook account. A news report posted on the Facebook page can go viral in no time, unleashing a flood of traffic.

For instance, the fan following of the page set up by *The Hindustan Times* on Facebook (Fig. 7.4) rose from 186,998 in September 2011 to 301,000 in June 2012. Similarly, the Facebook page set up by NDTV.com went up from 319,148 fans (Fig. 7.6) in September 2011 to 453,000 in June 2012. In the case of *The Times of India* this number stood at a staggering 1.8 million in June 2012 (Fig. 7.5).



Fig. 7.4 The page set up by *The Hindustan Times* on Facebook had 301,000 fans in June 2012. This number stood at 186,998 in September 2011.

Source: http://www.facebook.com/hindustantimes



## Fig. 7.5 The page set up by *The Times of India* on Facebook had 1.8 million fans in June 2012.

Source: http://www.facebook.com/TimesofIndia



Fig. 7.6 The page set up by NDTV.com on Facebook had 453,000 fans in June 2012. This number stood at 319,148 in September 2011.

Source: http://www.facebook.com/ndtv

(b) Business and Professional: These sites are more focused. Their members share a trade, a calling or a specific need. The most wellknown professional networking site is LinkedIn.com (Fig. 7.7). Its members join the site to build professional relationships, to seek professional recommendations and to further their careers. The first such professional networking site, Ryze.com, was set up in 2001. In India too, a valiant effort has been made by ApnaCircle.com to set up a professional networking site.

(2) *Social Bookmarking*: The term is used for those Web 2.0 websites that provide users tools to store their bookmarks online. The bookmarks are stored in neat folders and can be accessed by the user from any computer connected to the Internet. They can also be shared by designated people or groups of people to whom the user has provided access. Another advantage of social bookmarking is that the user can rate a resource that has been bookmarked or add comments about the pluses and minuses of the resource. These ratings can then help other users decide whether they need to download the resource or not.

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Source: http://www.linkedin.com/

The bookmarks can have a cascading affect on the fortunes of a media story or a blog post if they are rated high on popular bookmarking sites like Digg, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Technorati, Yahoo! Buzz, or Del.icio.us.

Hundreds of thousands of users, who subscribe to these social bookmarking sites or their feeds, then download the story. The effect is a virtual run on the website. Industry experts estimate that a story that gets promoted to the front page of Digg.com (Fig. 7.8), thanks to the number of times it has been 'dugg', can deliver 25,000 to 100,000 unique users.

It is, therefore, not a surprise to see the Indian websites displaying prominent social bookmarking icons on top of news reports. The reader is asked to share the report with at least one social bookmarking site—the current favourites being Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Google Circles and Pinterest (Fig. 7.9).



### Fig. 7.8 The home page of Digg.com, the social bookmarking site that can deliver 25,000 to 100,000 visitors for a single story.

Source: http://digg.com/



#### Fig. 7.9 The social bookmarks listed on the indianexpress.com story page. Source: http://www.indianexpress.com/news/army-chief-lifts-ban-on-lt-gendalbir/959365/

Several Indian websites now use aggregators, like Wibiya.com that connect users to 200 plus social media sites. *The Indian Express* and the *Hindustan Times*, for instance, provide a choice of 224 social bookmarks to their users. The saving grace is that these bookmarks open in a popup window (Fig. 7.10), saving the user unnecessary distraction.

Bookmark & Sha	re	meghna				
Move IPL to SA again, if threats are real: Warne						
http://www.indianexpress	com/news/move-ipl-to-sa-a	gain-if-threats-are-real				
Q		)				
W! A1-Webmarks	ன Adifni	🍄 aero				
🛃 AIM Share	<b>a</b> Amazon	📉 Amen Me!				
🖗 AOL Mail	a Arto	🚳 Ask				
🖀 Baidu	🕒 Bebo	🥘 Bit.ly				
DizSugar	🖾 Bleetbox	Blinklist				
🕒 Blogger	<b>b</b> Bloggy	🍃 Blogmarks				
😭 Bobrdobr	🖷 Bordom	<b>b</b> Box.net				
😡 Brainify	B Bryderi.se	💩 BuddyMarks				
b Buzz	🔿 Camyoo	📣 Care2				
🥟 Cirip	🗐 CiteULike	🖌 ClassicalPlace				
C Clickazoo	ⓒ Connotea	IQ COSMIQ				
Delicious	🗯 Designmoo	S믑 Digg				
🚉 diglog	D Digo	M Diigo				
Dipdive	💩 doMelhor	Doower				
What's this? Privacy		C AddThis				

Fig. 7.10 The social bookmarking links that are served by Wibiya on those Indian sites that run its code.

It is not known how much traffic these bookmarks are delivering to Indian media sites. The chances are that few Indian Internet users would be familiar with them and the few who may know about social bookmarking sites would have heard of only the top few. Certainly, very few would be familiar with the 224 names listed on the pop up page.

Another problem with the social bookmarking sites is that they allow you to bookmark a story only if you are a registered site user. How many users would like to register on 224 social bookmarking sites?

What India needs is its own social bookmarking icon. Till such time, the American social bookmarking sites will only serve as ornamentation on Indian media sites.

(3) *Media sharing sites*: A great fillip to content creation has come from media publishing and sharing sites. These sites have created robust applications that enable users across the world to publish media as text, images and videos. Most of these sites do not levy any subscription fee, and allow content creators to own the content that they have created. These sites, by doing so, have turned publishing on its head. The free media publishing sites can broadly be divided into four categories:

(a) Blogging: It is hard to estimate the size of the blogosphere or the volume of content that has been published or continues to be published on blogs written by millions of users. Much of the credit for creating this information tsunami on the Internet goes to Wordpress (Fig. 7.11) and Blogger. Both these blog providers have opened their applications to all Internet users wanting to set up a blog. They do not charge any signing fee or annual fee for their basic services.



Fig. 7.11 The home page of Wordpress.com, a free blog tool. *Source:* http://wordpress.com/

Instead they provide a bouquet of services to anyone wanting to set up a blog. These services include a personalised web address, free web space and a powerful content management system to post all forms of media. The blogger need not worry about blog design or its look and feel. There are scores of free templates to choose from. All that the blogger needs to decide is which template best reflects the mood, tenor and tone of the blog.

The blogger is also provided a choice to integrate several value added services free of cost. These services can be obtained by integrating the widgets, that is applications that can pull in specialised content from other sources, especially written for the blogs. Like other Web 2.0 facilities, the blogosphere also works on the principle of build and share. The bloggers are provided plenty of free tools to build conversations and communities.

Many bloggers have built a large fan following based on their writings, and directly challenge the traditional media model. However, there are hundreds of others who struggle to be heard or read. A common grievance of traditional media is that a large number of bloggers are not responsible enough. Their postings, at times, are misleading, mischievous or factually incorrect.

But, what cannot be denied is that blogs have enriched the Internet immensely. The bloggers have, through their contributions, added variety and diversity to public information, something which the traditional media with its limited resources could not have done.

(b) Microblogging: Another Web 2.0 application that has taken the world by storm is microblogging. Its most successful symbol is Twitter.com. This website, which was launched in 2006, has literally become an alternate channel of communication. The size of a Twitter post, popularly known as a tweet, is 140 characters. This is even less than the 160 characters that SMS users had learnt to live with. But the world, especially the United States, has been sucked into the Twitter storm.

One reason for the blinding success of Twitter is that it straddles two platforms: Internet and the mobile phone. It accepts tweets from both mobile phones and from Internet-based devices. More importantly, it routes the tweets to mobile phones too.

Each tweeter is allotted a unique web address, appropriately called the tiny URL. Every tweet that the tweeter now makes is broadcast to the mobile phones of the tweeters who follow this tweeter as an SMS message. The communication is instant and can be responded to. All tweets and their responses are stored on the tiny URL allotted to the tweeter.

The tweets can be made from any part of the world as long as the mobile phone from where the tweet is being made has Internet access. Alternately, the tweeter can log on to the Internet using a desktop or a laptop and post the tweet.

The tweets range from the personal to the public. These include comments on public issues, and raw reportage from places where a major news break occurs. For the media, Twitter.com has become a major source of information. Both the wire services and the newspaper editors mine the web to pick up raw information and juicy quotes.

Twitter jumped into the public eye in India when the former Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr Shashi Tharoor, referred to his travels in the economy class as travelling in 'cattle class'. The tweet caused outrage in the Congress, the party to which Mr Tharoor belongs, because the economy drive had been initiated by the Congress President, Mrs Sonia Gandhi. It was expected that the ministers and bureaucrats will take the drive seriously, and reduce the burden on the exchequer. However, Mr Tharoor's tweet caused many red faces in the grand old party. The media, of course, went to town, and quoted extensively from Mr Tharoor's tweets. In February 2010, Mr Tharoor's fan following on Twitter.com stood at a staggering 6.55 lakhs (Fig. 7.12).

Interestingly, Twitter, like Facebook, is seen as more than a news source. That is why most media brands in India have started tweeting. They use Twitter to catch the attention of its army of tweeters by posting news alerts. The belief clearly is that a Twitter user will click on the news link and arrive at the newspaper or television website.

The Twitter strategy, like the Facebook strategy, adopted by Indian Media, is a sign of the rising power of social media. No media sites can afford to ignore the social media sites. They make sure that all their important stories are tweeted in real time. Further, they encourage their staffers to tweet breaking stories. They realise that the more Twitter fans they have, the better will be their reach.



Fig. 7.12 The former Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr Shashi Tharoor, had 6.55 lakh followers on microblogging site Twitter.com in February 2010.

Source: https://twitter.com/#!/ShashiTharoor

The Mumbai-based DNA (Fig. 7.13), which had 14,113 followers in February 2010, had garnered 24,684 followers by June 2012. In the case of the *Hindustan Times*, the newspaper's followers jumped from 76,227 (Fig. 7.14) in September 2011 to 204,951 in June 2012. This shows that the crowds are thronging the new media or Web 2.0 sites, and the traditional media is recognising it – and rightly so. This is yet another proof of the emerging information order.

(c) *Wikis*: Wikis may not have taken off in India, but they are a rage across the world. More and more individuals and organisations are setting up wikis, using the free wiki space provided by wiki application providers like Wikispaces.com.

The most famous Wiki, of course, is Wikipedia. It has millions and millions of pages that have been created through collaborative effort using the Wiki software. What makes it unique is that all its pages are living documents that can, and are being constantly updated by web users.



Fig. 7.13 DNA had a following of 24,684 on its Twitter page in June 2012. *Source:* https://twitter.com/#!/dna



Fig. 7.14 The *Hindustan Times* had a following of 204, 951 on its Twitter page in June 2012.

Source: https://twitter.com/#!/httweets

The same is true of other public wikis. Content creation and updation is not limited to the wiki owner. Any web user can edit and modify the content, and this modification is not limited to correcting typos or factual errors. Users of public wikis can add new content, a new page or even a new section as long as the additions add value to the wiki. In the case of private wikis, that is wikis which are paid for, content modification is limited to editors who have been authorised by the organisation to make the changes.

The popularity of wikis arises from their simplicity, and ease of use. It takes less than five minutes to set up a wiki. The posting of content is easy, as the wiki is powered by a content management system that has a very friendly user interface. The wiki owner, like the blogger, can select a design from the several themes that wiki providers offer.

The modification of content too is easy. A user simply needs to click on the edit button to get access to the edit window. He can then modify the text and click on the upload button. The world will now see the modified page. Each modification is recorded in the wiki server and is visible to other users. They can delete the changes if they are malicious, factually incorrect or uncalled for.

It is this wisdom and involvement of the crowds that make wikis so unique. There was a time when the value or utility of Wikipedia, the world's largest wiki, was questioned. The refrain was that content posted by anonymous users cannot be relied upon. However, Wikipedia has shown that its checks and balances are strong enough to ensure the authenticity and credibility of content.

(d) Video sharing sites: The video sharing sites, led by the iconic YouTube.com, constitute yet another striking example of how Web 2.0 tools have changed the creation and consumption of media. Who would have thought that two- and three-minute videos shot by novices and amateurs will create traffic nodes that established television channels may find impossible to overtake.

But, sites like YouTube (Fig. 7.15), Revver, Blip.tv, Yahoo! Video and Meta Café have done precisely that. They have created the platform where any individual can realise his or her dreams. There are no editors on this platform, only viewers and it is they who decide the merit of the creations. The undeserving works die a quick death; the meritorious soar on viral waves.

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Fig. 7.15 The home page of YouTube.com, the largest video sharing site in the world.

Source: http://www.youtube.com

The popularity of video sharing sites, like other Web 2.0 applications, is a direct outcome of building a platform that can be shared. The uploading tools are simple and easy to use. On most sites, there is no fee to be paid to upload or download a video or to run it from a third party site or blog. The programme generates a link that can be embedded on a blog or on another website.

The video owner is asked to enter tags or keywords that best categorise the video and to write a small description explaining its contents. Users can locate the video by entering keywords in the search box, and browse the description before deciding to view the video. They can communicate their experience by rating the video and leaving their comments.

Good ratings can fuel downloads and turn unknown creators into celebrities overnight. This could not have happened in the world of traditional media, where there is no way to share content or give voice to individual creativity because all content creation and dissemination is controlled by a small group of editors and publishers.

(e) Photo sharing: Strictly speaking, photo sharing is not a Web 2.0 phenomenon. Several photo-sharing sites had come up even during the first phase of the Internet. Those sites provided passwordprotected server space to users to store photographs online. However, it is after the development of Web 2.0 tools that photo sites acquired a new momentum. Their membership soared and they became important traffic nodes on the Internet. The most popular of these sites are Photobucket and Snapfish. The membership base of both these sites crossed the 50 million mark by 2009. The other photo sites, whose membership stands over 10 mill users, are: Webshots (30 million), Flickr (26 million), Kodak Easy Share Photo Gallery (20 million) and Fotolog (15 million).

These photo-sharing sites offer a range of facilities. Members can now share photographs, tag photographs, leave comments, build conversation threads or rate photographs. The practice of assigning keywords or tags to each photograph has made searches more powerful.

Photo-sharing sites, now, also offer the facility of geo-tagging, and uploading images directly from Internet-enabled mobile phones. The photographs can also be arranged by themes in photo albums, stored as thumbnails or medium-sized images and run as slideshows.

A few photo-sharing sites, like Snapfish, also work as photo-finishing sites. They charge a fee to print and mail photographs to addresses provided by members. The photo-sharing sites follow different subscription models. Some are completely free; some offer limited services free; some are paidonly sites.

However, between them the photo sharing sites have emerged as a powerful node, where members can shoot, share and even sell photographs.

This is what Web 2.0 has done. It has completely changed the way media is being created and consumed.

#### **Useful Sites**

1. http://mashable.com

The website that follows all modifications, launches and updates on social media sites.

- http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/ The site provides latest social media trends.
- http://www.easymedia.in The site maps social media trends in India and abroad.

#### Assignments

- 1. List the Web 2.0 applications or genres that have changed the way people use the Internet.
- 2. Visit the Indian media sites that have set up pages on Facebook and analyse the kind of content that is being published there.
- 3. Name ten important Indian social media sites.
- 4. Visit ten Indian media sites and list the social bookmarks being used by them.
- 5. Visit ten Indian media sites that have set up pages on Twitter, and analyse the content being posted there.
- 6. Search the net to locate the best Indian blogs on
  - (a) Media
  - (b) Environment
  - (c) Defence
  - (d) Technology
  - (e) Social issues



## Blogging

B logs represent the most serious challenge to traditional journalism. They empower every individual to turn into a publisher, and publish their views for consumption by web users living across the world. This is the first time that such empowerment has taken place. So far, information dissemination was controlled tightly by a few publishers, and the entire information flow was from one to many.

Blogs have brought about a fundamental shift in information flow. The information now flows from 'many to many'. Thoughts, ideas, and views are expressed and shared by individuals and communities free of third-party controls. There are no editors who decide on what should be, or can be, published. Sometimes, the editors are the blog users. They decide if the content is worthy of their attention or not.

This is in sharp contrast to the way content is generated and disseminated by traditional media. The editors have traditionally decided what is 'news', what people want to read, and what people should read. These walled gardens are fast disappearing in the West; and the same is expected to happen in India too. The editors, for the first time, are experiencing public scrutiny by bloggers, and it is not a pleasant experience. There is growing discomfort at the way bloggers question, and sometimes ridicule, newspaper reports and opinions. The media too realises the growing power and influence of blogs. Indiatimes.com, which is the service portal of *The Times of India* Group, offers live blogging to all its web users. The blog page invites users to start blogging and be heard by the world (Fig. 8.1). Rediff.com, another major portal, offers blogging in nine Indian languages, besides English (Fig. 8.2). These languages are Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu, Bengali, Malayalam, Gujarati, Kannada and Punjabi.





Source: http://o3.indiatimes.com/

The news websites, however, limit blogging to their own employees. They also take care to distance themselves from the views expressed by their staff members. IBNLive.com, the website of television channel CNN-IBN, has even posted a disclaimer: "All the content posted in the 'IBN Blogs' section, unless specified otherwise, is made by CNN-IBN employees. The content posted in 'IBN Blogs' does not follow routine internal CNN-IBN reviews and editorial processes and should be considered only as the views and opinions of the employees and not of CNN-IBN" (Fig. 8.3).









The traditional media interestingly promotes blogs written by its editors and reporters. The *Hindustan Times* and its business paper

The Mint routinely carry announcements of the latest blog posts written by their editors. It is a good way to promote staff blogs. The flip side is that web users may not return to a blog if they find the blog posts dull and inane. The media must remember that the Internet is not a captive medium. It is a universe where only the best can survive and prosper. It is, therefore, fallacious to assume that bloggers will flock to a blog just because it has been written by a journalist.

The same is true of celebrities. There has been a rash of blogs started by Indian celebrities. But, most fade away after the first few enthusiastic posts. Two exceptions are the blogs of film stars Amitabh Bachchan (Fig. 8.4) and Aamir Khan (Fig. 8.5). Amitabh Bachchan is a prolific blogger and writes posts frequently, which make news. Aamir Khan posts blogs less frequently, but they are equally readable. The media monitors the two bloggers closely, because every post is readymade material for a nice news story.



Fig. 8.4 Screenshot of the blog page of film star Amitabh Bachchan. *Source:* http://bigb.bigadda.com/

The growing interest in blogs has encouraged entrepreneurs to set up websites that list Indian blogs. Several blog directories have come up, the more popular of them being Labnol.org, Indiblogger.in (Fig. 8.6) and Blogs.oneindia.in.



Fig. 8.5Screenshot of the blog page of film star Aamir Khan.Source: http://www.aamirkhan.com/blog/login.php?topicid=695



Fig. 8.6 The home page of the Indian blogs directory Indiblogger.in. *Source:* http://www.indiblogger.in/

#### **BLOGS AND THEIR FEATURES**

The word 'blog' comes from weblog, a term coined by Jorn Barger. According to Webopedia.com, Barger used the term 'weblog' on his website robotwisdom.com in December 1997. It was shortened to its more popular form blog by Peter Merholz in April 1999. Since then blog has come to mean a personal diary maintained on the Internet.

Blogs and the free tools that make it possible to blog have led to an explosion of information on the Internet. This virtual world, popularly referred to as blogosphere, exists outside the mainstream media. It is populated by techies, professionals, housewives, environmentalists, scientists, teenagers, celebrities, working and would-be-moms, social and religious groups and many, many more.

The writings are as varied and diverse as the bloggers and their interests. They range from critiques and rants to tip sheets and how-todo posts. There are millions of words posted by bloggers everyday. Some of them attract large audiences, but most are lost on the Internet. This is because blogs are easy to create, but very difficult to sustain. They require patience, commitment and determination.

Web users depend on specialised blog search engines to locate blogs of their interest. The most popular blog search engines are Technorati (Fig. 8.7) and Google Blog Search. Bloglines, Blogdex and BlogPulse are other blog search engines that assist users to navigate blog posts, which, today, are like an Internet tsunami.Their phenomenal growth is on account of two key factors: (1) the ease with which a blog can be created; and (2) the presence of giants on the Internet, who provide free blogging facilities. The two most sought-after international blog tool



Fig. 8.7 The home page of Technorati.com, a popular blog search engine. *Source:* http://technorati.com/

providers are WordPress and Blogger. Both allow bloggers to create an unlimited number of blogs free of cost. In India, the three important blog service providers are Indiatimes, Rediff and Sify. Most blog providers now allow blogging in Indian languages, a facility that has created a spurt in language blogging.

Some of the key features of a blog are the following:

- (a) Content area: This is where the blog post is displayed. It comprises a headline and text. A few blog posts may also include photographs, audio and video links. Invariably, the latest post is displayed first; the others follow in chronological order of posting. Each blog post carries a time stamp that informs the date and time of posting.
- (b) Archives: All blog tools provide for archiving. The most common archiving option is by month and year. The articles are transferred into monthly and yearly folders for easy access. The blogger can also archive articles based on subject or categories. In case of group blogs, the archiving can be based on author names.
- (c) Comment: Each blog post has a comment box, encouraging users to leave their opinions. The conversations that mushroom build communities, and lead to a greater sharing of information. This is a big advantage that blogs carry over traditional media formats where interactivity is limited. Blog owners can moderate comments, and remove portions that are malicious or in bad taste. They can also delete comment spam posted by third parties to boost their Google search ranks.
- (d) Feeds: Web users need not visit a blog everyday, because each blog is equipped with a content pipeline that works like a blog alert. This service, known as a feed, alerts blog followers whenever a new post is published. All that they need to do is to subscribe to the feed. The two most popular blog feeds are RSS and Atom. They track every new post published on the blog, capture the headline and excerpts, and display them on feed readers. The users can track scores of their favourite blogs using these feed readers without visiting them every day.
- (e) *Blogroll*: This is a great tool to promote like-minded blogs and build communities. Generally, the blogroll is populated by links to those blogs whose content is valued by the blogger. It mirrors blogger interests and guides bloggers to blogs of similar nature.

- (f) *Permalinks*: The blog tool assigns a unique web address to every blog post. The address includes date of posting and the title of the blog post. Users can connect to the blog posts by embedding permalinks in their websites or blogs. They can also use permalinks to send pingbacks and trackbacks.
- (g) *Plug-ins or widgets*: Bloggers today can provide multiple functionalities to their blogs by inserting application codes. These codes are available in the administration area, and all that the bloggers have to do is to drag and drop the code in designated areas. These codes, which are known as plug-ins or widgets, can pull news, weather updates, games, factoids, audios and even videos, and integrate them with the blog. It is for the blogger to select the required plug-ins from the hundreds and thousands of plug-ins that each blog tool provides.
- (h) Themes: Bloggers need not worry about the look and feel of their blogs. Each blog tool provides scores of themes, which are predesigned templates also known as skins. Most skins or blog themes have been developed by independent programmers and integrated with the blog tool. A blogger can select a theme that best reflects the blog mood. Bloggers are also provided the option of modifying themes. But for this, they need to have some programming knowledge.
- (i) *Trackbacks*: These are tiny bits of code that enable one blog to communicate with another. Their purpose is twofold. One, trackbacks inform a blogger that another blogger has commented on his or her blog. This blogger can now click on the trackback and read an excerpt from the comment. Without the trackback link the blogger would not have known of any other posting on the Internet that talked about the blogger's post. The second purpose of trackbacks is to build conversation and develop communities.
- (j) Pingbacks: Pingbacks are like trackbacks. The only difference is that there is no separate pingback code generated by the blog. The hyperlink alone is sufficient for the two blogs to communicate. The only requirement for pinging to happen is that the two blogs should be pingback-enabled. Also, unlike trackbacks no content is sent. The blogger has to click on the hyperlink to access the blog from where the ping came.

(k) Categories: All blog tools provide for effective categorisation. They enable bloggers to store content or blog posts in well-defined folders or categories. For instance, a media blogger can create categories, like print, television, wireless, new media etc. This makes navigation of current and archived blog posts easier for the blogger as well as the users.

#### DO'S AND DON'TS OF BLOGGING

(1) One subject, one blog: The blog must not meander from topic to topic. There should be a clear focus and all posts must revolve around the blog subject. For instance, if a blog is about media, then it should limit itself to issues related to media. A parenting blog should share the pains and joys of bringing up a child, while a career tips blog should provide insights into planning and shaping a career.

(2) *Blog on what you know*: Do not get carried away by what others are blogging. You should blog on a subject that you know and about which you are knowledgeable. If you are a hairdresser, then you should blog about kinds of haircuts, hair gels, hair dyes, hair perms, etc. The blogs should be based on your experience and should convey information that is of benefit to the average web user. You will find traffic converging on your blog. However, if you blog on political issues simply because the talk in your saloon drifts to politics, then you may be lost in a crowd. Your blog posts will be nothing more than recycled content—information that you have picked up from the newspapers, television channels or your customers.

(3) *Don't stretch yourself*: It is easy to create a blog, but very difficult to maintain it. It is, therefore, advisable to have a single blog on a subject that excites you, and on which you blog with authority. Bloggers, who try to make a mark in three or four fields, end up creating several average blogs that no one values or visits.

(4) *Cut the I's and add the you's*: A blog must be conversational and in second person. I-did-so and I-tell-you-this-from-my-experience blogs are read only by the blog writers. They are ignored by the blogosphere. In contrast, a conversational tone helps to build a community. The users are not offended by the sanctimonious tone adopted by the blogger.

(5) *Posts that matter*: The best posts are those that address specific user interests. Five such posts are the following:

- (a) Instructional posts: A common question that every male with a thinning hairline wants to be answered is how to arrest the hair loss. A doctor, who does hair transplants, or a doctor, who specialises in alternate medicine and treats hair loss, can start a blog on what causes hair loss and how it can be treated. Each post should give practical advice.
- (b) Review posts: There is a great hunger to know about the usability of products. An individual planning to buy a new car will visit the automobile blogs to learn about the latest car models. Another individual will go through the reviews of mobile phones before making a decision. This is where blog posts, that are objective, timely and well informed, can draw visitors and build traffic.
- (c) Comparison posts: Comparison posts are even better. They compare two or more than two brands that are close to each other and rate them on their usability, pricing, quality, etc. Such posts save web users considerable time, which they would have to otherwise spend on first acquiring and then comparing information before making informed choices.
- (d) List posts: These are by far the most popular posts. They give web users five reasons to buy a stock, seven points to keep in mind while blogging, 13 mistakes they should avoid while going on a date, 11 reasons why they should vote for an individual. These posts are short, crisp and work like tip sheets. They summarise the most important information in point mode.
- (e) Opinion posts: These are the most difficult. Ideally, you should be an authority with an original point of view. The most sought after opinions are on finance, politics, technology and religion. However, you should be careful not to let your opinions sound like a rant or a grievance. They should stir people, and make them reflect.

(6) *Frequency of posts*: A returning visitor is like a hungry bird looking for food. He will return only if his earlier visits have been satisfactory. But, if he finds no content, he may not return again. That is why bloggers, who do not post regularly run the risk of losing visitors. The question is: What should be considered regular postings? Once a day? Once every two or three days? Once a week?

The best posting cycle is once a day. However, it is not always possible to post everyday. Bloggers may run out of ideas and the post could be less than satisfactory. It is better to post once in two days or even once a week. But, the blogger must make sure that the post goes up like clockwork on these days; if possible at a fixed time of the day. It will not be long before the visitors recognise this fact and arrive only on those days when the post is published.

(7) *Heads that carry weight*: A blog headline has two masters. The first is the search engine algorithm that decides whether to assign a high rank to the blog post or not. This is done on the basis of keywords used in the headline. Smart bloggers know this and they take great trouble to tweak the blog headline. Some even write two headlines—one for the blog post and the other for the page—making sure that each one carries keywords that are being searched at the publishing time. For this, they visit the Google Adwords Keywords page, a free tool that lists the keywords being used to search blog posts.

The second master is the visitor. The visitor must find the headline exciting. This is where headlines that motivate visitors or excite their curiosity score over others. They tell a woman learning to bake a plum cake "5 tested ways to bake yum plum cake" or evoke her curiosity by stating "Oberoi Chef's plum cake recipe revealed". The chances are that these headlines will get clicked more than a straight headline "How to make a plum cake" or "This Christmas bake great plum cakes" (Also see chapter on Headline Writing (Chapter 4) on how to write headlines for blogs).

(8) *Prefer a simple template*: You do not need a web designer to create a killer blog page. Both Wordpress and Blogger offer scores of design templates known as themes. You can select any one that suits the tone, tenor and mood of your writings. You also have the option to choose a template from third-party sites that have designed templates, which are compatible with Wordpress and Blogger. The theme, however, should be simple. A visitor should not struggle to read content. The layout should be simple and the colours should be pleasing. The font should be legible and the point size large enough to be read easily.

(9) *Don't bomb your visitors with things to do*: Blog providers like Wordpress and Blogger offer scores of plug-ins that can be integrated in your blog. Since each plug-in adds a new functionality, and makes your blog more

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versatile, the temptation is to integrate as many plugins as possible. But, have you ever thought how these plug-ins look to your visitors? This is how a call-to-action list looks on most blogs:

- Subscribe to e-mail newsletter
- Click on affiliate links and make a purchase
- Click on ads
- Submit a post to a social bookmarking site
- Check the blogs on the Blogroll
- Leave a comment
- Bookmark the blog
- E-mail the posts to a friend
- Subscribe to RSS feed

It is a long list of commands. Do you really want your visitor to do all these things? Nine out of ten blog owners would like visitors to read what they have written. Everything else is secondary. So, decide what you want your visitors to do, and accordingly limit the number of plug-ins to the most essential.

(10) *Encourage subscription*: Two plug-ins that are a must for any blog that is looking for traffic are the following:

- (a) RSS feed: Today, all Web browsers like Internet Explorer and Mozilla have built-in feed readers. Most users prefer to use these feed readers though there are several others who have downloaded feed readers directly from the Internet. These feed readers are like content sensors. They pull in freshly published content from all those websites and blogs that offer RSS subscription. All that the Internet user needs to do is to enter the RSS code of the blog in the feed reader. The feed reader will check the blog for fresh content, and display a part of the post or the entire post, depending upon settings, in the display window. The visitor need not even visit the blog. He knows when a new post has been added. For the blog owner, this is the best way to build a loyal audience.
- (b) Subscribe to e-mail newsletter: The newsletter is another potent way of building a loyal audience. In this case, a fresh post is e-mailed to the inbox of the visitor. The visitor is given the unsubscribe option in case he wants to opt out.

So, if you want to build loyal audiences, make sure that your subscription notices are displayed prominently. You can consider posting

one notice on top of the sidebar where it can be easily noticed. You can also post a subscribe notice at the bottom of each independent post.

(11) Showcase the best posts: Every good blogger creates two kinds of posts. The first are the daily posts, also referred to as routine or normal posts. These posts keep the blog fresh and alive. The second, and more important, are the killer posts. These are the posts that hook visitors and motivate them to return again and again to the blog. These posts may have a low frequency, but they establish the uniqueness of a blog. Smart bloggers extend the shelf life of their killer posts by showcasing them as 'popular posts'. They either list their last five killer posts in the sidebar or create a page where all such posts are displayed in chronological order. The best is to do both.

(12) *Three navigation must do's*: A blogger must think like a website administrator. The goal should be to enhance user experience. This can happen only if the elementary navigation rules, listed below, are followed:

- (a) *Search box*: The search box is as important for a blog as it is for a website. It must be positioned prominently, ideally in the header on top of the sidebar. Equally important, it should appear on all blog pages.
- (b) *Contact page*: Every blog must have a contact page, and it must be populated diligently. The contact page must provide details about the background of the blogger and list contact details. Many bloggers avoid identifying themselves. This is a mistake. Your comments will be taken seriously only when the visitor realises that you are competent to make those observations.
- (c) Archives: Every blog tool provides archiving facilities. The posts can be archived by weeks, by months or by year. This is a good navigation tool, but it needs to be supplemented by a separate listings page where all posts are arranged in chronological order. Such a page gives the visitor a bird's eye view of all the content available on the blog.

(13) *Network, but network smartly*: A new blogger is unlikely to be noticed unless he or she happens to be a celebrity. So, how does an unknown blogger gain recognition and respect of fellow bloggers? Here are seven steps that can get a blogger noticed:

(a) *Step 1*: The first step is to make a list of all blogs that the new blogger wants to be associated with. These blogs obviously should be related to the blogger's own field.

- (b) Step 2: The second step is to link to these blogs. The names of the selected blogs should be listed in the Blogroll section. If the number of blogs is more than 10, then the blogger should create a new page, which can be titled My Favourite Blogs or Recommended Blogs.
- (c) *Step 3*: The blogger should subscribe to the RSS feeds of all the selected blogs. This will be a strong indicator that the blogger is not trying to curry favour, but is actually following a blog.
- (d) Step 4: The blogger should send an e-mail to all the blog owners that they are part of his blogroll because he admires their posts. The blogger must also mention that he subscribes to their RSS feeds.
- (e) Step 5: The blogger must comment on the posts made on these blogs. These comments must be substantive and should be more in the nature of a conversation so that the targeted bloggers start responding.
- (f) *Step* 6: If possible, create posts on points raised by other bloggers, and link these posts to the original post. Make sure that the trackback URL is entered correctly for the blogger to check your post.
- (g) *Step 7*: The groundwork is now done, and the time has come to request a link. However, this should be done carefully, and after six or more months of the first contact.

(14) *Provide links to social bookmarking sites*: The fastest route to fame is to connect your blog to social bookmarking sites. These sites can make your blogpost go viral. There was a time when a post promoted on the home page of Digg.com could bring as many as 25,000 to 100,000 unique visitors. Some of the other social bookmarking sites that you can look at are Delicious.com, Stumbleupon.com, Technorati.com, Reddit.com, YahooBuzz and Newsvine.com. However, be selective in choosing the social networking sites. You must prefer those that are interactive, and where you can quickly build a fan following.

(15) *Promote your blog on social networking sites*: Two social networking sites that have caught the fancy of Indians are Facebook.com and Twitter.com. Facebook allows registered users to create a page that can feature blog posts. So, if you are not a member of Facebook, sign up for an account. Create a page where you can showcase your killer posts.

Twitter.com provides a similar opportunity. It provides registered users the facility to post 140-character tweets. You too can use Twitter to tweet the URLs of your killer posts. However, your tweets will only be heard if you build a community of followers. For this, you have to work hard. You need to identify all possible twitters who share your interests. Then you must start following them, and their tweets. Gradually, you will find a community developing around you.

#### **Useful Sites**

- 1. http://www.webopedia.com/quick\_ref/history\_of\_blogging.asp The website has published an authoritative note on the history of blogging. It also includes a useful timeline.
- http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2009/02/04/the-biggestmoments-in-indian-blogging-history-guest-post/ A comprehensive post on blogging in India.
- 3. http://www.labnol.org/india-blogs/indian-bloggers.html A useful directory of Indian bloggers.
- 4. http://www.indiblogger.in/directory.php Another directory that lists the names of important Indian bloggers.
- http://www.blogadda.com/ A popular Indian blog provider that provides tools to web users to create blogs.
- 6. http://blogs.oneindia.in/

A good site for bloggers to showcase their latest posts.

 Celebrity Blogs: http://soumyadipc.blogspot.com/2009/01/list-ofindian-celebrity-blogs.html
 The next provides useful information on blogs written by

The post provides useful information on blogs written by celebrities.

- http://www.aamirkhan.com/blog/login.php The web address of the blog written by Aamir Khan, Indian filmstar.
- 9. http://bigb.bigadda.com/

The web address of the blog written by Amitabh Bachchan, Indian filmstar.

#### Assignments

- 1. How have blogs changed the information flow?
- 2. Write a short note on the key features of a blog.
- 3. List five do's and don'ts of blogging.
- 4. Describe three kinds of posts that are popular.
- 5. What should be the frequency of publishing posts on blogs?
- 6. List three pitfalls that new bloggers should avoid.
- 7. What are the three navigation musts that each blog should have?
- 8. How can new bloggers popularise their blogs?



# Podcasting and Multimedia Storytelling

ext is not the only media that populates the Internet. Journalists, developers and storytellers are using a variety of media to tell their story. The formats include images, slide shows, audio files, radio stories, podcasts, video stories, interactive graphics, Flash presentations and many more.

These storytelling formats have opened the floodgates of creativity. They have created far more versatile and powerful platforms than the plain, vanilla way of telling a story using text and still images. Much of the software needed to tell stories in these formats is available free on the Internet or comes bundled with digital cameras, video cameras and audio recorders. These tools have empowered web users to create their own media and publish it on the scores of free sites that dot the Net.

The journalists unfortunately have been a little slow to adopt multimedia in their work. Many of them have even suffered in Western nations, like the United States and Britain, where the Internet has shaken the foundations of traditional media. They have either lost well-paying jobs or become reluctant adopters of multimedia tools.

The story in India is slightly different. Since the Internet is still to threaten the traditional media, there is little or no effort on the part of
Indian journalists to learn the art of multimedia storytelling. But this does not mean that Indian journalists should ignore these tools. These are powerful tools, and every Indian journalist must make an effort to master them.

### PODCASTING

An important storytelling form on the Internet is podcasting or telling the story in the audio format. The first podcasts were published on the Internet in 2004. At that time, they were meant to be downloaded and played on iPods, the portable audio player manufactured by Apple. Later, new software made it possible to play podcasts on a variety of audio players. However, the name podcast—where 'pod' comes from iPod and 'cast' comes from broadcast—has stuck.

Podcasts are still to challenge the radio, but they enjoy several advantages. These are the following:

- 1. *Negligible production costs*: A podcaster needs no expensive equipment to create a podcast. The four essential items that are needed are as follows:
  - Laptop or desktop to run the podcast software
  - Microphone to record the podcast
  - Headphones to listen to the podcast, and
  - Internet connectivity to publish, download or stream the podcast.

The podcasting software is available free of cost on the Internet, and can be downloaded and installed by any beginner. The software comes with Help files that any computer user can master.

- 2. *Hosting costs*: There are several podcast sites where a beginner can host podcasts. These sites provide a small amount of server space for free. If the number of files goes past the free space limit, then the podcaster has to pay a monthly or annual fee for extra space. The beginner can also use a blogging application like WordPress to host podcasts. The blog provider charges a negligible fee of \$10 a year for 5 GB of space.
- 3. *Ease of creation*: The podcaster does not need a fancy, sound-proof room to record a podcast. Any place that is quiet, and where there is no audio disturbance, is good enough for amateurs.

4. *Easy editing*: Podcasting software, like Audacity (Fig. 9.1), works like text editors. Podcasters can add or delete sound clips in the same way that they edit a text file. The audio files can then be converted into MP3 or WAV formats and hosted on the Internet.



Fig. 9.1 Audacity software being used to edit an audio file.

- 5. *Wide reach*: The podcasts can be accessed anywhere in the world. The web user only needs to click on the audio link that is embedded on the web page. The podcast can be streamed directly or downloaded as a file and played from the hard disk.
- 6. *No licensing:* No licensing is required to publish a podcast. Any individual can create a podcast and publish it on the Web. This is especially beneficial for amateur singers or garage bands to record music and publish it for their fans to access it from all parts of India or abroad.

# **Podcast Directories**

A good way to be noticed on the Internet is to become a member of podcast directories. These websites work like podcast aggregators and encourage podcasters to embed their links. Each podcast is identified by section, tags and headline. There is also a brief description of the podcasts. Such directories are especially useful for new podcasters. The directories provide them a platform from which they become visible to web users. Some of the popular podcast directories are Podcast.com (Fig. 9.2), Podcast Alley, Podcast.net, The Podcast Directory (Fig. 9.3) and Podcast Pickle. However, India is still to get its first podcast directory.



Fig. 9.2 The home page of Podcast.com, a leading podcast directory on the Internet.

Source: http://www.podcast.com/

PODCAST	DIRECTORY.COM	Search for Podcasts	Register   Sign In	
Podcast Internet Radio Podcast Directory:	The Gnostic Podcast Listen to a Podcast Proclaiming and Explaining Gnostic Christianity www.obsticPodcat.com			
Add a Podcast Remove a Podcast			Ads by Google	
Search for Podcasts Podcast Directory by Country by Language by Parzz	The Podcast Directory	Most Listened Today:	Featured Podcasts this week	
by Popularity by Category by Tags	Architecture - Arts - Books - more	lady-sonia.com film clip SneezWort.com Podcast and Blog.	Student Financial Aid News The Student Financial Aid	
by Region by City on a Google Map	Blogs and Commentary Blog - Commentary - Interviews - more	Lista siti porno 2.0 (diciamo User Generated Porno) Christian Contessa	News Podcast is a free podcast providing timely information about financial aid, student loans,	
De la calleta	Business Agriculture - Business - Careers - more	SMARTBoard Lessons 136: Best of IWB Pedagogy' SMARTBoard Lessons Podcast	and topics regarding education, personal finance, and more.	
Vihat is Podcasting Creating an XML Podcast Hosting	Absurd - Comedy - Culture Astrology - Culture - Entertainment - more	SMARTBoard Lessons 133: New Link&Best of Senteo' SMARTBoard Lessons Podcast	The Archers Contemporary drams in a rural setting from the world's	
Podcast Sottware Firefox Plugin Podcast Hardware	Education Educational - Higher Education - Improvement - more	Paul Is Dead 11 - Conclusiones (pt. 1) Paul Is Dead Paul Está Muerto	opera.	
Ads by Google Podcast Online FM Radio	Ethnic African American - Arabic - Australian - more	Today's Search Buzz:	Spycast Each month, the International Spy Museum will offer a new	

Fig. 9.3 The home page of Podcastdirectory.com, a podcast aggregator. Source: http://www.podcastdirectory.com/

#### Audio Files, Players and Software

There are over 200 audio file formats being used to record podcasts. But, MP3 remains the most popular one. One reason for the popularity of MP3 is that it is a compressed file and uses less server space. It needs a smaller bandwidth to transmit or stream. Professional podcasters prefer to use .AAC (Advanced Audio Coding) and .WMA (Windows Media Audio) formats. The other audio formats being used by podcasters are .ahx (WinAHX Tracker Module), .band (GarageBand Project), .dsm (Digital Sound Module), .koz (Audiokoz Music File) and .pvc (Panasonic VM1 Voice File).

The most popular podcasting software is Audacity. It is a free software and can be downloaded directly from the Internet. Feed for All is another software that can be used to create, edit and publish podcasts.

The podcasts can be heard on Windows Media Player, Apple QuickTime, VLC media player or WinAmp.

#### How to Podcast a News Report

The first step is to get the audio. For this, the reporter needs a digital recorder with an external microphone. The microphone can be placed close to the subject and the interview recorded. In case of a group, the reporter can pass the microphone around and get several audio bytes.

There is no harm in recording an interview in a natural environment. For instance, a shopkeeper can be interviewed in a crowded marketplace amidst the din of the market. This gives the interview a natural touch. However, the reporter must ensure that the market din does not drown the voice of the subject.

If the background noise is too strong, then the reporter should record the interview in a closed room or in a corner of the shop using a wireless microphone. The microphone can be clipped in a suitable place on the subject's dress, usually the shirt, and the interview recorded.

The market noise can be captured separately in three or four 20-sec. clips to be inserted later in the audio report.

A reporter can also do a first person analysis of an event. In this case, the reporter can record the analysis on a digital recorder and transfer the audio track to the computer using a USB cord or else record the audio directly into the computer using the Audacity software. **Recording the audio:** There are three good practices to adopt while recording an audio. These are the following:

(i) *Wear headphones*: The reporter can hear the audio and be certain that the interview is being recorded. The headphones eliminate the possibility of recording an interview and then returning to the newsroom to find that no sound has been recorded.

The headphones also enable the reporter to know if the audio is clean, and there are no extraneous sounds like a humming noise that can affect audio quality. The reporter can correct the recorder settings to eliminate such machine disturbances.

(ii) *Mike placement*: The reporter should go through the recording manual to know the distance at which a microphone should be held to record high-quality audio. He should then practice holding the microphone in his hands. Often, a reporter finds it difficult to keep his hand steady while recording. This constant shifting can affect audio quality and also distract the subject.

The reporter should avoid placing the microphone on a table while conducting the interview. There is always the danger of the microphone rolling off the table or picking up loud sounds if the subject gets agitated and bangs the table.

When using a wireless microphone, the reporter should decide where exactly the mike should be clipped to pick up clean audio, free of laboured breathing sounds. Should it be attached to the shirt pocket or the first shirt button? Should it be placed lower down on the chest? The reporter can learn these finer points by doing some practice recordings.

The reporter should also figure out which is the best place to attach the battery unit. Should it be clipped to the belt, slipped in the front coat pocket or placed in the back pocket? If the subject is a woman, then what is the best place to clip the microphone and the battery unit?

(iii) *Framing questions*: The reporter should avoid asking questions that will lead to 'Yes' or 'No' answers. Such answers do not take the story forward. The reporter should let the subject talk, even if it means recording longwinding answers. The subject should be given an opportunity to settle down. So, the first few questions can be of general interest, that need no special effort from the subject. These questions and answers can

be deleted during editing. But they can make the subject unwind and help him or her become comfortable.

#### **Editing the Report**

Most digital recorders store audio files in the .WAV format. These are uncompressed files and their broadcast quality is excellent. They should be transferred into the computer as .WAV files only and stored in a folder. The file can be transferred using a USB cord that comes with all good digital recorders.

However, it is important that the files are stored in a scientific manner, very much like the way text files are stored. This makes the task of searching and retrieving old files easier. Another good practice is to create an editing folder. This is where a copy of the original file should be transferred for editing. The original file should be stored safely for reuse later or as standby in case something goes wrong during editing.

The reporter should now open Audacity, the audio-editing software, and import the copied file for editing. He can do this by clicking on the File>Import>Audio buttons. To play the file, the reporter should click on the green Play button located on the Audacity navigation bar.

The reporter should put on headphones before hitting the Play button. He should never edit audio based on the file being played by the computer speakers. The headphones enable the reporter to pick up all extraneous sounds like 'hmm' or 'umm' or 'err', which are not relevant to the story or heavy breathing noises before, during and after a sentence.

The headphones also allow the reporter to note 'dead' air between sentences. However, when getting rid of the 'dead air', the reporter should not make the audio sound unnatural. Every individual has his or her own style of talking. The pauses between sentences are an important part of them. So, do not remove this 'dead air' completely. The audio will not sound natural.

Similarly, it is important not to end the audio abruptly. A faint whiff of 'dead air' should be left behind for the audio to end on a natural note, something which human ears are accustomed to, and involuntarily expect to happen when listening to an audio story.

The audio file should be played at least twice before the reporter decides to hit the delete button. This practice too is akin to text editing

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where the editor goes through the report a couple of times before deciding on changes.

The reporter should now select the section of the audio track that needs to be deleted and click the delete button on the key board or the Cut command on the Edit menu of Audacity software. The selected track will be removed from the audio file. The edited file should be saved by clicking the Save Project command from the File menu (File> Save Project).

The Audacity software saves the file as .aup project file. Simultaneously, a data folder is created where the edited audio is saved. The Audacity files can only be played on Audacity software. For playing on other audio players, the files should be converted to a format that can be read by those media players.

The Audacity software allows files to be converted to WAV and MP3 formats, which are compatible with most audio players. The MP3 files have one more advantage. They are compressed files, and therefore, take less space. The disadvantage is that the audio quality suffers when the file is converted into the MP3 format.

The files should, therefore, be saved as WAV files if they are to be played from the computer or portable storage devices, like CDs or DVDs. If, however, they have to be stored on the Internet, or transmitted as e-mail files, then they should be saved in the MP3 format.

The files can be converted into MP3 format from the File> Export> Save as MP3 command. The original track stays untouched and the MP3 files are ready to be published on the net.

However, before hitting the 'publish command', the reporter must play the story to a colleague or a friend, who has a good ear, to learn if the story plays out naturally. Podcasts that sound stilted or where the reporter sounds like a contortionist should never be published.

#### **Podcasting in India**

Podcasting is still to take off in India or in Indian media. The one newspaper that encourages its senior reporters and editors to podcast their reports is the *Hindustan Times* (Fig. 9.4). LiveMint.com, the website of *Mint*, the financial daily from the *Hindustan Times* Group, runs podcasts as Live Mint Radio (Fig. 9.5). IBNlive.in.com, the website

of the TV channel CNN-IBN, was among the first to post its newscasts as podcasts (Fig. 9.6) but it has stopped doing so now.

However, there is little doubt that podcasting has great potential. It is only a question of time before more Indians and Indian media takes to podcasting.



Fig. 9.4 The podcast page of Thehindustantimes.com.

Source: http://www.hindustantimes.com/audio-news-video/podcasts/sid812.aspx



**Fig. 9.5** A screenshot of the radio page of Livemint.com *Source:* http://www.livemint.com/mintradio.aspx

BN Podcasts keeping with its path-breaking approach in gal	hering and reporting news on the televis	sion and the internet, CNN-IBN
so the first Indian mainstream media organisa u can subscribe to IBNLive's podcasts using t	tion to offer Podcasts to its audience an	d viewers.
STREAMING		0:01:01.727
low playing	Nev	vs Bulletin - 9 p.m. (17-02-2010) 🍕 🛄 👘
Podcast Feeds	Description	
News Bulletin - 9 p.m. (17-02-2010) Wed, 17 Feb 2010 22:43:39 +0530	The top stories from around India at 9 p.m. News from around the country and the world on politics, business, sports and entertainment.	
News Bulletin - 3 p.m. (17-02-2010) Wed, 17 Feb 2010 16:47:20 +0530	The top stories from around India at 3 p.m. News from around the country and the world on politics, business, sports and entertainment	
News Bulletin - 10 a.m. (17-02-2010) Wed, 17 Feb 2010 11:10:54 +0530	The top stories from around India at 10 a.m. News from around the country and the world on politics, business, sports and entertainment	

Fig. 9.6 The news telecasts hosted as audio stories on the IBNlive.in.com website. *Source:* http://ibnlive.in.com/podcast.html

#### MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING

The Internet makes it possible to publish reports that combine two or more than two storytelling formats, something which no news medium was able to achieve so far. This technology leap has given birth to a new kind of journalist—the multimedia journalist.

The multimedia journalist works with text, image, graphic, audio and video files to report a news event. The resultant story, which is described as a multimedia story, captures the news moments and the news mood better than any one single format.

This form of journalism has imposed new demands on traditional journalists. Besides the pen and notebook, they now need to carry three more storytelling tools: a digital camera, an audio recorder and a video camera. They also need to know how to use these tools, and the media they generate. Some of the popular storytelling formats that have emerged are the following:

1. *Telling a story using still images and audio*: The two media that are combined in this form of storytelling are audio and digital images. The story is developed using the following hardware and software:

*Step 1*. Get images: Use a digital camera to capture as many images as possible. The images should be from a variety of angles and as a rule should include long shots, close ups, crowd shots, face shots, action shots, etc.

*Step 2*. Select the images: Transfer the photographs to a computer using Bluetooth or a cable that connects the camera to the USB port of the computer. Copy the images that best tell the story in a separate folder.

*Step 3.* Edit the images: Use photo-editing software, like Adobe Photoshop, to crop out extraneous elements in a photograph. The cropped photographs can be sharpened, resized and saved for use on the web as .jpeg files. Such photographs have low resolution and use less space.

*Step 4*. Record the story: Use audio recording and editing software, like Audacity, to narrate the story. The story can be recorded as a single audio file or as several small audio files, with each file describing the action in one image or a group of images.

*Step 5*. Launch the Soundslides software and open a file. Import the images in the storytelling sequence and then import the audio files. Save the file.

*Step 6*. Publish the file: The multimedia file can now be published as an audio slideshow on the Internet.

The big advantage of such storytelling is that the audio is complemented by images. The files are light and there is no buffering even when they are streamed on low bandwidth connections.

2. *Telling a story using text, images, audio and animation*: PowerPoint, developed by Microsoft, is much more than a presentation software. It is an exciting tool that enables a journalist to combine text, audio, images, graphics and animation to create a powerful multimedia story.

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*Step 1*. Getting the story. The two digital tools that the journalist needs are audio recorder and camera. The recorder captures the sound bytes that the journalist needs to tell the story and the camera captures the story visuals.

*Step 2*. Editing the media: The journalist needs to edit each media separately.

- (i) The text has to be converted into bulleted points for being placed in slides.
- (ii) The photographs have to be selected based on their storytelling value and then cropped to enhance the effect.
- (iii) The recording has to be broken into smaller audio files for being superimposed on text or image slides or being included in the main narrative.

Step 3. Recording the main narrative: The journalist now needs to record the story. A good practice is to write the script before starting the recording. The script should have an intro that describes the main points in the story and a conclusion to round off the story. There should be a brief but evocative audio for each slide. This should include the audio bytes retrieved from the field audio. *Step 4.* Organising the story: The journalist should open a PowerPoint file, give it a name and move the edited elements in the following sequence:

- (i) The first slide to be placed in the PowerPoint file should be the title slide. It should be followed by the text and image slides that form the body of the narrative.
- (ii) The animation command box should be used to select an animation style that goes best with the mood of the story.
- (iii) The audio files should then be imported and embedded in the respective slides.
- (iv) The journalist has the option to use transitions before those slides where the narrative moves to a new point.

*Step 5*. Viewing the file as a single story: The last step is to run the multimedia story to check that each element flows smoothly into another. The journalist should not hesitate to record fresh audio or change the sequence of slides or animation styles if any element is found to be incomplete, jarring or distracting.

Once satisfied, the multimedia story can be published on the Internet as.ppt file.

3. *Telling the story using text, audio, video, images and graphics*: This is the highest form of multimedia storytelling, because it uses video clips that provide a natural movement and rhythm to the story and make watching the story much more fun. The flip side is that the video files are heavy and they become heavier when they are combined with audio and picture files. They need large amounts of server space and can only be streamed on large bandwidth connections.

There is no single way to develop a story that uses so many different forms of media. The best is to follow a step-by-step approach, where video clips form the fulcrum of activity.

*Step 1*. Visualising the story: The storyline needs to be mapped out before the shooting starts. The journalist should decide the different forms of media that will be used in building the story and what each media will communicate. This should include preparing a laundry list of media that is already available in the archives like images and media that needs to be obtained as video clips, audio bytes or still images.

*Step 2.* Getting the story: The four story-gathering tools that the journalist should carry are the faithful pen and notebook, a video camera, a sound recorder and a digital camera. Today, most video cameras come with a provision to shoot still images. In such cases, a journalist can switch modes and use the same camera to capture video footage and still images.

*Step 3*. Editing the story: Since the story has been recorded using four different forms of media, the journalist needs to process each separately. The work involves the following:

- (i) Going through notes scribbled in the old-fashioned reporter's notebook, and retrieving points that can be used as bulleted points while narrating the story.
- (ii) Downloading, selecting and preparing images for use in the story.
- (iii) Extracting audio bytes.
- (iv) Deciding video clips or sections of the video clips that should be used.
- (v) Preparing title and credit slides.
- (vi) Recording the intro and ending.

*Step 4*. Organising the story: The journalist is now ready to make a film using any video editing software, like iMovie, Windows Movie Maker or Final Cut Pro. The edited video clips, the audio clips, the still images and the text narration can now be imported into the storyboard. The journalist also has the option to add musical notes provided they do not violate copyright laws. The last step should be to preview the story. This should be done three or four times or even more till the journalist is satisfied that there is no jerky narration and all elements mesh together as a single whole. Only then the Make Movie button should be pressed.

*Step 5*. Publishing the story: The multimedia story is now ready to be uploaded. This can be done using the FTP (file transfer protocol) software since the file is heavy or it can be uploaded directly to the Internet using a content management system. In the latter case, the time taken to upload the file may be much more, especially, if the journalist is using low bandwidth connection.

4. Using Flash to tell the story: Flash is a very versatile software tool and can be used to tell stories in a compelling multimedia format. The two big advantages that Flash brings to the table are interactivity and animation. The Flash files are also lighter as they use text, audio, still and animated images only.

However, a journalist needs to master Flash, before he can use it as a storytelling tool. This is far more cumbersome than using software, like Final Cut Pro or iMovie.

Flash is generally used by web developers, who find it a great tool to develop web-based presentation or interactive graphic pages.

# Multimedia Storytelling in India

More and more media houses are now providing audio and video content on their websites. The *Hindustan Times* encourages its reporters to do audio analysis of stories. It also syndicates video from news agencies and uses tab-based design to showcase them as multimedia content on its home page (Fig. 9.7). The *Indian Express* too syndicates video from ANI and publishes it on its site to provide multimedia experience to its visitors (Fig. 9.8).

The Times of India Group publishes content from its newspapers and television channels on its portal Indiatimes.com. It also displays



multimedia content prominently on the home page of the timesofindia.com website (Fig. 9.9).

Fig. 9.7 Thehindustantimes.com uses a tab-based design to showcase audio, video and image files.

Source: http://www.hindustantimes.com/



Fig. 9.8 The Indianexpress.com syndicates video from ANI to provide the multimedia experience to its visitors. Source: http://www.indianexpress.com/video/

The television channels are rich in multimedia content, and use both text and video files on their sites. The audio and video stories are indicated through their respective icons. NDTV.com uses the camera icon to separate the video stories from the text reports (Fig. 9.10).





Top Stor	ies	
Latest	Most Read	Most Commented
India n	ot deterre	ed by Qaida
warnin	g on IPL,	hockey
	P Chidam an email the intern sending s	nbaram has brushed aside by Illyas Kashmiri warning ational community against sportspersons to India.
⊞ IPL 3: BC	CI pleads, Sen	a climbs down
⊕ Courts ca	an order CBI pr	obe without state's OK
⊕ Will Oz te	eens who attac	ked Indians be freed?
🕀 Gadkari	to unleash stra	ategy at BJP meet today
🕀 Hoodas h	ost lunch for 2	20,000 in Rohtak
⊕ Maoist at	tack: Jawans'	families protest   🛋
🕀 Pak foste	rs terrorism: I	ndian minister
⊕ 26/11 su	spects' lawyer:	s fear for their lives
🕀 Pune bla:	st death toll ris	ses to 11   🛋
🕀 Indians a	mong most at	tractive in world
⊕ 'Donated'	uniforms for I	indian Olympic team
⊕ Miffed Aa	amir quits cop	yright panel
⊕ In Pics: Shilpa Shetty's tea with royalty		
⊕ Test, Day	4: Bad light,	drizzle halts play



Source: http://www.ndtv.com/

# **Useful Sites**

- http://www.jtoolkit.com/audio/index.html
   A useful site to learn the gear needed by an audio journalist.
- 2. http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/startto finish/storyboarding/

A great site to learn multimedia skills.

- http://Flashjournalism.com The site provides useful tips on flash journalism.
- 4. http://mindymcadams.com/tojou/ An American instructor shares her experiences and provides tips to become a multimedia journalist.
- http://onlinejournalismblog.com/ The blog is run by Paul Bradshaw, a journalism instructor from UK, and is a very useful site for anyone wanting to keep track of developments in multimedia journalism.
- http://www.buzzmachine.com/
   One of the finest multimedia blogs on the net. It is written by Jeff Jarvis, a top multimedia authority in the United States.

# Assignments

- 1. What are the advantages of podcasts over traditional radio?
- 2. List the basic tools needed to create podcasts.
- 3. What are the points that podcasters should keep in mind while recording interviews?
- 4. Why should podcasters wear headphones while editing podcasts?
- 5. List the name and web address of ten important podcast sites in India.
- 6. List three formats used to tell a multimedia story.
- 7. Describe the different steps involved in telling a story using images and audio files.
- 8. Describe the steps involved in telling a multimedia story using Microsoft PowerPoint.
- 9. Describe the steps involved in telling a multimedia story using text, images, graphics, audio and video.



# Hyperlinks and Deep Links

A hyperlink is a code that is used to link one web page to another. The code is inserted in the text or image that the site administrator chooses to connect one web page to another. This text or image can be a single word, a headline, a few lines of text, an image, a graphic or even a full page.

When a web user clicks on the text or image link carrying the code, the user's browser—which may be Internet Explorer or Firefox or any other—reads the web address contained in the code and connects the user to the web page hosted at that address. It is this ability to link different elements on the net that makes Internet such a potent medium.

# **ELEMENTS OF A HYPERLINK**

A hyperlink is like a road map or a web path that is transmitted to the server to enable it to locate the web page. It is based on simple logic and helps the server to move from one folder to another as it looks for the requested page. Once the page is located, it is served to the user without any fuss.

This path or the web address is also displayed in the address bar when a page downloads. The layman may not be able to decipher the code, but the programmer, who wrote the code, will instantly know the folder in which the story is stored on the server. That is why the hyperlink can also be referred to as the web address of pages that form a website (Fig. 10.1).



Fig. 10.1 The web address of a news report published on the website of telegraphindia.com displayed in the address bar.

Source: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100218/jsp/calcutta/story\_12120462.jsp

The following hyperlink, taken from the website Telegraphindia.com, has been stripped to its basic elements to show how a web path is made: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100218/jsp/calcutta/story\_12120462.jsp

- 1. *http://www*: The mandatory part of the web address.
- 2. *telegraphindia.com*: The name of the site where the web page is hosted.
- 3. calcutta: The folder where all Calcutta news reports are stored.
- 4. *story\_12120462*: The identity assigned to the story.

The web address of each page stored in the server is unique and it is important that the address should always be correct and complete. A missing letter, a missing full stop, a missing Boolean character, like the plus mark or an extra character or word, in the web address will confuse the server. The server will be unable to locate the page because the address of the web page is wrong. It will then be left with no other option but to serve the message: Page not found.

A site where a user frequently confronts the 'Page not found' message reflects the sloppiness of the site's programmers and the site administrator, not to mention online editors who refuse to take quick corrective action when they see error pages. The purpose of hosting a news report is lost if the web users are unable to access the web pages. That is why it is important for all online editors to understand the mechanics of hyperlinks. They will serve their readers better if they ensure that there are no broken links on their site.

#### **KINDS OF HYPERLINKS**

Websites use three kinds of links: the simple hyperlinks, the deep links and the embedded hyperlinks.

- Simple hyperlink: The simple hyperlink is the code that is used to link different pages of the same website. The number of these pages may be two or a million, but the hyperlink ensures that all the pages can be accessed with one or multiple clicks of the mouse. A simple hyperlink is also used to link a website with the home page of another website. In this case, the user moves out of the host website and onto a new website. These links are generally used to improve the user experience and form part of the knowledge management policy of a website.
- 2. *Deep link*: A deep link is one where a website hyperlinks to a story that is stored on an inside section of another website. In doing so, the website bypasses the home page of the site that owns the story.
- 3. *Embedded hyperlink*: A few sites hyperlink words within a running story. The hyperlinking is done to enable browsers access stories related to the hyperlinked word. The embedded hyperlinks are both a boon and a bane. They provide access to related stories that may enhance the knowledge of a web user; at the same time, they also interrupt the web user's reading. The web user is tempted to stop at each hyperlinked word or group of words and click. This interrupts the thought process of the web user, and very often the web user is unable to focus on the story he is reading.

The embedded hyperlinks are particularly popular with blog writers, who use them to connect their blog posts to a news report or to another blog post. It is a useful way to provide context to a blog post (Fig. 10.2).



Fig. 10.2 The words 'expressed their displeasure' in a blog post on http://churumuri.wordpress.com/ have been hyperlinked to an article run on *The Hindu* website.

*Source:* http://churumuri.wordpress.com/2010/02/17/churumuri-poll-gangubaimusic-university/

# HYPERLINK FORMS

Hyperlinks can be categorised into four different types based on the way they are displayed. These are as follows:

1. *Text link*: The most common and popularly used hyperlink is the text link. It can be a single word used at the end of a paragraph or at the end of a web page. This word can be *Read* or *Full Story*. The web user on seeing the word *Read* will realise that the news report is not over. He needs to click on the word *Read* to reach the remaining part of the story (Fig. 10.3).

The Telegraph Missing On Your Daily New Is Now Impossible	The Teleg	raph			
	Thursday , February 18 , 20	010			
IN TODAY'S PAPER	IN TODAY'S PAPER Front Page > Nation				
Front Page Nation	Nation				
Calcutta Bengal Opinion International Business Stocks Live Sports Cricket Live Entertainment Sudoku Crossword Enhanced Jumble Gallery Horse Racing Travel	Aamir quits panel after Akhtar spat A panel set up to look into a proposal on film royalty sharing has got caught in Bollywood's celebrity wars.   Read Voice Gadkari's, line Sonia's When Nitin Gadkari had addressed the Delhi media for the first time last December after becoming BJP president, he had taken a leaf out of Rahul Gandhi's political g   Read GM crops vital for India: Pawar Union agriculture and food supply minister Sharad	Gadkari at the BJP national			
WEEKLY FEATURES Knowhow Jobs Telekids Personal TT 7days	Pawar today iterated his support for crop biotechnology, warning that India's ability to combat future challenges in fo   <u>Read.</u> Bengal govt 'pleased' Bengal law minister Rabilal Moitra today said the state government was "pleased" with the Supreme Court	executive in indore <u>Voice Gadkari's, line Sonia's</u> NATION BRIEFS → Aussie let-off → Poach case			

Fig. 10.3 The telegraphindia.com website uses the word *Read* to hyperlink the story to the story page.

Source: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100218/jsp/nation/index.jsp

2. *Headline link*: Some media sites prefer to embed the hyperlink in headlines. This is a useful practice, but it can also be confusing if the site runs a teaser paragraph after the headline. A new user will have to run the cursor on the text to know which part is hyperlinked. It is, therefore, advisable to either underline the headlines to announce that the hyperlinks are embedded in them or else use indicative text like *Full Story* to drive the attention of the web user.

Similarly, it is a good practice to underline stand-alone headlines when they are used as links. This assists the web user to instantly know that new story windows will open when the underlined text is clicked (Fig. 10.4).

<ul> <li><u>CBI recovers fake US</u> <u>cheques, arrests one</u></li> <li><u>Muslim clerics will 'protest'</u> <u>Rahul's visit to Azamgarh on</u> <u>'Batla pretext'</u></li> <li><u>Railways announces new</u> <u>package for Buddhist circuit</u></li> <li><u>Aamir Khan resigns from</u> <u>Copyright panel</u></li> <li><u>Aamir Khan resigns from</u> <u>Copyright panel</u></li> <li><u>2-day Hill bandh begins</u> today</li> <li><u>Mixed reaction to Silda EFR</u> <u>camp shift</u></li> <li><u>Case against job quota for</u> <u>Muslims</u></li> <li><u>Scorsese keen on restoring</u> <u>Kalpana: Shankar</u></li> <li><u>Cong meets today on seat</u> <u>sharing with Trinamul</u></li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Business</li> <li>MSatyam to hire 5,000 staff</li> <li>Govt may help Bharti for African acquisition</li> <li>Notice must before assessment of undisclosed income: SC</li> <li>India seeks investment from Austria</li> <li>ONGC team to invest \$2.25t</li> </ul> Sport <ul> <li>Rain spoils India's day</li> <li>'Playing conditions didn't include use of floodlights'</li> <li>'We still love Cronje'</li> <li>Bangladesh frustrate Kiwis</li> <li>India face Cup threat</li> </ul>
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Fig. 10.4 Thestatesman.net underlines headlines to indicate that they are clickable links.

Source: http://thestatesman.net/

- 3. *Numeral link*: Numbers are useful ways of informing a reader as to how many sections a story has been broken into. They can be used in two ways.
  - (a) Roman numerals can be placed at the end of the text to indicate the number of sections as indicated below: I, II, III, IV...
  - (b) Arabic numerals can be used in a similar manner to apprise the browser of the number of web pages used to run the report. The site can adopt any one of the following two styles:

1, 2, 3, 4 or Page 1 of 4 or Page 4 of 4

4. *Image/graphic link*: Hyperlinks are embedded in images or graphics when a site wants to link small images to their full versions. This is a good strategy. By using small images a site reduces the page weight. At the same time the hyperlink allows the web user to see the image or graphic in full by clicking on the hyperlink. Image links are used most commonly in photo galleries and e-commerce sites. They are also used on home or index pages of sites (Fig. 10.5).





Source: www.expressbuzz.com/

# UTILITY OF HYPERLINKS

Hyperlinks are one of the most important tools available to online editors to organise their sites in simple and user-friendly formats. They improve navigation, reduce download time and also add a dash of colour to pages. Some of the advantages that hyperlinks bring to a site are as follows:

1. Sectioning a story: Hyperlinks can be used to break long news reports into smaller and easily readable sections (Fig. 10.6). This has two advantages: (1) the user is not put off by seeing a report that runs and keeps running down the page in an unending manner; and (2) a shorter page reduces download time, especially if the page is loaded with visuals.

For Gadkari hit out hard at rampant factionalism in the party. He told the 250-odd members of the national executive: "Apni rekha badi karein naa ki doosron ki rekha chhoti. Jinko party ne sab kuch diya hai, unki vajeh se party ko mushkil na face karna pade," (You must not run others down; the party has faced difficulties due to those who have got so much from the party).

"Although I started on a tentative note, I am far more confident today, after having received support from all senior leaders," a leader present at the national executive meet quoted Gadkari as telling the delegates.

123

... contd.

Fig. 10.6 The Indianexpress.com publishes long stories across two or three pages, and hyperlinks them with numbers. The web users are also provided with the option of the single page format, in case they

Next

Single Page Format

want to read the story as a single page.

*Source:* http://www.indianexpress.com/

However, sectioning a story can boomerang if all parts are not properly hyperlinked. There may be negative fallouts if the story is too short to be sectioned. The user will end up feeling cheated. In deciding sections, the thumb rule should be to make it possible for site users to access the full stories quickly and easily.

- 2. *Image/graphic links*: Images are a powerful tool to generate user interest. They make the page livelier and also enable online editors to direct user attention to the site's most important sections. However, all online editors must ensure that the image links used on home or section pages are small and are not overweight. Otherwise, they will add to the weight of the page and increase the page download time.
- 3. *Dash of colour*: Online editors need not use the default blue colour to indicate the hyperlinked text. They can change the colour to make the hyperlinks attractive; of course, they must seek the aid of the Design Editor to select the colour. They should then stick to it to ensure uniformity and reader recall. If too many colours are used, the web user will not know which one stands for the link.
- 4. *Increased traffic*: Besides functional and design related utility, hyperlinks help build traffic to content-rich sites. This traffic may arrive from four different sources:

(a) *Directories*: There are several specialised portals on the Internet, like Yahoo.com and Rediff.com, whose staff members visit different sites everyday, study the content hosted on the sites, grade the value of this content and catalogue the sites in the shape of a searchable directory. The directory can then be searched using keywords.

These directories are a great boon for websites. They make it feasible for a user to reach their website without even knowing their site name. For instance, if a user searches for South Indian news, the Yahoo search directory throws up the names of thehindu.com, the deccanherald.com and many more media sites. All these names are hyperlinked to the home pages of the sites. It is quite possible that the user may not be aware of the web names of these media sites, but thanks to the search directory he can browse them.

(b) *Link aggregators*: There are some sites on the net that have very little content of their own but which are highly trafficked sites. These sites become convenient points for users searching for news of their interest. A very good example of a link aggregator is Samachar.com. It is one of India's highest trafficked sites. Users treat it as an invaluable reference point; a single page where they can see the major Indian headlines of the day; more than that they can access the stories by clicking on the hyperlinked headlines. Media sites may not like link aggregators, but they do not mind them as long as they continue to send traffic to their sites.

(c) *Search engines*: Search engines use meta tags (see Chapter 13 on Search Engines) to develop hyperlinked, searchable databases. They form another useful source of a third party hyperlink showering benefits in the form of extra visitors to websites.

(d) *Knowledge links*: Internet makes it possible to connect information databases that provide different perspectives to the same issue. Thus, in the case of Afghan War, websites provided links to American media sites, British newspaper sites, European newspaper sites, Arab newspaper sites and Pakistani newspaper sites. This made it possible for web users to know how other major war players were looking at the same issue.

Knowledge links have a flip side too. There is no guarantee that users who migrate to a new site thanks to the knowledge links, will come back. It is very much like Hotel Ashoka directing its customers to Taj Connemara with the belief that all of them will continue coming back to it irrespective of finding a new place to eat. It is possible, but it is a business decision that may also boomerang—a few may choose to stay on with Taj Connemara. That is why, content sites should be careful in providing links to other content sites and e-commerce sites should avoid providing links to rival e-commerce sites. It is not good business sense to promote your rivals.

#### ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

No one questions the utility of hyperlinks. But, most media sites would like third-party sites to take their permission before providing a link. They have good reasons to be so fussy and demanding.

The first question they need to ask is: will the new hyperlink reduce their credibility? This is a question that is of critical importance not only to content sites, but to link exchanges too. Samachar.com, the number one link aggregator in India, earned credibility and traffic in the early years of the Internet by providing links to major newspaper sites. It was so successful that it became the virtual entry point for Indians living abroad. Having earned that respect, it is now essential for Samachar.com (Fig. 10.7) to provide links to only those sites whose credibility is above board.

# Fig. 10.7 The home page of Samachar.com that aggregates links from major newspaper and television channel websites.

Source: http://www.samachar.com/

BBC, which has always put credibility above everything else, has posted the following disclaimer on its site bbc.co.uk: "We are not responsible for content hosted on external sites" (Fig. 10.8). But is this disclaimer enough? Will it absolve the online editors of bbc.co.uk of all responsibility if an external link that they provided turned out to be a report that incited communal passions?

RELATED INTERNET LINKS
<ul> <li>Chinese government</li> </ul>
🕨 Dalai Lama
The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites
TOP AMERICAS STORIES

Fig. 10.8 The disclaimer carried by bbc.co.uk about external links. Source: www.bbc.co.uk

There are two issues involved here. The first is providing the link. The link has been provided to broaden the information base of a user. No one can question this utility; in fact, everyone must welcome it. The second is a little difficult to answer. Links that direct users to reports that inflame passions in the name of knowledge can be treated as a tool to spread disaffection. Users would have remained blind to such reports if their attention had not been drawn to them. The Internet law is still evolving and it is difficult to say what stand the law-makers will finally take on this sensitive issue.

A similar question arises with regard to helplines set up during national calamities. When an earthquake rocked Gujarat in 2001, over a dozen relief sites sprang up, a majority of them in the United States, each requesting a link to be provided to them to enable people to donate online. Many of them requested media sites to provide links so that web users could reach their sites and donate handsomely for earthquake relief. The cause was such that most well-known Indian media sites and portals obliged.

The media sites may have done so from a purely humanitarian point of view. But, in doing so, they also gave legitimacy to the earthquake relief sites. A visitor would normally presume that the highly credible and wellestablished Indian media sites would have checked the antecedents of such sites before giving them a link. However, if this were not done the damage would have been phenomenal. One cheat could have badly tarnished the name and image of the site.

That is why all links provided on a site must be filtered carefully. This principle should also include advertising links. Respectable sites must block advertisements run by pornographic or communally sensitive sites. Site administrators must realise that they enshrine a linked site with respectability the moment they allow a link.

Of course, this exercise needs to be carried out carefully. If media sites try to play extra safe, they will end up lowering the utility of the net. If they indiscriminately lower their guard, then they may end up compromising their fair name. It is a tightrope walk that has to be undertaken and must be undertaken. After all, Internet is the best way to link people across the world, especially in times of need.

A second and an equally thorny subject is the issue of deep linking. A deep link by its very definition means penetrating a site and reaching a news report that is hosted deep inside it. Ideally, a site should feel happy when a third party provides a deep link to its news reports. It definitely makes sense for bbc.co.uk to provide a link to a major South Indian story hosted by thehindu.com, South India's major news site; just as it adds utility to thehindu.com to provide a link to a report on opportunities for South Indians in London run by bbc.co.uk. The visitors of both sites stand to benefit by such hyperlinking because both the sites are respectable sites and by providing hyperlinks they allow more people to access information of their interest.

But what about the deep-linked sites? A user may not visit the home page of a deep-linked site where paid advertisements have been hosted depriving the advertiser of an extra customer and the site owner of extra rupees. There is also the possibility that the user may be put off by the deeplinked story and may decide to blacklist the site. In contrast, a visitor who lands on the home page of a site will get a clear idea of a site's strengths and weaknesses. He will not go by a single deep-linked story.

Site administrators must also patrol the Internet to locate sites that have provided unauthorised links to their site. These links are like a double-edged sword. They may bring in traffic but may also bring in bad name, especially if the sites providing external links are pornographic or inflammatory in nature. The visitor will not be aware of the niceties or technicalities of hyperlinking, but his admiration for a site may be replaced by derision or ridicule if he stumbles across such links.

Online editors, therefore, should not take Hyperlinks for granted. They must be as careful in providing links as in allowing links. Ultimately, they must look upon Hyperlinks as a useful, though at times a slippery, ropeway to build traffic, as a useful knowledge management tool and a unique resource to enhance the power of the Internet.

#### **Useful Site**

http://www.patentperfect.com/idea.htm:

An article titled "Hyperlinks, frames and meta-tags: An intellectual property analysis" by Jeffrey R. Kuester and Peter A. Nieves.

#### Assignments

- 1. What is a Hyperlink?
- 2. Copy and paste an example of:
  - (a) Text link
  - (b) Image link
  - (c) Numeral link
  - (d) Headline link
- 3. What is a deep link?
- 4. How can Hyperlinks help increase traffic to a website?
- 5. Describe the main elements of a Hyperlink.
- 6. Write a short note on the different kinds of Hyperlinks used on the Internet.
- 7. Describe the three main utilities of Hyperlinks.
- 8. Find a news report published on a news site—Indian or international—that is hyperlinked to reports on other sites. Also, explain how the knowledge links benefit the reader.



# Content Management System

The number of news reports published on large news websites of newspapers, like *The Times of India*, *The New Indian Express* or the *Hindustan Times*, number close to 300 or more everyday. The bulk of these reports are text-based. The remaining are picture stories, podcasts and news videos. Each report, irrespective of its format, carries a time stamp and has a display life. After that, the news report is archived. It can then be retrieved using search tools based on keywords or publication date.

All news reports are hyperlinked. The web users can react to news reports and post comments in a comment box published at the bottom of the report. They can e-mail reports to friends and colleagues or refer them to social bookmarking and social networking websites.

The news website itself is meticulously organised. The navigation bars at the top or at the side of the web page guide the web users to content of their choice. Every element on the page, ranging from the font size for headlines and body text to interline spacing to placement of photographs and advertisements, is pre-defined. The look and feel of the site is the same web page after web page.

How do websites achieve such remarkable consistency? Who is responsible for organising large volumes of content in such an orderly manner? The engine that first creates and then powers a website is the content management system, popularly referred to as CMS.

It includes a suite of tools that enable creation, storage, publishing, distribution and archiving of content. Once installed, a CMS empowers editors to control the entire lifecycle of content. There is no manual intervention; the entire process is automated.

This is very different from the way content was managed in the 1990s, when Internet arrived in India. Editors could not publish content on the Internet unless they knew HTML. Each report had to be hyperlinked manually. This was a painful process. The editor had to download each web page, add the hyperlink and upload it to the web server.

# ADVANTAGES OF CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- 1. Seamless publishing: The CMS has made the entire publishing process seamless. It has removed the need for the editors to be technically proficient. They can focus on their primary work, which is content creation and content processing. The CMS gives them a user-friendly web template where they enter content in well-defined fields. The headline is entered in the headline box; the text goes in the body text box; the caption is entered in the caption box; the tags and keywords go in their respective boxes; and hyperlinks to related podcasts or video stories are entered in the archiving are done by the CMS running in the background.
- 2. *Faster turnaround time*: Editors can create new sections and pages with ease, literally at the click of a button, thanks to the CMS. These pages have the same look and feel as the rest of the site. New sections can be created to cover a major news break like the 26/11 attack on Mumbai or the hysteria that was created by the H1N1 flu reports in New Delhi.
- 3. *Text changes*: The editors can correct or modify headlines or body copy at any point of time. The changes are reflected on the site in real time with the time stamp recording the time when the copy was last updated. This facility is very useful in updating a breaking news report. The editors do not need to create fresh web stories

every time a new development occurs. Instead, the same story can be modified.

The final version of the story is saved in the database, and it is this version that gets displayed whenever a web user makes a request for the story.

- 4. *Great consistency*: The CMS is extremely elaborate. It is like a steel frame where every aspect of design is firmly riveted. The editor does not have to worry about point sizes or page width. Each element of the page is pre-defined and coded. The content flows seamlessly into these grids in their pre-defined places.
- 5. *Well-defined access rights*: The CMS creates a web authoring hierarchy. This hierarchy is defined by the editors who assign rights to users based on their seniority or role. For instance, the writers or reporters are only allowed to use the frontend to create a news report. They cannot publish it on the web.

The publishing rights are given to editors who work as filters. They go through the copy carefully and make necessary changes before using the CMS to publish the story. Generally, these editors are also given the right to modify or delete the news report that has been published. The advantage is that errors that might have gone unnoticed by the reporter in a hurry to post copy can be corrected quickly.

However, some news organisations prefer to assign this right to senior editors. The reasoning is that a senior editor is more experienced and can take decisions regarding the modification or deletion of published content.

The next level is creation of new sections. This right is generally given to the senior most editor in the team. Such a hierarchy ensures that the right to create, publish, modify or delete content is not available to everyone. There are checks and balances based on seniority and experience.

6. *Better security*: Access to the CMS is limited to authorised personnel. These personnel are provided passwords that are changed frequently. Also, there are access layers. The content team, for instance, cannot access the sections where the programme code is stored.

Password is only the first level of security. The second and more important is the insulation of the CMS from the Internet. The

CMS is placed behind firewalls to keep hackers away. Another important security precaution is to allow hosting from a restricted IP address. This ensures that all hosting or publishing occurs from a single location, which is tightly monitored.

Organisations that provide web-based access rights to their employees—even senior most employees—run the risk of exposing their CMS to hackers. It becomes difficult to locate break-ins, because editors are being allowed to publish content from any part of the world.

This is one reason why special care is taken to insulate user content. The pipeline provided to users to post their content directly on news websites can be exploited by hackers to post malware or disruptive code.

Another advantage of CMS is that changes can be tracked. Every editor leaves a trail when accessing the CMS. This trail can be tracked based on the password used and corrective action taken.

7. Lower site maintenance costs: A news website adds thousands of news pages every week. Each page has over two dozen navigation links. Besides this, each story has several elements like photographs, audio, video files, tags, etc. All these elements are retrieved from different storage bins in the database and served. The page also displays advertisements, several of which are based on tags or keywords.

A news site would need a small army of programmers to hyperlink all these elements in real time. Even then, there is no guarantee that all links would work properly. Some links may go to the wrong pages, the wrong stories or the wrong photographs. Some links may go nowhere and generate error pages.

The CMS makes sure that every element—be it text, video, audio, advertisement, graphic or photograph—is properly categorised, hyperlinked and stored in the right bins. The chances of errors are very slim.

The CMS also ensures single-window changes. The publishing date can be changed across the site by a single stroke; the font type or point size can similarly be changed across the site by changing the font name or point size parameters; an advertisement can be removed or replaced by changing the code. The CMS makes changes easy and quick. Also, since the processes are automated, the costs incurred in making the changes are reduced dramatically.

# KINDS OF CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

There are hundreds of CMSs available today. Most of them can be bought off the shelf and customised to individual needs. These are proprietary products and their code is jealously guarded. The cost of these systems depends upon their features.

The second and the more popular systems are the ones that have been developed by the community of open source programmers. Most of these systems are either free or available for a nominal fee. The most popular CMS in this category undoubtedly is WordPress (Fig. 11.1). This software was primarily developed to power blogs, but now can also be installed as a free and independent CMS.

Two other CMSs that are high on the list of developers are Joomla (Fig. 11.2) and Drupal (Fig. 11.3). Joomla is especially recommended for small and mid-sized websites while Drupal is considered to be a better option for large websites with multiple functionalities.



Fig. 11.1 WordPress.org, which is primarily a blogging tool, provides a content management system that can be used to power websites.

*Source:* www.wordpress.org



# Fig. 11.2 The home page of Joomla.org, an open source content management system that is used to power small and medium websites.

Source: http://www.joomla.org/



Fig. 11.3 The home page of Drupal.org, an open source content management system that is used to power large websites.

Source: http://drupal.org/

A big advantage of the open source CMS is the sharing of code. Websites can download the CMS and customise it to meet their specific needs. They do not have to pay for upgrades that are shared with all users as and when the update happens.

The third kind of CMS is the made-to-order CMS. In this case, a company hires a software firm to build a CMS. The company first defines its requirements, which includes the kind of content that is to be uploaded, frequency of publishing, number of categories, sections or links, access levels, etc. Based on this, the software firm prepares a website design. The design then becomes the grid to build the CMS.

The software firm trains the development team and editors of the media company. The development team then takes care of the day-to-day needs while the regular maintenance and development continues to be done by the software firm.

#### **IP ADDRESSES**

In layman's language, IP addresses are 'machine names' that have been assigned to computers to talk to each other. Each 'machine name' or address is a string of numbers that is written as four 8-bit numbers separated by dots. These numbers are unique and are expressed as 4 'octets', with each octet assigned a numerical value that ranges from 0 to 255. Thus, a typical IP address would read as 128.215.208.154.

Once a computer is allotted this number, it becomes its identity tag or name. It begins its communication on the Internet by giving its IP number, very much like a caller identifying himself on the phone before starting a conversation. What is important to understand is that every machine that is connected to the Internet has an IP address. This address may be permanent or temporary, but no connection can be established or messages transmitted without the computer being allotted an IP address. That is why IP addresses are sometimes compared to door numbers. Imagine how clueless couriers will be if they had no specific door number to deliver a parcel or if more than one house had the same door number.

Since each machine has a unique IP address, there is no possibility of messages ending up at wrong destinations or pages being downloaded on wrong machines. However, no human being can be expected to remember multiple IP numbers. One can well imagine the confusion if users were
required to type 216.27.61.137 to reach the site Howstuffworks.com. Internet administrators therefore use website names that can be recalled or remembered. But behind each website name is the IP address of the server, which the user does not know, but his machine knows.

The Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, popularly known as IANA, which administers these numbers, has built a hierarchical system to ensure that there is no overlapping or duplication of numbers and that there is a record of each IP address being used on the Internet. It has also set up regional bodies to look after different continents. For India, the IANA body that allots IP numbers is Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC). It is through this organisation that Internet Service Providers (ISPs), like Tata Indicom, Bharti Airtel or Sify Technologies, have obtained the IP addresses that enable them to connect their customers to the Internet.

After obtaining the IP addresses, the Indian ISPs distribute them to individuals or companies who buy their services to access the Internet or to set up their sites. Web users, who buy broadband connections, are allotted permanent IP addresses. This means that every time they log on to the Internet, their IP address is the same. This enables ISPs to pinpoint the organisations using fixed IP addresses.

But, not everyone uses a lease line to access the Internet. There are lakhs of Indians who use a dial-up connection to access the Internet. In these cases, the ISP provides temporary or floating IP addresses to the user. Thus, the computer of a Chennai resident, who has a dial-up account with BSNL, will be allotted a temporary IP address by BSNL the moment he logs onto the Internet. This gives the user's machine an identity to talk to other machines on the Internet and to fetch requests made by the user. This identity lapses the moment the user logs out. The floating IPs enable ISPs to serve a large number of users as against the fixed IPs whose usage is restricted to individual organisations.

#### **Useful Sites**

- 1. http://www.steptwo.com.au/papers/kmc\_what/index.html A simple explanation of content management system.
- http://cms-software-review.toptenreviews.com/ The site does a comparative analysis of the top ten content management systems.

## Assignments

- 1. What is a content management system and what is its role?
- 2. What are the advantages of using a well-designed content management system?
- 3. List the popular open source content management systems.
- 4. What are IP addresses and how are they allotted?
- 5. Explain the way an IP address is configured.



# Website Design, its Mechanics and Economics

omputer monitors were small to begin with. Their display screens were  $640 \times 480$  pixels, and websites were designed to fit these small screens. Then came the  $600 \times 800$  pixel monitors, and for almost five years from 1999 to 2004 the web designer had a little more space to play around. The Indian web administrators made sure that their web users realised this fact by posting an advisory that the website was 'Best viewed in  $600 \times 800$  pixels'.

The  $1024 \times 768$  pixel monitors became available in India by 2005. But, it took almost two to three years for their numbers to reach a level where website administrators gained confidence to start designing web pages to be displayed on  $1024 \times 768$  pixel screens. They no longer had to worry about web users getting frustrated by the sight of a web page extending beyond the web screen.

Today, the most common and popular website dimensions are  $1024 \times 768$  pixels, though companies have started manufacturing monitors that are even larger. The users have the option to customise their screen settings and they can view their web pages in different sizes.

However, the website looks best when it is displayed in its actual settings as can be seen from the screenshots of the Expressbuzz.com page.

The website has been designed for viewing in  $1024 \times 768$  pixels, and looks most pleasing when displayed in this size (Fig. 12.1).

The web page expands when the display size is reduced to  $600 \times 800$  pixels. The text gets displayed in a larger point size and a smaller section of the website is displayed in each scroll. The user has to scroll down or sideways to view the full page (Fig. 12.2).



Fig. 12.1 The Expressbuzz.com website displayed in the 1024×768 pixel screen. *Source:* www.expressbuzz.com/



Fig. 12.2 The Expressbuzz.com website displayed in the 600×800 pixel screen. The site now has to be scrolled sideways to view the full page.

Source: www.expressbuzz.com/

The  $1280 \times 1024$  pixel settings shrink the web page. The point size used to display the text shrinks. So do the images and graphics. But, web users can view a proportionately larger section of the web page. Such display reduces scroll needs on those news websites that display content across two to three screens.

## **OBJECTIVES OF DESIGN**

The larger screen size has given the web designers a little more leeway to display content. They can use the extra space to accommodate larger text sizes to improve readability and use larger images to improve visual appeal. However, the objectives of design have not changed. The six objectives, that web designers keep in mind while designing a website, are the following:

- 1. Navigation
- 2. Simplicity
- 3. Weight
- 4. Compatibility
- 5. Consistency
- 6. Facilitate communication

## Navigation

The foremost objective of any website is to enable web users to reach the stories of their interest with the minimum number of clicks. This involves building a site where:

- (a) each section is clearly defined;
- (b) the sections are organised hierarchically with the most relevant section getting the best display;
- (c) all stories within a section are hyperlinked;
- (d) web users can navigate to new sections from any web page;
- (e) web users can return to the home page from any web page; and
- (f) there is minimum clutter on the website.

The following steps can achieve good navigation:

(a) *Visualising the site*: The first step is to organise content in welldefined sections. This is not an easy task, because a media site, by and large, has a wealth of content, both text-based and visual. This content has been generated for readers who live in the cities or regions where the newspaper is sold. The same is true of television channels. Most channels generate content that is targeted to the needs and interests of their audiences spread across India.

The range and diversity is not the only challenge that the web designer faces. A bigger challenge is the content source. Broadly speaking, the content available to a media site comes from two sources: the primary source is the content generated by the newspaper or television reporters; and the secondary source is the content bought from news agencies and syndicated services.

The premium content obviously is the content generated by the newspaper or channel reporters. It needs better display, because it is the uniqueness of this content that gives web users a reason to flock to the news website. The syndicated content is available on scores of websites, and, at best, can add variety to the website. Its display, therefore, has to be subservient to the original content.

Yet another challenge is the focus. A website can be accessed from any part of the world, and therefore can be of interest to every web user conversant with the site's language. However, this does not mean that the website should change its focus. The primary audience of the website remains the reader or viewer for whom the original content was generated. All other visitors are a bonus and not the primary reason for the creation of the website.

For instance, the website of South Indian newspapers, like *The Hindu* or *The New Indian Express* will focus on stories that are of primary interest to their readers living in South India. There will be no point in focusing on stories emanating from North-East or North-West India unless such news reports have relevance to their primary audience.

In contrast, the media site of a newspaper that is being distributed in East India like *The Telegraph* or *The Statesman* will give priority to content that is of interest to web users living in East India or residents of East India, who have migrated to other parts of India but are still interested in what is happening in their home states.

This is also their strength. Their content is meant to meet the local, regional and national news requirements of their readers—and in that order. The website also needs to reflect these priorities.

The most competent person to make these decisions is the site editor. For this, the site editor needs to do an audit of the available content keeping visitor interests in mind.

- (b) Review of user interests: The site editor needs to study the site logs carefully to understand the user interest. These logs are like a gold mine. They record each and every aspect of user behaviour such as:
  - (i) time spent by a user on different pages,
  - (ii) number of pages downloaded by a user,
  - (iii) pages that are most frequently downloaded,
  - (iv) sections that the user bookmarks to enter a site, and
  - (v) cities and countries from where a user comes from.

This audit should be done regularly. It will make the site more focused on user needs, a prime requisite to improve navigation.

- (c) Navigation bar: The navigation bar is a critical design tool and great thought goes in deciding the links that should form part of the navigation bar, and the order in which these links should appear. The first decision depends on what content is available and how this content has been categorised. The second is even more critical. The web editor has three choices:
  - (i) The first is to display section links in alphabetical order. This enables the visitors to locate the sections of their choice by following the alphabetical list. A good example of such display can be seen on the Yahoo! India site. Barring the first two links, all other links are organised alphabetically (Fig. 12.3).
  - (ii) The second is based on content availability. The sections where the largest number of stories are available are placed first; the others follow. The advantage of such a display is that the website directs visitors to those sections that are its strength areas.
  - (iii) The third is based on content popularity. The web editor decides the placement of section links after studying which section is attracting the highest traffic.

There was a time when the navigation bar was run only on the home page. This was particularly true when websites were htmlbased, and every new story required downloading of all pages and hyperlinking the stories manually. This was a painful and laborious process. Thankfully, with the arrival of better technology, this practice has been discontinued. The navigation bar now appears on all pages.



Fig. 12.3 The navigation bar of Yahoo! India site. Barring the first two links, all other links are organised alphabetically.

*Source:* http://in.yahoo.com/?p=us

There are two ways in which a navigation bar is placed on a web page. Each placement has its advantages and disadvantages.

(i) Vertical navigation bar: The vertical navigation bar is positioned on the left side of the page (Fig. 12.4). The advantage of such placement is that the web user does not have to scroll to the top of the page to go to another section. The navigation bar runs alongside the news story.

The disadvantage is that the vertical navigation bar eats into the work area. It reduces the page width needed to display a news report.

 (ii) Horizontal navigation bar: The horizontal navigation bar is positioned on top of the page, right beneath the masthead or the nameplate of the website (Fig. 12.5).

The Telegraph The Telegraph				
	Thursday , February 18 , 20	10		
ACAP ENABLED	Blood on file-and-forget habit			
IN TODAY'S PAPER	Govt ignored specific intelligence alerts on Maoist activity near Shilda			
Nation Calcutta Bengal	Bengal's worst police massacre has ripped the veil off an ill-kept secret: few officials bother to go through intelligence reports   <u>Read.</u>			
Opinion International Business Stocks Live Sports Cricket Live	Life after nonsense 'SRK' flashing on the mobile screen at 9.33 in the morning can mean two things — either he is really	FORECAST: BRIGHT MS Dhoni after poor light stopped play on Wednesday. (Reuters)   <u>Read</u>		
Entertainment Sudoku	world wh   Read	Quote of the day		
Crossword Enhanced! Jumble Gallery Horse Racing Travel	Court can skirt states on CBI but with riders Constitutional courts can order a CBI investigation into a serious offence without the consent of the state government concerned but such "extraordinary power"   <u>Read.</u>	They are a highly motivated, disciplined and well-trained force ARDHENDU SEN Bengal home secretary on the allegation that EFR personnel		
WEEKLY FEATURES		lacked proper training to combat Maoists		

**Fig. 12.4** The vertical navigation bar used by Telegraphindia.com. *Source:* http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100218/jsp/frontpage/index.jsp



Fig. 12.5 The horizontal navigation bar being used by DNAindia.com *Source:* http://www.dnaindia.com/

It has two advantages. One, the user does not have to scroll down a page to learn the different sections available on the site; all the important links are listed on top of the page.

Two, and more important, it frees the page of any encumbrances on the side. The entire work area below the horizontal navigation bar becomes available to display the story. The only disadvantage is that the web users are forced to scroll up to the top of the page every time they want to visit a new section.

Besides placement, the web designer also has to struggle in displaying sub-categories. This is especially true of news sites where several categories have sub-categories.

For instance, the Sports reports can be categorised under subcategories like Cricket, Hockey, Football, Tennis, Athletics, Badminton, etc. The Nation category can similarly have several sub-categories, each named after one Indian state. Such categorisation improves navigation.

However, the sub-categories create a design problem. The horizontal navigation bar is not long enough to accommodate more than 10 to 12 links. The vertical navigation bar can do so, but, in the process, it can become too long and unwieldy.

The web developers have negotiated this tricky issue by developing three user-friendly tools. These are the following:

(i) Mouseover: The mouseover is a simple tool that displays the sub-category links when the cursor is placed over the main link enabling the web designer to embed sub-category links on the navigation bar. The links can be displayed horizontally (Fig. 12.6) or vertically (Fig. 12.6a).



Fig. 12.6 The mouseover tool used by *The Hindu* website to display buried links in the navigation bar horizontally. *Source:* http://www.thehindu.com/



Fig. 12.6a The mouseover tool used by Mid-Day to display buried links vertically. *Source:* http://www.mid-day.com/

The only disadvantage of such display is that the web users need to have sharp reflexes. The sub-category links fade away if the cursor even momentarily moves off from the main link.

(ii) Drop-down box: The drop-down box is another useful tool to display sub-categories. The category head appears as the default name, and when the web user clicks on it the subcategories are displayed.

The disadvantage is that only one drop-down box can be used on a page. Too many drop-down boxes look ugly. Another disadvantage of a drop-down box is that the list can become too long, and the user may hate to scroll down to the last item on the list (Fig. 12.7).

(iii) Using both horizontal and vertical navigation bars: Such a display reduces the work area, but gives the users a good view of the section links. It is used by the shopping site Indiavarta.com (Fig. 12.8).



Fig. 12.7 The website of Tamil newspaper Dinamani.com uses a drop-down box located on the extreme right of the navigation bar to display the names of districts. The user can click on any district name and get all news reports hosted in that section.

Source: www.dinamani.com





Source: www.indiavarta.com

(d) *Site search*: Navigation is enhanced when web users have the search facility. They can locate stories of their interest by entering keywords or tags. The search tool delves deep into the database to

locate every story that matches the keyword and then publishes the search results.

The search box must be placed on top of the screen or at a place where it is easily accessible. It should also be placed on all pages; sites that limit search boxes to the home page alone fail to make full use of this unique navigation tool (Fig. 12.9).



Fig. 12.9 The search box placed prominently on top of all pages of MSN India website.

Source: http://in.msn.com/

- (e) *Maintenance*: A major pitfall is broken links. This may happen on account of any one of the following two reasons:
  - (i) Sheer carelessness: Sometimes the web editors fail to insert the hyperlink correctly. This turns the link sterile. A user clicking on such a hyperlink ends up on an error page. The web editors must realise that the hyperlink has to be accurate to the last hyphen, space or comma. A good practice is to check the hyperlink after publishing the story.
  - (ii) Redesigned site: A redesign very often plays havoc with a site's links. This happens especially when a site has been running for a considerable period of time and has hundreds of hyperlinked stories stored in different folders. Links to many of these folders get broken when a redesign is undertaken. That is why the designers and the programmers must ensure

that the redesign does not play havoc with a site's existing links.

Links must be constantly monitored on running sites too. Broken links are the best way to lose visitors.

- (iii) Date change: Most news sites stop displaying old content when the date changes, because they are programmed to display fresh content. However, to provide flexibility, lifecycles of sections can be changed manually. Thus, hard news should have a 24-hour cycle only; after that hard news should be made a part of the archives. A feature, on the other hand, can be assigned a week-long cycle since it carries evergreen reports that can be read for a longer time. It is left to the online editors to make a judgment call on the length of time a story should be run as a current story. However, when a section lifecycle is changed to zero, all 24-hour-old stories move into the archives. Any links to these stories will stop working unless the user accesses them through the archives or through a search box that is programmed to read links of all archived content. It is, therefore, imperative for online editors to check which links have ceased to work following changes of section lifecycles.
- (f) Avoid clutter: Overloaded home pages reduce navigation. They are like shop windows that are crammed with products, most of which are of little or no interest to the shop's customers. This is precisely the risk that an overloaded site runs. The visitor does not know which story to open. He may find his attention distracted by the noise and clutter on the page. The distraction level certainly goes up on the sites that use animated visuals. These visuals blink and flash at a user hoping to grab the attention of the web user. But, very often they divert the attention of the web user from stories that may be more relevant.
- (g) Reduce the number of sub-folders: Sites must enable users to reach stories of their interest with the least number of clicks. Stories buried in multiple folders are unlikely to be downloaded. Multiple folders are useful on search directories, where each level narrows a user's search. There, the web user is willing to spend more time; however, the same cannot be said of news sites.

Imagine the reaction of a web user who is looking for a news report from his home district of Ramanathpuram. He arrives on the home page of the site looking for the story. He sees the India link and clicks on it. The India folder opens up to reveal links to all Indian states. The user clicks on the Tamil Nadu link. This takes him to the second sub-folder called Tamil Nadu districts, which displays links to all districts in Tamil Nadu. The user clicks on the Ramanthapuram link and enters the Ramanathpuram sub-folder. Here, he/she finds the stories from Ramanthapuram. But, it has taken him three clicks to reach the Ramanathapuram sub-folder.

This may be good organisation, but it may become self-defeating if a website creates too many sub-folders. The web user should reach a story with the minimum number of clicks.

(h) Avoid frames: A popular website design in the early years of the Internet was the use of frames. Such sites used a static navigation band on the top and side of the page. This navigation band stayed static, even when the content within the frame was changed.

The webmasters supported the frame concept, because the frame allowed them to regulate links. No external website could link to inside pages. At best, they could link to the home page.

Thankfully, websites have now started shunning the frame concept. They have realised that a frame suffers from three distinct disadvantages:

- It does not allow bookmarking of inside pages. A website that uses the frame concept has only one web address: that of the home page. All pages are run under this address. Web users have to start their journey from the home page. They cannot go to an inside page directly, because they cannot bookmark pages of their interest. This is in sharp contrast to a non-framed site where web users can directly enter the films section or the business section if they have bookmarked those pages.
- 2. Frames reduce the work area. The web designer can display the content only within the frame. He cannot encroach on the space allotted to the frame.
- 3. The indexing of such websites by search engines is incomplete. The search engine can direct the web users to the home page of the website. After that, the web users have to navigate on their own to locate the content.

(i) *Site map*: Another invaluable navigation tool is the site map. It is like a bird's eye view of the site. All sections and sub-sections are displayed in the order they appear on the web site. They are also hyperlinked and enable web users to navigate to sections or pages that they had difficulty in locating (Fig. 12.10).

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	Education News	<ul> <li>Most powerful Indiant: 2010</li> </ul>	Regional News		
	top Stories				
	Video News				
	National Video News	<ul> <li>Entertainment Video News</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Sports Video News</li> </ul>		
	International Video News	Business Video News			
	Editorial News	More Columnist News	Oped News News		
	Indian Express's Blog				
	Business News	Market News	Economy News		
	Personal Finance News	Corporate News	<ul> <li>Industry News</li> </ul>		
	More Business Video News	<ul> <li>Top Stories</li> </ul>			
	City News	<ul> <li>Pune News</li> </ul>	. Munipal News		
	<ul> <li>Kotkata News</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Ludhiana News</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Lucknow News</li> </ul>		
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	Terrois News	Other Cricket News	<ul> <li>Motor Sport News</li> </ul>		
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Fig. 12.10 The site map used on the Indianexpress.com website. *Source:* http://www.indianexpress.com/Sitemap/

Site maps serve one more useful purpose. They facilitate search engine robots in indexing the site.

(j) *Time stamps*: The time stamp is another useful navigation tool. It pays to display the last updated time prominently on the home page. It keeps the web users posted of any fresh content that has gone up on the site.

Time stamps should also be used on story pages. They inform the user of the time a story was published on the site. They also tell the user if the story has been updated.

## Simplicity

The home page must be simple. There must be no loud colours; no clashing multiple fonts; and minimum distractions. Sites must learn a lesson from

Google.com and Rediff.com, two of the world's highest trafficked sites. Both are simple, but highly functional. Simplicity is destroyed when any of the following tools are used excessively:

*Non-standard fonts*: Arial is the most popular font on the Internet. All operating platforms and all browsers support it. The other fonts that are available on virtually all operating systems are Times Roman, Helvetica and Verdana. Sites that use multiple fonts run the risk of setting text in a font that cannot be read.

All web designers must remember that a font can only be read if it is stored in the font directory of the web user. Otherwise, such fonts have to be turned into images and then used. Such usage can be jarring and destroy the simplicity of the page.

The page can also be distracting if it is full of large fonts. The sites must, therefore, limit the use of fonts to the top three Internet fonts— Arial, Times Roman and Verdana—and keep them small, that is, in proportion to the screen size.

*Animation*: Flashing banners and blinking buttons may look good on a toy site, but they have no place on a media site. They affect eye movement and cause irritation to a web user who is trying to read the text placed next to an animated banner. Sites, at times, are helpless in saying no to such banners, especially if the advertisers are insistent. The best that sites can do is to put buttons that enable web users to switch them off.

*Pop-ups*: Another distraction is pop-ups. They are mostly advertisements linked to pages that pop up on the screens of web users whenever the news or information pages download. Websites must insist on keeping pop-ups down to a minimum. They must realise that pop-ups have become a disease, and web users now use controls on their web browsers to prevent pop-ups from downloading on their screens.

*Use of marquee*: Another element that is too loud on a page is marquee. It is used on top of the page as a scrolling ticker to publish a breaking story. Like animated banners, marquees too are an irritation. They affect eye movement and distract web users.

*Excessive DHTML*: Dynamic HTML is a great language and produces some wonderfully pleasing effects. However, when it is used to programme side links or top links, it creates problems for the users. The web users only

see the text links displayed on the site; they do not notice the hidden links until they run the cursor over the main links.

*Colour schemes*: Colours can be pleasing when carefully used; they can clash with the message when they are too loud. It is always better to test colour schemes on half a dozen neutral users before introducing them on the site.

Further, when selecting the colours the web designer should keep in mind the target audience. A website aimed at youth should be bright and animated; a website aimed at serious readers should be simple and elegant; a website aimed at women should be soft and feminine; a website aimed at children should be colourful and full of animation.

The news website similarly should use sober and quiet colours.

## Weight

The most critical element of a site's functionality is weight. It is directly proportional to the download time. The download time shoots up when a web page is loaded with photographs, graphics and visuals. This is where design can be counterproductive. It may make the site visually appealing, but it can also reduce its functionality, especially in a country like India where most Internet connections have low bandwidth. Impatient users tired of slow downloads may close the system or move to other sites.

The page weight depends on the following three elements:

- (i) *Images*: The heaviest are the images, whether they are used as photographs or graphics. They need to be used sparingly, in small sizes and in low-resolution formats. Compression software can also reduce their weight. Now photo-editing software, like Adobe Photoshop, allows photographs to be compressed for use on the web.
- (ii) Advertisements: Sites cannot turn off advertisements. But they can insist that the weight of the advertisement should be less than 10 kb. They can also limit the number of advertisements per page.
- (iii) Text: The text is the lightest element on the page. It creates download problems only when the page is excessively long. In such cases, the page should be broken into two or three pages, with all pages hyperlinked to each other.

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## Compatibility

There is still no single design tool that works across all platforms and web browsers. A design created by using a Microsoft tool, like Front Page editor, will look perfect in Internet Explorer but will look different when seen on a Mozilla browser.

The problem multiplies in the case of non-English fonts. Indian language fonts that work well with Windows will not work with UNIX; similarly fonts that look elegant with Firefox will download as junk with Internet Explorer. On some systems, the popular Java applets will not download.

A media site, therefore, needs to study its log files to learn which platforms and browsers are being used by its users. Accordingly, the web designer must test the different elements of site design before going live.

## Consistency

A site must be consistent. This means that it must have the same look and feel across all its pages. All pages must use the same colours, the same fonts and should be laid out across the same work areas in an identical fashion. Even minor elements like the space between the headline and the byline or between the byline and the body must be the same page after page. This continuity must be maintained across all sections to enable the user to identify with the site.

## **Facilitate Communication**

Design helps a site to reach out to a user; and imbues it with a userfriendly character. The five elements that are used to make a site more user-friendly are the following:

- (i) Readability: This is achieved by selecting the correct font face and defining the column width. Here, it is useful to quote research carried out by Tinker and Patterson for the print media. They established that
  - readability nosedives by 15.5 words per minute when the copy is set in italics;
  - the all-capital setting suffers from a similar disadvantage. A user can read 4.78 words per second if the copy is set in all capitals as against 5.38 words per second if the copy is set in upper and lower case. An all-caps setting also suffers from the fact that it eats more space.

- serifed faces are more readable because the serifs, that is little flourishes at the end of the character, create a mirage of continuity and there is no break as the eye travels over words that have been set in a serifed typeface. A reader can read an extra 7 to 10 words every minute if the typeface is serifed.
- sans serif faces have been found best for headlines. They are simpler and starker and stand out sharply.
- Background images: Background images reduce readability, and introduce clutter on the page. The best policy is to use black text against a white background. It is the easiest to read.
- Column width: Too narrow or too wide columns affect readability. Web users find it difficult to read content that is published in columns that are more than 600 pixels wide. Side bars should be used on web sites whose display size is 1024 × 768 pixels or more.
- Minimize horizontal scrolling: Readability is affected when text is laid in content windows that are wider than the width of the computer screen. Web users are forced to use the horizontal scroll bar to reach the end of the line. Such a design can put off web users.
- (ii) Packaging: All related stories must be hyperlinked. This enables the web user to locate all important World Cup cricket stories or all India-Pak stories at one point. Similarly, photo galleries or videos relating to the same story must be hyperlinked. Packaging reduces the time spent by users to locate stories; also, it keeps the web users longer on a site.
- (iii) Story length: This point cannot be overstressed. Web users have very low attention spans and are unlikely to plough through news reports that run across multiple screens. The web designers must insist that no story should run beyond two screens.

## WEBSITE MECHANICS

Three different professionals with three different skill sets are involved in making a website. The process starts with the web editor. The editor decides the:

- content that will populate the website;
- nature of content and its format (text, audio, video);

- frequency of posting;
- sections or department heads where the content will be posted;
- navigation bar and Site Map outline; and
- archiving needs.

The web designer understands the site requirements from the editor, and builds two or three templates that best fulfill the needs expressed by the editor. The points that the web designer keeps in mind while building these templates are the following:

- Look and feel: The website should appeal to its target audience.
- *Navigation*: Web users should locate content of their interest with the minimum number of clicks.
- *Readability*: The font size used to display content is large enough for being read easily without being jarring to the eyes.
- Visual appeal: The site is well structured and pleasing to look at.

The web programmer steps in once the design template is approved. The programmer writes a code that converts each element on the page—be it text, images, page grid, navigation bar, colour schemes or advertisements—into computer-readable language.

It is this code that is read by the web browser to display the page. Figure 12.11 shows the screenshot of the source code written to display the web page. This code has to be written carefully. There is no room for errors. Even one wrong character can affect page display.



Fig. 12.11 The page source code that is read by the browser to display the page.

A further complication is the number of web browsers that are being used by Internet users. The most popular is Internet Explorer that has been developed by Microsoft. The other important browsers are Chrome developed by Google, Safari developed by Apple, and Mozilla developed by Firefox. The programmer needs to ensure that the code is intelligible to all these browsers. Otherwise, the same page will be displayed differently on different computer screens.

Another important point that must be kept in mind is that a programmer has to spend several hours to write the website code. The code, once written, freezes the web design. The editors cannot change the look and feel of the design without taking the help of the programmers, who have to modify the code to introduce the desired changes.

This is unlike print design, where the editors can play around with the placement of the pictures, graphics or text on the page. A newspaper page may look different every day but the website pages once coded will look the same day after day until changes are hard coded, which is a timeconsuming process.

#### WEBSITE ECONOMICS

A website is more than a web page. It is virtual property that has a name and web address and is populated by content that can be static or dynamic. The website can be built by the site owner or by specialised web companies that charge website creation and development fees.

The following costs are involved in building a website:

 Domain name: There are millions of websites on the Internet. Each has a unique name by which it is known. This name, which is known as the domain name, is sold by registrars appointed by Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Each domain name is made of two units; the name of the website and an extension that identifies the domain category. The most popular extensions are .com, .net and .org. These are also known as top-level domains, largely on account of their popularity. The other two important top-level domains (tlds) are .gov and .edu. The domain name extensions are decided by ICANN. Some of the less popular domain extensions are .info, .biz, .me, and .edu. Besides this, ICANN has allotted domain name extensions to each country. These domain names are known as country code tlds. The tld allotted to India is .in and .co.in. These domain extensions are governed by National Information Exchange of India or Nixi. Nixi, in turn, has authorised several Indian companies to sell the domain names on its behalf. These companies, known as registrars, sell the domain names through the Internet.

The .in name, which is more sought after, can be bought for a yearly fee of  $\stackrel{\textbf{Z}}{=} 800$ , while the .co.in name can be registered for an annual fee of  $\stackrel{\textbf{Z}}{=} 600$ . The annual fee becomes even less when a user registers the domain name for three or five years or more.

There are no restrictions on the purchase of tlds. Indians can buy .com, .net or .org names from Indian or international registrars. This open marketplace has benefited domain name buyers because the registrars offer attractive prices to lure buyers. A domain name carrying the .com extension can be bought for US\$10 or less while .info or .me names can be bought for less than US\$5.

2. *Site development*: The cost of website development varies from company to company. The smaller companies or freelance designers looking for work charge less than established web development companies. The cost also depends on the features and the number of pages that need to be designed.

For instance, the cost of a plain vanilla website that comprised five static HTML pages ranged from ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 5,000 in 2012. A 15-page website cost anything from ₹ 10,000 to ₹ 15,000, while a 25-page website cost upto ₹ 25,000.

The cost can rise steeply for websites that use flash headers or flash intros. In 2012, designers charged ₹ 15,000 to ₹ 20,000 for five-page flash website. Separate costs were charged for developing website logos and for graphic development.

3. *Content management system*: The most expensive component in website development is the content management system. The cost of the CMS is generally pegged to the number of manhours needed to develop it, which, in turn, depends upon the volume of work.

An economical solution that web development companies offer is building websites where the templates are pre-defined. Such packages are especially useful for small firms that need five-page websites. They cost around ₹ 2,000 or even less and the firms can choose from an array of templates that best suit the nature of their business.

However, media websites are very large entities, and their requirements are quite complex. They publish 100 to 500 news reports every day; each news report has a different life cycle and needs to be archived accordingly; they have to be stored in databases that can be searched by using keywords; the breaking news reports have to be updated frequently; most news reports are published with other media like images, audio or video files, and related news reports have to be hyperlinked.

These are complex tasks and need the building of highly sophisticated content management systems. Their costs, depending upon complexity, in 2012 ranged from ₹ 3,00,000 to ₹ 10,00,000.

The high costs of building content management systems have made some media firms turn to the CMS developed by open source developers. Two popular open source content management systems that are available free of cost are Joomla and Drupal. Of these, Joomla is preferred for building small or medium-sized websites. Drupal is used for large websites. But, both can be customised for requirements of media firms for costs that range from  $\overline{\mathbf{x}}$  1,00,000 to  $\overline{\mathbf{x}}$  3,00,000.

- 4. *Server space*: The media companies have three options for server space:
  - (a) *Shared hosting*: This is the most economical hosting. The companies pay for only that much space that they want to use. The disadvantage is that they have to share the remaining server space with other websites. Normally, such an arrangement benefits everyone. But, there may be times when servers may crash on account of malware hosted by other sites or sites may slow down because of an unexpected surge of traffic on any one website hosted on a shared server.
  - (b) *Dedicated hosting*: There is no sharing of resources in this case. A full server is dedicated to the media website. The web administrator can plan the optimal utilisation of space based

on storage needs and website traffic. However, the monthly rental of such websites is high.

- (c) Own servers: The media company can purchase its own server, and keep it in the premises of an Internet Service Provider (ISP). In this case, the recurring cost is limited to the rental that the company pays to the ISP, and this is quite reasonable. Some companies keep the servers in their own premises and connect them to the Internet through high bandwidth lease lines.
- 5. Maintenance: Hosting companies use skilled engineers to maintain the banks of servers that they own. They normally add this cost to the monthly rental cost of leasing servers, but there may be cases when they may draw up separate annual maintenance contracts. The maintenance costs also come into play when the media company keeps servers in its own premises. The servers then need to be maintained either by the company's own engineers or through an outsourced firm.

#### 20 do's and don'ts of web design

- 1. Do not use image backgrounds; they reduce readability.
- 2. News reports should not run beyond two screens.
- 3. There should be no horizontal scrolling of text.
- 4. Column width should not exceed 600 pixels.
- 5. Make sure that the site map is properly hyperlinked.
- 6. Make the navigation bar simple.
- 7. Say no to fancy navigation buttons.
- 8. Web visitors should know where they are on the site.
- 9. All pages should have the same look and feel.
- 10. Inform readers when the site was last updated.
- 11. Ban pop-ups or keep them to the minimum.
- 12. Do not hide hyperlinks; let them be visible to web users.
- 13. Do not go overboard in choosing hyperlink colours.
- 14. Provide web users the option to turn off animated graphics.
- 15. Keep page weight low to facilitate faster downloads.

- 16. Avoid using paragraphs set in bold or all-capitals; they make the page look ugly.
- 17. Do not underline text that is not hyperlinked; it is misleading.
- 18. Place alt labels on graphics.
- 19. Ensure that page design is compatible with all browsers.
- 20. Make sure that thumbnail image is not too large.

## **Useful Sites**

- http://www.webdesign.org/ A good resource for web designers.
- http://tools.devshed.com/c/a/Web-Development/Web-Designing-Tips/

The site publishes tips and articles on web design.

- 3. http://www.entheosweb.com/website\_design/default.asp The site offers a number of free web design tutorials.
- 4. http://www.garysimon.net/webdesign\_tutorial/1 A useful tutorial on web design.

## Assignments

- 1. List the six objectives of website design.
- 2. How can you improve navigation on a website?
- 3. Describe the different kinds of navigation bars, their advantages and disadvantages.
- 4. Why are frames no longer popular?
- 5. Which is the best designed website in your opinion? Give reasons.
- 6. What are the steps that a website needs to take to keep the design simple?
- 7. How does a designer keep the page weight low?
- 8. How can you improve communication on a website?
- 9. Describe the different steps involved in designing a website.
- 10. How is the website cost determined? Describe the different costs involved in designing and hosting a website.



## Search Engines

The most jealously and zealously guarded Internet software is the search engine algorithm. It is like a mysterious brew whose potency springs from its secrecy. That is why no search engine wants to sell or share its code despite its great market value. It would instead like to constantly upgrade its search code, index more web pages and provide more facilities.

The search engines have a reason to protect their turf: research shows that eight out of every ten new visitors to any site are search engine referrals. This means that almost 80 per cent of new Internet surfers who arrive at a site are from a search engine. Web sites that ignore this reality do so at their own peril. Every web editor must remember that he works for two masters. The first is the human master, who is the website user. The second, and equally important master, is the search engine robot or spider.

Every news site must be optimised for search engine indexing. This should not be limited to page keywords and tags. The optimisation should also include training of web writers and editors to optimise their copy for search engines.

A search engine is not a physical engine. Instead, it is an electronic code or a software programme that searches and indexes millions of web pages. The programme runs ceaselessly hour after hour, seven days a week, 365 days a year peeping into websites, collecting information and cataloguing them.

This is no mean operation; the search codes of Google and Yahoo! have indexed billions of pages that are stored on thousands of servers across the world. This is why they are able to deliver relevant search results for hundreds of thousands of queries searched every minute.

The scale of operations is mind boggling. A staggering 131.35 billion searches were made during the month of December 2009, according to data released by comScore (www.comscore.com). This was 46 per cent higher than the number of searches made in December 2008.

The highest number of queries was handled by Google—87.8 billion searches. Yahoo! with 9.4 billion searches was a poor second. It was followed by Chinese search engine Baidu with 8.5 billion searches.

#### HOW SEARCH ENGINES WORK

A search engine's operations can be broken into three clear areas. They are the following:

*Spidering*: This activity, which is also known as crawling, derives its name from the search code that is variously referred to as a spider, a crawler, a robot or a worm. This mysterious web code crawls across millions of websites that form the World Wide Web. When it lands on a website, it opens the page where the source code of the website is stored, notes and records the keywords stored within meta-tags in the source code, copies the important stories hosted on the home page and saves them against the site's web address.

The work of the spider is still not over. One by one, it painstakingly opens each link on the home page; records the first few lines of information hosted on hyperlinked pages along with the web address of each page; and then proceeds to record keywords stored in the source code of inside pages. Depending on the number of pages hosted on a site, this activity may range from a few minutes to several hours.

There is no fixed time when a spider will land on a site; search engines also do not relay prior information to sites about the impending arrival of a spider. Site administrators can surmise about the spider's arrival from the site server analysis figures. The site figures will reflect unusual activity on the day a spider has crawled through the site. The majority of site administrators do not mind this spying of their pages. They realise that the more information a spider gathers the more useful it will become later in organising searches. However, there are a few sites that host confidential information, and do not want such information publicised. These sites host a message in the page source code requesting search engines not to spider their pages. Amazingly, all web crawlers are programmed to read this message and leave such sites untouched.

The spider after crawling through a site wanders away to other sites only to return after two or three months or maybe more to note changes made in the site. It faithfully records these changes making searches more accurate and useful.

*Index*: The pages scanned by the spider are stored in a giant index, which forms the second part of the search engine. In some search engines, the spider only scans and stores the domain name of the site, the title of the web page and the keywords used to describe a page; in others like Google, the full page is copied and stored. Since the pages scanned can run into millions, the index, depending on the size of the search engine, can spread across hundreds of servers. What is more the spider updates the stored information every time it returns to the site.

*Search code*: The third component of the search engine is the search code that sifts through millions of pages stored in the index to find keywords that match a user's query. The search code then displays all websites matching the user's query along with hyperlinks so that the user can proceed to the site. The search code also assigns ranks to websites.

Different search engines use different parameters to decide the rank or relevance of a website. Some search engines look at the title of a page to match the query made by web users; others scan the top half of the stored web page to see if the search term prominently figures there. Still others look for keywords stored in the page description code. Some even rank sites on the basis of the number of site links, both internal and external. The ranking of a site can also depend on the information submitted manually. Since search engines use different ranking criteria, the same search query generates different results on different search engines.

There are hundreds of search engines on the Internet, but very few are popular. The popularity of a search engine depends on the number of pages spidered by the crawler and the ranking parameters employed by a search engine. The web users are not interested in visiting irrelevant sites thrown up by a keyword search; they attach more importance to relevance of the search results. That is why the best results are not directly proportional to the size of a search engine but on precise and utility-based spidering.

## **SEARCH DIRECTORIES**

The greatest rivals of search engines, at one time, were search directories. They were prepared manually by trained researchers who scoured the World Wide Web to locate, rank and index websites. The ratings assigned by researchers may have been subjective but they were more accurate; the user had the advantage of assessing the contents of a website by going through the brief description of the site written by the researcher.

Search directories were specially useful for new sites. Unlike search engines that took 8 to 12 weeks, sometimes even more, to reach a site, researchers working for a search directory could rate and index a site soon after receiving an inclusion request.

Yahoo! started off its web journey as a search directory, and it was extremely popular too. Even today the Yahoo! search directory is a popular search tool (Fig. 13.1).

YAHOO! DIRECTORY			
OWeb   ODirectory   Category Sean	ch Love the DIRECTORY? GOI		
News and Media		Email this page	Suggest a Site
Directory > News and Media			
CATEGORIES (What's This?)			
News and Media Formats			
<ul> <li>Blogs (2513) NEW!</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Magazines (3234)</li> </ul>		
<ul> <li><u>By Region</u> (20580)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li><u>Newspapers</u> (9331) NEW1</li> </ul>		
Columns and Columnists (372)	<ul> <li><u>People</u> (85)</li> </ul>		
Industry Information (249)	<ul> <li><u>Radio</u> (9115)</li> </ul>		
Internet Broadcasts (467) NEW!	Television (7660) NEWS		
Journalism (1111)	<ul> <li>Web Directories (165) NEW!</li> </ul>		
Journals (30)			
News and Media by Subject			
<u>Arts and Humanities@</u>	• <u>Law@</u>		
<u>Automotive@</u>	Literature@		

Fig. 13.1 Screenshot of the media page of the Yahoo! search directory. *Source:* http://dir.yahoo.com/News\_and\_Media/

However, the spread and growth of search engines have robbed search directories of much of their shine. Web users find it easier to locate a website or article of their interest by visiting a search engine than trying to locate a search directory.

The owners of search directories too realise that it is an unequal competition. They cannot index more than a handful of websites a day, and there are millions of sites. The search directories, unlike the search engines, are shrinking.

#### **REVENUE SOURCES**

There were three sources from where search engines generated revenue in the early years of their existence. The first was running of banner advertisements; the second was leasing of database to third party sites on a non-exclusive basis for a yearly fee; and the third was to charge fees from sites that wanted early listing.

In 2001, the search engines started charging fees to insert website names in search results. This was seen as an unethical practice and created a stink. Web users were appalled at the prospect of being directed to sites that were of no use to them, but which were placed high on the search page because the site owners had paid money.

Search engines defended themselves by saying they needed cash to stay afloat. There was merit in the argument, because they could not improve their services unless they generated revenue. However, web users were not willing to accept a practice that was so unethical.

Finally, the issue was resolved by search engines displaying paid listings and search results as two different categories (Figs 13.2 and 13.3). Today, paid listings is the most important revenue source of all search engines.

#### HOW TO USE A SEARCH ENGINE

Web editors must realise that there are three clear ways to harness the powers of a search engine. The first is to use search engines to locate background information that can enrich news reports; the second is to use search engines to build knowledge links; and the third is to use search engines to build traffic to the sites. The first two benefits accrue from the ability to target searches, that is to locate relevant sites without wasting energy and time. The third involves taking help of search engines to generate high visibility for the site where an editor works.

Web Images Maps	<u>News Orkut Books Gmail more</u> •	aavesh@gmail.com   <u>Web History</u>   <u>Settings</u> ♥   <u>Sig</u>
Google	media Search: ⊚ the web ○ pages from India	Search Advanced Search
Web 🕑 Show of	tions	Results 1 - 10 of about 1,100,000,000 for media [definition]. (0.24 second
Related searches: <u>Mass media - V</u> The term 'MSM' o the 20th centry, I <u>History - Purposes</u> en.wikipedia.org/w <u>Media avg</u> Wedia may Tites/name <u>Communica</u> en.wikipedia <u>OB</u> Show mo <u>Advertising, Ma</u> <u>Media repots on</u> ; <u>media, maketing</u> www.media.asia/	definition of media influence history of media Mikipedia, the free encyclopedia mainstream media' has been widely used in the blogo he growth of mass media was driven by technology, • Negative charactensitis of Journaliam ki/Mass_media - Cached - Similar - Owner widely the free encyclopedia widely the free encyclopedi	a Sponsored Links sphere During Understanding Television & Film Section 2015 (Section 2015) (Secti
Media types 🖗	t in the second s	

Fig. 13.2 The sponsored links are displayed on the right of search results on the Google search page.

*Source:* www.google.com



Fig. 13.3 The sponsored sites are displayed on the right and on top of the search results on Bing.com.

*Source:* www.bing.com

## HOW TO GET BEST SEARCH RESULTS

The first prerequisite of a good search is to use precise or specific keywords, which are less likely to generate unrelated results. This point can be better understood by search results that were thrown up for Atal Behari Vajpayee on Google, using different combinations of Vajpayee's name.

The results were an eye-opener: the search word Atal generated 122,000 page matches; search words Atal Behari halved the matches to 57,200; Vajpayee's full name saw the matches rise marginally to 57,850. However, when the keywords were changed to A.B. Vajpayee the matches shrank to 17,700. And when the search was performed for Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the number of matches returned was 32,200.

These numbers tell a clear tale:

- The first name can be shared by several people and therefore the matches will be generalised and possibly irrelevant; that is why the search for Atal threw up over one lakh results.
- The full name, by which a person is commonly known, will throw up fewer but more relevant results.
- The full name, if it does not happen to be the name by which an individual is popularly known, like A.B. Vajpayee instead of Atal Behari Vajpayee, will throw up even fewer and incidentally less relevant results.

When the search is made more specific, that is by using an individual's designation or a company's place of operations, the results will become sharper. Thus, in the above example, the use of the prefix Prime Minister to Vajpayee's name cut the number of matches down by one-third; however, the relevance of these matches went up because the search engine threw up only those pages that dealt with the work, life and times of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and not just that of Atal Behari Vajpayee.

A good searcher still has a few other search tools available to him. The first, of course, is to place the search words within quote marks. This binds the search words into one single unit, that is the search engine reads them as a single phrase and not as individual words. It will now look for the precise phrase "Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee" and in that exact sequence; ignoring pages that may have the words Prime Minister and Atal Behari Vajpayee appearing separately on the page. That is why Google when confronted with search words Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee placed within quote marks returned a mere 7,420 matches as against 32,200 matches when the quote marks were not used. However, for any individual researching Vajpayee's actions as a Prime Minister, these 7,420 matches would be far more valuable than the 32,200 results that were thrown up without the quote marks.

Search engines also have interesting pluses and minuses, known as Boolean expressions. They help users target their searches even more sharply. Thus, a search for Oxford+University+Press will throw up all sites related to the publishing house Oxford University Press; in contrast, a search for Oxford+University-Press will exclude websites related to the publishing house and display the websites related to Oxford University.

One should not forget the Boolean characters 'and', 'or' and 'not' besides 'plus' and 'minus' that search engines use for advanced search. Search results will change sharply when the searcher uses the option 'and' to link words or uses the option 'or' to exclude words and narrow the search. But, both will return more focused matches.

However, to master the web search, keep one thing in mind. Different search engines use different methods to locate and rank pages. It is, therefore, better to master the finer points of any two or three major search engines than to attempt random searches using different search engines at different times. The results will always be better if a user masters the help file provided by search engines; the help files enable users to understand the finer points, nuances and quirks of every search engine.

#### **GENERATING MORE TRAFFIC**

The work of a web editor does not end with writing, editing or hosting a web report. A good online editor must constantly strive to attract more eyeballs to the site. One of the areas where web editors can help is page description. This description is not visible to the Internet users but it is visible to the search engine spider. The spider records the page description and the page keywords meticulously. This 'machine understandable information', which is called meta data, goes on to constitute the search database of any search engine. There is little doubt that the site whose meta data is best focused will attract the highest search engine-based traffic.

The meta data is flagged, that is, it is placed between tags known as meta tags, for the spider to locate it easily. There is no single guide that defines what to place in the meta tags. That is why a small cottage industry has sprung up around search engines. Smart entrepreneurs lure site owners to entrust promotion of their sites to them—for a small fee. Even in India, most hosting companies offer listing on Internet's top search engines as part of the hosting package. Site owners, who wish to be enlightened as to how they will do this are invariably fobbed off by answers such as 'It is a secret', or 'Only we know how to do it'.

The mystery arises largely on account of the way search engines programme their spiders to collect and index information. The best one can advocate are a few broad rules to be kept in mind by online editors while writing meta data.

It is important to divide the meta data into two categories: page description and keywords. This guards against the possibility of being excluded by those search engines that use only one of the two indexing categories. The following rules must be followed in giving page descriptions and keywords:

- Page descriptions and keywords must be provided for each subsection of the site.
- The page description must be short. Ideally, it must be limited to one sentence. The spider may not record a long-winded page description in full; it may cut it off in the middle.
- The page description must be precise. It must accurately reflect the spirit of the content hosted on that page.
- Keywords must be used to enlarge and reinforce the sentence used to describe page content.
- The number of keywords should be limited to 25. Once again the danger is that the spider may not record the dozens of keywords that an enthusiastic online editor has written to snare search engine traffic.
- Keywords should not be repeated. Most search engines have programmed their spiders to avoid pages that try to influence selection by repeating keywords.

Several search engines match keywords mentioned in the meta tags with the words appearing in the top half of a web page. If they find that keywords do not match with the site content they skip recording them. This has largely been done to exclude pornographic sites. These sites took advantage of blind spidering to lure traffic by giving misleading descriptions.

The first few keywords are the most important; they are most likely to be picked up in a search than the last few keywords. Sites must never limit use of keywords to the home page. They can come up with half a dozen new keywords for each new section. The more the keywords the more is the possibility of figuring in search engine results. Also, whenever new sections are introduced, the page description and keywords must be suitably modified to direct web traffic to new additions on the site.

Please remember that search engines are the best friends of online editors. They must master them in full if they want to harness the full potential of the web.

## SEARCH ENGINE MARKET IN INDIA

The number of Indians who searched for content on the net in 2008 was 28 million, according to a comScore study released in May 2008. This was a 27 per cent increase in the number of Indians who searched the Internet in May 2007 (Table 13.1).

Most Indians should be happy at this increased search statistics. However, the number of searches made by Indians is only 2 per cent of the global searches. Another interesting point is that India is literally a Google country when it comes to searches. Of the 1,242 million searches made in June 2008, 1,011 million were made using Google (Table 13.2).

The next favourite search engine of Indians was Yahoo! where 117 million searches were made. Rediff.com with 18 million searches was the number one Indian property when it came to searches.

In terms of unique users, the Indian entities to figure in the top 15 search properties in India were rediff.com, nic.in, Times Internet Limited, naukri.com, Indian Railways and bharatmatrimony.com.
Ductoutin	Total Unique Visitors (in thousands)		
Properties	May-07	May-08	% Change
Total Internet: Total Audience	22,805	28,886	27
Google Sites	14,597	19,746	35
Yahoo! Sites	14,664	18,704	28
Microsoft Sites	10,800	11,980	11
Rediff.com India Ltd	7,740	9,246	19
AOL LLC	N/A	6,325	N/A
NIC.IN	5,675	5,953	5
Times Internet Limited	5,002	5,948	19
Wikipedia Sites	4,353	5,264	21
Naukri	3,295	5,105	55
eBay	4,204	5,020	19
Indian Railways	N/A	4,454	N/A
CNET Networks	3,194	3,841	20
Ask Network	3,155	3,444	9
BharatMatrimony.com Pvt Ltd.	2,336	3,420	46
Monster Worldwide	2,854	3,301	16

Table 13.1Top 15 Web Properties in India Ranked by Unique Visitors (May 2008<br/>vs May 2007)

*Source:* comScore World Metrix, http://www.comscore.com/Press\_Events/Press\_ Releases/2008/07/Top\_India\_Web\_Sites/(language)/eng-US

 Table 13.2
 Top Search Properties in India

	Searches (MM)	Share of Searches
Total Internet	1,242	100.0
Google Sites	1,011	81.4
Yahoo! Sites	117	9.4
Ask Network	24	1.9
Microsoft Sites	22	1.7
Rediff.com India Ltd	18	1.5
Facebook.COM	10	0.8
People Group	9	0.8
CNET Networks	5	0.4
Wikipedia Sites	5	0.4
AOL LLC	3	0.2

*Source*: comScore qSearch conducted in June 2008, http://www.comscore. com/Press\_Events/Press\_Releases/2008/08/India\_Search\_Engine\_Rankings/ (language)/eng-US

#### **Useful Sites**

1. www.searchenginewatch.com

Provides tips and information about search engine marketing and optimisation, paid search advertising and analysis of the search engine industry.

2. www.searchtools.com

The site explains how to choose and utilise a search engine on a web site. It also has information on robots, indexers, search servers, and related topics.

3. websearch.about.com/od/enginesanddirectories/ The website publishes current and informative articles on search engines.

#### Assignments

- 1. What is a search engine?
- 2. Describe the three key elements that make a search engine.
- 3. What do you understand from the word spidering?
- 4. How are search directories different from search engines?
- 5. How can you get best search results?
- 6. How can websites maximise search engine referrals?



# New Technology and its Impact on Media

he traditional media has thrived on a model where the entry costs were high and the number of players was limited. This put them in a unique position where they controlled the flow of information. The end users had no option but to depend upon them to get their daily dose of news.

The Internet has changed this equation. It has empowered individuals to publish content at negligible costs and to share it with large audiences. It has also created structures that allow publication of content in multiple formats—as text, audio and video stories.

This overabundance of information and its free flow has led to the fragmentation of the market. There are now millions of content creators vying for the space that till recently was tightly controlled by a few.

An equally worrisome development for the media is the disaggregation of content from advertising. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional media where content and advertising were sold as a single package.

The media that has been hurt the most is the print media, especially in the United States and Europe where a large number of newspapers have either closed down or have sharply curtailed their operations. In fact, the first decade of the new millennium has been very cruel for them. Mercifully, Indian newspapers, thanks to low Internet penetration, have not been affected in the same way as their Western counterparts. But, this does not mean that the Indian media houses are not aware of the potential of the Internet. They realise that the Internet is the new frontier, and they have to reinvent themselves if they want to be relevant. The popularity of the Internet is evident from its rapid spread in the 1990s. It reached one billion users even before it turned ten. In contrast, radio took 50 years to reach the first million listeners and television took almost 15 years to reach the same number.

The march of the Internet in the new millennium has been even more awesome. It has reached more users than all news mediums put together. It has changed the way news is created, distributed and consumed, and continues to spawn applications and products that have the potential to completely reinvent the business of news.

#### NEW NEWS DELIVERY VEHICLES AND THEIR IMPACT

The greatest attribute of digital content is that it can be repurposed for multiple media and for multiple devices. The Internet itself is the receptacle for content that is generated as text, images, graphics, sound, animation and video, and of content that combines two or more than two of these formats. This has created new audiences for the same content within the same geography as well as taken the new content to new geographies.

The same is true of applications. Social media sites, like Orkut and Facebook, are not only popular in the United States but across the world; blogging tools, like WordPress and Blogger, allow blogging not only in English but in scores of other languages that are not even spoken in the United States; Wikipedia has become the place to maintain a page not only for the American media but also for the Indian media; YouTube has set up an exclusive website for Indian videos.

This reach till recently was limited to the wired Internet. But, now it is being extended to the wireless universe, and this is where the Indian media can expect its first major challenge. In fact, it is interesting to note the aggressive marketing campaign that was launched by Idea (Fig. 14.1), a telecom company, against the use of paper. The campaign was not targeted against newspapers but tried to persuade subscribers to stop using paperbased products and save trees.

Another major challenge to traditional media comes from computerintelligent programs. These programs are already exercising a great effect on the way news is being selected and consumed, and this can be expected to amplify in the near future.



Fig. 14.1 The Idea ad that tried to persuade subscribers to stop using paper so as to save trees and nature.

#### Wireless Devices

In India, it is not the wired Internet but the wireless Internet that is expected to shape the information revolution. This is because half of connected India is still using painfully slow dial-up connections, and the other half that is connected to broadband is only marginally better. Even this relatively better half prefers wireless broadband connections because it allows them to access the Internet using multiple devices from multiple locations in a 100-m radius.

They can use the wireless connectivity to browse the Internet from desktops, from laptops that they can carry from their cubicles to the conference room and from smartphones that are Internet-enabled. This is why most media observers believe that it is the wireless devices that will be the new news delivery vehicles in India.

(a) *Mobile phone*: The potential of mobile phones as a vehicle to deliver breaking news cannot be doubted. The media companies that are

pushing their news on mobile phones realise this. They are the fastest, and the easiest, way to carry a breaking story to a user. They are always on and within close reach of the user.

There is also no question mark about their reach. As against Internet connections, which numbered approximately 19.6 million in March 2011, the mobile connections numbered a staggering 771 million. Further, the number of mobile connections continues to grow at a frenetic pace.

If there is a limitation, it is the screen size of mobile phones. The screen of the mobile phone is too small to display content meaningfully. All communication has to be stark and economical. The maximum number of characters that can be used to write an SMS alert is 160.

The same is true of content published on WAP sites. These sites have been developed especially to publish content that can be downloaded easily on the mobile phone. The focus of these sites is to communicate as many details in as few words as possible.

In the initial years, telecom companies charged high rates to facilitate data transfer. These rates have started coming down with the increase in usage. In fact, telecom companies, like Bharti Airtel and Reliance, now encourage subscribers to log on to the Internet using mobile phones. Similarly, mobile phone makers, like Nokia, LG, Sony Ericsson and Samsung, promote their phones by highlighting their Internet browsing features.

Besides this, a lot of public places in India are now Wi-Fi enabled or in the process of being made Wi-Fi enabled. These include places like airports, railway stations, hotels, parks, cinema halls, malls, restaurants, public libraries, etc., and can be used by smartphone owners to access the Internet.

The auction of 3G spectrum to private telecom players in 2010 for a staggering  $\gtrless$  67,719 crore has given a major push to the movement of multimedia content on mobile phones. It has also put pressure on media companies to improve their 3G offerings. They have to get onto the mobile bandwagon if they want to be relevant in the years to come. In fact, there is little doubt that mobile content is the future.

(b) *E-readers*: The e-readers that were first launched in the late 1990s were too unwieldy to command respect. It was only when Amazon.com launched the highly versatile Kindle in 2007 that the media industry

started looking upon e-readers as a viable device to deliver content. In 2009, the *Hindustan Times* became the first Indian newspaper to launch a Kindle edition (Fig. 14.2). Soon thereafter, *The Indian Express* launched its Kindle edition. Both the editions are priced at \$9.99 per month and can be downloaded wirelessly onto Kindle readers every morning. *India Today* became the first Indian magazine to launch a Kindle edition (Fig. 14.3). The magazine can be downloaded at a cost of \$1.99 per week.



Fig. 14.2 The Kindle edition of the *Hindustan Times* can be subscribed for \$9.99 per month from Amazon.com.

*Source:* http://www.amazon.com/Hindustan-Times/dp/B002KMIY1I/ref=sr\_1\_1 ?ie=UTF8&qid=1338954072&sr=8-1

The launch of iPad by Apple in January 2010 has given the newspaper industry another device to transmit content in the wireless format. Like Kindle, iPad too holds great potential of accessing news content using Wi-Fi. It also provides the industry with a device where content can be sold and not given for free as is the norm on the Internet.

(c) *Laptops and Notebooks*: They cannot be tucked in the pocket like mobile phones or shoved in the coat pocket like the Kindles or iPads, but laptops and notebooks are fast becoming the primary computing device in India, pushing out the desktops.



Fig. 14.3 The Kindle edition of *India Today* can be subscribed for \$1.99 per month from Amazon.com.

*Source*: http://www.amazon.com/India-Today/dp/B002U0KMYC/ref=sr\_1\_2?ie =UTF8&qid=1338954072&sr=8-2

The biggest advantage that laptops and notebooks provide is convenience. They can be taken anywhere and can be connected to the Internet using data cards that telecom companies like Reliance or Tata Indicom provide. They do not need external power because today's laptops have batteries that last for 24 hours. This makes them perfect to access content from anywhere in India and in real time.

Their screens are large enough to access full-sized web pages, making them an ideal wireless device to move content.

#### **Computer-Intelligent Programmes**

The explosion of content on the Internet has pushed developers to write programmes that locate and distribute content. These intelligent programmes use algorithms to mine data using keywords and tags, collate content based on the interests of web users and deliver it to their computers. These automated programmes are fast becoming the primary news delivery vehicles on the Internet because they save the web users the bother of visiting scores of websites and blogs in search of relevant content. (a) *RSS feeds*: This is the most popular content delivery vehicle on the Internet. It is like an intelligent pipeline that connects the web user to the content source. The RSS feed link gets activated every time fresh content is posted on a website, copies the headline or the first paragraph, based on user guidelines, and posts it in the RSS reader of the web user. The web user has the choice of clicking on the content link and visiting the website to read the full story or ignore it.

RSS feeds are particularly useful for those web users who want to keep themselves updated. They do not have to worry. The latest updates are posted on their RSS readers and can be read even when they are offline.

Most Indian news sites and portals too have realised the power of RSS feeds and encourage web users to subscribe to them (Fig. 14.4). Smart bloggers too display the RSS feed icon prominently on their blogs because they know that this is the way to build loyal traffic and keep their audience posted on the latest writings.



Fig. 14.4 The RSS feed page set up by NDTV.com. Source: http://feeds2.feedburner.com/NdtvNews-TopStories

(b) *Computer generated e-mail feed*: Content aggregators, like Google News and Yahoo! News, have set up automated news feeds that are delivered to the e-mail boxes of subscribers. The news feeds are generated using keywords or tags that the subscribers have submitted. For instance,

to generate a news feed on swine flu the Google programme will visit all websites and blogs that have posted a story on swine flu, copy the headline and the first paragraph and e-mail it to the subscriber with the web address of each story. The subscriber can then visit the website to read the story by clicking on the hyperlinks embedded in the news feed.

The news feeds have become an important vehicle to carry news to the subscribers and all media companies ensure that their websites are mined by news aggregators.

(c) Social bookmarking, most e-mailed, most read stories: These news delivery vehicles owe their existence to the wisdom of the crowds. The editors can only provide them; they cannot influence the way readers will use them. But, their importance or utility cannot be downplayed.

These computer-intelligent programmes harness the wisdom of the crowds by identifying stories that are being read most or are being e-mailed most. The selections are almost like a public announcement.

In the case of social bookmarking, the selected stories are moved to a neutral, third-party platform where they compete with stories selected by other readers from other websites. The stories that get the most votes get promoted on the page, encouraging hundreds of new visitors to read them. This is why social bookmarking sites like Digg.com or Technorati.com have emerged as important traffic providers.

#### **Tools Used by Editors**

It is not only the computers that assist web users obtain stories of their interest. The editors too benefit from digital tools that the Internet and wireless devices have created.

(a) *E-mail*: Most media websites today transmit breaking news to their subscribers through e-mail (Fig. 14.5). This is an effective way of keeping users informed of major developments, as and when they happen.

(b) *SMS alerts*: This is becoming an increasingly popular news vehicle to apprise mobile phone users of the latest stories. The stories are selected by the editors and pushed to the mobile phones of subscribers. They can also be pulled by the phone users using the short code.

(c) *Newsletters*: Media websites use newsletters to apprise readers of the best stories that are available on their sites (Fig. 14.6). The newsletters are sent once a day, maybe twice, to the e-mail box of subscribers.

	EUROCLEAN ROBOCLE for effortless cleaning	ANZ ROLLOVER HERE
, India	NDTV News Alert subscription	Advertisment Complete Collection of Chetan Bhagat
, World	Get Breaking News Alerts from NDTV via Email	@ Rs 267 + Free Shipping
, Environment	Cian un hara	Vering weeker
, spons	sign up nere	2 BOOKS.com
Photos	NAME	Advertisment
, Plogs		CXOtoday.com Enterprises Find Windows 7 Features Compelling
, Showe	EMAIL	El Windows7 Microsoft
<ul> <li>Snecials</li> </ul>		One of the key features in Windows 7 is
Polls	Subscribe	Direct Access, which eliminates the need to have third party VPN software.
Forums		Read more 🕑
Schedule	Follow us on twitter http://twitter.com/ndtv	Migrating to Windows 7, Wipro anticipates
, Weather	Connect with us on facebook http://facebook.com/hdtv	desktop management time, and tighter computer and network security.

### Fig. 14.5 Screenshot of the web page being used by NDTV.com to encourage web users to subscribe to news alerts.

Source: http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/new/NDTVNewsAlert.aspx

You are here: Home » Subscri TOI Newsletter THE TIMES OF INDIA	ption	TOI Daily Newsletter gives	Specials
		<ul> <li>you:</li> <li>Breaking news and top stories of the last 24 hours</li> <li>Latest news from different cities</li> <li>The latest business news</li> <li>Check out what's happening in the world of entertainment</li> <li>Get the latest sports news</li> <li>Check out our infotech offerings</li> <li>'Most Read' stories: Read what others have been poring over</li> <li>'Most e-mailed' stories: The stories readers have shared with their friends</li> </ul>	Aman ki Asha   The Great Indian Republic Soaring@60 More from Specials »



Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/subscription.cms

The newsletters summarise the most important stories of the day. Since each summary is hyperlinked to the story being run on the site, the newsletter subscriber can click on the hyperlink and proceed to the stories of his interest. The newletters are a handy tool for media companies to build loyal traffic.

#### **IMPACT ON NEWS CYCLE**

It is difficult to predict the future, especially a future that is going to be shaped by communication products that are yet to be developed or which are yet to reach a universal stage of acceptance in India. But given the present state of technology, some safe guesses can be made. Here is one guess as to how the 21st century news cycle will look like:

- The news will be broken on the mobile phone. It will be transmitted as an SMS alert or as an MMS.
- It will simultaneously go up on the Internet as a web story; and as Breaking News in the scroll bar run by 24/7 news channels.
- It will also go up as a podcast on media websites and released as a wire story for publication by different media.
- The story will be e-mailed to the e-mail boxes of subscribers; it will also become accessible as RSS feed.
- As more information trickles in, the story will be updated on the site.
- The TV channels will flesh out the story in their next bulletin with a live video stream from the story site.
- Photographs shot through a digital camera will be published live on the site; they will also be transmitted to mobile phones.
- The story will simultaneously be turned into an audio file for users to hear it on their laptops or on Internet radios, or even their mobile phones.
- The story, depending upon its news value, will be linked to useful text or video backgrounders available on the Internet. These backgrounders need not necessarily be available on the same site; media houses will encourage hyperlinking to useful articles available on other sites to give a holistic picture.
- The television channels will run the stories according to their news schedules, and their relative importance. But most of the time, they will be behind their websites unless they are telecasting live.

The newspapers will become the last link in the news chain. They
will provide less of news and more of views to satiate the readers'
hunger for a holistic picture.

#### IMPACT OF CONVERGENCE ON NEWSROOMS

A key question that media companies will face in the coming years is how to structure their newsrooms. Should there be multiple newsrooms? Or should there be a single and integrated newsroom? The initial response of the media companies was to delink their Internet operations from news operations. There is now a rethink on the subject. Indian media is swinging to the opinion that an integrated newsroom is most suited to handle convergence-led communication.

Currently, newsroom personnel select news stories and edit them to meet the requirements of their respective media—be it radio, television or newspaper. These newsrooms and their down-the-line production facilities are housed in different buildings. This is not surprising; each form of traditional media has had an independent existence, and for one simple reason: they were different stand alone mediums with different requirements.

Till the turn of the millennium, few Indian media houses owned properties across different platforms. Now, *The Times of India* and *India Today* groups own newspapers, television channels, news websites, FM radio stations and event management companies. Similarly, language newspapers like *Dainik Jagaran*, *Rajasthan Patirka*, Sun TV, *Sakshi* and *Malayala Manorama* have diversified into multiple platforms.

All major media companies now have products available in text, audio and video formats. Many of them are operational in multiple languages. This richness in content generation is, however, yet to be harnessed properly.

There is an urgent need to integrate operations; the print, audio and video staff—not to forget the mobile team—should work together, preferably from a single and integrated newsroom. If this is not practical, then they should be provided better communication facilities to share content.

A common newsroom will have several other beneficial spin-offs. There will be no need for three different people to send breaking news alerts. One person can provide text, audio and video hyperlinks to such an alert. Similarly, the mobile phone alerts can be handled by one individual, maybe the same individual. The same methodology will have to be adopted with regard to newsletters—instead of three newsletters a single newsletter that combines the summaries of important text, audio and video stories can be mailed.

This will not be the only change; there will be many more. The best way to understand the convergence-led impact on media companies is to visualise the different forms a news report will take as it courses its way towards the end-user. A reporter will first be required to transmit breaking news alerts to the newsroom. These alerts will either be flashed on an Internet-enabled laptop or conveyed on the phone to the newsroom. It is unlikely that media companies will allow the reporters to directly e-mail the news alert to subscribers. There will be certainly some gatekeeping, and the newsroom will be the common point for regulating and directing news traffic.

The reporter, who is in the field, would also be required to write one or two paragraphs detailing the news story. This will be vetted, edited and hosted on the media site. Once this has been done, the newsroom boss will order the breaking news alert to be e-mailed. The alert will have an embedded hyperlink to enable users to access the news story. If the event is big enough, the news photographer will shoot and instantly transmit a digital print to the newsroom boss. The digital print will be cropped, sized and hosted on the site. There may also be stories where file photographs may be used as visuals. Newsroom researchers will be used to dig out file photographs from the digitised photo library.

The audio desk of the newsroom will turn the story into an audio file, which will be hosted on a streaming server. The text team will pick up the link of this audio file and host it as an audio icon next to the text link. The user can now read the story as well as hear it, if he wishes.

The news desk will also simultaneously work to summarise the reports for being pushed out to wireless devices, like mobile phones, Kindle, iPad and personal digital assistants (PDAs).

The next step would be to introduce the audio-visual element. This will depend on two factors; one, the website has its own television team and this team is in a position to transmit the video of the event; or two, the site has an arrangement with an independent television producer like ANI in India, which provides eight to ten news videos a day.

In the first scenario, the video will be processed by the newsroom staff, converted into a video file and hosted on a streaming server; in the second scenario, the newsroom staff will wait for the processed video file to land before being hosted. The convergence will allow non-TV websites to work like small TV sites and host video content. Of course, they will need trained staff to handle this function.

If the event is big like the 26/11 attack on Mumbai, media companies will have to push more reporters into the field. These reporters will constantly send mobile alerts and update reports as the story continues to develop. The newsroom staff will filter, edit and host updates and also send out e-mail alerts to subscribers. The first stories that have been overtaken by events will be simultaneously deleted to avoid clutter. Once sites are able to host audio and video files the e-mail alerts will include hyperlinks to these files too.

The knowledge management team, which can also be designated as net researchers, will simultaneously scour different websites to find useful and related reports. These reports will then be hyperlinked to the main story. The users now have five options available to them at the same point:

- 1. They can read the report in a text form.
- 2. They can hear the report as an audio file.
- They can read or hear or even watch the report on their mobile or other wireless devices like Kindle and iPad.
- 4. They can watch the report as a video file, and
- 5. They can click on hyperlinks to read more related stories on the subject available on other sites.

This will be an ongoing process for any story; the scope of the process being decided by the relative importance of the story. Thus, minor stories may be dismissed with a simple text element; the relatively more important ones may have a text as well as an audio element; for the big stories the newsroom will definitely strive to have all the three elements, besides the knowledge links.

#### **EMERGING JOB PROFILES**

Convergence will not only redefine job profiles, but will also lead to the creation of new job profiles and new job designations. A typical newsroom that handles text, audio and video files will have five clear streams of staffers, each stream with a different skill set and a different hierarchy, and all reporting to a common newsroom boss, who may come from any media. Since such a newsroom is still to take shape it is difficult to say what the ultimate designations or hierarchy will be. But for a multimedia newsroom, the following will be the team nuclei:

1. Content editors

*Job profile*: They will select and edit text for printing and publishing on the Internet. The text will be edited in several formats: for hosting on the site, for being transmitted on mobile phones and for being downloaded on e-readers and PDAs. They will also select, edit and host photographs. The content editors will also hyperlink related reports and prepare print-ready pages if the media company is also in newspaper business.

2. Audio editors

*Job profile*: Turn a raw file into an audio report for hosting. Host the report on the site, and link it to the text report as audio files or podcasts.

3. Video editors

*Job profile*: Process and edit telecast-ready files for hosting; hyperlink them to text and audio reports. For those media companies that own television stations, this function is likely to be performed outside the newsroom, but ideally on the same floor or in the same building.

4. Knowledge managers

*Job profile*: Research stories and suggest hyperlinks to related stories and backgrounders. Assist the design team in providing information for graphics. The knowledge managers will be common to all the three media.

5. Coordination editors

*Job profile*: Receive breaking news alerts from reporters, edit, hyperlink and e-mail them; coordinate with audio and video teams

for similar alerts; alert knowledge management team to breaking stories; scan and distribute copy to different team leaders. And ensure that wireless-based content is edited and released quickly.

A development team comprising programmers and designers will assist the newsroom professionals. This team may or may not sit with the newsroom staff but will definitely be placed close to them. The newsroom boss will brief the design editor of the site requirements, be it the making of a graphic or the building of a new section. The design editor, with his team, will visualise the new section and once the newsroom boss clears the design, hand over the design to the programme team.

The entire operation will be tightly knit and integrated. Its success will depend on how well the different activities are coordinated. Several layers of professionals will man each team, with each layer performing the function assigned to it. Much will depend on the newsroom boss whose task will be to ensure that all activities are carried out without any loss of time.

#### **Useful Sites**

1. http://mashable.com

An American website that reports on how new technology is changing the way media works.

- http://mindymcadams.com/tojou/ An American instructor who provides valuable tips on multimedia journalism.
- 3. http://onlinejournalismblog.com/

The blog is run by Paul Bradshaw, a journalism instructor from UK, and is a very useful site for anyone wanting to keep track of developments in multimedia journalism.

- http://www.buzzmachine.com/
   One of the finest multimedia blogs on the Internet. It is written by Jeff Jarvis, a top multimedia authority in the United States.
- 5. http://www.easymedia.in

An Indian website that monitors the impact of technology on media.

#### Assignments

- 1. How are the wireless devices affecting the flow of information?
- 2. What are computer-intelligent programmes and what is the impact they have on news browsing?
- 3. List the tools used by editors to keep their users posted of fresh developments.
- 4. How is the news going to be distributed in the coming years?
- 5. Write a short note on the emerging job profiles.



## THE GREY AREAS

he Internet, being a new medium, has expectedly raised several issues. These issues are legal, ethical and operational. Most of them are quite complex and have both bewildering and fascinating facets. Currently, most scholars and media practitioners limit themselves to identifying the pros and cons of these complex issues. At some point of time, professionals, trade bodies and nations will have to resolve the issues through written laws and unwritten, but binding, codes.

Interestingly, these issues arise from Internet's most popular features. A few of them are the following:

- Defamation that arises from Internet's most endearing strength its phenomenal reach.
- Embarrassment and consequent litigation that arises from Internet's greatest asset—interactivity.
- Misinformation and its impact on credibility that arises from Internet's most popular application—e-mail.
- Infringement of copyright that arises from Internet's great value the easy availability of content.

Today, the New Media is struggling to find its feet. Tomorrow, it will try and set the agenda. But before it does so, it will have to find answers to these and many other issues.

#### THE ISSUE OF DEFAMATION

For publishers, the reach of the Internet is not an unalloyed boon; it is also a publishing nightmare. A news report run on a website becomes accessible across the world. It can be read in Afghanistan and Zambia, in Alabama and Tamil Nadu. It may damage reputations in Yemen though it may have been hosted in India; it may cause injury suits to be filed in countries as far removed as Poland and Brazil. The danger is real and can be ignored only at the risk of legal action and financial damages.

In India, the issue of defamation has one more dimension. Several Indian websites are hosted on servers based in the United States. This creates dual liabilities, one in India and the other in the United States. Where should a complainant file a case? Should the case be filed in the United States where the sites are hosted or in India where the news is generated? What happens if the case is filed in a third country, like England?

These are issues that have no easy answers. The world has to move in the direction of a single international authority or a single law that should decide all web-related disputes. The legitimacy of such a body should be endorsed by all nations and its verdict should be final and binding. Otherwise, most publishers will have to build controls that will close their site to countries whose laws are inimical to free publishing. If this happens, Internet will become more like a printed product, limited in reach and distribution.

Another Internet application that is causing concern is blogging. Hundreds of thousands of people now publish blogs in which they post interesting nuggets of information. The information ranges from personal to professional; and includes opinion and comments too (see chapter on Blogging).

Bloggers are not trained journalists, and some of them get into trouble when they make statements that are not backed by facts. They forget that there is a fine line between information and misinformation and between comment in public interest and defamation. Like the rest of the world, blogs are causing some disquiet in India too. There is a growing feeling, especially among the media that the blogosphere needs to be regulated. The two issues that are causing concern are as follows:

1. *Anonymous blogging*: There are several bloggers who have earned popularity by writing hard-hitting blogs against individuals and organisations without revealing their names. Fairness demands that they should let their readers know who they are. This will enable their readers to make better judgements about their writings.

It also gives individuals and institutions an opportunity to respond to such postings. An anonymous blog that led to a court case was the one that was written by a blogger, who went by the name of Toxic Writer. The blogger's writings made Gremach Infrastructure Equipments and Projects Ltd, a Mumbai-based company, to file a case in Bombay High Court.

The company wanted the court to direct the Indian subsidiary of Google to disclose the name of Toxic Writer, who was posting defamatory messages on Blogger.com, a blog application owned by the web company Google.

2. *Personal attacks*: The danger arises when the grey line is crossed between comment and defamation. Sometimes, the bloggers are so carried away that they make statements that can be construed as defamatory. It is important here that the bloggers avoid direct and personal attacks on individuals. Otherwise, they should be ready to face defamation cases. The 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks saw a surge of passion. Hundreds of individuals vented their anger and fury at the failure of the state to curb terrorism. Several bloggers also expressed their displeasure at the way the media, especially the television channels, covered the event.

The thrust of the charges was that the media had compromised the security of the hostages by telecasting live from the crime scene. According to the bloggers, the terrorists were using the telecasts to locate hostages.

A few bloggers even made personal comments against journalists covering the event. One such blogpost that went up was titled "Shoddy Journalism" and was posted on ckunte.com. The post attacked the NDTV telecasts and its reporter of jeopardising the lives and security of hostages and security personnel. It also made personal comments against the NDTV reporter covering the event. The blogger, however, withdrew the post and apologised to NDTV when the television channel served a legal notice objecting to the blogger's comments.

Another blog post that sparked a row was the one that questioned the claims of the Indian Institute of Planning Management (IIPM). The blog post and the subsequent developments caused a major uproar in the blogosphere and was widely reported in the media.

There is a strong feeling that bloggers need to exercise greater restraint when posting comments. They can do great damage to the reputation of individuals and organisations through direct or personal attacks. The bloggers, on the other hand, consider demands for restraint as attempts to shackle them.

Much depends on how the blogosphere evolves in India.

#### INTERACTIVITY AND ITS REGULATION

No communication medium has witnessed a more vicious abuse of freedom of speech than Internet. Almost all well-meaning bulletin boards have been disfigured with abusive, hateful and disparaging postings. It is as if the users get a vicarious delight in posting nasty and demeaning messages. The messages range from plain hate verdicts against communities and religions to obscenities written in vulgar language. There are nasty attacks on individuals and institutions. Very rarely, the bulletin boards spawn healthy and well-informed criticism or debates.

Politician-bashing too has become a prolific activity on bulletin boards. Angry citizens use bulletin boards to slap obscenities on political leaders they do not like. Very often these bulletin boards become a place where rival groups vent their anger. The midnight arrest of the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr M. Karunanidhi, in 2001 led to a burst of nasty postings against the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms J. Jayalalithaa. Later, Ms Jayalalithaa's supporters hit back with equally nasty postings. The same hate and anger was displayed on bulletin boards set up to debate the post-Godhra happenings in Gujarat.

It is difficult to understand why people abuse such a basic utility. But, they do; the automatic hosting facility that bulletin boards provide seem to have brought out the worst in several Internet users. They revel in the power that technology has placed literally at their fingertips: the right to express their views freely even if this right is exercised in a negative, shameful or degrading way. This is not possible in newspapers, radio or television where the messages have to go through strong gatekeeping controls. These messages are printed or broadcast only after personal, communal or abusive overtones have been expunged.

No wonder, interactivity, which is lauded as Internet's greatest bonus, is one of its greatest liabilities too. Site administrators are now reviewing withdrawing this facility, even if it means weakening the Internet ethos of free speech. A solution that is finding favour is to introduce gatekeeping. This solution involves inviting users to post messages on subjects of their interest; but these messages do not go directly on the site. Professional editors excise the unwanted innuendoes, slants and attacks. However, they ensure that the sanitised version does not lack fire; indeed, a great virtue of the Internet will be lost if users' outpourings are turned anaemic and lacklustre.

The timesofindia.com, which initially allowed free posting of messages, has now placed a filter. The web users are advised that: "Comments are moderated and will be allowed if they are about the topic and not abusive" (Fig. 15.1). This eliminates the possibility of abusive and hate postings. The people's viewpoints that finally go on the Internet are fair opinions, not personal onslaughts.

Your comment	
Characters remaining (300)	
Name	Email
Will be displayed	Will not be displayed
Location	
/vill be displayed	
Please answer this simple	e math question.
17 + 5 =	Post comment
11 / J S = -	Provide and the second second

Fig. 15.1 The notice posted on Thetimesofindia.com website that browser comments are moderated before being published.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/

The Hindustantimes.com goes further. It tells its users that "By posting your comments here you agree to the terms and conditions of www.hindustantimes.com." The terms make it clear that web users are fully liable for comments that they post. The site's privacy policy states: "You (web users) ... agree to indemnify us in full and permanently against any third party liabilities, claims, costs, loss or damage we incur as a result of publishing material you submit to us, including consequential losses" (Fig. 15.2).



### Fig. 15.2 The Hindustantimes.com warns its web users that they will be liable for any claims that may result on account of their postings.

Source: http://www.hindustantimes.com/privacypolicy/CommentsTnC.aspx

The flip side of such tight controls is that they kill spontaneity. Web users may lose heart when they find their comments laser pencilled. They may avoid posting new comments or post comments that are bland and inoffensive.

So, media websites have to be careful. They have to walk the tight rope if they want to take advantage of the interactivity provided by the Internet. There are two issues that need to be addressed. The first is: should media regulate content that is posted by netizens on the ground that it cannot encourage content that tends to abuse, ridicule or disparage individuals, institutions or communities? The danger is that such a move will handcuff free debate by stifling hundreds of well-meaning citizens or individuals, who find the Internet a great way to interact and share views. The second is the question of law. Who should be responsible for the violation? The site administrator for providing a facility that has become a major source of embarrassment and concern? The service provider who has provided the infrastructure to enable people to make hate postings? Or the individual who allows his basest instincts to come to the fore when he logs on to a bulletin board?

Of the three parties involved, the crime of the individuals who have posted obscene or defamatory messages rings out loud and clear. They have definitely caused harm and damage to an individual, or an institution's standing, and must be sued for defamation. The site administrator also needs to be pulled up for failing to regulate the activities on the site. He must remember that he has unwittingly provided a forum to an individual or individuals to go ahead and tarnish the image of third parties.

The comments posted on social networking sites constitute another area of concern. Many of these comments are malicious; some even are personal attacks on individuals and institutions. The postings that worry administrators most are religious. Such postings can inflame passions, and lead to law and order problems even if they may have been posted in another part of the world.

There was much anger on the net when the Indian Government in 2011 wanted social networking sites to remove content that was blasphemous, derogatory and defamatory. The government order named 21 sites that included the world's leading sites Facebook and Google. (Fig. 15.3).

#### **MISINFORMATION AS E-LEGEND**

Misinformation on the Internet is acquiring a remarkable ring of truthfulness and credibility as it is mailed in an unending, ever-growing e-mail chain, becoming almost an e-legend in the process. One out of three Internet users across the world either received misleading e-mails or read about them in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Chain mails were sent informing people

- of how Nostradamus had seen the fall of the twin towers and had written a quatrain on it;
- of how Microsoft's 'Wingdings' graphics font was used by conspirators to send a secret message stating that the attack was coming;



Fig. 15.3 Screenshot of the news report published by Zeenews stating that the government wants content posted on social networking sites to be screened.

*Source:* http://zeenews.india.com/news/net-news/govt-wants-content-on-social-networks-screened\_745544.html

- of how 4,000 Jews were warned not to go to the World Trade Center on the day of the attack;
- of how the CNN footage of Palestinians celebrating the attacks was an old CNN tape;
- of how photographs of the burning towers showed the face of Satan in the billowing smoke;
- of how a man surfed the falling debris to reach safety; and
- of how a Bible was found in the Pentagon debris untouched by the smouldering fire.

Closer home, a misleading e-mail on Godhra train carnage was sent as chain mail to media houses, prominent citizens and hundreds of individuals. The mail tried to convince Indians that the violence in Godhra erupted when *kar sevaks* forcibly carried a teenaged girl into a train coach and locked the coach doors preventing the Godhra locals from rescuing the girl. To give authenticity to the story the mobile phone numbers of a news agency reporter were given. Recipients were asked to call the number to confirm the veracity of the report. Needless to say, the reporter was inundated by phone calls asking to confirm if the report was true. The report was not; it was an act of mischief, an intelligent attempt to sow doubts in the minds of Indians.

This is the most dangerous aspect of misinformation on the Internet. It is carried forward and given a sinister shape by perfectly honest, wellmeaning and sincere people. As the chain grows the misinformation starts acquiring an aura of credibility. Observers say that such chain mails are more like urban legends, the term used to denote macabre, melodramatic stories that get a life of their own as they are narrated by one unsuspecting group to another. It is not a surprise that similar tales of misinformation on the Internet are being referred to as e-legends.

Different people have different reasons to move such mail. But the result is the same: a lie told repeatedly acquires the face of a truth, if not truth then a believable rumour. The desire to believe such stories stems from primitive instincts. The Nostradamus quatrains are the finest examples of people's belief that everything in this world is preordained; that is why, every time a major tragedy occurs we twist and turn the quatrains to confirm to ourselves and the disbelieving world that Nostradamus had actually seen the event.

Misinformation and disinformation campaigns on the Internet have made the task of established media networks that much harder. By definition, news is based on facts and figures; and media networks go to extreme lengths to sift facts from rumour. Now they will also have to weed out truth from e-legends.

This is going to be no mean task. Information controls in the wrong hands can prove to be a most devastating weapon. With people willing to believe rumours, spurious prophecies or laboured explanations of good and evil we can only make Internet a major zone of conflict between truth and misinformation.

#### **COPYRIGHT ON THE INTERNET**

Every media site posts a notice proclaiming that all reports run on the site constitute the intellectual property of the company. The reports, be they in the form of text, images or audio-visual files, cannot be reproduced in any form or in any other medium without the specific permission of the site administrator. The only exception that the sites make is for individuals to download reports for personal or academic use. Yet, there are instances of small sites lifting stories or recycling stories hosted on media sites. This is a clear copyright infringement, and the sites are well within their rights to initiate legal proceedings under the law of the land. However, these violations mostly go unnoticed, because the Internet is so big that it is virtually impossible to patrol it.



Fig. 15.4 The Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, popularly known as Berne Convention, is an international agreement that regulates issues related to copyright.

Source: http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/trtdocs\_wo001.html

However, direct stealing of content is not the only copyright violation witnessed on the Internet. There is a far more serious crime that several websites indulge in. It is called framing. This technical sleight of hand allows websites to generate pages that give an impression to the user that he has not left the site though in reality the user is browsing content that is downloading from another site.

All this sounds very complicated. But, technically it is easy to create the effect. The website uses frames to divide a screen into two horizontal sections. The top part is a narrow band and carries the website's masthead or the website's name. This part of the page downloads from the website's server and remains on the user's screen till the user closes the site, and opens a new site. The remaining screen that constitutes the second part of the page is used to download content from another site. There are two reasons why websites resort to frames. Firstly, it helps such websites build an illusion that they host quality content giving users sufficient reason to return again and again to these sites; in the process they build traffic at the expense of the framed sites. Secondly, advertisements run by these websites on the masthead band get greater exposure; the websites can, therefore, charge higher tariff. That is why, framing is considered a win-win situation by sites that indulge in it.

But, what about the framed sites? Why don't they protest? One reason, of course, is that most of these sites are not aware of small sites taking advantage of their news content to build traffic. The second is that even though their page is downloading in a small frame on the user's screen, each download is being counted as a page view. This swells up their total page views, enabling them to charge higher advertisement tariff.

There is still no clear legal yardstick to determine whether framing constitutes violation of copyright or not. The common view is that sites that openly declare that a user is moving onto another site do not violate any copyright as long as their own frame does not conceal the framed website's name or trademark.

However, the verdict is not so considerate in the case of those sites that mislead users by masking the framed site's masthead. These sites may be indirectly swelling the number of page views of the framed site but they are also giving a misleading impression—that they own the content. Since content constitutes intellectual property any benefit derived from it without paying adequate fees amounts to an infringement of the property owner's rights.

That is why framing is compared to deep linking, another grey area that worries lawyers. In fact, deep linking is not as bad as clever framing but it does allow websites to bypass home pages while providing direct links to stories run on other sites. The only grouse that deep-linked websites may have is that they may lose advertising revenue if users do not visit their home pages, where the maximum number of advertisements are hosted. But once again deep linking involves accessing the inner pages of websites without the concurrence or permission of website owners. The reverse argument is that the Internet will cease to be a connected entity if hyperlinks to home pages or inside pages were outlawed, affecting both navigation and utility. Another question that bothers lawyers is whether websites indulging in framing and deep linking should also be impleaded as parties in defamation cases arising out of malicious content hosted on framed or deep-linked sites. Once again, there are two points of view. The first one is that defamation will be limited to the website on whose server the content is hosted. According to this school, the liability lies with the website that has generated and hosted the content very much like the newspaper or magazine that has published an article.

However, the second group contends that the websites that resort to framing are equally guilty. They are consciously moving traffic to content that is potentially defamatory in nature, and therefore, they are equally involved in its dissemination. A similar argument is advanced for hyperlinking.

However, there is little doubt that framing is the more serious offence. Hyperlinking can still be given the benefit of doubt till a clear law evolves but framing must be both seen and treated as a crime.

#### THE ISSUE OF OPINION POLLS

Another grey area is the opinion poll conducted on the Internet. It is considered unscientific by professional pollsters. In fact, CNN.com carries the legend, "This is not a scientific poll" beneath the Quick Vote widget despite the fact that the question is answered by hundreds of thousands of site users (see Fig. 15.5).

The reason for this disclaimer is simple. The accuracy of an opinion poll rests on the sample composition and not on sample size. The fact that technology allows individuals to vote multiple times further erodes the sanctity of the poll.

Let us look at technology first and then at the methodology. For computer buffs, an Internet poll is like an open book. The voters do not have to whip up patriotic passions or turn into lobbyists to obtain a favourable verdict. Any individual can change the verdict. All that the individual needs to know is how to manipulate the computer.

The first generation opinion polls were the most vulnerable. They provided no safeguards. A user could vote repeatedly and the poll code would keep recording each vote as a valid vote. It was almost like refreshing

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the page. Depending on the voter's inclinations, the number of Yeses and Nos were inflated with nobody being the wiser.

Have family year?	you or anyoi lost a job in	the p	your ast
Read Re	lated Articles		
Yes		53%	155106
No		47%	135677
Total vol	tes: 290783		

Fig. 15.5 The notice carried by CNN.com beneath the opinion poll that advises visitors that this is not a scientific poll.

Source: http://edition.cnn.com/

However, wide inconsistencies in voter verdicts made site administrators realise that they need to write a code that would prevent voters from casting multiple votes. Two solutions were developed. The first involved blocking the IP address of a user once he had voted. The second involved floating a cookie into the user's system. The cookie blocked a vote from being cast again and the site administrator could regulate the time span during which a user could cast multiple votes.

However, both the methods are not foolproof. They either limit the representative nature of the poll or lack sufficient safeguards to prevent multiple voting.

Methodology is another factor that diminishes the credibility of an Internet poll. Any pollster will tell you that the accuracy of an opinion poll depends on several factors. Some of these are: the way a question is framed, the words used to elicit a response, the size of the poll sample, the geographical spread of the poll sample, the methodology adopted to select the sample and its relevance to poll requirements. This is not all. The last step is even more critical. It involves careful analysis of polled data to arrive at conclusions that reflect public opinion on sensitive or controversial issues.

None of these factors are kept in mind while running an Internet poll. The person devising the poll invariably is a journalist with no background in psephology. The selection of the poll subject depends on the most important news break of the day and is decided by the Online Editor of the media site or a staff member authorised by him to perform this function. On some media sites a senior print journalist, who may not even be involved in day-to-day Internet operations, but whose news judgement is rated high in the organisation may take this decision.

If this is so, then why do media sites run opinion polls? More than that, why do newspapers publish them the next morning? There are three reasons why Internet polling has become an essential part of media websites. These are as follows:

- Stickiness: An opinion poll is a useful tool to extend the visitor's stay on the site. It sparks user interest, especially when the poll question deals with controversial issues. The site can expect to generate three page views from a user who shows interest in the opinion poll. The first comes from the submission of vote; the second can come from the user's visit to the news story that sparked the poll; and the third can come if the user wants to check at a later point how the polling is proceeding.
- 2. *Free resource*: Media sites do not have to hire professional pollsters who charge fancy sums to generate opinion polls for their print editions or television channels. Their existing website staff is able to handle Internet polls without any investment, by adding an extra, interactive feature on the site.
- 3. *Money spinner*: The Internet poll can be branded in a sponsor's name to generate extra revenue.

#### **Useful Sites**

- http://www.wipo.org/ The website of World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).
- 2. http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/trtdocs\_wo001.html The full text of Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.
- http://www.gallup.com
   The site of Gallup, the leading poll company.

4. http://www.mit.gov.in/content/information-technology-act The Department of Electronics and Information Technology page where the Information Technology Act 2000, and all the subsequent amendments are given.

#### Assignments

- 1. List the web address of any three Indian websites that deal with Internet law and its violations.
- 2. Study the Privacy Policy posted on any two Indian media sites and bring out the important points.
- 3. Write a brief note on the nature of comments posted by web users on media sites. You can choose any three media sites to analyse the comments.
- 4. Find any two Indian sites that use frames to display third-party content. Study the sites carefully and explain whether what they are doing is right or not.
- 5. Why does CNN.com advise web users that the opinion poll published by it is unscientific?



## GLOSSARY

Analog: The system of transmitting data in alternating waves.

**Application**: A software that enables users to perform a specialised task like sending an e-mail or creating document files. Such a software invariably has a user-friendly front-end that makes it easy to operate.

**Applet**: The window that opens on a page, allowing the user to view contents without leaving the main page.

**ARPANet**: The project run by the US Department of Defence in the late 1960s and early 1970s to transfer data and connect defence personnel working in different cities. The acronym stands for Advanced Research Projects Agency Network.

**ASCII**: The term used in computers to represent Latin letters, numbers, punctuation, etc. It stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange.

**Avatar**: The graphical representation used by web users as their identity in the virtual world.

**B2B**: The business conducted between two or more companies over the Internet. The acronym stands for Business to Business.

**Backbone**: The high-speed lines set up within a network to transmit data.

**Backup**: The copying of data to a second location in the same system or another system or on a portable storage device like a pen drive or a CD.

**Bandwidth**: The term used to denote the volume of data that can be transmitted across a line. The bandwidth is measured in bits-per-second. The higher the bandwidth the faster is the data transmission.

**Banner ad**: The advertisement run on a website that leads to the advertiser's web page when a user clicks on it. The most popular banner ads are 468 by 60 pixels in size.

**Binary**: The digital transmission system where only zeroes and ones are used.

**Bit**: A contraction of the term Binary DigIT. It is the smallest unit of information that a computer can process. Each bit is either a one (1) or a zero (0).

**Blog**: An online journal or diary in which content is published and archived as posts. The posts are published in reverse chronological order with the last post being displayed on top of the page.

Blogger: A web user who owns or writes a blog.

Blogosphere: The world of blogs, the posts and the conversations.

**Blogroll**: A list of blog names that a blogger publishes in the sidebar. This is the blogger's way of informing visitors of the blogs that he likes.

**Bookmark**: It is the web address of a link stored in the browser's system. The browser can click on the link to open the Internet site instead of typing the web page address in the address bar every time he wants to open a particular web page (see also Social Bookmarking).

**Boot**: The term used for starting a computer.

**Bps**: The term used to indicate the speed at which data is transmitted from one point to another. The acronym stands for bits per second.

**Broken Link**: A link that does not work because the embedded code in the text or image is incomplete or the web page address has been changed.

**Browser**: A software programme that is used to decipher Internet pages that may be written in HTML, ASP, XML or any other language. The browser, which is loaded in the user's operating system, transmits commands to fetch pages from the Internet, converts them into their original format and displays them on a user's screen. The most popular browser today is Internet Explorer. The other important browsers are Chrome, Firefox and Safari.

The term 'browser' is also used to refer to an Internet user. The term arises from the verb 'browse', which means going through Internet pages.

**Bug**: The term 'bug' is used in two different contexts. It is used to denote an error or a glitch in a programme. It is also used to indicate a code that has been written to ferret out information.

**Bulletin Board**: A software programme that allows people to directly post messages on a site from any part of the world. It is considered to be one of the most popular applications on the Internet. Millions of people find it a very useful way to express and exchange information.

**Byte**: The term used to denote the number of bits that go to make a single character. Generally, there are 8 bits in a byte, sometimes more, depending on how the measurement was done.

**Cache**: The section of memory used to store Internet files temporarily. These files get stored automatically when a user goes on the Internet. Caching enables a user to access stored files quickly, but if they are not deleted regularly the user may end up seeing old files on his screen.

**Captcha**: It is the acronym for Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart. Web users are asked to enter the alphabets and numerals displayed in the Captcha box as proof they are humans.

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**CD-ROM**: The storage disks used to store data. Their greatest advantage is that they can be physically carried from one place to another. The acronym stands for Compact Disc Read-Only Memory.

**Chat**: The communication between two or more web users on the net in real time using an online chat application.

**Client**: A software programme or an application that is loaded on a user's computer and is used to access data from a web server. The most popular client application is the browser.

**Clickthrough Rate**: The number of times an advertisement is clicked upon by a user, expressed as a percentage. For instance, if a banner ad is clicked one out of every ten times it downloads on a page, then the clickthrough rate is 10 per cent.

**Clipboard**: The temporary storage area where information is put on hold in a cut and paste operation.

**CMYK**: The term used to describe the proportion of secondary colours cyan, magenta, yellow and 'key' (black) used in four-colour printing. The acronym stands for Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black.

**Comments**: The remarks posted by web users on news reports, articles, videos or blog posts. These comments bring in interactivity.

**Compression**: The method used to reduce the weight of a large file like a photograph or a graphic. Compressed files use less storage space and take less transmission time, making it possible to transmit or download images faster on the Internet.

**Computer Metrics**: The terms used to indicate computer measurements. Some of the more commonly used terms are:

Bit = one binary digit (1 or 0)	8 bits = one byte
1024 bytes = one kilobyte	K = kilobyte
Kb = kilobit	MB = megabyte
Mb = megabit	MB/s = megabytes per second.
Mb/s = megabits per second	bps = bits per second
Gigabyte = 1024 megabytes	Megabyte = 1024 kilobytes.

**Content Management System**: The software suite that allows website owners to post, hyperlink and store content in text, audio, and video formats. The software automates the entire publishing process.

**Cookie**: A cookie is a small text file placed in a user's computer by a website when the user visits the site. This text file cannot be read by the user's computer, but can be read by the site's servers. It is generally used to store user preferences, login or registration information.

**CPM**: An advertising metric used to denote the cost that an advertiser has to pay for every thousand downloads of his ad. The M in CPM comes from Roman numeral M for 1000. The acronym stands for Cost Per Thousand.

**CPU**: The computer unit where all information is processed. The acronym stands for Central Processing Unit.

**Crash**: When the system stops functioning on account of a malfunction of some component or software application and needs to be started again.

**Crowdsourcing**: The utilisation of the services of large masses of people, who are not part of an organisation, but are willing to offer their services in building content or solving problems.

**Cursor**: The arrow or bar-shaped image that is controlled with the help of the mouse. It enables users to glide along text or images on the screen. The cursor need not be in the shape of an arrow or a bar alone. The other popular images are an hour glass, a straight line or a cross.

**Cyberspace**: The term broadly used to indicate digital capacity available across millions of interconnected networks around the world.

**Cybersquatter**: Individuals who register well-known company names as their own domains and then demand huge sums to release them to the company.

**Database**: The digital repository where all information is stored in an electronic format.

**Dedicated Line**: A telephone or data line that is provided to an individual or an organisation for use on an exclusive basis.

**Desktop**: A computer monitor placed on a desk or a table to display digital data. It is connected to a central processing unit (CPU).

Digital Signature: A digital code that can establish a user's identity.

Document: A digital file that is used to create and store data.

**Domain Name**: The name that is used to indicate a website. This name is unique. It enables a user to reach a website that may be hosted on any server anywhere in the world. Each domain name carries an extension; the world's most popular domain name extension is a .com domain. The other generic domain name extensions are .net, .org. Countries have been allocated separate domain name extensions; the domain name extension for India is .in.

**DOS**: The base software that is used to run a computer. The acronym stands for Disk Operating System.

**Download**: The transfer of data from the server where a site is hosted to a computer that has sought the data.

**DPI**: The term refers to the resolution of a digital photograph or a laser printout. The more dots per inch that a document has the higher is the resolution or the sharper is the image. The acronym stands for Dots Per Inch.

**Driver**: The software that tells the computer how to operate an external device, such as a printer, a scanner or a modem.

**DSL**: The technology developed to transmit data across high speed transmission lines. The acronym stands for Digital Subscriber Line.

**E-Commerce**: The process of purchasing and selling goods on the Internet, using credit cards or net banking accounts to transfer funds.

**E-mail**: The application that allows electronic messages to be transmitted from one computer to another across interconnected networks.

**Extranet**: The computer network that is outside a company's private network, but allows a select number of users to access the company's site or database. It is popularly used to provide access to vendors and business partners.

**FAQ**: The popular acronym of Frequently Asked Questions. These questions provide users all the answers that they may possibly need with regard to a site. They are like a smartly designed question and answer help file.

**Feed**: Content from a website or blog to subscribers using web syndication tools like RSS or Atom. Subscribers can obtain the feeds at fixed hours and in a format they prefer. This keeps the subscribers aware of the latest content being hosted on their favourite websites.

**Fibre Optic Cable**: A cable that uses light pulses rather than electricity to transmit messages.

**Firewall**: A firewall is a digital wall built between a private network and the Internet. It regulates all messages flowing into, and out of, a network. It protects the network from hacker attacks and also acts as a shield against viruses.

Flash: An animation software that is used to build moving images.

**Frames**: Frames are used to divide a web page into multiple windows, with each window carrying its own content. This enables a user to scroll one window even as the other windows stay fixed.

Floppy: A magnetic, portable disk that is used to store and transfer data.

**Folder**: A sub-directory created to hold files belonging to a particular subject. Folders help in storing digital data in a methodical manner.

**Folksonomy**: The informal and unstructured online classification based on tags created by web users.

**FTP**: The software used to transmit text or image files from a computer to the website's server. The acronym stands for File Transfer Protocol.

**GIF**: A format used to store image files, especially line art or images having large areas of the same colour. The acronym stands for Graphic Interchange Format.

Gigabyte: The term used to denote 1024 megabytes.

**Hacker**: An individual who breaks into third-party networks using an Internet connection to steal information or deface sites.

**Hard Drive**: The storage device used in a computer to hold large volumes of information. It is popularly referred to as hard disk.

**Highlight**: The selection of text, images or graphics by clicking on them. The highlighted file can then be dragged and dropped at another point or opened by double clicking.

**Hit**: The term hit is used to indicate the number of items that get downloaded every time a user downloads a page. For instance, if a page has two images, one logo, one advertisement banner and a small amount of text then the computer will record five hits every time the page is downloaded. The term is often misused to indicate the popularity of a site. It is wrongly used to indicate the number of times a page has been downloaded from a server.

**Home Page**: The first page of a site. It is this page that opens when a user types a website address. The Home Page is also known as the Index Page.

**HTML**: The language used to code documents for use on Internet. The code ensures that the text or image will appear on a user's screen in the same format in which it has been hosted. The acronym stands for HyperText Markup Language.

**HTTP**: The most important protocol used on the Internet. It enables movement of hypertext files across the Internet. The acronym stands for HyperText Transfer Protocol.

**Hyperlink**: The text or images that have the web address embedded in them.

**Internet**: The network that connects hundreds of thousands of computers across the world, making it possible to move millions of text, audio and video files from one computer to another.

Icon: The graphic used to indicate an application, file or folder.

**Instant Messaging**: The use of online software to chat with one or more persons. Most Instant Messaging software like Yahoo! Messenger or

Microsoft Live Messenger provide facilities like informing users of their status, creation of groups, etc.

**Internet Telephony**: It is the transmission of sound signals on the Internet. This makes international calls very cheap as the signals are transmitted on the Internet and not on traditional phone lines.

**Intranet**: A network of computers used by an organisation to transmit and share data. This network is limited for company work and does not allow access to the general public.

**IP Address/Number**: IP addresses are 'machine names' that have been assigned to computers to talk to each other. Each 'machine name' or address is a string of numbers that is written as four 8-bit numbers separated by dots. These numbers are unique and are expressed as 4 'octets', with each octet assigned a numerical value that ranges from 0 to 255. Thus, a typical IP address would read as 128.215.208.154. Once a machine is allotted this number, it becomes its identity tag or name. It begins its communication on the Internet by giving its IP number, very much like a caller identifying himself on the phone before starting a conversation.

**IRC**: The software that makes it possible for users to simultaneously transmit and read messages being moved by other users. The acronym stands for Internet Relay Chat.

**ISDN**: A high-speed dedicated phone line provided to a user to move large chunks of data. The acronym stands for Integrated Services Digital Network.

**ISP**: A public or private organisation that provides access to Internet users on its network. The acronym stands for Internet Service Provider.

**Java**: A programming language developed by Sun Microsystems to build large, complex systems, such as transaction processing systems. It is also used to write programmes that create small windows of text or images on a page.

**JPEG**: The most popular format used to store image files. All files stored in the JPEG format get a .jpeg extension.

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Kilobyte: A kilobyte is equivalent to 1024 bytes.

**LAN**: Scores of interconnected computers housed in a building. The connectivity enables computers to share data stored or being moved on the network. The acronym stands for Local Area Network.

**Leased Line**: The dedicated line provided by a telecom operator to move large chunks of data. The line is exclusive to the user. Its biggest advantage is that the customer does not pay for the telephone time; he pays a flat annual rental for using the line round the year.

**Linux**: A free operating system developed by Linus Torvalds and made available free of cost to the world in 1991. It is called an open source system, because all its applications and codes are available for anyone to study and use.

**Login**: There are two distinct meanings of the term login in computer parlance. The first means accessing a computer. The second means a unique name used to identify a user when accessing password-restricted accounts like e-mail or shopping systems.

**Mailing List**: A list of e-mail users who can be sent a single mail simultaneously. Media sites use it to mail breaking news headlines or important stories to registered users.

Megabyte: The equivalent of 1024 kilobytes.

Memory: The storage capacity of a computer.

**Menu**: The commands that enable a user to access the different functions of an application.

**Meta Tags**: Words or phrases used in an HTML document, which work as site's search parameters. The robots used by search engines read these words and store them in servers. Links to these pages are displayed when a user types the search words stored within meta tags.

Moblog: A blog that is maintained using a mobile phone.

**MoJo**: The short form used for journalist who uses a mobile to transmit news reports.

**Modem**: The device that connects a computer to a phone line to enable transmission of data from one system to another.

**Mosaic**: The first browser developed to enable users to access Internetready files. It was released for use in 1993.

Motherboard: The main circuit board of a computer.

**MPEG**: The format used for video compression and desktop movie presentation. The acronym stands for Moving Pictures Expert Group.

**Multitasking**: The running of multiple programmes in a single machine.

**Navigation**: The process of moving across a single page or multiple pages of a website using hypertext links, clickable buttons, icons, or images.

**Netizen**: A synonym used to denote an Internet user. The term is derived from a contraction of the words Internet and citizen.

Netscape: The name of a popular browser used on the Internet.

**Network**: A network is the linking of two or more computers to share data.

Node: Any single computer that is connected to a network.

**Open Source Software**: The software where the manufacturer makes the application code public. It can be used, as well as improved upon, by others.

**Password**: A secret word used by a user to access his account. The best passwords are those that use both alphabets and numerals.

**Paste**: The process of inserting text or image copied from another file.

**Permalink**: The web address of a blog post. It is called a permalink, because it does not change even when the post is moved into the archives.

**PC**: The popular acronym for personal computer.

**Ping**: It is used by the blog application to send a packet of data to another blog as a way to automate a trackback.

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**Plug-in**: A programme that can be added to an existing application as a new feature. Macromedia flash is an example of a plug-in.

**Podcasts**: An audio file that is hosted on the Internet as an MP3 file that can be downloaded or run as streaming audio.

**Portal**: A website developed to serve as the Internet entry point for a large number of services. These services range from free e-mail, search engine, shopping to news and career information. The most popular Indian portals are Rediff.com, Indiatimes.com and Sify.com.

Posting: The process of hosting a text or an image on a website.

**Protocols**: They are written rules or languages that computers use to talk to each other over a network.

**Proxy Server**: The server used as a firewall between a private network and the Internet. When a user makes a request to fetch a file it does not go directly to the Internet; instead it is routed to the proxy server. The proxy server then makes the request to the concerned site.

**RAM**: The memory used to store the most commonly used programs. When an application is run on a computer, its executable files are copied into RAM, enabling the processor to access information quickly. This enables the computer to run programs faster. The acronym stands for Random Access Memory.

**RGB**: The acronym for the three primary colours Red, Green, Blue. All Internet images are hosted in the RGB format and not the CMYK format that is based on secondary colours and is used in four-colour printing.

**ROM**: The memory used to store programmes required to operate, start and load an operating system. The acronym stands for Read Only Memory.

**Root Directory**: The main directory where all the base programmes are stored.

**RSS**: It is a web syndication format that enables real-time syndication of content. The acronym stands for Really Simple Syndication.

**Save**: The process of copying all inputted text or images onto the hard disk. The data so saved can be recalled later.

Save as: The copying of an existing file in a new location.

**Screen Saver**: An image that is displayed on a monitor when a system is idle.

**Scroll**: The term used to denote the vertical or horizontal movement of the screen to display contents at the base, side or top of the page.

**Search Engine**: A software developed to search the web. It consists of three parts: a spider that roams the net to collect information; a storage bin where the information collected by the spider is stored; and a search code that ranks the sites in terms of priority. Some of the popular search engines are: Google.com, Bing.com, Yahoo!.com, AskJeeves.com.

**Server**: The computer that is used to store all text, graphic and visual data. When this computer is connected to the Internet, users can download data in the format in which it has been stored.

**SMTP**: The protocol used to send e-mail from one server to another. The acronym stands for Simple Mail Transfer Protocol.

**Social Media**: The software tools that empower web users to publish and share content online. Some of the more popular social media tools are blogs, wikis, messaging, video and photo sharing.

**Social Networking**: The online utilities that empower web users to create personal profiles and then connect or socialise with friends or other users having similar profiles.

**Spam**: Unwanted messages sent into the e-mail boxes of hundreds of users. The most common form of spam is to invite users to visit pornographic sites, lure them with get rich schemes or mail unsolicited company information. Most e-mail companies now provide users the facility to block such messages. But, still spam continues to flood e-mail boxes.

**Social Bookmarking**: The websites that allow users to store web addresses of favourite sites online. The advantage is that these bookmarks can be

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accessed from any computer that is connected to the Internet. Members also have the advantage of browsing sites bookmarked by their friends.

**SQL**: The computer language that allows programmers to send queries to databases. The acronym stands for Structured Query Language.

**Software**: The programme codes that carry instructions for running an application.

**SSL**: The protocol that encrypts and transmits messages in a safe format across the net. It ensures three things: privacy, authentication, and message integrity. The acronym stands for Secure Sockets Layer.

**T-1:** The high-speed line connecting networks to the Internet. T-1 lines can carry data at the speed of 1,544,000 bits-per-second. Theoretically, it means that a T-1 line can carry a megabyte of data in less than 10 seconds.

**T-3**: This is the fastest transmission line connecting networks. It is capable of carrying data at the speed of 44,736,000 bits-per-second.

**Tags**: Tags are keywords created by content creators. These keywords are then used by search programmes to index and display content in search results.

**TCP/IP**: The complete range of protocols developed to carry out the different activities on the Internet. The acronym stands for Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol.

Terabyte: The equivalent of 1000 gigabytes.

**Thread**: Conversations that arise around a post made on discussion board, online forum or blog. The original post is the thread that connects all the conversations.

**Trackback**: An automated system by which one blog informs another that it has been linked to. This enables blog owners to know who is commenting on their posts or linking to their blogs.

**Upload**: The process of moving text or images from the user computer to the server for storage.

**UPS**: The battery pack that keeps a computer or a bank of computers running when the power goes off. The length of time that the UPS can keep a system running depends on how powerful the batteries are. The acronym stands for Uninterrupted Power Source.

**URL**: The address of a website or a web page. Thus the URL of the Google site is http://www.google.com. The acronym stands for Uniform Resource Locator.

**VoIP**: VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol. It allows people to talk with each other using the Internet backbone.

**WAN**: The computer network that is spread over several buildings or campuses. The acronym stands for Wide Area Network.

**Web 2.0**: It is a broad term used to describe the group of applications that empower web users to create and share content. These applications include blogs, wikis, photo and video hosting and sharing and social bookmarking sites.

**Widgets**: These are standalone applications that can be embedded on a website, a blog or desktop.

**Wiki**: A software that allows web users to add and edit content as a collaborative tool.

**WWW**: The interlinked network of computers that can be accessed publicly from anywhere. The acronym stands for World Wide Web.

**XML**: A popular language to code and host pages on web servers. The acronym stands for eXtensible Markup Language.

**ZIP**: The software that is used to compress files for storage and easy transmission.

## About the Author

Sunil Saxena has over three decades of experience in Print, New Media, Social Media, Mobile Journalism, Media Education and Media Research. He incubated *Gaon Ki Awaaz*, India's first voice-based news and information service for rural India that won two South Asian awards and one National award for innovation.



He is one of the first Indian journalists to move to New Media in 1998. As Vice President

of the Internet Company of The New Indian Express Group, he set up 12 websites in five languages, and also set up the group's online information and research service.

As a print journalist, he has held key positions in leading Indian newspapers (The Times of India, The New Indian Express, and The Pioneer) and magazines (India Today, India Week). He is currently the Director of the Amity School of Communication, Amity University Rajasthan. Earlier, he was the Dean of the International Media Institute of India and of the Asian College of Journalism. He has also had two stints with The Times School of Journalism.

As a researcher, he has conducted a study on the state of media in Malawi on behalf of UNESCO.