

# A STUDY OF DIGITAL ARCHIVES OF LEADING NEWSPAPERS OF KASHMIR

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**Abstract Purpose:** The study has been conducted with the objectives to find out if the Kashmir valley-based popular English dailies maintain online archives and whether or not the archives are user-friendly.

**Methodology:** The study used Content Analysis method with the sample comprising of six leading English newspapers published from Kashmir. It looked into the crucial aspects of periodicity of digital archives of the sample dailies and user-friendliness in terms of access and data retrieval.

**Findings:** Even though the valley-based English dailies maintain online archives of news content, they need to make extra efforts to preserve their content for online readers. Besides, the archives need to be made more use-friendly and easily accessible.

**Research limitations:** The study highlights features available in online archives of selected newspapers.

**Future Research:** The study presents broader picture of online archives and can be enriched by including aspects like content management policies of the newspapers and the impact of online presence on their readership.

**Keywords:** Archives, Newspaper, Media, Kashmir, Websites

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the often quoted phrases in the world of journalism is that “news is the first draft of history”. Although there is no consensus as to who used the phrase for the first time, but there is no dispute pertaining to the emphasis intended in it about the archival importance of newspapers. The “morgue”, as a newspaper archive is traditionally known, is a critical source of knowledge for reporters and the public, as well as an important repository of the history of the paper’s interaction with its community (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2013).

Referring to the educational and historical value of news, Pettinato (2010) cites an article printed by ‘The State’ in Columbia, South Carolina, United States on December 5, 1905, which opens with these lines- “What is news today will be history tomorrow”. The article terms the modern newspaper as the chronicle of the most important and interesting things of the day and suggests that it “should be a

text-book in every modern school”. The article asserts that the most valuable source of facts that the historian ever finds is a file of old newspapers. Stating that the interesting and significant issues, events and developments of contemporary times will someday be eagerly sought in libraries, the article observes: “The newspapers are making morning after morning the rough draft of history. Later, the historian will come, take down the old files, and transform the crude but sincere and accurate annals of editors and reporters into history, into literature” (as cited in Pettinato, 2010).

However, there is also a possibility of accidentally recycling journalist’s mistake(s) including wrong dates, names of people and places, errors of fact and spelling mistakes (Quinn & Lambie, 2008). Looking for specific old print issues or editions of newspapers in the archives can be quite cumbersome and labourious. On the other hand, accessing back issues in online archives is much faster and easier.

There are significant differences between the traditional newspaper archives (morgues) and web-based resources.

Ward (2003) lists three benefits of the web-based archives: they offer richer content with audio, video, pictures, charts and data which can complement the text; impressive scale (range) of web-based archived material; and the sheer amount of information being accessed. By mid-2000, the web edition of *BBC News* estimated it had upto 700000 stories in its archive with hundreds being added daily (p. 138).

Quinn & Lamble (2008) also list some advantages of searching newspaper archives like most of the archives are relatively simple to search by using relevant keywords or terms, searches can often be limited to specific dates or ranges of dates and good archives contain a wealth of useful information.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is worth looking at the context in which online archives have come to assume an important place in news organisations. Like many other professions, Information and Communication Technologies have brought unprecedented changes in journalism. Whether it is information gathering, which is called reporting, or presentation and packaging (involving writing and layout stage), ICTs have changed the way journalism is practiced in the 21st century. They have also changed the way people use media. The most visible manifestation of ICTs is online journalism which is fast emerging as a popular alternative to traditional media. As more and more people spend time online, print media organisations in United States and some other Western countries have been witnessing declining circulation and some of them have even closed down the print editions and redirect the resources and investment to focus on web editions. For instance, 'Newsweek' discontinued its print edition in December 2012 after 80 years, amid falling advertising revenues as readers moved towards online. Newsweek's switch was seen as a "signpost" of how traditional print news outlets were being "battered by an exodus" of readers and advertisers to the web (The Wall Street Journal, 2015). The magazine was re-launched by its new owners, IBT Media, the digital news company in 2014.

The web offers many additional features not found in traditional print media including immediacy, permanence, capacity, flexibility, interactivity, and mobility. Permanence and capacity relate to the digital archives of media publications.

Online archives are becoming increasingly valuable features of print media organisations. As they mature, they build into a useful resource of material which is both archived and equally importantly, searchable. This can provide an important context to current reportage on the site as well as a research resource in its own right (Ward, 2003, p. 23).

But as Quinn & Lamble (2008) state online archiving is a relatively new practice dating back to the early 1990s in some cases and "therefore, historical news records from before that time are often not available online and must be searched manually" (p. 68).

Unlike the present-day newspapers with the option of online archiving, those created in the letterpress era require conversion to digital formats using scanning equipment. Scanning millions of pages of old newspapers is a huge task involving enormous resources. Technological advancements (both software and hardware) have opened up new possibilities like digitisation which can provide greater access to newspaper collections.

The need to provide access to newspaper texts poses a challenge for the libraries on account of the poor nature of the paper. Impetus is placed on copying texts to prevent undue wear and tear upon the paper and allow continuous public access (King, 2005). British Library, for instance, houses one of the finest newspaper collections with issues dating back to 1800s available in the repository.

With the far-reaching benefits of newspaper digitisation, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions must decide how best to utilise their limited funds to digitize a select number of newspaper titles for public consumption. A web-based archive is a living entity, an essential element of a site's content provision. It can complement current content and enhance interactivity and personalisation of information. A site can satisfy a broader range of user demands if it organizes its archive effectively (Ward, 2003, p. 138).

To cater to the needs of people who visit archive of a news website, most sites offer a search function. However, as Ward (2003) points out, they are not always easy to find; they do not always offer advanced searches; if their advanced searches offer search by content category, those usually simply replicate the categories of the site and some people prefer to browse directories (p. 140). He suggests a combination of conceptual tools (e.g. manual indexing) and technology (e.g. search engines), adding that more advanced site archives offer this flexibility.

In India, the mainstream newspapers have used online medium to supplement their print versions and have achieved impressive online readership. A publication's website is indicative of the importance accorded by it to the new media. A well maintained website is seen to improve brand image of a newspaper while a poorly managed web version reflects a rather passive approach on its part.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To find out whether or not the popular Kashmir-based English dailies maintain digital archives.

2. To assess the periodicity of digital archives of sample dailies.
3. To find out if these archives are user-friendly vis-à-vis data retrieval and data usage.

## METHODOLOGY

### Content Analysis

The study used Content Analysis method. The method was relevant for the study in view of the limited time and resources. It was also found to be suitable for addressing the objectives that underpinned the research. The study involved content analysis of the online editions of select Kashmir-based English newspapers. The parameters of the study included:

- Availability of online archives
- Duration of archives
- Retrieval of archives
- Periodicity of online editions
- Availability of search box
- Availability of e-paper
- User-friendliness of the websites

### Sample

The sample comprised six leading English dailies published from Kashmir viz., Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Times, Kashmir Reader, Kashmir Monitor, and Kashmir Observer. The newspapers were selected for their circulation, frequency and popularity.

*Greater Kashmir* is the first and the largest circulated English newspaper being published from Kashmir. From a weekly news tabloid in 1987, it has become 20-page daily newspaper. The circulation of *Greater Kashmir* increased from 2,500 initially to 11,000 in 2000 to 50,000 at present (Greater Kashmir office, 2015). On the other hand, *Rising Kashmir* has emerged as one of the strongest competitors of *Greater Kashmir* in a short span of time. Its circulation at present is 15,000 (Noor, 2013).

*Kashmir Times* is the oldest newspaper of J&K state with a total readership of two million. It reaches every corner of the state and several parts in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi (Kashmir Times website, n.d.). Other sample newspapers, viz., *Kashmir Reader*, *Kashmir Monitor*, and *Kashmir Observer* were selected for being among the fastest growing English dailies of Kashmir.

## FINDINGS

### Availability of Archives

The link leading to the archives has been found to be available in case of all but one sample newspaper, that is, *Kashmir Observer*.

### Duration

It has been observed that even though some newspapers were published as early as 1950s and 1990s, the online archives did not come into existence until the change of the millennium (Table 1). It was in 2006 *Greater Kashmir* maintained digital archives for the first time in Kashmir, followed by other newspaper organisations. The newspapers have been found to update their website on daily basis.

**Table 1: Duration of Archives**

Publication	Date of Establishment	Archives Available Since...
Greater Kashmir	1998	February 2006
Rising Kashmir	2008	February 2009
Kashmir Times	1954	Not Clear
Kashmir Reader	2012	September 2013
Kashmir Monitor	1998	September 2010
Kashmir Observer	1997	2008

### Irregular Archives

The newspapers have been found to have struggled initially to maintain the online archives on regular basis, except for *Greater Kashmir*. For instance, in case of *Rising Kashmir*, in 2009 the archives for February are followed by those of April and May, after which another month, June, is missing. Then again, archives for three months between September 2009 and January 2010 are not available. The archives for 2011 are completely missing, whereas merely two months' archives are available for 2012. The archives of *Rising Kashmir* have been regular and accessible only since August 2013.

In case of *Kashmir Times*, the archives of up to only a decade are available, beyond which they are not available. By clicking on a certain date, the current edition appears again.

In case of *Kashmir Reader*, initial archives are not regular, like September 2013 is followed by December 2013. However, the archives have been regular after this period.

In case of *Kashmir Monitor*, the archives link does not open, which means the archives are inaccessible.

In case of *Kashmir Observer*, the link to archives is not available, though each segment, viz., regional news, world news, business, sports, etc., carries its separate archives. Such archives are highly cumbersome. One has to wait for hundreds of pages to open to access their required content.

## Retrieval

The retrieval of archives varies from one site to another. While in some, the archives are retrieved through the given calendar, in others the archives are accessed by typing date or month in a given box and so on, as evident from Table 2. Search box and e-paper have been found to be available in all sites.

**Table 2: Retrieval of Archives**

Publication	Retrieval of Archives
Greater Kashmir	By Calendar (Also provides quick links for last 30 days' archives)
Rising Kashmir	By Months, Categories, Tags
Kashmir Times	By Date, Calendar
Kashmir Reader	By Months, Calendar
Kashmir Monitor	By Date
Kashmir Observer	By Segments

## User-friendliness

In case of just two sample dailies the archives have been found to be user-friendly, that's *Greater Kashmir* and *Kashmir Reader*, whereas for the rest they are either partly or not at all user friendly, as evident from Table 3.

**Table 3: User-friendliness of Archives**

Publication	User-friendly
Greater Kashmir	Yes
Rising Kashmir	Partly
Kashmir Times	Partly
Kashmir Reader	Yes
Kashmir Monitor	No
Kashmir Observer	No

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Even though the Valley-based English dailies maintain online archives of news content, they need to make extra efforts to preserve their content for online readers. The archives need to be made more user-friendly. And the content needs to be made easily accessible.

With the far-reaching benefits of newspaper digitisation, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions must decide how best to utilise their limited funds to digitise a select number of newspaper titles for public consumption. Keeping in view the importance of press-clippings database, there is a need to explore its scope at local level. The newspaper organisations and libraries can go for collaborative projects to digitize the newspaper archives or come up with a more comprehensive database of old issues.

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