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**BASIC FEATURES OF ONLINE NEWSPAPERS**

The reading habits of the 21st century people are different from the habits people exhibited just half a century ago. Although a lot of people still buy and read physical newspapers, a lot more consume newspaper products on the internet [4; 7, p. 1300]. It is a truism to say that news media has undergone considerable changes under the influence of the internet. Online newspapers are considered to be a new media type that has resulted from the use of modern internet technologies in the media domain [1, p. 121]. Online newspapers are claimed to have acquired attributes associated with the internet. Like the global communication network, they keep up with the latest changes in the real world; they are also diverse in the scope of items they feature and in a range of tools they employ; they embrace the most dynamic and diversified examples of complex news genres [8, p. 211]. Nowadays, most of American and British newspapers are enjoying their online presence, which makes online newspaper one of the modern mainstream media presenting a new way of news delivery. Hence, the research into their basic features proves to be topical. This paper aims at outlining the basic features of online newspapers as sampled by the Wall Street Journal Online [9].

Although online newspapers and their print counterparts share common features, especially in terms of content, online newspapers offer their readers a lot of advantages, instant news delivery and wide coverage being just a few. More specifically, online newspapers update their sites the moment fresh items of information are discovered in order to deliver news immediately [5, p. 4]. Moreover, the possibility to access the information at any time in any place has made online newspapers ‘only a few clicks away’ [3, p. 16] from their readers.

Online newspapers have distinct layout and structure. The homepage of an online newspaper is characterized by heavy compartmentalization and segmentation [6, p. 194]. In other words, newspaper website pages are organized in segments which are different thematically, visually and functionally: navigational bars, headlines, news sections, services sections, multimedia, etc. This results into homepage functioning ‘as a gateway to the complete offer of the paper’ [8, p. 212].

The results of our research show that most of the homepage of the *Wall Street Journal Online* is taken up by the thematic news section which highlights the most important news items. The news section is organized in separate ‘compartments’ identifying specific thematic areas, e.g. world news, sports, life, culture, markets, real estate, etc.

The *Wall Street Journal Online* possesses a full range of interactive features typical of medium interactivity: send-article-to-friend options, audio and video downloads and photo galleries [2, p. 659]. The newspaper employs a combination of text, images, audio, video and graphics to create a completed news story. The use of

Multimedia has a two-fold function. On the one hand, a combination of text with video, audio and graphic means keeps the reader fully involved with the story. On the other hand, different media means complement each other to create a detailed picture of the story in quite a short space [10]. The *Wall Street Journal* employs video and audio means both on its homepage and inside its articles. Almost each article under our analysis is provided with either a video or a reference to the video. In addition, 5 (or even more) photos are provided to illustrate all articles.

The *Wall Street Journal Online* follows a two-way communication model developed within the news industry which allows its readers to comment on the articles, to respond to other readers’ comments, to participate in ongoing discussions, etc. For example, each article is supplied with a ‘*Comment*’ option at the bottom of the page and provided with the information about the number of comments posted (usually located below the author’s name). Moreover, the authors’ contact information is provided at the end of each article to encourage the reader to contribute to the discussion.

While offering the readers an increased choice of options, this changing relationship between newspapers and readers provides the latter with the possibility to participate in the news production.

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