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**Paper: AN**

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRINT AND ELECTRONIC REFERENCE SOURCES : A CASE STUDY ON ENCYCLOPAEDIA**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The advances in computer and communications technologies have improved the facilities of information access – in-house and/or remote. The optical storage devices with ability to store pictures and sound and high processing capabilities have added another dimension to the fast changing trend to information access. These developments are today responsible for the growth of full text information sources in electronic media. Mainly two types of information sources, the primary periodicals and the reference works have found it convenient to get into the electronic form in large number their high utilitarian and generic value. Their number is also increasing in recent years and many of them are available on INTERNET and on CD. The recent addition to the category of Reference works in the Encyclopaedia Britannica; (EB) launched on Internet in 1999 with also its CD version. The paper has made a comparative study of both print and electronic form of the Encyclopaedia from the usage point of view and has concluded their mutual benefits. A few sample searches conducted with both print and electronic form are presented in this paper.

### **2. PRINT FORM OF EB**

The EB is now more than 230 years old. In 1974, from the 15<sup>th</sup> Edition it changed to the presently available 3 Parts namely, Micropaedia, (10 Volumes) Macropaedia, (19 Volumes) and Propaedia (1 Volume). It continued with regular revisions till 1998. It has been publishing “Britannica Book of the Year” since beginning as an information update mechanism. The Yearbooks also continued till 1998.

### **3. ELECTRONIC FORM OF EB:**

The electronic EB available since 1999 is in three versions. A Web site – [www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com), EB Online Version 9.1 launched in 1999. The other two are Britannica.com Online, and BRITANNICA CD2000 and DVD. The EB Online is the complete Encyclopaedia, as well as Merriam Webster’s College Dictionary and the Britannica Book of the Year. It provides 130,000 links and has 70,000 articles.

#### 4. USE OF PRINT FORM

The searching for a subject from print form of EB normally begins with Micropaedia (Knowledge in Brief) which gives short articles and then to Macropaedia (Knowledge in Depth) for detailed information on the desired subject. The Propaedia is a semantic representation of knowledge divided into ten parts (I to X). The Propaedia is the complete knowledge map of the subject content of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. It provides cross-references and are in fact links to other articles spread in the 19 volumes of Macropaedia.

#### 5. USE OF ELECTRONIC FORM

For searching Electronic EB one would enter into the EB Web site [www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com). There are three options on its Home page – [Subscription Information](#), [Free for 30 Days](#), and [Try a Sample Search](#). The first option is fee based; the Free for 30 days requires one to go through a Registration process hence the first time user can try out a Sample Search.

#### 6. THE COMPARISION

1. The print form of EB from the user point of view is convenient, it does not require to go through the networked protocols as set for most electronic media on INTERNET. It has over the years has also developed a systematic methodology to search the Encyclopaedia. Starting from Micropaedia the user can enter in his desired topic or article. It should be pointed out here that they're very little browsing option in any 'Reference Work' unlike a Book or a Monograph. The user often consults a Reference Work when he or she is looking for a specific piece of information, and he is guided by the work or by the Library Staff. All the three parts provide several cross-references. In specific cases the Propaedia also provides links.
2. The EB Online first requires certain pre-requisites in terms of Hardware and Software requirements and the access to INTERNET. Considering that the user has access to these resources still he has to undergo with some mandates. He has to enter into the Subscription, or seek a Free trial option which also requires an elaborate Registration and Authorisation process and is the first hick-up encountered by the user which discourage him at the first instance. Another important aspect of user psychology is that after submission of his query user has to wait for considerable time for the data flow from the Web site to the end user system with or without graphics. This fatigues user and makes the search a tedious process. The options on Home page are sometimes are quite ambiguous and the search goes on with a 'trial and error' method.

The above are general structural observations on the Print form and the EB Online. But the advantages of the latter however cannot be altogether ignored. Some of its benefits are described here with search examples using "National Library of India" and "Gandhi".

## **7. SEARCH ON “NATIONAL LIBRARY”**

This search yielded 21539 linked references and covered “National Library” throughout the World some with Graphic images as well. But surprisingly the two links observed for National Library of India were quite alien to the focus of the search term. One link to Alipore and another to Ranganathan, Shiyali Ramamritham. Only advantage the user gains in this search is that of substantial knowledge about the National Libraries throughout the world with hyperlinks.

## **8. SEARCH ON “GANDHI”**

This search generated 214 linked articles to the search term, which also included; Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and even Sonia Gandhi. The search intended was more specifically focussed on “Mahatma Gandhi”. It is very interesting to note that there are more than 100 subjects linked to Mahatma Gandhi or Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi besides his biographical sketches. This can be considered as one of the most beneficial point of Electronic EB. However a trial on this topic was also made with print form using “Propaedia” which is highly time consuming whereas in Electronic EB it is instantaneous. Some subject links generated to search term Gandhi are:

- i ) Indian National Congress and Gandhi
- ii) Black Political Responses
- iii) Satyagraha
- iv) Civil Disobedience and non-cooperation movement
- v) Sevagram
- vi) Wardha
- vii) Nehru and Gandhi
- viii) Vallabhai Patel and Gandhi
- ix) Porbandar
- x) The last phase

and so on.

## **10. CONCLUSIONS**

The comparison of Print and Electronic form of EB reveals some specific advantages of both Print form as well as of Electronic form. In the Print media the user goes to the sources with

specific question in mind and knows what he wants and searches and it is rather a fact finding exercise. The Micropaedia and the Propaedia help the user appropriately with relevance to the topic of search. The user cognitive sense makes him the best judge of the information he gets through his search.

The advantages of Electronic Form however are many and cannot be ruled out entirely. It is good for browsing and seeking links to related topics, which extends his search. This is the specific advantage of the Electronic form, but sometimes the user is bogged down by too much of information on his desktop which makes it difficult to go for selection. But the links are instant along with the latest updates. The Updates available on Web are of greatest advantage of the Electronic form. The gap in this context is hardly a week whereas in case of Print form it is more than a year and it cannot provide links retrospectively.

Hence, provided the user has access to INTERNET and a specific subject in mind, retrospectively requires everything on the topic in shortest possible time, the electronic form in general is useful. In case of just fact finding exercise one can rely on Print form and is highly adequate.

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