The Evolution of Accessible News Media

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In the last decade, the landscape of news media has undergone significant transformation driven by the increasing demand for information and the rapid advancements in technology. These changes have profoundly affected the speed, accuracy, and accessibility of news and content.

A 2012 content analysis of major Indian news outlets revealed that "news articles on disability issues appear to possess more publicity value than news value." Similarly, a report on the depiction of mental illness between 2019 and 2020 highlighted the stigmatizing tone, language, and imagery prevalent in media[1]. However, today's landscape is vastly different, marked by accessible technology and heightened awareness about disability.

Smartphones and tech giants like Google, Microsoft, Apple have introduced many features like Voice Controls, Face Recognition Systems, Live Captions on Google Meet, Point and Speak feature on Apple, and customisable gestures and alerts. One can also adjust how sensitively the iPhone responds to tap or touch. Furthermore, Apple's Assistive Access supports users with cognitive disabilities and Google's accessibility menu, Select to Speak, Switch Access, and TalkBack make the digital world more disabled-friendly.

Today, breaking news often reaches people through social media before it's even published on news websites. Online media now offers news in audio and text formats, and podcasts have become a popular medium for consuming news in an audio-friendly manner. Some 24/7 news channels provide prime-time news with sign language, while video news with accompanying text and WhatsApp-based news updates offer easily accessible options.

Voice-activated search assistants like Google Assistant and Siri simplify the process of finding news and content. The adoption of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) has begun to influence major news outlets like the New York Times and the BBC. These enable the users to engage more with the story and create an immersive experience. The latter captures the attention of the youth through detailed visuals, descriptive subtitles, and wide distribution on social media. The integration of AI into journalism is also on the horizon, with AI tools like "Hallucination" generating news quizzes, AI image generators, AI voice generation, and AI-powered transcription services like "Otter."

As the news industry strives for greater diversity and inclusivity, both journalists and readers insist on making news more accessible. Workshops are being conducted to sensitize journalists to issues related to people with disabilities, and journalism schools are offering dedicated courses and workshops on disability and inclusive language. However, systemic insensitivity in the industry persists and will require ongoing dialogue and technological advancements to overcome.