THE STUDY METHOD

THIS STUDY seeks to determine the extent of convergence between the various categories of news content programmed by Malayalam newspapers and their readers’ preferences in reading such content. Such an effort will provide valuable insight into the relationship between Malayalam newspaper’s news programming practices and reader’s reading patterns and preferences.

OBJECTIVES

Thus this study attempts to clarify whether newspaper readers' attach a similar kind of importance to various news content categories as decided upon and displayed by the editors. More specifically the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out newspapers news programming practices in relation to various categories of news content
2. To find out the readers’ preferences in relation to the various categories of news content
3. To ascertain the relationship between the news programming practices of the selected dailies and readers’ preferences in reading the programmed content.

The above objectives call for a content analysis of sampled dailies and a survey among their readers.

Through content analysis, the newspaper’s news programming practices as manifest in the news selected and displayed on various pages will be ascertained. As described in the first chapter, the manifest content relating to local, regional, national and international events in different areas of life undoubtedly is a product of the news values and the editorial policies of the newspapers concerned. After ascertaining the manifest content through content analysis, the study will conduct a survey among the readers of the newspapers concerned to determine their
preferences in reading various categories of the news content. The last and most important part of the study is to investigate the nature of relationship between the news programming practices of the newspapers and their readers’ news reading preferences.

The results of such an analysis would indicate whether the news reading preferences match with the editorial judgements.

As similar studies have not been done yet, this study is conceived as an exploratory one. Hence it was decided to confine the study to Malayalam dailies which command a large readership among the Indian language newspapers.

**SAMPLED DAILIES**

The two leading Malayalam dailies namely, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* were purposively selected from among the dailies published in Kerala as of 2005. The choice of these two dailies was based on the criteria of circulation. According to ABC report of July-December 2005, *Malayala Manorama* topped the chart with a gross circulation of 13,95,191 copies. And, *Mathrubhumi* with a daily circulation of 10,40,183 copies had the second position. Together, these dailies account for more than 65 per cent of the total readership in Kerala. Hence, a detailed study of these dailies was considered sufficient to investigate the study objectives.

The two sampled dailies have in fact been the leading news providers to millions of their readers ever since their establishment. Both the dailies have multi editions and a network of news bureaus across India and abroad. A fierce and healthy competition between them has helped each one maintain and increase its readership despite the slow and steady growth of other Malayalam dailies such as *Kerala Kaumudi, Deshabhimani, Madhyamam* and *Mangalam* etc.

The sampled dailies have high quality printing facilities and latest technologies for the transmission of data between various units. Both the dailies are published simultaneously from several centers in Kerala and outside.

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For this study, the Kottayam district edition of the dailies was purposively chosen as Kottayam occupies a prominent place in Kerala’s mass media scenario. The origin of journalistic activity in the district can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century. **Jnananikshepam**, the first newspaper published by the natives, was brought out from CMS press in Kottayam in 1848. Situated in the middle of Kerala, Kottayam remains a major centre of newspapers and periodicals. Six prominent dailies namely **Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, Kerala Kaumudi, Mangalam, Deshabhimani, Madhyamam** and **Deepika** are being published from here besides over thirty periodicals. A brief profile of the sampled dailies is detailed below.

**Malayala Manorama**: Malayala Manorama was established in 1888 by Kandathil Varghese Mappilai at Kottayam. The first issue of Malayala Manorama was published on 22nd march 1890. Malayala Manorama became a bi-weekly in 1901, a tri-weekly on 2nd July 1918 and a daily a decade after.

A part of the family owned private limited company, Malayala Manorama Publications, the daily has 16 printing units in India and abroad. And, it has consistently retained the top position in daily circulation and readership for the last thirty years in Kerala. K.M. Mathew is the Chief Editor and Mammen Mathew, the Editor. In 2007, the Manorama group launched a 24-hour electronic news channel called the MM News and four FM radio stations in Kerala.

**Physical Parameters of the Daily**: Size: Full dummy (52 cm deep 32 cm wide); Number of pages: 18 and above; Number of columns: 8; Column width: 4.2 cm; Supplements and weekly features, on all days except Tuesday (varies from one edition to another).

**Editions and Circulation**: Thiruvananthapuram-1,42,112; Kollam-1,20,835; Kottayam-3,47,194; Kochi-2,07,859; Thrissur-1,31,180; Palakkad-90,120; Malappuram-79,760; Kozhikode-11,591; Mumbai-29,684; Chennai-9,301, Bangalore -18,871; New Delhi-11,739; Kannur-95,945

Mathrubhumi: The Mathrubhumi daily was launched on 18th March 1923 as a tri-weekly by a group of patriots headed by K.P. Kesava Menon. It grew into a full-fledged daily in 1930.

Mathrubhumi, currently owned by the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Company Limited has 13 printing units in Kerala and outside. Though Mathrubhumi daily led in circulation during the sixties, it lost the top position to its main rival Malayala Manorama at the end of seventies. But thereafter, it has maintained the second position in circulation and readership. The Mathrubhumi group publishes several other specialized periodicals besides owning a book publishing division and four FM radio stations.

Physical Parameters of the Daily: Size: Full dummy (52 cm deep 32 cm wide); Number of pages: 18 and above; Number of columns: 8; Column width: 4.2 cm; Supplements and weekly features appear on all days except Tuesday (varies from one edition to another).

Editions and Circulation: Thiruvananthapuram-1,24,867; Kollam-79,992; Kottayam-1,22,222; Kochi-1,44,374; Thrissur-1,37,302; Palakkad-72,975; Malappuram-71,358; Kozhikode-1,58,721; Mumbai-23,004; Chennai-5,726; Bangalore -5,954; Kannur-1,28,392

Total Circulation: 10,40,183 (ABC-July-December 2005).

CONTENT ANALYSIS METHOD

Content analysis is the most versatile research method available for investigating any problem in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inferences. Though being used in a variety of disciplines and areas of specialized enquiry such as biography, linguistics, archaeology, art, music, philately, international relations and information sciences, its wider application remains in its turf i.e., the media studies, in particular newspaper studies.

It won’t be wrong, in fact, to say that the content analysis of newspapers is as old as the history of content analysis itself. Its distant antecedents could be found in the studies of Speed (1893), Mathews (1810) and Tenney (1912), which were devoted
to the evaluation of press performance and trends in its contents. Following these pioneering studies, content analysis emerged as a systematic, objective and quantitative method for studying and analyzing the manifest content communication for the purpose of measuring variables.

**Study in Two Laps**

As is well known, the editorial judgements based on the editorial policies of the newspaper would remain constant in selection and display of news content. But the end product of such judgements would vary depending upon the news value of the news stories that break each day. Thus the newspapers’ content and the way it is displayed on the pages vary from one day to another. Therefore, content studies meant to investigate programming practices of newspapers must not be restricted to a single day. At the minimum, such studies must be carried out for two days spread across a sufficiently longer period. Hence in this study, the content analysis was carried out for two purposively chosen days during August 2005. The first lap of the study was on August 2nd 2005. A fortnight later, the second lap of the study was conducted, i.e., on August 18th 2005.

The descriptive data of lap I and II was independently prepared to check whether the news programming practices of the two dailies were similar across two laps. While auditing the newspaper’s programming practices with the reader’s reading practices, the lap I and II data was merged to constitute the aggregate data.

To ascertain the reader’s preferences in reading various news contents programmed on August 2nd and 18th, a survey among the readers was conducted the very next day, i.e., on August 3rd and 19th respectively.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis was a news item. Each item was counted as a single unit including its headline, body and pictures. Pictures with captions were also counted as news items. Here in this study, the content was classified into various categories of news as given below.
I. Generic Categories of Content

1. **Straight News**: Matter of fact rendering of events/happenings as they unfold.

2. **Features**: This includes content which does not follow the news style in presentation and is displayed with or without pictures. These are not matter of facts pieces; they elaborate, define or explain and provide background information with or without comments, observations and arguments.

3. **Letters**: Express the views of the reader.

4. **Editorials**: They expresses the views of the Editor/Newspaper.

II. Geographic Categories of Content

1. **Local News**: News originating from the district headquarters or the place of publication and elsewhere with relevance to the area of publication.

2. **Regional News**: News originating from within the state of Kerala, and which has relevance to the State.

3. **National News**: News about the Nation (India) irrespective of its origin.

4. **International News**: News originating outside India with an international significance. News relating to India having international importance also come under this category.

5. **Others**: Those which do not come under the above defined category.

III. Subject Matter Categories of Content

1. **Domestic Politics**: News about domestic political organizations, politicians, political affairs, political corruptions and scandals

2. **International Politics and Diplomacy**: News about politicians and political parties of countries other than India and about foreign diplomatic relations between and among nations, visit of dignitaries, signing of protocols/agreements etc.
3. **Crime and Terrorism**: News on and about robbery, murder, theft, terrorism, terrorist organizations and efforts to end terrorism etc.

4. **Trade Unions**: News about trade unions, trade union leaders and their activities.

5. **Social Unrest**: News on and about strikes, hartal, bandh, protest meets and marches, police actions on agitators and the like.

6. **Human Interest**: News about odd events, incidents, people and strange happenings.

7. **Education and Social service**: News on and about education, educational institutions, teachers, students, academic activities and about social service activities of institutions and committed persons.

8. **Religion**: News about religions, religious institutions and their activities.

9. **Trade, Industry and Commerce**: News about trade organizations, industry, budget, share markets, financial institutions, inflation and other economic affairs.

10. **Accidents and Disasters**: News on and about accidents of all kinds involving humans from all over the world and about natural calamities.

11. **Science, Information Technology and Others**: News on and about the scientific world and Information on technology, new inventions, scientists and other categories.

12. **Military**: News on and about military activities, war and development of new artilleries.

13. **Sports**: News on and about Sports events and sports persons.

14. **Art, Culture & Entertainment**: News on and about various art forms, artists, all kinds of cultural forms, film and TV.

**Inter-Coder Reliability**

As it is mandatory to determine the intercoder reliability value in content analysis studies, two coders independently coded the news items into three content categories - geographic, generic and subject matter. Using the Cohen's Kappa co-
efficient formula, the inter coder reliability between the two coders was assessed. Acceptable reliability calls for a coefficient of 0.8. The test of inter-coder reliability yielded the following co-efficient in respect of the three content categories which were over and above the acceptable co-efficient of 0.8.

1. Geographic category of news: 0.896
2. Generic category of news : 0.885
3. Subject matter category : 0.888

READERSHIP STUDY PROCEDURE

Research has helped in developing techniques by which newspaper content or for that matter the content of broadcasting networks and films can be studied. Techniques to understand the composition of the audience of mass media have been developed. Despite these developments in communication research, media professionals and practitioners continue to ask themselves questions such as, what stories interest my audience. Am I providing content that interest them? And how do my audiences use the content?

Unfortunately an answer to these questions seems to be elusive. Techniques to collect such information as, how many people use a medium, who uses it and to what demographic group the audience belong, have been developed. But techniques to gain knowledge of the usage patterns of content by the audience have not been perfected yet, particularly in the case of the print medium.

While gadgets like the ‘audimeter’, ‘Television meter’ and ‘people meter’ have proved useful in providing almost precise and near dependable data on the usage pattern of radio and TV, the print media continue to rely on surveys for information on the usage pattern of their content.

But surveys cannot attain the precision of electronic devices in determining how newspapers are read, which stories are read in what sequence, do readers give them the same importance to stories as given by the editors, what type of stories are read and to which one do the readers give top priority? To these and similar questions, surveys gather information by asking questions.
Responses are determined by what questions are asked and how they are asked. Innumerable experiments have been conducted to study how response patterns are affected by changes in question stimuli. Researchers are aware of the loopholes inherent in questionnaire surveys. Close-ended questions force respondents to conform their answers to one of the choices determined by the researcher, while open-ended questions bring a variety of responses that make data analysis difficult.

These are just a few problems inherent in surveys undertaken to determine the news reading patterns among the readers. Other problems such as ‘tendencies to select extremes’, ‘perseverance in the physical location of responses’, ‘response bias’ produced by response acquiescence set have all been studied and warned against.

Researchers have evolved techniques to overcome these deficiencies in questionnaire surveys. The two such methods commonly used are ‘aided recall’ and ‘self-administered’ readership survey.

The aided recall method is restricted to assessing the readership of selected items. Here the interviewer shows clippings of particular items and finds out which stories the respondent remembers to have read. In the self-administered readership survey the respondents answer pre-determined set of questions.

**Hybrid Aided Recall Method**

This study used a hybrid method in which the respondents were administered a structured questionnaire to elicit data on their socio-demographic variables as well as newspaper reading habits. In addition, the study adopted a novel aided recall method to ascertain readers’ reading patterns and preferences of news content. The novelty of this method being, that the respondents were supplied with a copy of their previous day’s newspaper wherein each news item had been chronologically numbered. And, they were instructed to scan the newspaper and mark the news items read by them the previous day in all the pages. This method was bound to give far more accurate responses as the readers’ had with them the copy of the daily which they had read the previous day. As a result, it was easier for them to recall with greater certainty the order in which they read the various news items. Using this novel method, the data was collected in two laps.
As pointed out in the introductory section of this chapter, there was a need to conduct the readership survey to determine the extent to which the news programming practices match reader’s preferences in reading the content programmed by the dailies in lap I and II, ie, on August 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 18\textsuperscript{th} respectively. Accordingly, readership survey was conducted among the readers of Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi in two laps. The lap I readership survey was done on August 3\textsuperscript{rd} and the lap II survey on August 19\textsuperscript{th}.

The investigator prepared a questionnaire to elicit information regarding the demography and reading habits of the respondents. The questionnaire was pre-tested and a code sheet was prepared to mark the reading patterns of the readers during the survey.

Sample for Survey

A multi-staged sampling procedure was adopted to arrive at the sample for the survey. As Kottayam district editions of Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi were chosen for the content analysis, the readership survey had to be conducted among the readers of Kottayam district editions. Therefore, a quota of 150 readers was assigned to each of the dailies. Given the fact that the Kottayam district editions’ readers are spread across Kottayam town and four other municipalities, samples from each of these areas had to be selected.

The Kottayam municipality being comparatively larger in its geography and population, it was divided into two areas – Kottayam I and Kottayam II. A quota of 25 respondents each was fixed for Kottayam I and II and the other four municipalities namely, Changanasseri, Vaikkom, Kanjirappalli and Pala.

In each of the six areas, one residential locality was purposively chosen so as to include readers belonging to divergent socio-economic backgrounds. In the next stage of the sampling procedure, a list of regular subscribers of the two dailies was obtained from the news agents of the respective areas, and from each list a random sample of 25 respondents was chosen to constitute the ultimate sample of 150 for each daily in both the laps.
The respondents were administered a structured questionnaire to gather data on their socio-demographic traits and media reading habits (see Appendix - I). To ascertain the reading patterns and preferences, the study, as explained earlier, adopted a novel method better than the most commonly used aided-recall method. In that, to make the recall easier and at the same time accurate, the respondents were supplied with a copy of their previous days newspaper in which each news item had been chronologically numbered. And, they were asked to mark the news items they read in all the pages the previous day.

The respondents of the first lap (August 3rd) were again approached to collect data of the second lap on August 19th. The marked copies of the lap I and II newspapers were collected and the chronological number of items identified as “read” by each of the respondents had been assigned a number.

The lap I and II data relating to the reader’s reading practices was merged to constitute the aggregate data. The content analysis data and readership data was compared to realize the study objectives.

The data was subjected to appropriate statistical tests to ascertain the significance of the study results as detailed in the succeeding chapter.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

In the absence of any major study on the relationship between news programming practices and reader’s news reading patterns, the present study assumes importance. Yet another salient feature of the study lies in its two fold methodology of conducting content analysis and comparing its results with results of the readership survey. This study perhaps for the first time employed an improved aided recall method by presenting the readers with a copy of the newspaper they read the previous day to identify the news items read by them.

This study, being exploratory in nature is confined to Malayalam press and its readers. This remains a limitation of the study. The reader sample was small and confined to one locale. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides pointers to conduct studies on a large scale to ascertain whether the news reading patterns and preferences of readers’ match with the news programming practices of Indian dailies.