DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

NEWSPAPERS are a product of professional endeavour. They are designed and packaged to serve the most important human need – the need to acquire information on all aspects of life in today’s modern and fast changing society. In fulfilling this need, editors consciously strive to gather and disseminate news in ways to attract reader’s attention and there by ensure that they read, comprehend and use it whenever and wherever needed.

The newsgathering and processing is a complex activity involving scores of stringers, reporters/correspondents, copy editors and editors who select and edit news and then display it on various pages using appropriate design elements. In doing so editors attach varying importance to the news items selected. While some are chosen to be displayed on front pages in bold headlines, some others are relegated to unimportant positions of the pages. Some items are chosen for special treatment for display in tinted or bordered boxes, colour heads and the like.

To help readers locate news relating to different subjects, editors pool stories belonging to various regions and subjects under page-specific standing heads such as national news, international news, sports, trade/commerce, education, obits etc.

In these and other pages, various design treatments are given suggesting which of the stories are more important than the others. Of late, some newspapers through navigators on page one, directly tell the readers that there are stories on certain pages that they must read. Such editorial practices are not static. Editors often modify their news programming practices in tune with readers’ changing needs and expectations.

Such practices however are not known to bridge the reader-editor gap in respect of the news programmed and news read. Nonetheless, professionalism demands for a regular assessment of the news programming practices and readers’ reading preferences. Such assessment would provide a better insight essential to make
news content match readers’ news needs. Against this backdrop, the present study was conducted in the context of Malayalam press.

THE STUDY

The study focussed on assaying the news programming practices of Malayala Manoroma and Mathrubhumi which continue to dominate the Malayalam press milieu. The dailies were examined in two laps to determine their news programming practices in relation to various categories of news content. At the same time, the study ascertained readers’ preferences in the programmed news content. These two facets of the data was correlated to ascertain the nature of relationship between the news programmed by the editors and the news that was actually read by the readers. The data analysis revealed interesting and functionally relevant results.

The Editorial Practices

As found out in earlier studies, this study too unambiguously pointed out to the regional character of the Malayalam press in terms of its content with the regional news dominating in relation to national and international news. In addition, as could be expected, the prime concern of the leading Malayalam dailies was on providing straight news about events and issues that relentlessly unfold day after day.

In respect of various subject matter categories of news, the editorial practices tended to favour news of domestic politics as compared to other subject matter categories of news. Other subject matter categories received varying importance in the two dailies under investigation.

Satisfaction and Credibility

Were the readers satisfied with such news programming practices followed by their dailies? To obtain an answer the study gauged reader’s satisfaction with the current editorial practices. The analysis revealed that Malayala Manoroma readers were far more satisfied with its news programming practices as compared to the satisfaction of the Mathrubhumi readers. Here in lies a point for the Mathrubhumi to ponder as to why their readers do not derive satisfaction as much as Malayala Manoroma readers do.
The study also assessed the credibility of the two dailies as pursued by their respective readers. The analysis once again indicated that *Malayala Manorama* readers held their newspaper to be quite credible compared to readers of *Mathrubhumi* who had assigned a relatively low credibility to their daily.

**Editor-Reader Convergence and Divergence**

The analysis of the data revealed that the readers of both the dailies had their own preferences in reading various pages. While *Malayala Manorama* readers met the general expectations of qualifying page one as the most read page, the *Mathrubhumi* readers had a different preference. They were found to prefer reading page three to the front page. This indicates a mismatch between editorial practices and reading habits of the readers.

Such a mismatch was far wider when it came to the quantum of news programmed and the quantum of news read. The study revealed that the quantum of news read was abysmally low – 32.1 per cent of the stories published in *Malayala Manorama* and a further low of 26 per cent in the case of *Mathrubhumi*. The finding highlights the fact that readers do not read everything that is printed by the newspapers. One implication here is the fact that newspaper readers are far more selective than the editors are.

Flowing from this is another implication which calls for the editors to be far more imaginative and exacting in making their content match the information needs of their readers. Such efforts would certainly pay and make the content relevant to the readers.

Though the news read was extremely low, there was a convergence in the various categories of news programmed by the editors and the news read by the readers. This was the case in respect of the three categories – geographic, generic and subject matter.

**Concluding Remarks**

These broad findings and conclusions are tentative. Further research requires to be undertaken to validate the findings. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted using the same research designs in different locales. In addition, there is a need to
conducted studies with an enlarged sample of newspapers as well as readers both in the context of the Malayalam press and in the context of other language dailies including English. Such studies besides enriching research literature would also be of value to editorial managers and planners of Indian newspapers. Perhaps here, professional media organisations such as Indian Newspaper Society, Press Institute of India and National Readership Studies Council could undertake or commission studies of similar character both at the regional and national level.