THERE ARE not many studies of Malayalam Press to understand the nature of relationship between the importance the newspapers and readers give to the different news categories and subject matters of news.

This however is not to deny the presence of large number of content analysis studies conducted by journalists, academics and students. In this chapter, some of these studies have been grouped and presented under four sections. The first section details the findings of studies relating to the divergent content of the newspapers, especially Malayalam dailies.

The second section focuses on a couple of experimental studies designed to understand the importance of certain news values at the level of the readers. The third section reviews a few studies that investigated readers' preferences in reading the contents programmed by the Malayalam dailies. The fourth and last section focuses on a summary of the gatekeeping studies to point out the general mismatch between readers' interest and judgement of the editors.

CONTENT ANALYTICAL STUDIES

In the 1960s George carried out a content analysis and readership survey of six Malayalam dailies to understand the general attitude of the readers to each paper. Interestingly, it found that the readers were emotionally attached rather than intellectually to their newspaper. This attachment was dependant on the religious or caste identifications of the particular newspaper. The study also evaluated the distribution of space for Kerala news, national news and international news. It found that the Malayala Manorama published from Kottayam devoted 78.8 per cent space for Kerala news. National and International news occupied only 11 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. Deepika allotted about 61 per cent to Kerala news and another 29 per cent and 10 per cent to the national and international events
respectively. The other four papers devoted 50-60 per cent of their space for Kerala news, 27-30 per cent for national and rest for international news.  

Vilanilam made a comparative study of foreign news reported in two US and two Indian newspapers. The US papers selected were New York Times and Philadelphia Enquirer and the Indian papers were the Times of India and the Malayala Manorama. His study revealed that the newspaper of both the countries programmed news unfolding in regions closer to home. As a result, the quantum of foreign news in US dailies was less than three per cent of the newshole. Indian newspapers on the other hand devoted nearly 15 per cent of their space to foreign news.

The factor of proximity, an important criteria in news programming, also stood out in a study by Ahmed and Subash. They content analysed six Malayalam dailies to determine the news to advertisement ratio and the importance the Malayalam dailies attach to local, regional, national and international news events. Their study revealed that the major dailies, Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, and Kerala Kaumudi gave almost equal space to news and advertisement, i.e., 50 per cent each.

The other dailies such as Deshabhimani, Chandrika and Veeekshanam devoted 70-80 per cent of its total space to news and the rest to advertisements. Also, all the dailies attached greater importance to regional news followed by national and international news. And irrespective of the affiliations of the managements, political news was given the top priority in all the dailies, followed by crime and trade unions.

Radhakrishnan and Karippai content analysed Malayalam dailies in 2001 to understand the role of newspapers in transfer of agricultural technologies. They


found that the illustrations contributed to the understanding of the printed messages. However, a number of inadequacies have been identified in the use of illustrations in the farm pages of most of the leading Malayalam dailies. Editing without technical expertise has been quite often distorting the intended messages. The experience stories - either of success or failure- have increased human element but demands professional skill by the contributor. The question-answer columns and the ‘tips and bits’ are the other common formats appearing in the farm pages. Further, on analysing readers response the study indicated that experience/success stories were the most preferred ones and were instrumental in creating attitudinal changes.  

Rosamma did a content analysis of seven Malayalam newspapers in 1990 to study the information needs and use of information sources in newspaper establishments in Kerala. The Newspapers as a whole devoted 63.73 per cent of their space to news content and 36.27 per cent to ads. The largest news space was in the Chandrika (85.56 per cent) and the largest advertisement space was in the Malayala Manorama (51.77 per cent). It was found that the Malayala Manorama devoted below 50 per cent of the total printed area to news. Three-fourth of the newshole (76.89 per cent) of the dailies belonged to hard news i.e., matter of fact reporting of events and happenings.

Features (16.39 per cent) took the second largest share of the newshole followed by editorials (2.70 per cent), readers views (2.25 per cent) and miscellaneous (1.77 per cent). The study revealed that space provided to news was the largest in the Kerala Kaumudi (83.78 per cent). Analysis of themes of news items found that all the newspapers gave prominence to politics. News about political parties and their activities constituted more than 15 per cent of the newshole. Sports news appeared second in order of importance in Malayala Manorama and the Mathrubhumi.

Kumar did a content analysis of selected Malayalam dailies in 1993 to study the regional character of Malayalam dailies. He found that regional news occupied 34.3

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per cent of the cumulative newshole. Malayalam dailies except *Deepika* devoted the largest space for area news. The study showed that not only the party owned papers but also the business house papers gave maximum space for interpretative news and features.\(^{31}\)

The case of developmental news in three Malayalam dailies was investigated by Rajesh in 1996. He found that *Kerala Kaumudi* gave more developmental news than *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*. Education received second priority in *Kaumudi* whereas the second priority of *Malayala Manorama* was technical and scientific development and that of *Mathrubhumi* was rural and urban development. Family planning and housing were the most neglected developmental sub-categories in all the newspapers.\(^{32}\)

From the foregoing literature survey it emerges that the Malayalam dailies provide prime place for regional news followed by national and international news. In that, it is the hard news i.e., matter of fact reporting of events and issues that was programmed far more regularly than other categories of news such as features, columns etc. In terms of subject matter of news, the Malayalam newspapers tended to give prominence to politics than other subject matter categories. Most of these studies unfailingly point out that the proximity news value matters most in programming news in Malayalam dailies. This practice is not specific to the Malayalam press. Newspapers around the world follow a similar practice.

**STUDIES ON NEWS VALUES**

While the above studies affirm the importance of proximity in news programming practices of newspapers, there are a couple of studies which primarily investigated the importance of selected news values from the perspective of readers. One such study is by Straughan and Murdoch. In 1986, they conducted an experimental study to examine whether the presence of certain news values affects readers interest in news stories. The news values they examined were timeliness, prominence, cultural proximity and conflict. The reader interest in news was measured by the scored

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value of a manufactured news item. Forty sets of such news items were created, each set consisting of an experimental item that included a news value or a pair of news values; and corresponding news item without the news values. The subjects of the studies were 240 undergraduate students of an introductory mass communication course at a University in the southern United States. They were divided into an experimental group, which read the news item containing news values, and a control group, which read the item with no values. All subjects then completed separate questionnaires on reader interest. Results indicated that the presence of news items containing conflict and proximity news values scored significantly higher in reader interest than items that did not contain these news values. Additionally, all combinations of the experimental news items, except for the combination of timeliness/prominence, were scored significantly higher than the control combination items. Results also showed a significant relationship between frequency of viewing television news and interest in foreign news.33

David, in 1997, conducted an experimental study to investigate the relationship between news recall and high-imagery news language and pictures. For this purpose, subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (high-imagery copy with pictures; high imagery copy without pictures; low imagery copy with pictures; low imagery copy without pictures) and asked to read the stories as they would normally read other newspaper stories. They were then asked to re-call as much of the target story as they could. The recall test was followed by a manipulation check on the imagery-evoking potential of the high and low imagery versions of the target story. Manipulation checks for the target stories were conducted in the no-picture condition. In addition to an11-item imagery index that tapped quantity, ease and vividness of the images evoked by the target stories, subjects also evaluated the high and low imagery versions on three other scales: comprehensibility of the story, its meaningfulness and the interest in the story. The order of presentation of the high and low imagery version was counterbalanced between subjects. The results suggested that there was a significant gain in re-call from the addition of either visual imagery through pictures or verbal imagery through high-imagery language. Surprisingly, the addition of both visual and verbal imagery all the same time did not yield the expected additive effect. The results also indicted

that imagery induced by news language can be as potent as visual images. This means that relative to sterile, non-imagistic writing, well-composed verbal stories with imagery-evoking language might facilitate recall and learning. From the standpoint of memory and comprehension, if reporters had more freedom to use high-imagery language, even at the expense of slightly departing from conventional norms of reporting, there could be some tangible payoffs.\textsuperscript{34}

**READERSHIP STUDIES**

There are plenty of studies that have investigated the nature of readership of Malayalam dailies. Most of these studies are by journalism students pursuing post graduate courses. In 1994, Devi conducted a survey of Malayalam newspaper readers and their reading preferences and patterns. She found that the readers of Malayalam dailies attached very high importance to newspapers, the mean affinity being a high of 3.90. This suggests that people in Kerala relay heavily on newspapers for information on day to- day events and issues happening nearer home and in far away places. The readers of *Malayala Manorama, Kerala Kaumudi* and *Chandrika* gave first preference to area news whereas the readers of *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani* gave first preference to regional news. From her content analysis it is clear that the newspapers allotted maximum space to regional news followed by area news, national news and international news.\textsuperscript{35}

In 1993, Suresh studied the influence of editorials of Malayalam dailies. He found that very few people read editorials to form an opinion. People mostly read editorials to get more information on an issue. Majority of readers read it to understand the stand taken by the newspaper. Most readers agreed that some editorials have an influence on their views.\textsuperscript{36}

Another student-scholar Rajeev conducted a study on the readership of political news in Malayalam newspapers in 1996. He found that periodicity of reading political news was high among the males than the females. Majority of the readers


ranked political news as their first preference. It was found that majority of readers were regular readers of political cartoons while editorials and articles/columns on politics were read occasionally.\textsuperscript{37}

Sreela on the other hand did a study on the impact of news on crime against women in Malayalam newspapers in 2003. She found that all respondents read news on crime against women and they read it fully. 44 per cent of respondents believed that newspapers try to suppress facts while reporting crime against women. Most of the readers (75 per cent) opined that newspapers give most prominence to news on sexual harassment. The readers complained that news reports on crime against women as incomplete and impartial and were being used to increase the circulation of newspapers.\textsuperscript{38}

Anil studied the status of environmental reporting in Malayalam newspapers in 1997. He found that among the Malayalam newspapers, \textit{Mathrubhumi} and \textit{Madhyamam} gave more coverage to environmental stories in terms of space and frequency. But in-depth articles and investigative reports on environmental issues were very few. Malayalam press gave importance to events rather than issues. The dailies did not pay much attention to major environmental issues like pollution.\textsuperscript{39}

A study on the feasibility of read ‘N’ record method in determining newspaper reading preferences was done by Lakshmi Panicker in 1994. Her study demonstrated that the feasibility of using the read ‘N’ record method in determining what readers actually read. In that study, she compared the results of both the read ‘N’ record survey and that of the questionnaire survey. She found that the two methods came up with different results suggesting that one of the two methods was better than the other. However the read ‘N’ record method appeared to be advantageous as it discovers what people actually read, rather than they say they do.\textsuperscript{40}


STUDIES ON THE READER - EDITOR GAP

The field of gatekeeping in newspapers has been a subject of scores of studies in the west since early 1950s. In early studies, researchers (White 1950, Geber 1956) focused on large number of items that failed to gain entry and on the reasons for exclusion.41 In those studies there was a tendency to emphasise the subjective character of news selection decisions. Later, more attention was given to systematic influences on selection that can be considered as either organisational or ideological. The former refers primarily to bureaucratic routines, the latter to values and cultural influences which are not purely individual and personal but which stem from the social setting of news activity.

Subsequent research clearly demonstrated that the content of news media usually follows a predictable pattern and that different organization behave in a similar way when confronted by the same events and under equivalent conditions. There appears to be a stable perception on the part of news decision makers about what is likely to interest an audience and a good deal of consensus within the same social-cultural setting (Hetherington, 1985). A condition for this generalization is one of limited diversity within the media systems a whole.42

Gatekeeping Studies

Although the first gatekeeping studies presumed that news selection was guided by an expert assessment of what would interest audiences, there has been mixed support for this view. Research comparing audience interests in news topics and editorial judgement of the same subject matter has shown wide mismatching (Bogart 1979, Hargrove and Stempel 2002, Robinson and Levy, 1986).43 A comparison between editors and readers of 'top stories' as polled in the USA for 1995-1999 showed 48 per cent agreement and no correlation between audience interest in

40 Lakshmi Panicker, A Study on the Feasibility of Read 'N' Record in Determining Newspaper Reading Preferences, Dept. of Mass Communication, University of Calicut, 1994, p 35.
news and actual coverage (Tai and Chang, 2002). Based on the findings they concluded that US editors did not give audiences what they wanted.

If that is the case in the US, what is it like in India? Do Indian newspapers provide news which meets the needs and expectations of their readers. In other words, do readers of Indian newspapers pay a similar attention and importance to news as ascribed to by the editors?

Answers to these questions are not available yet. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and determine the degree of consonance between editorial practices and reading preferences in the context of Indian newspapers with specific reference to Malayalam dailies.

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