7. CONCLUSIONS AND INFERENCES

The study of trends in features stories with respect to text, context and reader reveals a close association between the variables. The trends in text were studied through the content analysis of feature stories, trends in context and readership were analyzed with a survey of feature readers, and the results of the two stages of study show a close association between reader preferences governed by his context and dominant trends in text. The trends in subject matter, presentation and source of feature stories show that the change in feature stories in the span of eighty years is gradual. The trends in reader and context show that the reader’s internal and external context drives his/her preferences. The study also concludes that the trends in text and trends in reader and context are connected and readers approve of the change in text.

The present study adds to the existing body of work by bringing out the trends in feature stories, it enriches the existing work by showing the connection between evolution of text and gratification of reader needs that arise in accordance with his context. The theories of selectivity and consistency hold true for the present study as the reader’s internal and external context becomes a driving force in choosing the text he reads. Thus, the conclusion of the study was that the variables of text, context and reader are connected even in the present era.

7.1 TRENDS IN TEXT, CONTEXT and READER of FEATURE STORIES

The major findings of content analysis of feature stories show change in content, presentation and source of feature stories. The change in almost all the parameters is steep in the first two decades i.e. the pre-Independence and the post-Independence era. Thereafter the changes become gradual and dominant themes emerge in the span of eighty years. The major trends and the connection between the trends in text and reader preferences are discussed as under.

**Major trends in subject matter of feature stories, reading preferences and reader need gratification:** The trends with respect to subject matter in The Tribune and Times of India are dominance of News Features in all decades. While these are restricted to political subjects in The Tribune, in Times of India, news features appear on varied themes. Lifestyle features form the next prominent category in both newspapers. Besides these while Review features are popular in Times of India, Art and Culture features are popular in The Tribune. Features on social issues and
problems are prominent in both newspapers, while they show a steady rise in The Tribune, there is random trend in Times of India although they are prominent in both. The readership survey revealed that News Features, Lifestyle features, Art and Culture, Health features, and Review Features were some of the types of features preferred by most of the respondents. The demographics and psychographics of the readers showed a significant association with the reading preferences. Lifestyle features were a preferred choice for respondents in young age groups and more females than males read trend stories about lifestyle subjects. With respect to psychographics, sociability and self-esteem show a significant association with the choice of subject matter. While those in low sociability read more about lifestyle trends, those in medium to high sociability prefer to read about topical issues and events along with lifestyle trends. In the case of self-esteem levels those with low self-esteem read review features along with the topical issues, those in medium and high self-esteem read diverse themes and health features more than other types of features. Despite the differences, News features, Lifestyle features, Art and Culture features, Problem features are the preferred categories and the same are found to be dominant in the content analysis. The results from the content analysis showed a close connection with the results of the readership survey as news features were the most preferred type of features chosen by the respondents were the types that were dominant in all decades or had shown a rising trend for the time under analysis. The findings of content analysis and reader preferences could be connect to understand the relationship between the variables of Text, Context and Reader. Affective needs, cognitive needs and escapist needs had higher mean scores reflecting the fact that readers derived high cognitive, affective and escape need gratification. Social Integrative and Personal integrative needs had the lowest mean scores reflecting that that respondents derived lesser personal and social integrative need gratifications from reading feature stories. One could also say that news features that provided interesting information and added knowledge seemed to be fulfilling the cognitive needs of the respondents, whereas the features on art, culture, lifestyle seemed to be fulfilling the needs for diversion and entertainment. Another interesting finding is the comparison of subject matter pre independence and post independence. Although a number of categories show a dip, from pre-independence to post independence era, but lifestyle features deserve a special
mention as these are in big percentage in the pre independence era and see a dip for several decades after independence before resurfacing in the last few decades. The subjects like relationships, sensitive issues like sexual relationships, homosexuality, sensational stories on celebrities are all subjects prominent in the pre-independence era that only resurface in the papers in last few decades.

The finding shows a connection between the internal and external context of the reader and the text. While one could say that the readers of the newspaper were the learned and the elite in the pre independence era, the subjects in text catered to their lifestyle and needs, with the end of British rule and emergence of social issues as an external context for the readers in India, the themes in features also become less lifestyle oriented. In the present decade when once again the majority readers have lifestyle issues as the most sought after topics, the text seems to be catering to them.

**Major trends in writing style and reader preferences:** Major trends in writing style of feature stories in both Times of India and The Tribune show dominance of descriptive style of writing. While the Informative style in popular in the pre-independence era and analytical style is gaining ground in recent decades, descriptive style continues to dominate throughout. While social issues use more of analytical style, the lifestyle features, art and culture, personality features use descriptive style and informative style. Informative style is majorly used by a section of news features and Utility features.

The findings are again in accord with the result of reader survey as descriptive style of writing the features was most preferred across readers. Although descriptive style was a preferred style across all demographics and psychographics, the preference for informative and analytical styles of writing were influenced by psychographics of the readers. Those with low sociability, low self esteem and internal locus of control preferred informative style of writing feature stories, while those with medium to high sociability, medium self-esteem and external locus of control, preferred analytical style of writing.

**Major trends in ease of readability** show an increase in FRE score which in turn implying an increased ease of readability of the text, both in Tribune and Times of India. Thus, one can conclude that ease of readability shows an upward trend during the time under analysis.

**Major trends in placement of feature stories** in The Tribune and Times of India show a change in the terms of increase in variety of subject matter on the front pages;
varied subjects with no patterns of back pages, and emergence and growth of special theme pages in the inside pages. The special theme pages carry the maximum number of feature stories and make the readers' job easy as a reader interested in a particular subject matter can skip to the special theme page of his choice.

**Major trends in the ratio of verbal element** to visual element in feature stories show an increase in visual element per unit of verbal element in the span of eight decades. Thus, one can conclude that there has been a rise in the visual element in the presentation of feature stories and this rise is steep in last two decades.

Closely associated with the verbal visual ratio are the **major trends in the use of text breaker devices**. These show an increase in feature story to text breakers ratio. While this increase is gradual in The Tribune, it is random in Times of India. Besides, an increase in the number of text breakers being used per story another major finding is the most preferred text breakers used change in the course of eight decades. Another finding is the change in usage of the text breakers, while in earlier decades the use is more ornamental with calligraphic fonts used for Drop Cap and other text breakers, in the recent decades the use is more to serve the dual purpose of breaking the monotony of text and enhancing the design without excessive ornamentation.

**Major trends of fonts** in feature story headlines show prominence of Roman and Sans Serif fonts. While The Tribune main edition shows popularity of Roman and Sans Serif, in Times of India Roman font is prominent for main edition. In case of feature supplements, Sans Serif fonts are more popular. An interesting observation is also that the trends in of pre independence and early decades come back in the recent decades especially in the case of The Tribune.

**Major trends in the typographical arrangement** of the headlines show Centered and Flush left as the preferred style in main edition. While waistline pattern sees a decline, free style headline show a rise but are restricted to feature supplements.

**Major trends in length of headline** are increase in percentage of single heads and further decrease in number of words within the single heads. The composite heads disappear from the newspapers in the mid decades, the only exception being The Tribune feature supplements where the composite heads still appear. The prime reason for shrinking length and changing structure of headline is perhaps the decrease in length and word count of the feature story over the years.
Major trends in sources of feature stories show an increase in staff reporters and change of terminology to identify the staff reporters, decline in use of news agencies as a source and decline in miscellaneous source and no source stories. Overall, the feature stories appear as an editorial content sourced from authentic and credible sources. The increase in staff reporters reflected an addition of local flavour and additional detailing to the feature stories besides adding variety of subjects and credibility to the content. Thus, the theoretical perspective of glocalization of content suggested by many researchers in the study of change in media content holds true in the present case.

Besides the findings in trends of feature stories over the years and the reader preferences with respect to subject matter and writing style, the study also gauged the readers’ opinion on the changes that occurred in the content, presentation and source of the feature stories. With respect to trends in content, majority of feature, readers were in approval of the variety of subject matter and themes in the feature stories. Maximum number of feature readers had a strong approval for descriptive style of writing being the most suitable for feature writing. Although there was a lesser majority that approved the change in language of feature, stories but there were more respondents who approved the ease of language as compared to those who disapproved it.

In terms of readers’ opinion on the changes that occurred in the presentation of the feature stories, majority of respondents approved of the appearance of the special pages for feature stories with niche subject matter; majority of respondents also approved the increase in visual element and text breaker devices used in the feature stories. With respect to the feature story headline, while respondents approved use of new fonts and typographical patterns, they disapproved the shortening of feature story headline. In terms of change in the feature stories, there was again an approval for the increase in number of local staff reporters, a trend visible during content analysis.

Another area of study was the influence of the internal and external context on the reading preferences and the change in feature stories. The survey results showed that more readers admit that their internal and external context influenced their reading preferences. The results were found to be statistically significant in both cases. Therefore, the researcher can conclude that state of mind, mood, inner desires, beliefs, attitudes along with the physical and social environment of the reader that
includes his placement, his affiliations to different groups and events of importance in his vicinity all have a significant influence on the feature reading of respondents. Thus, one finds a strong connect between the major trends in text and readership and sees that both are affected by the internal and external context. Thus, the conclusion of the study was the strong relationship between the variables of text, context and the reader with respect to the trends in feature stories.

The findings of the present add and enrich the existing body of work: The present study not only draws a connection with the existing body of work but also adds and enriches it at several levels. The findings of the study can be linked to the existing literature and theoretical framework. The trends in text of feature stories that emerge through the present study support and add to the works of Bleyer (1916), Crawford (1931), Patterson (1947), Brenneck & Clark (1947) and Nicholls (1972).

The authors in their work discussed the popular types of features, the dominant themes, writing styles of feature stories. The prominent categories discussed in types of features by the authors included news features, personality features, utility features, review features and lifestyle features, the same were found as the dominantly appearing features in the present study. According to Nicholls (1972) news form one of the biggest source for features, the same holds true for the present study. The results of content analysis show news features being the most dominant in all eight decades, thus strengthening the claim made by Nicholls. The present work however adds to these dominant categories as many more types of features emerge during the time under analysis. For instance Problem features, Middle, Business and Economy features etc. In terms of writing styles, the existing body of work suggested emotional appeals, descriptive and narrative styles being most suitable for feature writing and the present work reveals that descriptive style of writing is the most used for feature stories and the most preferred by the readers.

In terms of typography and visual treatment also, the findings of the study are in accord with the existing literature. The authors suggest importance of visual element in feature stories and the present work reports an increase in visual element in the feature stories over the years. In terms of feature titles, Crawford (1931) suggested that feature titles should ideally be at least five principle words, the same is found true in the present work as the long composite heads shrink to shorter titles below 10 words during the time under analysis. Not much work has been done in the past on the fonts and typographical arrangement of feature story headlines, the present work
thus, enriches the existing work on feature story typography by reporting the major trends in fonts used in feature stories and the popular typographical arrangements of feature story headlines.

Besides supporting the trends in text, the present study also supports, the claim made by the existing works that the reader interest and need gratification is the dominant factor in shaping the trends in text. Reed (1931) in his work established a link between the reader and the text as he said that the reader preferences are a prime factor that help the feature editor choose the various types of features to be used in the newspapers. The observation is true in the present work also, as the popular / recurring/ dominant categories of feature stories in the content analysis are the ones that are most preferred by the readers. Reed also discussed the reader need gratification and asserted that entertainment features have the prime purpose to fulfil the needs for diversion and amusement. The present study strengthens and proves the same as the readership survey conducted in the present work shows that affective needs and needs for diversion and escape are amongst the most gratified needs by reading feature stories. Alexander (1987) concluded that more and more writers are turning to feature writing as feature stories accomplish the goal of blending facts and feelings. According to the author, knowledge and information is not enough as the readers look forward to their feelings being satisfied. The assertion finds strength in the findings of the reader survey that shows affective and diversion need gratification along with cognitive needs, thus reiterating the fact that reader needs go beyond information where consumption of newspaper is concerned.

Thus, while the existing work had suggested that reader interest is a key factor in deciding the preferred themes in content and presentation of text, the present work confirms and validates this claim by bringing together the results of content analysis and readership survey. It also goes a step ahead in seeking reader's approval and disapproval in the terms of change that has occurred in feature stories and it is found that the claims made by existing work can be linked to the findings of the present study. Crawford (1931) for instance suggested that the feature story title should be at least five principle words; he further also suggested that while novels have shorter titles than this, the same could not be held true for feature stories. This claim is supported by the reader's disapproval of the decrease in length of feature story headlines, where reader has felt that one word or short titles added ambiguity to the feature story. Reddick (1949) suggested the importance of visual element in
saleability of feature stories. The conclusions of present work strengthen the claim that visual element is an essential ingredient for saleability as one not only sees a gradual rise in the visual element in feature stories in the content analysis but also the survey shows that readers are in strong approval of this change.

In terms of reader’s context, the present work again supports and adds to the existing work. Steigleman (1950) in his work established a connection with the reader preferences and the context in which he lives. The present work adds to this as the study reveals that the internal and external context of the reader does influence the reading preferences. The reader’s admit that their preferences and reading habits are governed by their needs, moods and aspirations. The reader’s also admit that their placement, group affiliations and the social/political/cultural events occurring around them influence what type of features they chose to read.

Besides supporting and enriching the body of existing work that focuses on feature stories, the present study also established link with the broader area of work that focuses on trends in newspaper content as a whole. The trends and changes reported in the content and presentation of the newspaper content as a whole by the existing work comes close to the findings of the present study of feature stories. The most significant connection between the findings of the present study and the existing work can be drawn by looking at work carried out by Tiffen (2010). In his study of change in Australian newspapers, the author concludes that the change in newspapers is neither linear nor regular, the same is found true in the present work as the trend plot of the change in various parameters show random walk than any linear trend.

Another important finding of Tiffen’s work was increase in segmentation of the newspaper, the same is found true in the case of feature stories as the number of special pages and niche feature supplements increase during the time under analysis. While one finds similarities in the trends of newspaper content in Australia, the same could not be held true to the study conducted on American newspapers. Peers, L. & Nesbitt, M (2004) in their study of newspaper content of 52 U.S dailies reported Politics, Government and Sports to be the key themes in the news content, the same does not hold true for the present study on feature stories. Although news features dominate the themes, but Sports is not a preferred category either in the content analysis or in the reader preferences where the feature stories are concerned.

The findings of the study come close to the existing research on the design and typography of the newspaper content. Jacobson (2006) for instance suggests that the
newspaper design is a significant aspect in readership of newspaper and reports that circulation and readership of popular newspapers is affected by the change in design. The same is observed in the findings of the present study where readers have strong opinions on the typography and design of feature stories. There is strong approval for the increase visual element, on use of text breakers and typographical arrangement of headlines.

In terms of theoretical foundations, the present study supports the existing models of communication that highlight the sender receiver connect and the theories of selectivity and consistency. The basic SMCR model that supports the idea of sender possessing a set of skills for effective message development are supported in the works of existing authors and are found to be true in the present work where one sees that over a period of time, specialized sources for feature story develop. For instance, the findings of the study show that with specialized feature writers taking up the job of writing feature story to the newspapers the variety of features in newspapers increase. The readers also approve this change in source of feature stories. Theoretical foundations further assert that context in which reader receives the message becomes an important part of the reception of message. The results of the present study support and add to this framework as the readership survey shows that the internal and external context of the reader influences the choice of features read. Besides the basic models, the theories of selectivity and consistency, uses and gratifications approach support the findings of the present study. The connect between trends observed in content analysis and results obtained in readership survey show that uses and gratifications approach holds true in the case of the present study on features. For instance, increase in variety of subject matter can said to be a trend that evolved in response to the reader needs that evolved with times. In addition, the increasing number of special pages, or feature supplements dealing with niche subjects can be a response to the reader need for quicker and better selection of text from a bulky newspaper. An increase in visual element in feature stories can be a change that can be connected to the reader’s need of better visual satiation from newspapers when compared to a plethora of mass media around. The readers’ approval of the above mentioned changes show that the changes that occurred in text were in accordance with what the reader has expected. The findings of the readership survey with respect to the reader preferences and need gratification can be seen with respect to the existing theoretical framework. As one
notices that preferred categories of features across the demographic and psychographic profiles are the one that are significantly noticeable in the content analysis of eighty years, thus one could say that there is a connect between the reader needs and text. The choices and preferences of the readers do reflect in the text. The Uses and Gratification theories can be seen as a foundation for this phenomenon as one could conclude that readers choose the text that satiates their needs and the text responds to the reader needs by recurring over time.

The theoretical foundation of consistency theories also hold true for the present study. Based on a premise that an individual is beset my numerous conflicting forces and strives to achieve an internal equilibrium, the consistency theories believe that a person has capabilities of selecting the media content that help him attain this equilibrium. The theory was found applicable to the feature readers as they admitted to the fact their reading preferences are driven by their internal and external context.

The readers responses that indicate their choice of subject matter being driven by their present set of circumstances, their moods and desires and their group affiliations support and strengthen the theories of selectivity. In several instances the respondents report that the choice of features they read in the newspaper was to do with the present situation in life, for instance respondents undergoing career downswing read career features, those in relationship troubles read agony aunt features, those looking for travel adventures read lifestyle feature son travel, those looking for personality enhancement read self help features. The present study supports the theories of consistency and selectivity where the choice of feature reading is concerned.

Thus the present work on trends of feature stories with respect to the variables of text, context and reader concludes that even in the present era the variables of text, context and reader are inter connected. The content analysis of two centenarian newspapers brings forth the trends in text i.e. content, presentation and source of feature stories. The trend observed in text are neither linear nor sudden, they are gradual and show random walk. The readership survey brings forth the trends in reader and context and suggests that context of the reader influences the choice of the text. In addition, the changes in text observed during the content analysis are approved by the readers. The findings when seen in totality show a connection between the variables of text, context and reader.