ABSTRACT

Newspaper, that was once a dull and drab grey sheet of paper carrying cut and dry, matter of fact news in a mundane format has transformed into a colourful spread of news and features with innovations in content and design. The present study looks at the evolution of feature stories that appear in the newspapers over the span of eighty years. An intimate form of journalism, feature stories are reflective of the humane face of society and responsive to social and cultural developments, the present study thus looks at the trends in feature stories with respect to the text, context and the reader.

The objectives of the present study with respect to the variable of text included a study of subject matter, writing style, readability ease, positioning, typography and source of feature stories. With respect to the variables of context and reader, the objectives of the study included analyzing the reader preferences, the need gratification derived from reading features, and the influence of internal and external context of the reader on feature reading. The study also looked at the opinion of readers towards the changes that occurred in the feature stories over a span of eighty years.

The study included a two-step methodology. In the first stage, a content analysis of two centenarian newspapers was undertaken for a span of eighty years. In the second stage, a readership survey was undertaken to determine the trends in context and readership.

The findings of the study reveal that the change in feature stories is gradual and follows a random trend. Over a span of eighty years, the variety in subject matter, ease of readability, proportion of visual element and use of text breaker devices shows an increase. The trends in readership show that the reading preferences are affected by the internal and external context of the reader. The readers also approve of the changes that occur in the text and hence the study of trends in feature stories shows a close connection between text, context and reader.

Key Words: Feature Stories, Text, Context, Reader, Newspapers.