2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present study, deals with the analysis of the changing trends of a feature story vis-à-vis the variables of text, context and reader; their interrelationship and the role they play in changing trends of the feature story.

Text in simplest terms can be defined as a record of a communicative event. According to Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey and Richardson (2005) ‘text’ needs to display two characteristics; first, they need to be recorded or recordable and must have a sense of durability or stability. At this level, text has been conceptualized as a product. Secondly, texts must communicate, in other words they must generate and exchange meanings. At this level, text can be conceptualized as a ‘process’- that is as a process of meaning-making from the production through the reception and decoding of the text. Thus, the relationship between text and reader is crucial.

Context can be understood as the set of all entities or situations in which a message is conveyed and received. While the internal context of an individual refers to the current mental state, within which the individual’s behaviour is generated, external context refers to the physical and social environment that influences the choices, behaviour and decisions of an individual, in turn influencing how he receives and interprets any information.

Reader here can be understood as the receiver of communication who decodes the message and provides a feedback. As the role of receiver is essential to any effective communication, similarly in the context of present study the reception of feature stories by the reader is essential to the successful formulation of a feature story. The reader has been understood as the most significant factor in a majority of communication studies, as it is the effect and desired reception of message by the receiver that confirms the success of a communication process.

Since the context of reader become the determining factor in choice of text, hence the relationship between text, context and reader becomes crucial to the study of trends in feature stories.

Over the years, the societal conditions have changed and led to the evolution of new reader needs that have been addressed by the evolution in the content and presentation of the mass media messages or the text in the present study. Thus, it is essential to understand the theoretical foundations that help understand the relationship between the text, context and reader and examine if the role they play in
changing trends of the feature story in terms of its content, presentation and reception.

2.1 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION UNDERLYING THE CONCEPT OF TEXT, CONTEXT AND READER OF FEATURE STORIES

Various communication approaches and theories explain the interrelatedness of text, context and reader vis-à-vis the essential communication components. The very first model of communication, Aristotle’s rhetoric, though focusing on oral communication, established the concept of source and receiver that remains pertinent to every communication approach to date. Thereafter the Lasswell’s model of ‘Who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect’ brought forth not only all the essential elements of communication but was also one of the very first models that placed emphasis on the receiver and effects of the message on the receiver. Later, Schramm’s circular model threw light on the encoding and decoding process of the message and the system of feedback for better construction of messages. This model can be understood as the basis of various readership studies that are undertaken to improve the quality of content of the newspaper. Besides these, the S-M-C-R or the Sender Message Channel Receiver by Berio mentioned in detail the sub elements of the essential component of the communication process.

The basic linear and non linear models of communication that explain the sender – receiver relationship become pertinent to the present study as the message encoded by the sender can be understood in terms of ‘text’ of the feature story in the present study. The elements of the message help understand the factors that a feature writer uses when he composes a feature story and gives it a unique treatment different from a usual news story. The receiver and his process of decoding and understanding the message can be understood as the reader and his readership pattern in relation to the present study.

While the communication models help explain the construction and encoding of a feature story, theoretical approaches like Consistency Theories and the Uses and Gratification approach help understand the reader and his context and hence the motives or reasons behind the choice of the mass media content. These approaches help understand the reasons as to why the readers choose to read a feature story in the first place, what are the needs that remain unsatisfied through a news story and are fulfilled by a feature story and how these needs become the prime factor in influencing the reader’s choice of text. In addition, the concept of social factors
being the originator of these reader needs and the themes of feature story text help establish a connection among the three variables of text, context and the reader.

The effect of message on the receiver, or in the case of present study the effects of feature stories on the readers and the variation in these effects depending upon the individual differences and the social set up i.e. the internal and external context of the reader is explained by the Theories of Selective influence.

The theories and models discussed below are drawn from the disciplines of communication, psychology and sociology and together help understand the process of construction of the feature story text, the reasons or motives behind the reader’s choice of this text based on his context and finally the effects that this text has on the reader. These theories also help understand how the change in the trends of the feature stories i.e. the text is influenced by the reader needs and context.

SMCR MODEL

Basic Premise of the Model: The SMCR model developed by David K. Berlo in 1960 explains the four elements of communication Sender, Message, Channel and Receiver. The model emphasizes on the psychological nature of communication as it attempts to portray the necessary ingredients of each of the four elements. The basic premise of the model is that source encodes a message based on his/her skills and transmits through one of the five senses to receiver whose interpretation of the message depends on his/her meanings for the words that compose the message.

Berlo explains the sub elements or the factors that need to be understood under the elements of Source, Message, Channel and Receiver. Source according to Berlo is the one who encodes the message. Communication skills, attitude, knowledge and socio cultural conditions are the factors study of source. Message is the piece of information that is conveyed from the source to receiver and the sub elements of message according to Berlo are code, content, treatment, elements and structure. Channel, that is often seen as the vehicle that carries the message is explained by Berlo’s model as one or more of the five senses. Besides Berlo’s approach, channels have been considered by those interested in the study of communication in other ways. These include disseminating channels of newspapers, television, radio, magazines, books, etc.

The last factor in Berlo’s model is the Receiver. The factors considered in the study of the receiver are same as the source as the same person might serve as a source and a receiver simultaneously. However, the interpretation differs, for instance in the
case of the receiver the communication skills would include decoding skills of reading, listening, and thinking. The attitude here would be the attitude of the receiver towards the source. Knowledge in this case would include familiarity of the receiver towards the subject and situation. Finally, the socio-cultural conditions of the receiver need to be considered while transmitting a message.

Berlo’s model is relevant to the present study as the elements in Berlo’s model can help understand the variables of Text, Context and Reader. **Source in Berlo’s model can be compared to the feature writer** and the Message can be seen as the feature story itself. The knowledge of the sub-elements of source and message can be used to understand the process of composition of the feature story. Qualities of the source or the feature storywriter in this case are significant when we look at the process of idea generation and choice of slant and treatment of the feature story. For instance, the communication skills, particularly the ability of the writer to be able to express the everyday mundane event in the most vivid and lucid form is essential to a feature writer. The creative ability of the writer to be able to do justice with the human-interest element of the story is again essential for a feature writer. Besides this, the attitude of the feature writer towards the subject and his knowledge of the subject become a crucial factor in lending a slant and treatment to the features. For example, a feature storywriter can do justice to a copy on a subject like global warming only when he has knowledge about the issue or may be when he has a favorable attitude towards the societal issue and looks forward to provide a solution through his writing.

As according to Berlo as a poorly informed source cannot have an effective communication similarly a poorly informed feature writer with little knowledge of the subject cannot do justice to the story. In addition to this, the source or the writer’s attitude towards the receiver or knowledge of the target audience will help him choose appropriate subjects for his audience. Finally, the factor of socio-cultural conditions would be kept in mind as the feature storywriter chooses the subjects for his story.

The element of **Message in Berlo’s model that is comparable to the feature story** itself in the present study includes the sub-factors of code, content and treatment. An understanding of these factors with respect to composition of feature stories can help enhance the quality of feature story. The choice of vivid and lucid expressions, the human-interest treatment and choosing one focus out of the available facets of a
subject are some of the points kept in mind while framing a feature story. Also the choice of language, the readability ease of the text, structure of sentences, the placement of paragraphs all fall under the factor of Message in Berlo’s model and are extremely important to any feature story.

The **Channel in the case of present study can be understood as the publications that carry the feature stories.** This theoretical foundation can help in placing a feature story in a correct channel or medium. For example, a feature story on travel, written in simple English and placed in a travel magazine has higher chances of reaching the target readers effectively as compared to the same that is written in difficult codes and placed randomly. Thus, the knowledge of channel in terms of disseminating mediums and the knowledge sub elements of message can help in effective dissemination and reception of the feature story.

The **Receiver in the model can be understood as the ‘reader’ of the feature story** and hence the various factors enlisted under the receiver can be understood to gain an insight into the readership patterns of the feature story. According to Berlo the skill set, the attitude, knowledge and socio cultural conditions are the factors that are significant in the study of the receiver. In the context of present study, one can relate them to the feature story reader. One can examine through the present study that do the feature stories interest the reader only when he has the favourable skills to decode the message or is he able to understand the language and codes used in the feature story. Moreover, the knowledge of the subject is also an essential condition for the receiver or the reader to have interest in the feature story. On the other hand, it is also essential for a source to understand the knowledge level, the attitude and the reading skills of the receiver to be able to write an effective piece.

The socio-cultural conditions of both the source and the receiver in Berlo’s model can be seen as an essential element in understanding the variable of Context in the present study that refers to the internal and external context of the receiver. According to Berlo’s S-M-C-R model the socio cultural conditions of the source and the receiver affect the communication, similarly in the case of the feature stories the socio cultural conditions affect the internal and external context of the reader that in turn influences the changes in text. The socio-cultural conditions could reflected as themes of the feature stories because and the receiver or the audience is able to
appreciate the feature story when he/she can relate its theme to the socio cultural conditions around him or to his external context.

Thus, Berlo's Model with its detailed account of the factors or sub elements of Sender, Message, Channel and Receiver help understand the process of composition of a feature story. Beginning from the stage of idea generation for the feature, the process of choosing correct code and treatment for the story and finally effective distribution and reception of the feature story keeping in mind the attributes of the receiver; all find an explanation in Berlo's model. The model however is limited to only understanding the process of communication. It does not explain the reasons or the motives behind the use of mass media content and the effects that the message has on the receiver.

Since the present study deals with the variables of text, context and the reader vis-à-vis the changing trends of the feature stories in newspapers it is essential to understand the factors that govern these changes. The reader needs that emerge from the internal and external context of the reader have been understood as one of the major forces that drive the change in the text. How this context shapes the readers need and how it affects the text is explained by the concept of selectivity discussed ahead.

**CONCEPT OF SELECTIVITY: CONSISTENCY THEORIES and UTILITY THEORIES**

William James, a psychologist, almost about a century ago, wrote “Although we are besieged at every moment by impressions from our whole sensory surface, we notice so very small a part of them” James (as cited in Barrett, 1961, p.84).

When James mentioned the concept of noticing only a small part of the messages we are exposed to, he hinted towards a phenomenon of narrowness of consciousness that can be explained as the concept of selectivity that helps the audience/reader make choices of the content they wish to consume form the available communications. While the basic communication models explain the process of communication and the essential elements that are required to complete the process of communication they do not throw much light on the reasons behind the choice of specific mass media content. The concept of selectivity puts forth various factors that come into play when a reader makes a choice to pay attention to a specific part of the content amongst the flood of information he is exposed to. These factors also explain and
describe various kinds of information that people look for in the mass media and the uses that they make from this information.

According to Davison, James and Yu (1982), although there are several approaches to understand the concept of selectivity but for convenience the major explanations of selectivity can be grouped into three categories. All of them are based on aspects of human personality and behavior, but some emphasize certain aspects more than others do. These are:

(i) Consistency Theories – based on people’s attitudes, values and beliefs
(ii) Utility Theories – lay stress on needs and interests
(iii) Availability Theories – refer more to habits and skills of listening and reading that have been developed overtime

The three theories complement each other and help understand how the audiences handle the wide variety of information they are exposed to. In context of the present study, these theories can help understand if the internal and external context of the reader affects the reception of text. The theories can help understand the reasons behind the choice of content in newspaper reading. It can also explain if the need gratification is associated with the choice of mass media content. Together the formulations of consistency and utility theories can help explain stages or levels that come into play when a reader is exposed to a wide variety of newspaper content and makes a choice of which content to consume.

The variables of text, context and reader can be related to this theoretical foundation, as it is the reader’s needs and motives or the reader’s context that becomes a factor in deciding which part of the content or text he chooses to read. The theories explain how the socio psychological context that is the originator of the reader’s needs and motives guides the reader to make a choice of the text and how the text evolves in accordance with these needs.

CONSISTENCY THEORIES

Based on a premise that an individual is beset by 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. Many formulations of the consistency theory have been put forth in past years. These include Heider’s (1958) Balance Notion, Osgood and Tannenbaum’s
Congruity, Festinger’s (1957) Dissonance, New Comb’s (1953) Inter-Personal symmetry, McGuire’s (1969) Probabilogic etc. According to McGuire (1974), the conflicting forces faced by an individual might include one’s own needs, one’s information, the views of significant other people with whom one wishes to retain good relationships, one’s own past and present behaviour etc. In the face of these, an individual strives to maintain complex and precarious connectedness and coherence among his or her inner experiences. In such a scenario, any new information coming from the vast and diverse mass media channels can on one hand upset this delicate balance an individual has achieved and on the other hand offer numerous opportunities for gratifying the need for consistency. The person in conflict regarding any personal or social issue can find almost any material that helps him in an inner resolution. McGuire also states that resolutions are worked out more easily and securely through exposure to the media than in dialogue with other persons because the one way communication involved in media (specially the print media) use does not entail a challenge to such resolutions. According to Davison, James and Yu (1982), individuals consciously and subconsciously, select from the flow of communications those ideas that fit in with their attitudes and values and are consistent with their existing values and beliefs about the world. At the same time, they ignore, miss out or forget communications that would be ‘dissonant’ or that do not ‘fit in’.

The approach holds significance to the present study as it can help understand the choice of themes and subject matter by the readers. For instance, an individual who advocates female rights or sympathizes with atrocities on woman would find himself paying heed and reading features on women issues. Similarly based on individual belief systems and values readers would make their choice of the text that they believe is consistent to their viewpoints. This approach when applied to the present study can help understand if the internal and external context of the reader i.e. the needs, moods, beliefs, values and group affiliations come in to play while reader makes choices from mass media content.

Having established the fact that individuals choose from the available mass media content the information consistent with their thoughts or inner equilibrium, the consistency theories further explain the process through which this selection takes place. The three principle theories that underlie this process are theories of balance, congruity and dissonance (Maccoby and Maccoby 1961; Zajonc 1960). Common to
the three approaches is the principle of selectivity in exposure, perception, attention, interpretation and recall of mass media messages. These can be understood systematically in order to understand the mechanism through which a reader chooses the text he wants to consume in accordance with his internal and external context. One mechanism by which people can maintain and strengthen their existing view of the world and avoid having it distributed by incongruent or unbalancing information, according to consistency theories is selective exposure. This behavior involves exposing oneself to messages that are consistent with one’s attitudes and beliefs and avoiding other messages. However, since with the plethora of information being bombarded at an individual it becomes difficult to avoid all dissonant communications and therefore one uses selective perception and selective interpretation. Perception refers to the psychological activity by which individuals organize meaningful interpretations of sensory stimuli they receive from the environment. Because of the differences in cognitive factors as interests, beliefs, prior knowledge, attitudes, needs and values- different individuals will perceive- that is attribute meaning to- virtually any complex stimulus differently based on different cognitive structures (Andal, 2008). Thus according to this principle people of distinct psychological characteristics, sub cultural orientations and social network membership will interpret the same media content in very different ways. Finally, people may forget dissonant information and might only remember the consistent content; this behavior is known as selective recall or retention. The consistency theories and the concept of selective perception and interpretation is relevant to the present study as it explains the factors that come into play in making a choice while selecting the articles to read. In the context of present study, the concepts would help explain the reading preferences. As the study seeks to analyze the reading preferences with respect to subject matter, the concept of selective perception and interpretation can help understand how these choices differ from one individual to another or how these are associated with the internal and external context of the reader. For instance, the study could show that a set of individuals prefer news features more than lifestyle features, in that case the concept of selective perception of the individuals of their preferred subject matter can be understood as the theoretical reason behind the choices they make. For example, the choice to read religion features by an individual could be because the opinions in the religion feature would agree to his belief systems or the internal
context. Social categories and social relationships also become reason behind selective attention and hence one realizes that the concept of external context becomes important when the reader is choosing the text he wants to read. For instance, people who have deeply established social ties might pay more heed to the content that is of interest to their family and friends.

The concept of selective interpretation can be applied in the context of present study as a same feature article read by individuals with distinct psychological and subcultural orientations having different interpretations to the article. The same content can be perceived as significant by an individual who finds it consistent with his value systems while another individual can interpret it as unreliable because the information is dissonant to his beliefs. Thus the consistency theories help understand the factors that come into play while choosing the content from a number of news stories and feature articles that appear in the newspapers. In addition, the concept of selective perception helps understand how the readers make their choices from articles on varied themes and subject matters. Further, how they interpret the text and how much of the read text is recalled or retained is again understood through the concepts of selective recall.

**UTILITY THEORIES: USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH**

Several theories attempt to study the mass media effects and the reasons behind mass media usage with the approach of studying the gratifications the readers sought from the mass media usage and content. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), although these theories have differing starting points, but taken together they are concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs which generate expectations of mass media or other sources which lead to differential patterns of media exposure resulting in need gratifications and other consequences. While some of the approaches take observed gratifications as a starting point and attempt to reconstruct needs that are being gratified, others focus on the social origins of audience expectations. In both cases, they hold relevance for the present study as it looks at the reader's context and needs, how they are gratified and how they influence a change in text.

According to uses and gratifications, approach people pay attention to, perceive and remember information that is purposive and consciously select messages that fulfill their needs. The approach simply represents an attempt to explain something of the
way in which individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals, Katz et al. (1974). These needs can be of several kinds such as keeping in touch with important events, need for love or friendship, need for reassurance or diversion and escape from boredom etc. The uses and gratification approach suggested a new perspective on the relationship between the audiences and the media. Realization of the consequences of individual differences and social differentiation of behavior related to mass media led to the belief that audiences were not passive and in fact actively select content from the mass media and prefer content that can gratify their needs. Therefore, the main proposition is that needs and rewards that the individuals obtain from the mass media influence people's patterns of attention to media content and the uses to which they put the information obtained there from. Several researchers also believe that understanding the pattern of gratifications is a prerequisite to understand the importance of media effects.

Thus, the Uses and Gratifications approach becomes significant for the present study as it can help understand the reasons behind readership of feature stories and the effect these feature stories have on the reader. The approach attempts to outline the needs that the feature stories can fulfill and hence helps understand the reason why people choose to read feature stories. For instance, the approach can help understand what kinds of needs are satiated from reading of what category of features. For instance, readers looking forward for diversion could read travel or lifestyle features while those looking for more knowledge and awareness could choose to read news features. In addition, the same feature could be satiating different needs as his internal and external context changes. For instance, a career feature might not ne fulfilling any need for a reader when in a stable job but the same can be gratifying an essential need for awareness and knowledge when the same individual is planning a career change. Therefore, the need gratifications sort form the text in accordance to the readers' context is a concept that the theoretical foundation can help explore. In addition, do the needs of the readers drive the choice of content in the case of feature stories can be seen when the U&G theory is applied to the findings of the present study?

Mc Quail (2002) puts forth another tangent of the U&G approach as he says that Uses and Gratification model also suggests that it is not so much that the
media affect people, as it is that people selectively use and thereby affect the media. He suggests that in order to survive, media such as newspapers or other media must adapt to people's needs. In simpler words, Mc Quail suggests that the media content is driven by the consumer needs that in turn are influenced by the social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Thus establishing a connection among the variables of Text, Context and the Reader.

Mc Quail's interpretation of the Uses and Gratification approach is of relevance to the present study as the change in content and presentation of the feature stories in the newspapers could be attributed to the changing reader needs and contexts. For instance, the trends and changes in the subject matter, writing style, readability, verbal-visual presentation of the feature stories when compared to the reader's preferences and opinion on change can help discover if the changes in text were governed by the reader choices.

While so far one understands that the reader need gratification is an essential element in the study of mass media functions and effects, it is also essential to understand the concept of 'need' to be able to better comprehend needs and gratifications. Questions like, what is a need? Does an interest reflect a need? What needs can mass communication help satisfy? can be addressed, as one understands the nature of the needs. Several different strategies have been used to categorize these needs but since there are many different kinds of people and because these people find themselves in so many different situations, the number of needs that mass media can satisfy is enormous. Several models and categorizations of needs have been attempted to streamline the list of needs with an assumption that people use a given media to satisfy their needs and desires and that media differ in their way they can satisfy the needs of the audience. Although several models present a list of needs that are believed to be best gratified by mass media, two categorizations most relevant to the study have been cited here for the purpose of drawing a relation with the present study of feature stories. These include a typology of needs by McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) and Katz, Gurevitch and Hass (1973).

McQuail et al. (1972) put forward a typology consisting of the following categories of needs

i) Needs to do with diversion: this includes a need for emotional release, escape from problems and a welcome change from routine.
ii) Needs to do with personal relationships: media might provide a substitute companionship, or may furnish material for conversation

iii) Needs having to do with individual psychology: this includes the desire to obtain reassurance, to understand oneself, to feel important, to gain a sense of personal identity

iv) Surveillance of the environment: these include the need to know about the events that might affect one and to obtain information that will help one to do something or accomplish something.

Katz et al. (1973) put forth substantially the same categories but stated differently

i) Cognitive Needs: These are to do with acquiring information, knowledge and understanding

ii) Affective Needs: these are to do with emotional or aesthetic experience including the need for love and friendship, the desire to see beautiful things

iii) Personal Integrative Needs: These are to do with confidence, stability, status, reassurance

iv) Social Integrative Needs: These are to do with strengthening contacts with family, friends and other people in general

v) Tension Release needs: These are to do with needs for escape and diversion.

Both the postulations of the consumer/reader needs that can be satiated by the mass media suggest a framework that can be utilized to identify the needs of the users that are best satiated by reading feature stories. Although a number of researches point out that need, gratification is extremely personal and no two people have exactly the same needs but despite the variation among the needs of the individual, some recurring patterns can be found. According to Frank and Greenberg (1980), many of these recurring patterns are to do with demographics like age and sex although they also agree that there can be several exceptions. Graber (1978) reports that women notice more stories about world food problems, health care, medical malpractice, drug addiction and daily campaigning than do men do. Doolittle (1979) in a study reports that older people who have active social lives are more likely to look to media for material to use in conversation than those who engage in less interpersonal communication. Thus, one also understands that the need gratification patterns of the readers can be connected to demographics and psychographics of the audiences. Certain sociological and psychological conditions can lead to variety of reader needs
that are satiated by mass media content. The present study seeks to find out if the same holds true in the case of feature stories.

In the context of present study, the categorization of needs by Mc Quail et al. (1972) and Katz et al. model (1973) prove extremely useful in understanding the needs that the feature stories might fulfill or the motives that lead the readers to pay attention to and read a certain feature story. For instance, Cognitive needs could be satiated by consumption of features on topical events, utility features that enhance knowledge; Affective needs could be satisfied by reading feature stories that are to do with subjects of entertainment. The personal integrative needs or the needs to do with personal relationships could be fulfilled by a wide variety of feature stories on personality enhancement and social integrative needs could be gratified by reading features on social groups and clubs. The diversion needs could be satiated by reading features on travel, celebrities, or other lifestyle subjects. While the theoretical foundations suggest that features could be fulfilling a wide variety of reader needs, the present study shall undertake to find out if the same hold true in reality.

Social origins of Needs: Katz et al. (1974) mention that social and environmental circumstances of the individuals lead them to turn to mass media for the satisfaction of certain needs. For instance, in some societies people might actively seek political news while in others lifestyle features and articles might be more in demand. Katz et al. (1973) suggest that it is the combination of psychological dispositions, sociological factors and environmental conditions that determine the specific uses of media by members of the audience. They put forth five ways that suggest that social factors may be involved in generation of media related needs.

i) Social Situations produce tensions and conflicts, leading to pressure for their easement via mass media consumption (Katz and Foulkes, 1962)

ii) Social situation creates an awareness of problems that demand attention, information about which may be sought in the media (Edelstein, 1973).

iii) Social situations offer impoverished real-life opportunities to satisfy certain needs, which are then directed to the mass media for complementary, supplementary or substitute servicing (Rosengren and Windahl, 1972).

iv) Social situations give rise to certain values, the affirmation and reinforcement if which is facilitated by consumption of congruent media materials (Dembo, 1972).
v) Social situation provides a field of expectations of familiarity with certain media materials, which must then be monitored in order to sustain membership of valued social groupings (Atkins, 1972).

These postulations hold relevance for the present study as they put forth the clear and strong link that the social situations have with reader's internal and external context, particularly the reader’s needs. Levy (1978) further confirms the observation as he states that there appears to be characteristic cultural differences in needs and the way media are used to satisfy them. The fact that special needs can arise because of major events that occur around the reader has been illustrated by several case studies. For instance, uses that people made of the mass media after the assassination of President Kennedy reflected that they used mass media in helping them shake off the shock from the event (Schramm, 1965). Similarly, in Israel a study conducted in wartime concluded that mass media was used as a means of releasing tension and as a means of obtaining reassurance that, things were all right. Therefore, one sees that several of the above mentioned needs of the readers arise from the various conditions produced by the social context.

This theoretical foundation can be linked to the present study when we look at the social situations giving rise to diverse reader needs that are satiated by the text. Thus, the Utility theories along with their social dimensions once again help in understanding the close connect between the text, context and the reader.

THEORIES OF SELECTIVE INFLUENCE

The all consuming question that has dominated research and the development of contemporary theory in the study of mass media can be summed in simple terms- namely, ‘what has been their effect? That how have the media influenced us as individuals in terms of persuading us -De Fleur (1970, p.118)

As one understands and appreciates the significance of theoretical foundations in the process of construction of a feature story message through the models of communication and the reasons for the choice of feature story readership through the concept of selectivity, the next pertinent question arises as to what are the effects of this mass media content has on the receivers. Although the concept of selectivity along with the consistency theories and the utility theories explain the needs and
motives behind mass media usage but they do not speak in detail about the effects this chosen content has on the reader or the factors that influence the effects of this chosen content. One of the initial attempts that postulated the effect of mass media content on the receivers was hypodermic needle theory in 1920’s. However, the idea put forth by this theory that exposure to mass communication had immediate, uniform and direct effect on the audience was challenged and abandoned as the socio-psychological factors that distinguished people from one another were considered as the potential intervening variables. This realization led the theorists to believe that each individual can be affected by similar mass media content in several different ways. These considerations led to the idea of postulating the Theories of Selective Influences. Emerging from social scientists’ increasing recognition of patterning in behaviour of individuals and groups, the theories of selective influence help comprehend the selective influence mass media content has on individuals.

The shift from magic bullet theory to the perspectives of the selective influence theories was one from a relatively simple to a very complex conceptualization. Suddenly, all of the factors- psychological and sociological- distinguished people from one another were potential intervening variables. They operated between stimulus on one hand i.e. content presented by the mass media and the responses on the other i.e. the changes in feelings, thinking or action produced among the audience members who were exposed to that content. Instead of the simple sender-receiver situation in the magic bullet formula with no factors operating between the media and the mass, there were now several sets of intervening variables modifying this sender-receiver relationship (Andal, 2008). In addition to studying the effects of mass media content on audiences the selective influences approach also brought to the forefront the factors that caused them to attend to the content in a selective manner. Among these factors are the characteristics of the communicator, context of the messages themselves, and the channels over which people received information.

By 1948 Harold D Lasswell summed up the process of communication as “Who, says what, in what channel, to whom, with what effect?” The individual differences theory and the social differentiation theory that are two of the major theories under De Fleur’s compilation of the selective influences theories, pertain specially to the “to whom” factor in Lasswell’s convenient summary. Following this, the empirical media research focused heavily on the study of media effects. Several researchers in their pursuit of insights into media effects processes turned their attention towards
role of media in society. Although individual findings of the effects research were enormously varied and two interrelated sets of empirical generalizations emerged: first, the influence of mass media is rarely direct, because it is always mediated by individual differences and second that the influence of mass media is rarely direct, because it is usually mediated by group membership or relationship. This approach has been formulated in the form of Theories of Selective Influences by De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach, S (1975). They explain the theories of selective influence in terms of three distinct but related formulations in the main. These are:

- Individual Differences Theory
- Social Differentiation theory
- Social Relationship theory.

According to Baran and Davis (2012), the Individual Differences Theory argues that because people vary greatly in their psychological makeup and because they have different perceptions of things, therefore media influence differs from person to person. More specifically, "media messages contain particular stimulus attributes that have differential interaction with personality characteristics of members of the audience" (De Fleur 1970, as cited in McQuail 2005, p.471)

This approach becomes relevant to the present study as it can help understand how the choice of mass media content of one individual might differ from another depending upon his/her psychological makeup or the internal context of the reader.

For example, a more sociable person could prefer to read feature articles to do with lifestyle features on travel or party etc while another individual with low sociability and high shyness level could prefer to read utility articles on personality development. The two individuals could also read a same feature article and perceive and interpret in different ways based on their psychological characteristics. Thus, the readership pattern of feature stories and the factors that influence the readership of a variety of feature stories can be understood from the perspective of this theory.

The Social Differentiation Theory is another approach to study the selective influences on audience. In terms of mass media effects, this theory believes that there are categories of individuals who will react to media messages in similar ways depending upon social differentiation. Forms of social differentiation include segmentation and stratification. One could understand the context in terms of external context or group belongingness, and observe the patterns of similarity in
mass media content consumption amongst people belonging to a particular social
group. In addition, these patterns would differ from the media effect patterns of
another social group.

In relation to the present study, the theory becomes useful as it can help draw a
connection between the variables of text, context and reader. The societal conditions
or the social groups to which an individual belongs can be understood as the external
context of the reader that shapes his reactions towards the mass media messages i.e.
the 'text'. To present study can examine if the readers belonging to a particular socio
economic group would have interest in a specific type of feature story. For instance,
readers belonging to an affluent urban group might have a high level of interest in
feature articles to do with expensive gadgets, or must have luxury items, or most
sought after dinning destinations etc i.e. the lifestyle features that deal with
indulgence. On the other hand, readers of lower income group in a semi urban
background could have preference towards utility feature articles that render help on
money saving, economic and in budget holiday destinations. Based on the theoretical
foundation, the present study seeks to find answers to these questions.

The third approach in the Theories of Selective Influence is the Social Relationship
Theory. Derived from the study by De Fleur and Ball Rokeach, S in the 1940s cited
in 1989; the social relationships theory suggested that different social groups could
influence people's attitudes or choices and various social categories have an
influence on the political intentions and media consumption behaviours (De Fleur
and Ball Rokeach, 1989). Researchers like Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953) also
indicated that individual's behaviours were influenced by group beliefs and based on
the knowledge of what were expected by the other members.

The theory becomes useful in the context of present study as it again helps appreciate
the relationship between the reader and the context in which he consumes the mass
media messages or the text. As the theory, postulates the fact that group beliefs have
an influence on the media consumption patterns of the individual, in the present
study one examine if people are affected in their reading preferences based on the
groups they belong to. For instance, a group of readers who have a religious
affiliation could be interested in a feature story to do with that particular religious
belief because their individual behavior is being guided by the group beliefs to which
they belong. In another example, Prisuta (1979) observes that social situation in
which one finds oneself appears to be an important determinant of the way mass media are used. Adolescents, for example, interested in news and public affairs tend to be associated with other young people who have similar interests. Also Chaffee and McLeod (1973) observed that people who belong to more organizations seek more information than those who belong to fewer organizations, possibly, because they have greater opportunities to use this information in conversations. Thus, the theory of Social Relationships helps understand how people belonging to specific groups are influenced by the group behaviour that in turn influences their choice of feature stories they read. The present study can see if the same hold true when it comes to reading preferences in case of feature stories.

Thus, in the context of the present study the theories of selective influences can help explain the choice of feature story readers when they consume a feature article instead of a news piece. It can also help explain why some newspaper readers switch over to the lifestyle and feature supplements without having gone through the front page that carries the major news of the day. On the other hand, it can also explain why some readers consider the feature supplements as non-serious news and prefer to restrict their newspaper reading to hard news only. In addition, the association and co relation between specific type of feature read and the demographic and psychographic profile of the reader can be examined with the help of these theories. For instance, the difference if any in the choice of content based on gender or social affiliations or social status can be understood with the help of theories of selective influences.

Theories of selective influences and the concept of selectivity along with the consistency and Utility theories help understand the reason for media use and the effects of mass media on the receivers thus establishing a connection between text, context and reader.

2.3 SUMMARY
The communication models, theories of selective influence and the concept of selectivity together help create a connection between the variables of text, context and reader in the present study of trends of feature stories. The theoretical foundations to the study help one appreciate the role of various models and theories in the process of creation, execution and distribution and reception of feature stories. The entire process, right from the step of generating ideas for the feature stories to
encoding the message effectively and finally consumption of the same by the reader to satisfy their needs is marked with theoretical foundations.

The basic communication models explain the process of encoding and decoding the text of feature stories. **Berlo's model** and the elements of Source, Message, Channel and Receiver become relevant to the present study as they help understand the factors that govern the composition, distribution and reception of feature stories. The model explains the factors to be kept in mind by the source or the feature write while composing the message or the feature story and the elements of code and treatment that are essential to the form of journalistic features. It also highlights factors that influence the reception of message i.e. reading feature stories. The model provides a holistic approach to understanding the theoretical foundation of several dimensions of feature production and reception.

The **concept of selectivity** puts forth the reasons behind the reader's choice of content by explaining the role of reader's context in choice of text. The theories of consistency and utility explain the concepts that underlie the process of selection of text by the reader according to his context. The **consistency theories** can explain how a reader of the feature story undergoes the process of selective exposure, attention, perception and interpretation to maintain his internal equilibrium while choosing to read a particular story. For instance, while a feminist could choose to read, a story on women liberation because it is in accord with his value and belief system on the other hand a sexist would either choose to ignore this feature story and if he happens to read, the story would exercise selective interpretation of the same text. Thus, the concept can help understand how the reader in keeping with his internal and external context receives a certain text to maintain an internal equilibrium.

The **utility theories** or the **uses and gratifications approach** further explain the concept of needs and these become a prime factor in choice of text. The Katz model explains how readers fulfill a variety of needs from the mass media content or how they chose from the available content the one that satiates a particular need. In the context of present study, the theory can help examine if people chose the feature stories content in accordance with their needs. The extended study of Utility theories also brings to forefront the origin of the reader needs in the societal conditions or external context of the reader. In other words the theories explain how the social conditions shape the internal and external context of the reader, that gives rise to
reader's needs that in turn are fulfilled by the text which evolves and takes new shape and form in the process.

Further the theories of selective influence introduce the concept of limited effects or the fact that mass media has unique and non-uniform effects on the audiences depending upon the individual differences in terms of socio psychological factors, the social differentiation and the social relationships. This can help examine how reader's internal context i.e. socio psychological traits and external context i.e. belongingness to different social groups affects their choice of features read.

Thus the various theoretical foundations help establish a connection between the variables of 'text', 'context' and 'reader'. Based on the theoretical foundations that ascertain this link between the text, context and the reader, the present study tries to examine if this connect exits in the present times or is evident as one studies and analyses the changing trends of feature stories.