3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As the present study deals with the evolution of feature stories with respect to the variables of text, context and reader, literature was reviewed keeping in mind the three interrelated themes. The literature review has thus been presented with a thematic classification that has been further organized in order of chronology. The study of trends in feature stories fell under the wider subject of evolution of newspapers, shaping and transforming of their content. Therefore, works on feature writing as a special journalistic form, studies on place of feature stories in newspaper content, trend studies, and content analysis studies of newspapers, and studies of evolution of text in different social conditions have been reviewed under the variable of text. The variable of reader that focuses on reception of text included readership studies, reader need-gratification studies and reader perception studies. Context in the present study has been seen as the internal and external context of the reader therefore the studies that show the connection between the two have been placed under the Reader and Context sub head.

3.1 STUDIES RELATED TO TEXT

The literature review under this section brings together the early works that explore the form of journalistic features and the contemporary trend studies that bring out the trend in newspapers. The early works focus on evolution of feature stories as a journalistic form discuss the types of features, their writing styles, their verbal visual presentation, the process of constructing a feature story from the stage of idea generation to marketing it. The trend studies bring out the changes that have occurred in text over a span of time and the trends in newspapers in present times. Since the variables of text, context and reader are connected; many works on text do bring out the reader and context connection. Studies under this section also bring out the evolution of text in different social, political and technological settings. However, they have been placed in this section as they primarily focus on the form of feature stories, their types, and the factors that influence change in them.

Bleyer (1916) in his work discusses the types of newspaper content. Besides the hard news stories the author discusses at length the content that goes beyond the regular news. He comes close to the subject matter of present day features in the sections where he discusses the society and entertainment news. According to him, "interest
in social and personal news is so great that practically every newspaper maintains a society department" (p.221), thus laying stress on the significance of subject matter that has a human touch or emotional appeals going beyond the cut and dry routine news. Since Bleyers' work is almost a century old, one could infer that the society and entertainment news perhaps became the foundation of newspaper content that later evolved into feature stories.

The author further explains the difference in treatment of the regular news stories and the one's dealing with social and personal subjects. The latter using emotional appeals and portraying the events not only attractively but also bringing out the spirit of the event. Author also adds that the typographical style of the society columns often differs somewhat from other sections of the newspaper. Thus, Bleyer throws light on the newspaper content that became the foundation for feature stories. His work discusses both the subject matter and typography of features content.

Reed (1931) traces the origin of journalistic features, the various types of features stories and how they have grown over the years, the writing styles used for features and the need gratifications sought from various types of features. Among the major types of feature stories included in his work are personal improvement features, personality sketches, review features, utility features, personal experience features, and entertainment features. Discussing how each type of feature gratifies some reader need, Reed explains that entertainment features that include a number of sub varieties are designed with the purpose of providing diversion and amusement to the readers. The author further establishes the link between the reader and the text as he says the reader preferences are a prime factor that helps the feature editor choose the various types of features to be used in the newspapers.

Another dimension covered in Reed’s work is the connection between the text, context, and reader. An important conclusion that Reed draws is that the present form of feature stories is a result of several influences from diverse sources, “...the popular articles, like the nationalities of modern civilization, give unmistakable proof of motley kinship.” (p.9). Highlighting the significance of the reader preference in the evolution of features, Reed says, “Regardless of their extraction, journalistic features did not develop primarily because of their authors’ ambitions and aspirations. They came in response to both reader demand and editorial requirement.” The reader demand according to the author results from the social situations of the individuals and their “resultant psychological reactions to external stimuli.” (p.10) Thus, Reed
not only discusses the dimensions of text but also highlights the significant factors that drive the changes in journalistic features, external context of the reader being one of the prime factors.

**Crawford (1931)** strengthens the connection between text and reader in his work. According to the author, the essential tasks of the writer should be capturing reader’s attention, generating reader interest and sustaining the reader’s attention and interest through the article. Delving deeper in to the variable of text the author talks about four important factors that generate reader interest. These include title of the article, the visual element, the name of the author and the lead. An interesting observation of the author about the feature title being the comparison he draws between titles of novels and feature articles. The author concludes that while short titles might be suitable for novels that enhance the life of the novel but the same is not true for feature stories that have a shorter life span. The title for feature articles according to the author should be more than five principle words. Thus, the work covers various dimensions of feature articles.

Adding another dimension to the study of text is **Patterson (1947)** in his book, 'Writing and Selling Special Feature Articles'. While the first part of his work puts forth the basics of feature writing, finding subject, and materials for the features, types of features, visual element in feature stories and writing styles for the features, the second part explains how the feature stories are slanted to meet the audiences’ tastes. According to the author, a feature writer should keep in mind two prime objectives that the feature stories should be written to help the reader and to please the reader. He also states that there is no conventional or set formula for writing feature stories, reader interest and reader need gratification is the guiding factors that dictate the feature story. Author also says that news reports can be elaborated into features by interviews and research as this helps satisfy reader’s curiosity.

While the work so far dealt with reader interest being the prime factor in composing the text, i.e. the feature stories, **Brennecke and Clark (1947)** in their book ‘Magazine Article Writing’ go a step ahead as they believe a feature article should have a desired effect on the reader. An important conclusion of the work being that a feature writer must make a close and in depth study of his reader to “calculate as accurately as possible and in advance, the effect which his words are going to make” (p.91). Authors also believe that a feature article can be called successful only when it has a desired effect on the reader, whereas if the author fails to have any effect on
the reader the writer fails in his effort. Thus, the work brings out the significance of connection between reader and text especially in the case of feature stories. Putting the reader at forefront, authors also suggest that article writer cannot always follow his own inclinations and use his own language instead; he must use the medium that his readers already understand and the “code to which they already have the key” (p.92).

Reddick (1949) in his book, 'Modern Feature Writing', deals with basics of planning feature articles, types of feature articles and the reasons for their popularity, writing styles of feature stories, and importance of visual element in saleability of feature stories. Reader interest figures as one of the significant factors in all four sections. While in the first section author outlines the human-interest element as a prime factor for choosing subjects for feature stories, in the second sections the author outlines reader interest as a defining factor behind popularity of features. While discussing the writing style, author not only suggests qualities of writing style but also special style of writing for “rapid reader". In the last section where the author highlights the aids to marketing, visual element is pointed out as a significant factor that adds to saleability of the features by generating and sustaining reader interest.

Steigleman (1950) in his book ‘Writing the Feature Article’ provides an in depth and systematically guide to building a feature article. The book explains in detail the process of idea generation, importance of visual element, organizing of the feature article from the lead until conclusion, and selling the article. An important conclusion of Steiglman’s work being establishing a connection with the reader and the context in which reader lives. The author believes that until the feature writer learns what people are talking about he cannot become a good writer. (p.426)

While several works discuss the factors that shape the text, there are some that bring out the significance of text i.e. feature stories as an element that defines the personality of the newspaper. Nicholls (1972) in his book, ‘Features with a Flair’ explains the form of journalistic features and differentiates it from other forms of journalistic writing. The author also suggests that it is the feature writer who plays a major role in showing the paper’s emotion. Besides highlighting the significance of the text, another interesting observation in Nicholls’ work is the connection between text and context. According to the author news form one of the biggest source for
features, thus reiterating the idea that, socio political cultural events around the reader become one of the source that shapes the feature stories.

Alexander (1987) in his book 'Beyond the Facts: a Guide to Feature Writing', provides a comprehensive and holistic approach to feature writing. Divided in 29 chapters the book provides details of writing a feature story, the homework done to prepare each type of feature story, the visual element, and typography used in feature story. Citing reader need satiation as a one of the major factors in evolution and growth of features author says, “Knowledge and information are not enough. The reader has to have his feelings considered and satisfied and through feature writing the reporter blends facts and feelings to provide a broader view of events and personalities” (p.5). Author thus concludes that more and more writers are turning to feature writing as feature stories accomplish this goal of blending facts and feelings. While many studies focus on the form of journalistic features and provide insights into the various dimensions of feature writing, there is a body of work that studies the newspaper content as a whole. From the changes that have occurred in the newspaper content to the trends in the contemporary newspaper, to evolution of text in different social set ups, the studies further help understand the variable of text. There are also studies that provide insights into the significance of studying newspaper text and the methods to study the same.

Hyer (2003) traces the development of newspapers with reference to production and dissemination of text and looks at the impact of technology on the same. The study focuses on London and Scandinavian cities before 1900, comparing the two with respect to the technological changes affecting the news production and dissemination. Author concludes that London was far ahead of the Scandinavian capitals in the size and sophistication of text production during the eighteenth century. However, from the middle of nineteenth century, new technology seemed to close this gap.

While there are studies that look at the evolution of text in yesteryears Peers, L. & Nesbitt, M (2004) look at trends in text in the present century. In a content analysis of 52 daily U.S., newspapers divided based on circulation. The data revealed that major topics that dominate the news content include Politics, Government, and Sports. Stories about ordinary people, obituaries, and community announcements combined comprise only five per cent of the content. The most common writing approach is straight news. Few stories address the reader directly, most of them are
written in third person. The various forms of visual aids – photos, graphics and emphasized text are a part of less than half of stories on weekdays. More attention is paid to visual aspects on Sundays. Front-page stories on average are more likely to have photos, graphics, and emphasized text. About one-fifth of the stories provide contact information.

The literature review on the variable of text also includes studies on the ways of analyzing text. Macnamara (2005) in his study looks at content analysis as one of the well established and fastest growing technique to study broad range of ‘texts’. Macnamara’s work traces the history of the technique of content analysis from its introduction as a systematic method to study mass media propaganda by Harold Lasswell to the present times. The work revisits the main purposes of content analysis suggested by Berelson and adds to the same by providing a flowchart for conducting content analysis. Theory and rationale for conducting the content analysis become the first step followed by choosing the variables to be studied. Thereafter the operationalization measures need to be identified that are followed by coding schemes. Sampling, training, coding, tabulation and reporting are the steps that follow in a typical content analysis process according to the author.

Another perspective of looking at transition in text is provided by Cronin (2006) who suggests that exploring the status of the newspaper as a commodity can present new ways of understanding the transition between the newspapers. His work draws a connection between the newspaper as a commodity and the socio cultural context of the time. Through the case study of The Manchester Guardian an English provincial newspaper that later became a well –known national newspaper, The Guardian, author explores the questions about 19th century British newspapers and evolving commodity culture of the time. The author explains that while previous studies focused on more glamorous commodities like grand exhibitions and pictorial displays in advertising as exhibits of the culture of the time, newspapers can be an equally important commodity to study the culture of an era because if not more, the newspaper did as much to define the character and form of consumer culture.

An important part of the study of text is also the study of how the text is presented the typography and design and its relevance in the newspapers. Jacobson (2006) in his article on newspaper design discusses how the newspaper design becomes a significant aspect in readership of newspaper. Citing examples of newspaper circulations, author explains how the same are affected by a change in design of the
newspaper. For instance the circulation of The Toronto Sun went down from 211,000 to 189,000 after a redesign was introduced and went back up to 202,000 in two weeks of launching a yet another new design, thus indicating the effect of design on readerships and circulations. Citing some more examples, the author concludes, that design elements that caught the attention of readers were - more colour, better colour reproduction, smaller photos but more of them, better headlines and more legible body types. The one’s which did not have an impact on the readers included custom typography, large photos, Photoshop effects, large areas of white space and poster style single story pages.

Zdovc (2007) adds another dimension to study of text by exploring the reasons behind evolution of similar text in different social settings. He looks at journalistic writing that emerged in Slovene at the time new journalism was emerging in America. The author not only compares and contrasts the two forms of writing but also investigates the reasons for the emergence and practise of these forms of writing. The work is based on a selection of research material from issues of Tovaris – weekly magazine in Slovene and oral information from journalists practising in Slovene at the time under analysis.

The study puts forth that different reasons were responsible for growth of novelistic techniques in America and Slovenia. In America new journalism emerged because journalists realized that it was no longer possible to react to the contemporary social phenomenon in the traditional way and thus needed a new form of journalistic writing that was more suitable to describe the contemporary society. On the other hand, in case of Slovenia, the emergence of novelistic techniques was a consequence of the political censorship. The author explains that the only way to attack the socialistic system was through personal stories and metaphoric writing that was more likely to escape the censor’s detection and the reporters continued to do the same until the process of democratization started. The author thus, draws connections between the socio political environment of the country and the style of writing, suggesting the former influenced the latter.

Johnston (2007) analyzes the variable of text by looking at the writing style of the newspaper content. The study conducted on two Australian broadsheet dailies The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald; found that inverted pyramid was the most common structure in news section of the papers. In an analysis of 2435 stories in the two dailies over the month-long sample period, it was found that 81% of the
stories were written in inverted pyramid style. The remaining (19%) were in narrative style (16%) and comment style (3%).

In a similar study, exploring the changes in transition of text Weldon (2008) in her study of changes in the front pages of American Newspapers reports an increase in the front-page features, from 35% in 2001 to 50% in 2004. Further, the findings of the research show a shift towards anecdotal and humanistic approach to storytelling as she concludes that, “newspapers have become story papers”. Thus, narrative style of writing that focuses on character building, descriptions of people, places and events, often in chronological order became an essential ingredient of American newspapers.

Enriching the study of text further, Keegan (2008) looks at text as a visual element and how the changes in visual element can help revive the newspaper industry. In his study, the author found that changes in body text and headlines, introduction and emphasis on text breakers and changes in masthead contribute to reviving the reader’s interest in the newspaper stories. Taking the case study of The Washington Post, author concludes that looking at the text, as a visual element can be one of the most potent tools in enhancing the newspaper and thus increasing readership.

Exploring another dimension of change in text with respect to changes in technology is the work by Conboy and Steel (2008). Their study looked at the impact of technological changes on the newspapers and the functions that the newspapers need to provide in order to survive. The major findings of the study reveal that the impact of Internet on the contemporary newspaper is much more than “switch of technological engagement with readerships”. The authors put forth the debate that while on one hand newspaper digitisation allows content to be tailored to the end user, on the other hand, by filtering out and personalising content on the Internet, readers deny themselves access to some greater deliberative context. The authors thus conclude that technology does bring hyper differentiation yet it is the producers and the readers of the newspapers who have the ultimate say and even responsibility for the future.

Another dimension in the study of text is the readability ease of the text. Dalecki, Lasorsa & Lewis (2009) in their work looked at the readability ease of news stories and focus on the problems in readability and reasons behind the same. Four online full text-databases were looked at, for accounts of deception contained in newspapers, magazines, academic journals, trade organizations and web sites. A total
of 181 deceptive stories written by nine reporters were identified and this sample was compared to a random sample of ostensibly authentic news stories written by the same news organizations. The findings indicated difference in the readability scores of the authentic and deceptive stories. Looking forth at the reasons for the low readability—deadline pressures, format features and other excuses were believed to be an insufficient explanation to the relatively low readability of news stories of appearing in major American news publications as these reasons held the same for both authentic and deceptive stories. The authors concluded that deceptive stories had high readability because the tales deceptive reporters told were not constrained by reality, however they assert that the research does not encourage deceptive news stories but describing the complex world as simply and clearly to the readers as they can.

The authors in their work while quoting studies on readability of newspaper content also mention that while news stories have become less readable over a passage of time, the non-news stories have gotten progressively more readable over time. Danielson and Lasorsa, 1989; Gitlin, 2003, p. 99; Sherman, 1893 (as cited in Dalecki, Lasorsa & Lewis, 2009).

The study of text further becomes relevant with the research that focuses on the phenomenon of glocalization. A phenomenon that is affecting every form of business or commodity in the present era shows its effect on the media content also. Rao (2009) in his study focuses on the theoretical framework of glocalization as a foundation to understand the changes that have occurred in the Indian Journalism in recent years. The author offers a new line of thinking as he says that the impact of globalization in Indian news content when analyzed with respect to glocalization can be seen as a set of practices where local media absorb the global and gives a new life to the local content. The analysis is based on 39 formal interviews with journalists and editors conducted in New Delhi and the content of several English and Hindi 24-hour news channels and daily newspapers over a period of six months during 2006 and 2007.

The important conclusion drawn after a discussion of transition of the Indian journalism is that glocalization is a potentially inclusive framework to understand the change in Indian media content. The author illustrates that the changes in the media content are driven by the fact that the readers are interested not in the global events alone but how the global events can be localized. In India, the increasing use to
global news formats has also led to the rise in local news content. The global news formats have been absorbed in Indian context by applying this format to the Indian themes that are pertinent in Indian context. For instance, the author explains the localization in India has deep religious and cultural connotations. While Astrology is not considered news by Western journalistic standards, newspapers in India treat astrology as newsworthy, deserving column space and programming time slots. The author concludes that often global news sustains through links to local and localization of all that is global is necessary to generate and retain the reader interest.

Another study that provides an insight into evolution of text in the Indian context is study of front page of newspapers in India. Murthy, Ramakrishna and Melkote (2010) in their study of trends in the first page priorities of Indian print media reporting suggest the changes that have occurred over a period in the front page of the four English dailies. A descriptive and analytical content analysis conducted over the four newspapers, The Hindustan times, The Indian Express, Times of India, and The Hindu. Important findings of the study show a shift from the traditional news values and an approach towards market driven journalism. A comparison of past journalistic practices and the present ones’ show a shift from economic, social and development news to crime, politics and entertainment news. An interesting trend is also an increase in sports and entertainment news on front-page. The authors report that while in past journalistic practises these occasionally found place on the front page, in present time’s full first page with banner headlines including coloured photographs of celebrities and events is a common scenario. The authors also report an increase in visual element, particularly the photographs in the front page of newspapers. Thus, the study brings out the trends in text of front page of Indian Newspapers and thus becomes relevant to present study.

The studies related to text also explore the factors that lead to change in text, one of the foremost being the reader interest through adequate representation of readers in the newspaper content.

Oh and Katz (2009) in their study examine the change in news reporting on communities of colour over a period. The authors attempt to find if the newspapers covered the diverse communities within which they serve and further if these communities were represented in a fair manner without misrepresentation. The focus here is on the Asian American community and the change in coverage of Asian American issues with an increase in size of the community. The methodology for the
study was a content analysis of eight major U.S. newspapers from 2000 to 2008, using constructed week samples for each of the nine years.

The study finds a weak positive relationship between diversity of the Asian American population in a community and frequency of stories produced in the local newspapers. There is a clear trend towards more articles about Asian Americans in papers but it is limited. The larger Asian American communities do not result in improved news coverage. Quantity increases, but quality does not. Thus, the author concludes that newspapers report more on Asian Americans when the size of the community increases, but problematic representations continue. The reasons being newspapers' fear of alienating European American readers.

Tiffen (2010) in a content analysis of six Australian newspapers analyzes the changes that have occurred in the span of 50 years, 1956-2006. The major findings of the study report that change in the newspaper did not come at all, it was neither linear nor regular. The most pronounced change was that Australian newspapers offered their readers much more than previously. With respect to the size of the newspaper, on an average in 2006, each paper had five times as many pages as in 1956 and about three times as great an area. The share of advertising had declined and when clubbed with increase in size of newspapers it meant an increase in the editorial space. In terms of visual presentation and editorial text not much change has occurred. The reason being, while on one hand the reduction in the percentage of space devoted to advertising has meant more space for editorial content, the increase in use of visual aids has meant decline in space for editorial text. In case of the front page of the newspaper, the most significant trend was reduction in the number of articles on the front page. Besides the above mentioned changes in the appearance of the newspaper, another finding is the increasing segmentation of the newspaper and growing special sections.

Tuyull (2010) in his study establishes a link between the past and future of newspapers. The author suggests that predicted doom of the print industry can be tackled if one looks at the journalism of the past as a prologue to the journalism of future. The author discusses that the variety of newspaper types was more extensive in nineteenth century, and special interest newspapers that filtered content through generic perspectives to promote a single issue or person were common. Throwing light on the transition that occurred from the nineteenth century to the next, author talks about the change in the way of thinking where "news triumphed over opinion".
In his view, framing this new form of journalism as superior was a “costly error” and “there’s only-one-way-to-do-journalism” mentality proved to be fatal. In concluding his approach, the author suggests that returning to the old practices of journalism could be one way of saving the print industry. Author also suggests the reform must recognize that there is more than one way to do journalism so that the press can return to the vibrant print culture of the 19th century.

Change in the newspapers on various parameters is discussed in an analytical report by Clarion Communications (2011) that compares the national newspapers from 2011 to their 1986 equivalents by analysing news that appear in the first six pages in the span of 25 years. Major findings of the report suggest that newspapers across the spectrum now broadly report identical content as tabloids and broadsheets come closer to each other in terms of style, content, and subject matter. The percentage of hard news in Tabloids goes up from 19% in 1986 to 29% in 2011, whereas in Broadsheets, it shows a decline from 31% in 1986 to 25% in 2011. However, despite these changes, there are some dimensions where newspaper shows no change, i.e. the national news agenda remains similar from crime and the economy to politics and celebrity. The study involved comparing editions of The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Express, Sunday Times, and News of the World on identical days in July 1986 and July 2011.

Johnston & Graham (2011) focus on the narrative style of writing and its place in the journalistic writing today. The authors believe that in revamping themselves, newspapers worldwide are making several changes and one amongst them is the shift in the way a news story is presented. The authors for the purpose of their research revisited the two newspapers The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald that were a part of earlier study on writing style of the newspaper and found that narrative writing style has decreased in the period from 2007 to 2009. From one fifth of the stories using narrative styles in the former year, the number shrank to less than one sixth in the latter year.

This change is attributed to the changing media landscape and the social context. For instance, the authors suggest that one of the reasons for decline in narrative style can be attributed to the financial crisis that lead to cost cutting and journalist shedding. As downsizing of journalist targeted feature writers, who brought the narrative approach to the story, the decline in narrative writing style could be attributed to
social context. However, narrative style of writing remained an essential part of newspaper content.

Another dimension to the text studies is added by the research that focuses on certain elements within the text of the newspapers that become prominent with change in social and political environment


The findings with respect to the effect of socio-political environment on the newspaper text are that change in political environment had a more significant influence on the text of the newspaper as compared to the economic and technological change. An interesting and more significant finding with respect the present work is that while the changing political context had a major influence on the direct quotes in the news stories, the change in human-interest stories was less significant. Thus, suggesting that the political change affected news stories more than the human-interest stories. Another finding of the authors is the changing trends in direct quotes signified the changes in source of news. Authors report that the changes in news stories suggest news organizations’ increasing reliability on reporters to get the news rather than waiting for the news to come to them via mail or telegraph/mail. Thus, changing political environment affected the source and message of the newspaper text.

An analysis of the front pages of the Spanish newspapers is provided by López-Rabadán and Casero-Ripollés (2012) who look at the evolution of the Spanish media agenda through the longitudinal analysis of the front pages from 1980-2010. Looking at the front pages as the most important journalistic space and social relevance of current affair news in exercise of citizenship in contemporary issues, the authors trace the changes that occur in three decades. Major findings reveal that there is a decrease in number of hard news on the front page and an increase in the percentage of soft news, increase in presence of new alternative actors (NGOs, civil society, experts, etc.), no significant diversification in the area of territories
references and no growth in the degree of homogeneity of the front page agenda of Spanish press.

Kristensen and From (2012) in their work look at the blurring boundaries between lifestyle journalism, cultural journalism and consumer journalism. The authors look at the changes in content with respect to the coverage of lifestyle, culture and consumption in the Danish Press. The work is based on comprehensive empirical studies of lifestyle journalism and cultural journalism in a Danish context draws upon content analysis of key years in the twentieth century and first decade of twenty first century. The findings of the study show extensive but changing coverage of lifestyle and consumption as driven by the changing social context and emergence of consumer society. The author also conducted interviews with editors and journalists who look at lifestyle journalism as a relevant and conventional part of modern newspapers and that priority given to special issues by the newspapers reflect trends within society and the media as such. The growing competition in mediascape, the rise of consumer markets and the changing technological environment, are some of the reasons cited for the change in content.

Zamanian and Heydari (2012) in their study on the readability of texts discuss the most frequently used readability formulas and weigh the pros and cons of using readability tools. The major disadvantage cited is that readability measuring tools are limited to the surface structure and do not consider the deep syntactic and semantic structure of the passage. Enlisting the advantages of these tools, authors suggest that attractiveness of using formulas to measure readability lies in the belief that they objectively and quantifiably evaluate the difficulty of written material without measuring characteristics of readers. Also use of the formulas, especially the ones that measure the text in terms of ease of reading by grade level help the writer with much needed information according to his target audience.

3.2 STUDIES RELATED TO READER AND CONTEXT

As the message derives its full meaning only after reaching the receiver, the study of newspaper text is incomplete without studying its effects on the readers. Various studies of reader experiences and effects have been grouped in this section. In addition, the studies showing the influence of internal and external context of the reader on the reception of text have been reviewed in this section

Schwartz (1980) in his work looked at the psychographic analysis of newspaper use i.e. association between lifestyle of the readers and the way they use the newspaper.
The author tries to explore if the lifestyle of the reader, especially how he spends his time and money can be a key in enabling the researchers to understand the factors underlying the newspaper use. The study was based on a telephonic survey of 349 adults in suburban Midwestern communities that constituted the market for local daily newspaper. The author reports significant differences in newspaper consumption in different segment of readers. Both the demographics and psychographics of the readers had significant association with the newspaper use. 

Whitney (1980) in his work establishes a co-relation between status of the individual and the mass media use. A total of 1557 voting age adults were interviewed before and after 1968 presidential campaign. The findings of the study show a positive correlation between status inconsistency and media use. The effects of status inconsistency were found to be most pronounced for print media. 

Wang (1982) in his work looked at the way readers perceive a newspaper without news stories i.e. perception of people towards a newspaper that carried only feature stories. The study was conducted by undertaking a survey of 202 subscribers of Min Shun Bao (The People's Living Daily). The newspaper in question is the only paper in Taiwan that carried no straight news. The study reported that the newspaper was not as successful as the publishers had hoped it to be. One half of the total respondents rated the content of the paper as fair and only one-third said it was quite good. The results regarding readers' perception of editing and quality of the paper were similar.

Mings (1997) in her study of uses and gratifications of online newspaper discusses the challenges faced by the print newspapers and compares the gratifications sought from print newspapers and online newspapers. Using questionnaires and videotape data of the participants, self-reported measures of print newspaper gratifications were correlated with the gratifications sought from online newspapers. The findings of the study were that those who reported avoiding print newspapers also reported avoiding online newspapers. The prime reasons cited for avoiding the newspapers is lack of enough information and that newspapers contain unpleasant information. Participants who reported gaining utility gratifications from print newspapers also reported seeking those same gratifications from online newspapers. The factors included in Utility gratifications included newspaper being a good use of time, and information in newspapers being a help in plan their evenings or weekends. Participants who reported gaining para-social interaction gratifications from print
newspapers also reported little tendency to avoid online newspapers. The factors here included writing a letter to editor seemed having a conversation with other newspaper readers and that newspapers were a way to learn about other people’s opinion. Although the study compares the gratifications sought from newspapers in two different mediums, it also brings out the major type of gratifications sought from the newspaper content.

Kepplinger and Daschmann (1997) propose a news-processing model in their study of reception and interpretation of mass media content by the audience. Keeping in mind the two opposite ideologies regarding the reception of mass media content (One that viewers are passive and will use, understand and remember the content of news stories similarly. Another that value system and knowledge of the readers and viewers has an impact upon the selection of media and media content) the authors approach the question of how news is processed by audiences. Assuming that people tend to select information with respect to their existing cognitive structures, the question that authors put forth is that “are these structures the consequence of real life experiences or are they shaped by former media coverage” (p.5). Conducting a quantitative content analysis of the four prime time newscasts of three TV networks and a survey of 34 people, the authors conclude that viewers’ interest and recall of the news content was not arbitrary rather these were stimulated by existing knowledge, which was primarily attained from former media coverage. Thus, the important finding of the study is that audiences’ today’s context is mainly the consequence of former news.

An Impact study conducted by Readership Institute, North-Western University (2001) measures newspaper content, consumer reaction and looks at the correlations between the two. The nationwide study was conducted with 37,000 readers and non-readers and 100 Impact newspapers in U.S. The theme, origin, geographic focus, writing style, visual complexity, front page diversity, and content organization that included sectioning, content promotion, typographic and other overall measures were analyzed for 74,000 stories.

The important findings of the study show that a typical U.S. newspaper – regardless of the size- offers a story mix emphasizing sports, politics/government/war, police/crime, health /home /food /fashion /travel and business stories. These five categories take up almost 75% of the typical weekday newspaper’s space, while the other 25% is a mix of entertainment, science, arts and disasters, etc. Sunday
newspapers show more diversity in content as compared to the weekday newspapers. In terms of writing style, the study shows that larger newspapers run more stories written in a feature-style or commentary/criticism style. The emphasis on narrative storytelling, rather than the straight-news approach in more pronounced on Sundays. The content when seen vis-à-vis consumer satisfaction showed that Content practices relate to consumer satisfaction. Thus, the study concluded that changing content can increase satisfaction and that satisfaction has the potential to translate into higher readership.

Prior (2003) explores the reasons for popularity of soft news by looking at the relationship between preference for news formats and the individual traits of liking for news and liking for entertainment. The study also examines if the preference and consumption of soft news is linked to the political knowledge. Drawing from a survey of 2,358 randomly selected U.S. residents author reports that people who like a medium for its entertainment value are more likely to rank soft news among their preferred news format. The author also suggests that the preference for soft news is a result of mushrooming of the media outlets that in turn provide content to meet the receivers' needs to increase their profit. In addition, the increase in number of people consuming soft news today than thirty years ago does speak more about diversity of content and more options to choose from than “dumbing down” of audiences or media content. With respect to the connection between preference for soft news and level of political knowledge, the author concludes that there is limited evidence that viewers actually learn from soft news.

Readership Institute (2004) puts forth a study of reader experience and establishes a connection between the newspaper text and the reader experience. Through a survey conducted on the young adult readers in the age group of 18-34 years, the study outlines the following major findings with respect to the experiences of readers vis-à-vis the editorial content. With respect to the subject matter and dominant themes, mix of news content is important. For instance, hard news, lifestyle and features, and movies, music and art recur as drivers of several experiences. Dynamic visual treatment is a recurrent theme i.e. photos deliver content and meaning in them and that they bring readers into other content elements. Diversity of people in stories and photos is also a common theme. Readers not only want to see people like themselves but also want to see the life around them reflected in their local daily newspaper.
Readership Institute (2004) in another study, ‘The Effects of Childhood Exposure to Newspapers on Adult Readership’, brings out the significance of context of the reader in shaping the newspaper reading habits. In a study conducted by a mail survey of 10,800 readers of local daily newspapers, the author explores the correlation between childhood exposure to newspapers and adult readership. The research finds statistical evidence that children who grow up in homes where news is regularly read and discussed tend to read newspapers more as adults. In addition, children who were exposed to newspaper through class-related activities in school also show higher newspaper readership as adults than those who had no such exposure.

Brook (2007) in a news report based on National Readership Survey (NRS) of newspapers in United Kingdom reports the newspaper reading habits particularly with respect to the time spent on reading newspapers. The study shows that “there has been for many years a mistaken assumption that all we are reading is for two minutes” (Pratt in Brook 2007, Para 3). Brook reports that NRS found readers spent an average of 70 minutes reading a Sunday newspaper, with 50% taking an hour or more over their read. In addition, the Saturday editions are read for longer than their weekday counterparts are.

Johansson (2008) in his work looks at the reception of newspaper content particularly focusing on human-interest, sport and celebrity stories, typically perceived as “trivial” tabloid journalism. According to the author, tabloids have continued to grow as the best-read newspapers in Britain even though the content of the tabloids has been abandoned for criticizing journalistic responsibility. Drawing from focus group discussions and interviews of young adult readers of The Sun and The Daily Mirror, author reports that tabloid reading experiences are related to the daily routine and to the wider social context. The author explains that three important aspects in terms of reading experiences could be highlighted. At one level, enjoyment of reading could be understood as a way to deal with day-to-day struggles and an opportunity for relaxation and release of general everyday anxieties. On another level, reading (specifically celebrity stories) could be seen as a vent for frustration rooted in experiences of social inequality and third, an overlapping of the two levels connects to the wider social context.

Zdovc (2009) in his study analyzes the discrepancy in the text and the reader needs with respect to the journalistic form of feature writing. Zdovc in his work states that
the quality journalistic writing in the form “well written feature stories” is one of the potent tools that can help the decline in newspaper readership but the Slovene press that continues to offer “elementary feature stories” to the readers has not acknowledged the same. The author explores the discrepancy and the reasons for it and the sources data for the study from two research projects, one being qualitative analysis of test published in magazine Tovaris in the years 1965, 1970, and 1973 and second being qualitative analysis of national daily newspaper of Slovene, Delo. In addition, the contents of texts included in three readership surveys of newspaper Delo were also analyzed.

The author concludes that the prime reasons for discrepancy in the reader expectations and the text being served to them vis-à-vis the feature stories is due to following reasons. The narrative form of writing that is being used world over to attract the readers back to print has not been acknowledged as an important form of journalistic writing in Slovene and journalists and editors in Slovene continue to associate narrative style of writing as a out-of-date technique only to be used in uninteresting reported stories. Further, the author point out the reason for the present state is lack of knowledge about theory of journalistic text and reluctance to become familiar with new findings of journalism theory and practise. The author strongly suggests the need to include preference for different form of journalistic writing as one of the objective in readership surveys.

Nguyen (2012) looks at the effects of soft news and if they can serve as a way of keeping the young informed about the public affairs. Based on a secondary analysis of the 2007 Australian Social Attitudes Survey, the study reports association between the ages of the respondents and reading preferences. Author reports that younger the person, more likely s/he is to consume soft news. With respect to the news attachment, author concluded that people who attach to the news in one way or another are older and more likely to be males. Overall, with respect to the attachment to the news, author concluded that soft news items-except the category of sports- are followed less than hard news.

Thus, soft news item did attract the reader but failed to generate a reader attachment in the sense of reader following the news, the exception being young females (18-34 age group) who followed and kept up with latest news on ‘celebrity gossip’ and ‘latest fashion in clothes’ and the like. The study thus, concludes that soft news tastes decline from young to old and from females to males confirming the business
strategists' belief that their often targeted audience, younger females, have stronger taste for certain categories of soft news than other section of the audience. An extension of the findings was also that soft news might not contribute to public attachment to the news in long term, but do help an ailing news business in the short term. Thus, not only is there a connection between the text and the reader in terms of reader tastes and preferences the same has a far reaching affect on the context that shapes the media content in the first place.

3.3 IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS – KNOWLEDGE/ TECHNIQUES/ SOLUTIONS

The literature reviewed for the purpose of present work brings together the studies that look at the trends in mass media content, particularly the newspaper content and its presentation, how it evolves, and how the audience with different contextual backgrounds receives it. Thus, the body of work helps in framing objectives that analyse trends in feature writing with respect to the three variables of text, context and the reader.

The studies that focus on the variable of text provide insights both into the form of journalistic features and the trends in contemporary newspapers. Bleyer (1916), Crawford (1931), Patterson (1947), Brennecke & Clark (1947) and Reed (1931) highlight the popular types of feature stories, the process of idea generation, the writing style, titles, presentation and typographical treatment given to the feature stories. The body of work becomes relevant to the present study as it helps in framing objectives that look into the trends in content and presentation of feature stories. These help develop objectives of analyzing the trends in subject matter and writing style feature stories. In addition, the objectives to do with trends in feature titles and typography treatment given to features evolve from this body of work.

Reddick (1949) and Steigleman (1950) provide a multidimensional approach to feature writing by discussing the various aspects related to marketing and selling feature stories. According to the authors, significance of internal and external context of the reader becomes an essential ingredient in slanting the feature stories. Thus, the studies become relevant to the present work as they help in framing objectives that look in to the reader context and its effect on reading preferences. Nicholls (1972) and Alexander (1987) bring in the contrast and connection between news and features. While Nicholls concludes that news events are one of the biggest sources of feature stories, Alexander adds to the premise by concluding that knowledge and
information does not satiate the readers alone and thus springs the need to present the same in form of features. Thus, the studies become relevant to present study that seeks to explore the connection between text and reader by undertaking a content analysis and a reader’s survey.

While there is body of work that focuses on form of journalistic features, there is contemporary research on the trends of newspaper content. Peers, L. & Nesbitt M (2004) in their study of American newspapers; Tiffen (2010) in his content analysis of Australian newspapers over five decades, and Clarion Communications (2011) in its study of trends in British newspapers. The studies become relevant to the present work as they highlight the trends in the newspaper content across the world and help coming up with objectives of the present study that are to do with trend analysis of subject matter and presentation of feature stories. Adding to these are Murthy, Ramakrishna & Melkote (2010) and Rabadán &Ripollés (2012) with the focus on the front page. The works are relevant to the present study as it explores the trends in positioning of feature stories with respect to the pages on which they appear.

Jacobson (2006) with his work on presentation of feature stories and Johnston (2007), Weldon (2008) and Johnston & Graham (2011) with their work on writing style of newspaper content become relevant to the present study as the latter deals with trends in writing style and presentation of feature stories. While the existing literature shows a direct connect between the typography and readership, it becomes an objective for the present study to explore the connection between changes in typography and the reader’s opinion of the change.

Weldon (2008), Dalecki, Lasorsa & Lewis (2009) and Zamanian & Heydari (2012) explore the readability of newspaper text. While the existing literature reports use of variety of tools to measure the readability of the news stories, it helps in devising methods to measure the readability of the feature stories for the present study. In addition, the studies show a decrease in readability of news stories and increase in non-news stories, thus helping frame the objective to do with readability of feature stories. Macnamara (2005) in his study looks at content analysis as one of the well established and fastest growing technique to study broad range of ‘texts’ and thus helps in building the methodology for the study.

While the work on text helps frame objectives for analysis of changes and trends in feature stories over a span of time, the reception studies help enrich the second stage of the present study that is the reader’s perception and reception of feature stories.
Wang (1982) looks at the perception of readers towards a newspaper that carries only soft news and feature stories and reports mixed responses from readers, thus helping frame objectives on how readers perceive feature stories in their newspapers. Mings (1997) reports the gratifications sought from print newspapers and later compares them to online newspapers. The work becomes relevant to present study as it undertakes to explore the gratifications people seek from reading feature stories.

Several impact studies conducted by Readership Institute North-Western University look at the correlation between newspaper content and consumer satisfaction, the reading habits of individuals and the gratifications sought by reading variety of content in newspapers. The body of research in this area becomes relevant as it helps in suggesting the parameters that can be included for study of content in newspapers and measuring reader satisfaction. While maximum studies focus on reception of the entire news content, works of Zdovc (2009) and Nguyen (2012) stand out as they focuses on the significance of feature stories.

The readership studies are further supplemented with studies that bring in the reader and the context in which the content is consumed. Schwartz (1980) establishes a connection between newspaper use and lifestyle of the readers and Whitney (1980) in his work establishes a correlation between status of the individual and the mass media, thus suggesting objectives for the present study that can look at the correlation between demographics/ psychographics of the readers and their reading preferences.

Kepplinger & Daschmann (1997) suggest that viewers interpret information about new events in the context of past events and an impact study by readership institute brings out the significance of context of the reader in shaping the newspaper reading habits. Thus, the studies help in building objectives to do with effect on internal and external context of the reader on the reading habits.

The literature review for the present study thus brings insights on the form of journalistic features, the trends in newspaper content and presentation, the reception of content and the influence of internal and external context of the reader on the form of text and reception of text.

However, few studies bring the three variables together. For instance, a number of authors explain the form of journalistic features and numerous readership surveys tackle the questions of reader preferences but do not connect the variables of text, context and the reader. The present study attempts to fill this gap by studying the three variables of text, context and the reader in a single study.
Another gap identified is in the lack of focus on the feature stories in trend analysis of newspaper content. The researchers study the entire newspaper content in totality and the findings often cannot be applied to feature stories as they differ in form and presentation from the news stories. The present study attempts to fulfil this void and add a new dimension to the trend studies by focusing on the change that has occurred in the feature stories in the past eighty years. The content, presentation, and source of the feature stories have been analysed and thus the form of journalistic features has been given special focus in the present study both in the stage of content analysis and reader survey. Thus, while the existing literature focuses on reception of newspaper content as a whole, often inclusive of editorial and advertising content also, the present study focuses on reception and need gratification from feature stories.

Moreover, while the readership studies are limited to the study of reading preferences and associations with demographics and psychographics the present work aims to strengthen the body of work by going a step ahead. The present study shall aim to undertake the reader survey that not only includes the existing dimensions but also looks at the effect of internal and external context of the reader on the reading preferences, the nature of need gratification derived from the reading of feature stories and most importantly the level of reader approval and disapproval of change in feature stories.

In terms of methodologies followed the existing trend studies look at the change in the span of 25 years and 50 years, but the present study shall be more exhaustive as it takes into account a time span of 80 years. Although there are studies that look at the changes across centuries but the sample size is small in such cases, thus the present study attempts to fulfil this wide by increasing both the time span and the sample for more pronounced results.

In addition, to adding more focus on feature stories and incorporating the three variables, the present study attempts to fill the void that exists due to lack of studies with Indian context. Most of the studies included here are trend analysis of newspaper content in American, British, and Australian newspapers. Although there are studies on Indian newspapers, but these are either focus only on front page analysis or do not incorporate the variables of text and reader in one study. In fact, few studies deal with the subject of feature stories and the analysis of trends in content and presentation of feature stories in Indian newspapers.

Thus, the present study brings together the three variables of text, context, and reader with special focus on the journalistic form of feature story and its evolution in the Indian Centenarian newspapers.