4. TERMS OF ENQUIRY

The present study is an attempt to observe, describe, and analyze the trends that have emerged and the changes (if any) that have occurred in the feature stories that appear in newspapers. The study has been undertaken keeping in mind the variables of Text, Context and the Reader. The variable of Text includes a study of trends in the content, presentation and source of feature stories from pre-Independence era to the present era in two centenarian newspapers. The variable of context examines the context in which readers consume the text. The variable of reader studies the various dimensions involved with the reception of feature stories, i.e., reading preferences, influence of context on readership patterns and readers’ opinion of change in text.

4.1 AIM

To study and analyze the trends in Feature Stories vis-à-vis Text, Context and Reader by examining Times of India and The Tribune – two centenarian newspapers, from 1930 to 2009 and by conducting a readership survey.

4.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

a) Text (Content Analysis)

1. To study the trends and changes if any in the subject matter/types of features, i.e. to study the dominant themes of feature stories during the sample period.
2. To analyze the trends and changes if any in style of writing of feature stories.
3. To determine the trends in readability ease of feature stories.
4. To study the trends and changes in placement and positioning of feature stories over time i.e. the pages on which they appear in the sample newspapers.
5. To analyze the proportion of visual element in the feature stories.
6. To study the usage of text breakers devices in feature stories.
7. To analyze the trends in Feature Tittles vis-à-vis typographical arrangement, font and length of headlines.
8. To determine trends and changes if any in the source of the Feature Stories over time.

b) Context and Reader (Readership Survey)

1. To identify the readers and non-readers of feature stories and ascertain the reasons for non-readership.
2. To study the reading preference of respondents vis-à-vis subject matter/ types of feature stories and writing style of feature stories.

3. To determine the demographics (Age, Gender, Socio-Economic Status) of feature readers and analyze the association (if any) with reading preferences to do with subject matter and writing style.

4. To determine the psychographics (Self-Esteem, Sociability, and Locus of Control) of the respondents and analyze the association (if any) with reading preferences to do with subject matter and writing style.

5. To study the nature and extent of need gratification derived from the readership of Feature Stories.

6. To analyze if the feature reading is driven by the internal and external context of the readers.

7. To study the perception of respondents regarding trends in Feature Writing as driven by the social- cultural, political, and economic conditions operating at that time.

8. To study readers’ approval/disapproval of change in Feature Stories over time.

4.3 HYPOTHESES

a) Text (Content Analysis)

1. Subject matter of feature stories shows a significant change during time.
2. Writing styles of feature stories show a significant change during sample time
3. The ease of readability increases with passage of time.
4. There is a significant change in positioning of feature stories over time.
5. There is an increase in the proportion of visual element.
6. There is increase in the incidence level of Text Breaker Devices.
7. There is significant variation in typographical arrangement, font and length of headline over time.
8. There is a significant change in the source of feature stories over time.

b) Context and Reader (Readership Survey)

1. The time consuming nature of feature reading is cited as the reason for non-readership by maximum number of respondents
2.1 Reader Preferences for subject matter/ types of features show a significant difference

2.2 Reader Preference for writing styles show a significant difference
3. Reading preferences and demographics of the respondents are significantly associated.

4. Reading preferences and psychographics of the respondents are significantly associated.

5. Patterns of need gratification show significant differences.

6. More readers admit to their feature reading being context driven.

7. Social-cultural conditions are identified as the predominant catalyst for change in feature stories.

8. Majority of readers approve of the change in Feature stories

4.4 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. **Time**: The time under analysis, i.e. 1930-2009 measured in decades

2. **Change**: Change in the frequency of occurrence.

3. **Trend**: A pattern or direction of change determined by plotting a series of data points that move in a certain direction over a period. Trend has been represented by a trend diagram in the present study for the change that occurred in various categories of content analysed through the content analysis. There are four main types of trends, Secular trend i.e. gradual and steady increase or decrease, Seasonal trend i.e. fluctuating according to the season, Cyclic trends i.e. fluctuating upward and downward but not according to the season and Random Trend or Random walk i.e. no trend or varying from external causes happening at random.

4. **Feature Stories**: A piece of journalistic writing that covers a selected issue in depth. Based on facts like a news report but using a slant and style of writing that may resemble a piece of fiction with use of appeals like emotion, suspense and humour. Includes those written on issues of topical interest and timeless topics.

5. **Subject Matter**: The dominant theme of the feature story determined by analyzing the key theme of the feature story.

6. **Types of Feature Stories**: Features classified on the basis of dominant themes into several categories such as News Features, Science and Technology Features, Utility Features, Art and Culture Features, Health Features, Lifestyle Features, Review Features, Personality Features, Business Features, Personal Experience Features, Commemorative Features, Problem Features, Middle and Miscellaneous (Others) including Historical, Astrological, Philosophical, Photo, Hobby Features. [Each category defined in Subject Index]
7. **Writing Style:** The style in which feature stories are written. These have been classified as informative style, descriptive style, analytical style, and argumentative style. [Each category defined in Subject Index]

8. **Readability Ease:** Indicates the ease of reading a piece of text, measured here in terms of Flesch Reading Ease calculated using word length and sentence length in MS Word 2007. The high scores indicate features stories were easy to read and low scores indicate that they were difficult to read.

9. **Placement of Feature stories:** The placement of feature stories is with respect to the pages of the newspaper. Pages of newspaper here include Front page, Back page, inside pages of the newspaper.

10. **Verbal Element:** The textual part of the feature stories measured in square centimetres.

11. **Visual Element:** A photograph, picture, chart, graph, illustration or any other way of displaying information other than text in feature story measured in square centimetres.

12. **Text Breaker Devices:** Typographical devices that break the monotony of text. These include Box, Box Story, Sub headlines and kickers, Strap-lines, Drop Cap, Dingbat, Paragraph Sub Heads, Slugs and Multi column Lead, Bold text. [Each category defined in Subject Index]

13. **Headline:** The text at the top/side/centre of the feature story giving the gist of the story or article that follows.

14. **Typographical Arrangement of Headlines:** Refers to the typographical patterns in which the headlines of the feature stories are set. The categories in typographical arrangement include the following Waistline pattern, Flush Left, Centered and Set Centered, Pyramid and Inverted Pyramid, Free style and Flush Right. [Each category defined in Subject Index]

15. **Font:** A set of type of one particular face and size belonging to any one of the following five categories; Black Letter, Roman, Sans Serif, Script and Cursive, and Decorative and Nouveau.

16. **Length of Headlines:** Measured in terms of the total number of words.

17. **Source:** Refers to the where the feature is sourced from. The categories include the staff reporters, news agencies, syndicates, miscellaneous and no source i.e. where no source for the feature story has been mentioned in the newspapers.
18. **Readers**: Respondents who read feature stories in the newspapers Times of India and The Tribune

19. **Demographics**: Includes the variables of age, gender, socio-economic status. Age is measured in years, gender in physical terms, socio-economic status calculated through a summated score of education, income, and occupation of the respondent.

20. **Psychographics**: Includes the variables of self-esteem, sociability and locus of control. Self Esteem defined by the summated score on the self esteem scale, measured in four levels from low, low to medium, medium to high and high self esteem. Sociability as defined by the summated score on sociability scales, divided in similar four levels as self-esteem. Locus of Control as defined by the summated scores on Locus of Control scale where low scores indicate an internal control i.e. a belief that one’s own actions determine the rewards they get and high score indicates external control i.e. a belief that rewards in life are generally outside the control of the individual himself.

24. **Reading Preferences**: Preferences in terms of what the respondents like the most in types and style of feature writing. Preferences in subject matter measured with respect to the types of features the respondents like to read the most from a given list of types of feature stories and preference in terms of writing style is measured with respect to the style of writing liked most by respondents.

25. **Need Gratification**: Measured in terms of summated score computed based on individual scores achieved on each one of the five subscales measuring cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and escapist need gratification. [Each defined in Subject Index]

26. **Context**: Defined in terms of internal and external context of the readers. Internal Context refers to the readers’ current mental state within which the readers’ behaviour is generated. For the purpose of present study internal context has been defines by the mood of the reader, needs and desires of the reader and the set of beliefs and values of the reader. External context refers to physical and social environment within which the readers’ behaviour is generated. For the purpose of present study, it has been defined by the placement of the reader, his group affiliations, and the events occurring around him.