CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND INFERENCES

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study in detail taking into consideration the fulfilment of the objectives framed for the study. It is observed from the findings that the newspaper editorials of the English national dailies of India exhibit varying trends in its readability score. In this chapter, a broader aspect of interpreting the findings of the study will be presented in two parts – discussion and inferences. The first part of this chapter presents in detail the discussions of the study’s findings by correlating with the findings of the previous researches. The second part presents the inferences based on the substantiation of relevant theoretical frameworks and fulfilment of the research gaps of the study.

Newspaper editorials constitute one of the most important sources of news analysis of important contemporary issues of the society. According to Okoro and Agbo (2003), an editorial is “a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader”. So this opinion piece presents useful information to newspaper readers on the existing public agendas of the society. Newspaper editorials as a kind of opinion texts are different from the other types of news discourse in the sense “that they are supposed to present evaluations and comments about the news events already reported in the newspapers” (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2011, p. 3).

Owing to the fact that newspaper editorials are extremely valuable piece of opinion information for the public, the present study tries to find out how understandable the editorials are for its readers. Readability, as a matter of fact is one of the most important criterion that affects the efficacy of a written material. In this section, the findings of the study are correlated to the findings of the previous studies presented in the related literature survey. From the results obtained in the study, it is observed that newspaper editorials of the highly circulating national dailies of India are not easy to read
Discussion

This section discusses in detail the findings of the study by correlating with the findings of the previous studies. Connecting the research findings with the literature reviewed helps in critically interpreting and describing the significance of the research findings. Incorporating the results of the previous studies in interpreting the findings of the study helps in expanding the application and knowledge of the research study. Through the discussions presented thematically, this section explores the underlying meaning of the research study.

1.1 Readability of General Public Text

The findings of the study indicate that newspaper editorials are hard to read. This result is not surprising since a number of studies have shown that most public information materials are difficult to read and understand (Trenchard and Crissy, 1952; Hoskins, 1973; Stevenson, 1975; Seaton, 1975; Stempel, 1981; Johns and Wheat, 1978; Burgoon et al., 1981; Porter and Stephens, 1989; Fusaro and Conover, 1983; Fishkin, 1985; Burton, 1991; Allinder and Peterson, 1992; Danielson et al., 1992; Murphy, Gamble and Sharpe, 1994; Bodle, 1996; Mumford, 1997; Oliver and Eckman, 1998; Jung and Jo, 2001; McLellan and Dobinson, 2003; Meyer, 2004; Wallance et al., 2008; Hillbom, 2009; Greywoode et al., 2009; Adhikary, 2010; Jhanwar and Bisnoi, 2010; Gazni, 2011). However, few studies contradict the results of the present study proving that public information materials are easy to read (Suresh and Vasanthkumar, 2002; Vatta et al., 2010).

Though readability is considered as an important quality of text, newspaper editorials fail to acknowledge the fact. The concept of readability has long been studied and analysed since the late 19th century but still many public written texts do not consider its applicability on a serious note. The study's finding and similar findings of the
previous researches indicate that print media based public information material need to incorporate the concept of readability to increase its effectiveness.

1.2 Readability of Newspaper Text

The average readability score of the newspapers editorials in the study is 42.47 which falls under the ‘difficult to read’ category. As per the Flesch Reading Ease Score Chart, the readability of the editorials fall under the ‘13th to 16th’ educational reading grade level. This means that the editorials are beyond the reading ability of an adult of average reading ability (which is designated as having a readability score of 60-70 and a corresponding reading grade level of 8th and 9th grade level). Since newspapers target the general audience, a reading grade level of ‘13th to 16th’ is much higher for its readers to understand.

Fowler and Smith (1979) discovered that magazines were easier to read than newspapers. So, the issue of readability of newspapers need to be discussed with serious concern where editors should start focusing on using easier linguistic structures in their writing. Even Robert Gunning and Rudolf Flesch, who are both readability specialists, working in United Press and Associated Press felt the need “to bring down the reading grade level of front-page stories from the 16th to the 11th grade” (DuBay, 2004, p. 23).

Going in consonance with the present research findings, many researchers have argued that newspapers should lower their reading grade levels if they want to increase their effectiveness (Burgoon et al., 1981; Fowler, 1978; Smith, 1983; Meyer, 2004). This justifies the fact that many best seller and popular novelists such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, John Grisham, John Clancy, Steven King, Lee Harper and Dan Brown have written at the 7th-grade level and most of the biggest selling romance novel writers write at the 7th-grade level and even below it (Dubay, 2007a).

Further, DuBay pointed out that as compared to other publications, the highly circulated publications such as Time, TV Guide and Readers Digest are written at lower reading grade levels (9th-grade reading level). However, The Times of India which is one of the highest circulated newspapers in the world is written at 15th grade level as
compared to other highly circulated and popular newspapers such as The Sun (UK Tabloid) and Daily Mirror (UK Tabloid), all written at 9th grade level (ibid). Even in the present study, the editorials of The Times of India are written at 13th to 16th grade. This suggests that the largest newspaper of India still has no improvement in terms of its readability.

Owing to heavy competition from other print media forms such as magazines, novels and story books, the need to lower the reading grade level of newspaper texts is heavily felt. The efficacy of a written text can be enhanced only when the public text are readable enough for maximum readers.

1.3 Readability and Circulation

The study tries to correlate the concept of newspaper circulation and readability. As observed in many previous studies, there exists a positive correlation between readability and circulation (Murphy, 1947; Feld, 1948; DuBay, 2007a). Keeping in view of these research studies, highly circulating newspapers are chosen as sample for the study by assuming that these highly circulating newspapers would be highly readable for the readers. But the finding that these highly circulating newspapers are lowly readable rejects the above assumption. This gives a new insight to the fact that the highly circulating Indian newspaper editorials may hardly be read by its readers because of its difficulty level.

The finding depicts that these newspapers though highly circulated fail to reach its readers fully. This implies that high circulation may not necessarily mean that the contents of the high circulating newspapers are thoroughly read by its readers. The study brings a new observation in its finding that circulation may not be a predictor of textual readability.

1.4 Readability of Editorials

It is evident that newspaper editorials are one of the most important news segments covered in newspapers. This is supported by the fact that research trends in readability analysis concerning newspaper editorials have crept up gradually. Researches
pertaining to readability of newspaper editorials have been conducted by comparing the readability of the editorials and other types of news articles (Trenchard and Crissy, 1952; Monznette and Rarick, 1968; Stempel, 1981; Fusaro and Conover, 1983) and other printed text (Murphy, Gamble and Sharpe, 1994). Few studies reported research in readability of editorials on a holistic approach (Hynds, 1990; McLellan and Dobinson, 2003; Adhikary, 2010).

Prior to the present research, Stempel (1981) conducted a comparison of readability of six kinds of content – international news, national news, local news, editorials, women’s or family living news and sports and found that the readability of editorials are on a lower rank. Trenchard and Crissy (1952) found advertisements to be more readable than editorials in two national weeklies, *Time* and *Newsweek*. Fusaro and Conover (1983) discovered that lead news stories scored higher than lead editorials. Murphy, Gamble and Sharpe (1994) found that among adult subject information leaflets, newspaper editorials and popular magazine articles, the lowest readability goes to newspaper editorials. It is a matter of serious concern that in many comparative studies regarding editorials and other printed texts, editorials proved to be the lesser readable ones.

McLellan and Dobinson (2003) still find language complexity in newspaper editorials as compared to the newspaper editorials of 15 and 30 years ago. This may be considered as a reason for low readability of newspaper editorials. Adhikary (2010) found the readability scores of editorials in Nepali broadsheet dailies to be fairly low. The present study’s observation that the average readability score of newspaper editorials is 42.47 means that they are less readable for the readers. Except for the study by Monznette and Rarick (1968) who found that editorials were more readable than news stories and Hynds (1990) who found that over years, newspapers have enhanced readability, all the previous studies as well as the present study point that newspaper editorials need to improve its readability level.

In general, it is observed that in spite of the fact that editorials are the most valuable written piece in newspapers all through the years, editorials are still very hard to
read owing to its difficult writing style and language complexity. Editors need to incorporate different writing techniques such as use of easy language and appropriate exposition, imposition of preciseness and clarity, reduction of jargons and redundancies to improve the readability of newspaper editorials.

1.5 Readability and Subject Matter

The present research findings depict varying forms of subject theme among newspaper editorials. Politics based subject theme is the most favoured form of subject matter for the newspaper editorials according to the research study. In one of the earlier studies, Hynds (1990) through the content analysis of newspaper editorials on the basis of subject matter found that editorials based on politics and government came to be the most dominant theme. Based on the findings of the present and the previous study, it is clear that editorials based on politics are the most preferred theme for editors.

Issues on politics have been one of the major themes taken up in newspapers very often. Researches over time have found that political stories have a higher readability level than sports stories (Anderson, 1966; Danielson and Bryan, 1964; Razik, 1969; Reiley, 1974, Johns and Wheat, 1978; Catalano, 1990). But the present study proved contradictory results, stating that political editorials in newspapers are slightly less readable than sports editorials (political editorials with an average readability score of 42.82 as against sports editorials with 43.78). The study also found that political editorials which are the most popular category of newspaper editorials with majority of the editorials written under this theme have low readability level.

In another study conducted by Ali et al. (2010) in terms of readability of news articles across topics, it was found that ‘sports’ articles were the most readable, followed by ‘entertainment’, ‘politics’, ‘science’ and ‘business’. In the present study concerning readability across varying subject themes of newspaper editorials, issues such as ‘social development’, and ‘entertainment’ are more readable than issues such as ‘politics’, ‘crime/police/law & order’ and ‘science & technology’ though the difference in readability scores is marginal.
Some previous researches came up with similar results. Fowler and Smith (1982) while analysing news content in *Time* and *Newsweek* found that delayed-reward items such as national affairs, science, medicine, business and economy were found to be more difficult to read than immediate-reward items such as sports, people, newsmakers and movies. Smith (1984) also found that among categories of newspaper content, human interest and lighter issues such as features and entertainment are more readable than serious issues such as national-international or state and local news. These similar findings interpret that newspaper texts focusing on human interest and lighter issues are easier to read as compared to serious themes such as politics, crime, police, legislation and science and technology.

### 1.6 Readability and Writing Style

Writers employ different techniques of writing style in their text for the purpose of fulfilling certain motives. Newspaper editorials, as the main source of public opinion formation in the society are always written in an analytical and explanatory style so as to make its readers have an in-depth knowledge of certain issues happening in the society. This enables the readers to take up a proper decision and subsequent action regarding the issue. It has been observed earlier by Dalecki et al. (2009) that print media articles have shifted its trend from mere reporting of facts to news analysis. Many print media organizations started using the concept of news analysis in their articles as a way of supplementing the reported facts.

The study’s finding depicts that newspaper editorials use three writing styles – descriptive, interpretative and persuasive to present and analyse ideas effectively for its readers. Hynds (1990) also found the exclusive use of writing devices such as argumentation, explanation and descriptions to enhance the presentation and comprehensibility of the newspaper editorials. The way editors use different forms of writing styles in their arguments to express and explain certain issues is a significant feature. Newspaper editorials employ different forms of exposition such as interpretation, description, argumentation, persuasion, satire, background historical analysis, suggestion and many other writing techniques for comprehending and influencing the readers’ mind.
1.7 Readability and Linguistic Structure

It is interesting to note that there is a correlation between linguistic structure and readability of the concerned text. One aspect that is observed from the present study as well as previous studies is that the difficulty level of a text depends on two main factors – sentence length and word length. The result of the present study empirically supports the earlier researches that newspaper texts are written in a difficult manner. This indicates that the public information materials are written beyond the suitability of the public readers. If a text is written beyond the level of the readers’ understanding, it needs to be revised thoroughly for enhancing the readability.

In objective testing of readability, as in the case of the present study, sentence length is one factor in analysing readability. Many researches have supported the fact that shorter sentences are easier to read than longer sentences (Sherman, 1893; Lorge, 1944; Flesch, 1946, 1949; Brinton and Danielson, 1958; Bormuth, 1966, 1969; Partow-Navid, 1991; Jacobson, 1998). The present study came out with the finding that the overall length of the editorial (in terms of the number of words) matters in predicting the readability of the entire editorial. The finding suggests that shorter editorials (less than or equal to 400 words) are slightly easier to read than longer editorials (exceeding 400 words).

There may be two factors on which the length of the editorial depends – the average sentence length and the number of sentences used in the editorial. In the present study, majority of the editorials are longer editorials. So, the main reason for low readability of the newspaper editorials in the present study is the use of more number of words resulting in long sentences and more number of sentences. In a long sentence, the reader needs more time to read the sentence and retain its meaning. Addition of multiple ideas by using more words also leads to long sentences. In longer time, it is more likely that the reader may tend to forget the interrelated concepts and ideas, that is, the formation of meaning by using the subject and the predicate involved. This leads to disintegration of interest which ultimately affects the overall readability of the text. The same pattern follows with lengthy texts.
In the present study where majority of the editorials are lengthy (beyond 400 words), there are high chances of inculcation of multiple ideas by using more number of words and sentences. This may create problems in retaining the concepts and its meaning in the readers’ mind. Moreover, in analytical and opinion articles like editorials, the use of different writing devices such as styles of presentation, mood and tone, examples, comparison, historical background, etc., are exhibited in diverse ways to provide an in-depth explanation to the reader. So, with all these factors taken into consideration, longer editorials proved to be less readable than the shorter editorials for its readers.

One way of enhancing better readability is by the way of editing. Editing process provides a chance for revising the written text. Roberts et al., (1994) found improvements in readability of articles after peer review and editing processes. Perhaps, deadlines and speed lead to less attention on the readability on the part of the reporters (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007). In the light of the present research findings, it is suitable to adopt a much in-depth and thorough editing process for writing the editorials with special consideration on the sentence and word structure without diminishing the meaning of the ideas embedded in the newspaper editorials.

Readability is a cornerstone of communication (Leong et al., 2002) and it is used to tackle the issue of difficulty in reading. The findings of the present study which confirm with many of the earlier studies indicate the fact that measuring readability is an important aspect of determining how effective and suitable the written text are for its readers. It has also been rightly predicted by DuBay (2004) that when text exceeds the reading ability of the readers, they usually stop reading. The main goals of readability – comprehension and the conveying of information (Sattari, 2012) proved to be productive ways of creating an effective communication between writers and readers.

2. Inferences

This section presents the interpretation of the present research findings from the perspectives of the theoretical framework and the research gaps identified for the study. Drawing inferences is a way of logically reasoning the research findings and deriving a wider perception of the research results. In order to make the research findings
meaningful and significant, the logical inferences are drawn upon by substantiating the findings with the relevant theories. Along with this, the fulfilment of the research gaps are also discussed in order to check whether the goals of the research are satisfied or not.

The study is based on an in-depth study of newspaper editorials. The study is among few researches which exclusively deal with the study of newspaper editorials. According to Berlo (1960) in his SMCR model, messages are expressions of ideas (content), expressed in a particular way (treatment), through the use of a code. The basis of the research study where each newspaper editorial is considered as David Berlo’s ‘message’ having three components code, content and treatment is justified from the study’s finding that each newspaper editorial can be divided into three components based on writing style, subject theme and tone of presentation. The writing style, subject theme and tone can be designated as Berlo’s code, content and treatment respectively.

One of the research gaps identified for the study is that no study in the knowledge of the researcher was found using the parameters of code, content and treatment (based on David Berlo’s ‘message’ structure) of any written text, specifically newspaper editorials. The study and its finding that newspaper editorials are found to be composed of three components – code (writing style), content (subject theme) and treatment (tone) validates the fact that this study may be the first of its kind to apply the parameters of Berlo’s ‘message structure’ in any written text, specifically newspaper editorials. The meaning of the newspaper editorial lies in the underlying concepts of its specific writing style, subject theme and tone of presentation taken as a combined parameter.

The study which measures the readability of the newspaper editorials of English national dailies of India depicts that the editorials have low readability level. The study fulfilled the research gap which states that very few studies on the readability of newspaper editorials have been conducted so far. The study, in fact may be the first of its kind to study the readability of newspaper editorials in terms of writing style, subject theme and tone of presentation taken as a combined measure. As predicted by interpretative theorist Ricoeur (1976) that the meaning of a text is always a pattern of a whole, not just a composite of individual elements, writing style, subject theme and tone
of the editorial taken as a composite structure indicates the overall structure, purpose and meaning of the editorials.

Even in the Indian context, researches on readability of newspaper editorials have not been found in the knowledge of the researcher so far. The study which may be one of the first of its kind to study the editorials of Indian newspapers provides significant findings in view of the existing status of newspaper editorials and its problems in India. The study found that the editorials of the highly circulating English national dailies of India are difficult to read and the ways in which they are written are not suitable enough for its readers. Hence, the study’s finding validates Berlo’s (1960) idea that in constructing the written messages, writers need to sequence their words and appropriately arrange their sentences so that their structure reflects the meanings for the relationships among the elements denoted by the words. There is a need to reconsider the structuring and framing of newspaper editorials using the word and sentence variables.

Regarding the technique of measuring readability in the study, popular readability index Flesch Reading Ease Score test was applied to the newspaper editorials. With specific regard to newspaper editorials, Flesch Reading Ease formula has never been used as a measure of predicting the readability of editorials of any Indian newspapers in the knowledge of the researcher. The study proves that Flesch index can be successfully applied to measure the readability of the Indian newspaper editorials. This fulfils another research gap in regard to the usability and applicability of Flesch index for measuring readability of Indian newspaper editorials.

As Flesch Reading Ease Score formula is based on textual linguistic factors, editors should possess working knowledge of the written linguistic structures. This substantiates Barbara O’Keefe’s (1988) message design logic in the process of generating messages that writers should design their written messages logically to make the readers comprehend the message easily. Depending on the purpose of the editorials such as to describe, interpret or to persuade its readers, editors have to design the editorials in specific forms by using certain tones such as argumentation, satire, praise, appreciation, sorrow, etc.
The finding of the study that newspaper editorials are hard to read indicates that for effective generation and transmission of messages (editorials), editors, do require a lot of planning before writing editorials and passing it on to its readers. John Greene’s (1984) *Action Assembly theory* which states that message producers should possess both *content knowledge* and *procedural knowledge* (Littlejohn, 2001) can be brought into consideration in the discussion here. Editors should possess the in-depth knowledge of the issues they are writing about and also the process of expressing it. Greene gives more emphasis on procedural knowledge as producing an effective message needs more knowledge of ‘knowing how to do and present things properly’. Hence, editors should know the appropriate writing style and tone to present the specific subject matter to its readers.

Another finding of the study relating to linguistic structure of the newspaper editorials is that length of the editorial (in terms of the number of words) is one factor used in predicting the readability of the newspaper editorials. The finding shows that shorter editorials (less than or equal to 400 words) are slightly easier to read than longer editorials (exceeding 400 words). This finding can be correlated with another research gap indentified for the study which states that no study was found relating to readability in terms of length of a given text. The study, for the first time depicts that longer written texts are more difficult to read than shorter text.

This aspect of the research finding brings Kintsch’s (1998) *Construction-Integration theory* in the limelight. The theory describes that text comprehension follows a two-stage process. The first stage deals with the surface features, that is the words and other linguistic factors and the second stage deals with the presentation of ideas and mental organization of textual concepts and meanings. The favouring of using more words (leading to lengthy editorials) in the newspaper editorials features the first stage (construction stage) of Kintsch’s theory where editors focus on the concept of using words as an important linguistic factor in constructing the meaning of the messages (editorials).
The study also observes varying subject themes of newspaper editorials. The finding shows that for editors, issues on politics, crime/police/law & order and science & technology are the most preferred themes while writing editorials. Two important concepts to be taken into consideration here is Wilson’s (2002) strategy selection and goal pursuit in the process of message selection. In the process of strategy selection, editors select the specific type of issues while in the case of goal pursuit, editors create and present the message (editorials) for fulfilling their goals. This is how editors try to influence its readers through attractively planned messages. Out of the various issues on different subject themes, editors give more importance only to specific issues to show the importance of these issues. This suggests that the readers need to think about these issues more than other issues.

With diverse range of issues happening every day, editors perform strategy selection by considering the most important and contemporary issue of the society as the editorial content. Dissemination of such issues to the public are considered utmost important and urgent as people need to form public opinion about such issues in the social world. At the same time, editors perform goal pursuit by inculcating certain techniques in the writing such as making the written material highly readable, interesting, and appealing and above all enlivening it with human emotions. In pursuing for goal pursuit, the ultimate factor is the construction of the written messages by using proper linguistic characteristics – both the syntactic and semantic elements.

In view of the study’s finding regarding the preference of writing style, subject theme and tone in newspaper editorials, it is equally important to bring the importance of Lasswell’s Propaganda theory (1934) and McCombs and Shaw’s Agenda-Setting theory (1972). Editors strategically select certain issues and accordingly toned it as editorials to create ideas and images in the minds of the public. The selected issues (of specific subject themes) are written in specific styles such as descriptive, interpretative and persuasive and given certain shades of emotions such as argumentative, satirical, joy, sadness, etc., on the basis of the intentions and goals of the editors. The way the selected issues are projected and presented before the public is a clear form of exhibiting propaganda to the public. In one sense, editorials have become an instrument of propaganda. This explains
why editors frame the structure of editorials by the use of certain writing techniques. Hence, editorials not merely inform but influence and mould the public minds too.

The same finding presented above can also be used to justify the framework of McCombs and Shaw’s Agenda-Setting theory (1972). Newspaper editorials, which have a high interpretative power, act as an agenda for its readers. They mould readers’ perception of events in the society to order and organise their own world on the basis of such perceptions. The issues highlighted in the editorials are the agendas that influence the public to form public opinion in the society. In selecting certain themes, displaying them in specific writing style and perfecting them with appropriate tones, editors through their editorials try to shape the social reality for its readers. The selected theme, its writing style and tone projected the overall agenda that the editor wants to convey to its readers.

Through the three structural components of writing style (code), subject theme (content) and tone (treatment), editorials encourage people to think and try to bring changes in their mind by arousing people to form public opinion in the society. As part of the agenda-setting function of mass media, editors also focus specifically on certain parts of the issue that are extremely important within the message. Such points may be highlighted at the end with a certain tone or may be found repeatedly focused in almost all paragraphs in the editorial. The important parts may also be depicted in the form of a satire or quotes or even a phrase. This gives an idea to its readers to attach importance in certain areas within the message (editorial) itself.

The in-depth analysis of the editorials in terms of the three components – code, content and treatment provided diverse areas of analysis and interpretation in terms of the research findings of the study. This aspect of categorising, studying and analysing the newspaper editorials though new in the field of research regarding newspaper text, proves to be an innovative technique of studying the structure of newspaper texts in detail. Moreover, the idea of measuring the readability of such text supports the research with interesting insights in its findings. Certain theories have been validated and tested
accordingly showing that valid and logical conclusions can easily be drawn from the research findings.

The discussions pertaining to the present study’s findings and previous research findings and the inferences drawn by correlating the study’s findings along with the theoretical framework of the study provided a wider analysis and interpretation of the research findings. The concept of analysing the in-depth structure of newspaper editorials and measuring the readability of the high circulating newspapers is an innovative way of depicting the suitability of the editorials among its readers. The interpretations presented in this chapter helped in drawing logical conclusions out of the research findings. It also provided a platform for generating useful suggestions for further researches which will be presented in the next chapter along with the conclusions of the study.