CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Human civilization thrives on communication. With diverse ways and means of communication, humans have been able to maintain and upgrade their survival in the society. Due to a high speed growth in the overall population, culture and society and as mankind strives for growth and modernization in all spheres, communication in the public and mass scenario is gaining grounds at a high rate. In the contemporary information age where information constitutes the major source of education, professional work, research and entertainment, the importance of information is highly valued. The mass media through its various forms like the print media, electronic media, films and the new media is wholly responsible for disseminating messages in the form of information to a large number of people whose magnitude and diversity is unimaginably wide.

One way of imparting, sharing and disseminating information, ideas and knowledge among people at the mass level is through the dominant form of print media, that is, the newspapers. Newspapers are one of the most conventional and popular forms of conveying a wide array of information sources to its readers. Newspapers provide daily updates to the readers about various issues of the society – from domestic to global concerns on a regular basis. Moreover, the exhibition of diverse themes and content in newspapers provides a good option for its readers to read newspapers regularly. According to Reah (1998), along with the news segments, newspapers also consist of other segments such as analysis, comment, entertainment and advertising which are opinionated information. It is quite evident that newspapers provide information in the form of news and views. Readers can find variety of information that suits their level of interest in newspaper content. So, newspapers have become one of the most important sources of daily discourse for the public life.
Reading newspaper has been one of the regular activities of man, say, “for some people, reading newspapers is a necessity, perhaps in the form of a morning ritual, in order to keep up to date with what is happening in the surrounding world, while it is an ideal activity for relaxation for others” (Hillbom, 2009, p. 4). Hence reading newspaper is one of the choicest lifestyles of the present days. History has shown that coming of any new medium has not affected the presence of newspapers. It is a medium that has always augmented itself to suit the requirements of the day. Even if the mainstream media including the newspaper is heavily threatened by the digital new media, peoples’ habit of reading newspaper never diminishes. Newspapers, still occupy the biggest space among the printed media. That way, the message carried by the newspaper has to have the biggest capacity to convey the message to the readers in particular. Hence, in order to make the newspapers easily understandable by its readers, it should be written in a very easy and simple language.

Due to reasonable cost and easy availability of newspapers, it is logical to conclude that newspaper messages reach the core audience effectively. Our day to day experience in newspaper reading also appears to agree with this assumption. One can habitually go through the newspaper headlines over a cup of tea in the morning, only to enjoy the aroma of the tea as well as that of the fresh newspaper pages coming out of the printing machine. In contrast with this assumption, many studies comparing readability between newspapers and magazines found that magazines were easier to read than newspapers (Fowler & Smith, 1979). In fact, some readers say that they have no time to read the newspaper content and some even claim to read it in the evening. The emerging trend of readers spending less time in reading newspapers has become a serious concern.

With the influx of digital print media forms, readers are getting divided between paper publications and online publications. Due to this, the character of the medium and the readership habits has also undergone a change. ‘Reading newspapers’ has started to become ‘viewing newspapers’ where readers tend to see the visuals (both pictures and words) printed on the text rather than trying to read and understand the ‘message’. Therefore, in order to find out the shift in the change in readership patterns, the worthiness of the service provided by the newspapers needs to be re-examined. There is a
real necessity to check whether newspapers have become a tough medium for the readers or it is for want of higher readability on the part of the written messages. The present study highlights the efficacy of newspaper editorials, one of the most important sections of newspaper content by analysing how readable the editorials are written for its readers.

1. The Concept of Readability

As newspapers are primarily meant for the general audience, here comes a great necessity for knowing the readability level of newspaper texts. The concept of readability is one of the most important factors that determine the efficacy of a written material. “Readability is what makes some texts easier to read and understand than others” (DuBay, 2004, p. 3, 2007a, p. 4). The concept is different from the term ‘legibility’, which is concerned with the ease of recognising letters and words. Readability indicates the degree of ease of understanding a particular written text. In simple terms, readability is a concept which has to do with the comprehensibility of the written text by its readers.

According to Webster Dictionary, ‘readable’ indicates the text being “fit to be read, interesting, agreeable and attractive in style; and enjoyable.” The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines ‘readable’ as something “that is easy, interesting and enjoyable to read”. According to The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, readability means “easy or interesting to read – capable of being read” (as cited in Fry, 2002, p. 286). The dictionary definitions simply focus on the concept that readability is the ease of reading a particular text. It expresses that readability is how easily we understand and enjoy reading a particular text. When the text is interesting, readers find it easy to understand.

For Richards, et al. (1992, p. 306), readability means: “how easily written materials can be read and understood. This depends on several factors including the average length of sentences, the number of new words contained, and the grammatical complexity of the language used in a passage” (as cited in Zamanian & Heydari, 2012, p. 43). The definition emphasizes on the textual and linguistic characteristics of written material as the main determinants of readability. It is a matter of fact that the way we write matters a lot in depicting the ease or difficulty of what we write for our readers.
simple terms, text readability depicts how easily a reader understands a piece of text (Pitler and Nenkova, 2008) and the ease with which a document can be read (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall (1949) gave a very comprehensive definition which says readability is: “the sum total (including all the interactions) of all those elements within a given piece of printed material that affect the success a group of readers have with it. The success is the extent to which they understand it, read it at an optimal speed, and find it interesting.” According to this definition a highly readable text is the one which fulfills the three criteria where: (i) readers can easily understand the words and phrases (ii) readers can read a given passage at optimum speed (iii) readers read the given text with great interest. The concept of readability attempts to link the reader's level of understanding with that of the textual reading level (Bentley, 1972).

According to George Klare (1963), readability is precisely defined as “the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing.” This definition focuses exclusively on the writing style, which is considered unrelated from issues such as content, coherence, and organization (DuBay, 2004). A coherent and readable writing is the result of the linking of the overall elements that facilitate the ultimate text comprehension (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Better comprehension ultimately leads to conveying of information effectively. Hargis et al. (1998) defined readability as the “ease of reading words and sentences.” This depicts that readability depends on two main variables of written language – words and sentences. In linguistic terms, these two factors are also attributes of clear writing.

Readability is a concept which takes into consideration various aspects of the reading process. As pointed out rightly by Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall (1949), the degree of readability of a text depends on three factors: the degree of understanding, the speed of reading and the degree of interest. The higher the degree of understanding, the higher the readability of the text is. Similarly, a highly readable text can be read at a comparatively higher speed. The interest level of the given text also determines the
The degree of readability of the text with more interesting text pertaining to more readability. The concept of readability integrates the overall reading patterns of the reader.

According to Klare (1984), the issue of readability is an important factor that is linked to the reading skills of the readers. If a particular text is written at the appropriate level of reading skills of the reader, it would amount to higher degrees of success in reading. So, it is quite imperative to write the text for the right readers. It is also equally important to note that readability deals with the different aspects of reading behaviour among people — peoples’ ability and inability to read certain text. The concept of readability itself is a predictive factor for determining the efficacy of written texts among its readers.

Gray and Leary (1935) found 228 variables affecting textual difficulty and are grouped under four broad categories — content, style, format and features of organisation according to priority of importance (as cited in DuBay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). Of all the four categories, content which depicts the subject matter of the written text was the most important factor. The style takes into consideration the semantic and syntactic factors within the writing. Third in importance is format, which talks about design, typography and illustrations. After the format is the ‘features of organization’, which consists of different sections of the written text such as chapters, sub-themes, headings, paragraphs, etc.

Initially, many of the scholars found that content, format and features of organization cannot be measured statistically while writing style which considers the semantic and syntactic variables were quite measurable (DuBay, 2004). Semantic features related to the word such as word frequency, word familiarity, length of the word in syllables and syntactic feature related to the sentence such as sentence length (in terms of the number of words) can be easily measurable statistically. Scholars eventually predict that semantic (word) and syntactic (sentence) structures constitute to be the best indicators of textual readability (Fry, 2002).

Readability is a complex concept as it deals with the understanding of the written text by its varied readers. According to the Board of Directors of the International
Reading Association (1985), "many factors enter into determining the readability of materials, including the syntactic complexity of sentences, density of concepts, abstractness of ideas, text organization, coherence and sequence of ideas, page format, length of type line, length of paragraphs, intricacy of punctuation, and the use of illustrations and colour. In addition, research has shown that student interest in the subject-matter plays a significant role in determining the readability of materials".

G. Harry McLaughlin, who created the SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledygook) readability formula in 1969, has a rather different approach to define readability. According to him, readability is the "the degree to which a given class of people find certain reading matter compelling and comprehensible." Here, McLaughlin depicts readability as the outcome of the "interaction between the text and readers of known levels of skill, knowledge, and interest" (DuBay, 2004, p. 3). It is a complimentary process that exists between the text and its readers. The readability of a particular text is dependent upon the reading behaviour of the specific readers.

On a holistic approach, readability is the "ease of reading created by the choice of content, style, design, and organization that fit the prior knowledge, reading skill, interest, and motivation of the audience" (DuBay, 2007a, p. 6). Hence, according to Dubay (p. 5), "there are two contributors to easy reading – the reader and the text.

Those features of the 'reader' that make reading easy are:
- Prior knowledge
- Reading skill
- Interest
- Motivation

Those features of the 'text' that make reading easy are:
- Content
- Style
- Design
- Organization."
Reading process involves a considerable amount of interplay and blending between the textual features and the reader's characteristics. The reader's reading habit is very much linked with the reader's reading ability and comprehensibility of the text. So, the linguistic and the textual characteristics such as vocabulary, word length, sentence structure, nature of the language and text and characteristics of the readers such as type of reader, the purpose of reading (by the reader), the reader's impression about the subject are certain factors that need to be considered while preparing a written text. This will ultimately facilitate greater understanding of the concerned text by its readers.

The present study analyses the readability of newspaper editorials from the perspective of the textual characteristics focusing into consideration the linguistic style of writing of the editorials of specific newspapers. The linguistic style of writing includes the textual quantitative features - word and average sentence length, vocabulary difficulty and word frequency which are easily measurable. Along with the style of writing, the study also considers another textual factor, that is, 'content' as an indicator of affecting textual readability. It also analyses whether specific subject theme content of newspaper editorial affects the textual readability of the particular editorial or not.

2. Historical Perspective of Readability Studies

The origin of the earliest readability study was the concept of studying literature from a statistical view point by English literature professor, L. A. Sherman in the 1880s (DuBay, 2004). “In his book *Analytics of Literature, A Manual for the Objective Study of English Prose and Poetry* (1893), he showed how sentence-length averages shortened over time:

- Pre-Elizabethan times: 50 words per sentence
- Elizabethan times: 45 words per sentence
- Victorian times: 29 words per sentence
Sherman's work proved to be a landmark study in the field of reading. He discovered that using shorter sentences and concrete terms increase the overall readability of the text. "Sherman was the first to use statistical analysis for the task of analysing readability, introducing a new and objective method of literary criticism" (DuBay, 2004, p. 11, 2007a, p. 42). Sherman's research provided a pioneering support in determining the comprehensibility and efficacy of written texts in the following years.

During the 1920s, a new interest in the readability studies culminated in the education discipline. In 1921, psychologist Edward L. Thorndike of Columbia University came out with his publication, "The Teacher's Word Book which listed 10,000 words by frequency of use" (DuBay, 2004, p. 12, 2007b, p. 4). Thorndike found that frequent words often used in written text such as a, an, the, is, of, to, etc., are comparatively more familiar than other words. These words are also the simplest and the shortest ones which are easy to understand. Hence, using of these words more frequently in a text makes the text easier to read.

Johnson (1946) found that "twenty-five percent of the 67,200 words used in the 24 life stories written by university freshmen consisted of these ten words: the, I, and, to, was, my, in, of, a, and it" (as cited in Dubay, 2004, p. 12, 2007a, p. 43, 2007b, p. 4). The word frequency test eventually proved to be an effective method to test the readability of written texts. Many people from the academic discipline such as teachers and writers began to select books for their students on the basis of Thorndike's word frequency measure.

Vocabulary plays a great role in depicting the readers reading skills. The reader's knowledge and comprehension ability can be easily recognised from his vocabulary skills. Chall and Dale (1995) also depicted that text difficulty depends on the vocabulary factor. Thorndike further continued his research work with the publication of two more books in 1932 and 1944 which listed 20,000 and 30,000 words by frequency of use respectively. (Dubay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). Until the arrival of proper readability measures, the vocabulary test measures were frequently used by academicians and communicators for various purposes.
The listing of word frequency to test textual difficulty was found to be quite reasonable. According to Klare (1968), “not only do humans tend to use some words much more often than others, they recognize more frequent words more rapidly than less frequent, prefer them, and understand and learn them more readily. It is not surprising, therefore, that this variable has such a central role in the measurement of readability.” During this time, development of school textbooks came to be greatly influenced by the vocabulary test measure developed by Thorndike. This concept of vocabulary frequency lists proved to be a great help for teachers to evaluate the readability of reading materials for their students and classes.

Gradually in U.S.A, the adult literacy studies were the first studies conducted to evaluate the reading ability of the general readers (DuBay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). In 1917, the first adult literacy test was systematically conducted among the military personnel in the U.S. Following the success of such literacy test on a mass scale, the testing of adult civilians began in Chicago in 1937. The respondents’ reading skills in general reading materials were tested and the respondents were graded accordingly on the basis of their different reading ability. This paved a way for assessing the reading grade level of people on a mass scale. The literacy testing of the adults discovered that “general readers in the U.S. were adults of limited reading ability. The average adult was able to read with pleasure nothing, but the simplest adult materials, usually cheap fiction or graphically presented news of the day” (DuBay, 2004, p. 4, 2007a, p. 14).

Still, the main concern of educators, writers, journalists, corporations and Government agencies was the issue of a lack of a generalised method for measuring readability of a particular text. Thereafter, a series of research studies were conducted by a community of readability scholars such as Edgar Dale and Ralph Tyler (1934), Bernice Leary and William S. Gray (1935), Irving Lorge (1938, 1944), Rudolf Flesch (1946, 1949, 1964, 1979), Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall (1948), Robert Gunning (1952), Wilson Taylor (1953), George Klare (1963, 1975, 1976, 1980), John, R. Bormuth (1966, 1967, 1969), G. Harry McLaughlin (1968), Edward Fry (1963, 1968, 1969, 1977) and many more. These scholars were credited for developing readability measurement techniques of
a given text. The readability measures proved to be a boon for those groups of people who were really concerned about the readability factors in their texts.

Readability, as a matter of fact is associated with easy understanding of the written text by its readers. So it takes into consideration the use of easy language in the construction of the whole written message. Readability is the linguistic complexity of the text, especially its semantic and syntactic dimensions (Chebat et al., 2003). Moreover, in print media messages we find a large number of readers with varying levels of reading skills. So, it is always beneficial to prepare messages with easy linguistic characteristics so as to make the texts understandable effectively to its wide variety of readers. According to Hackos and Stephens (1997), some of the factors that make a text highly readable are:

- Using short, simple, familiar words.
- Avoiding jargon.
- Using culture-and-gender-neutral language.
- Using correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Using simple sentences, active voice, and present tense.
- Beginning instructions in the imperative mode by starting sentences with action verb.
- Using simple graphic elements such as bulleted lists and numbered steps to make information visually accessible (as cited in DuBay, 2004, 2007a).

Following these golden rules of writing will enhance the readability of a text to some extent. It is always advisable to write a text in simple and easy ways to make the text easily understandable for its readers. A good writing is the one which is easily understandable by its readers. It is the reader’s degree of understanding that depicts the overall efficacy of the written text.

3. Measurement of Readability

The early forms of readability measurements were quantitative approaches to test the readability of the concerned text through mathematical readability formulae such as
Flesch Reading Ease Score, SMOG Index, Fog Index, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, SMOG Readability and the Fry Readability Graph. “Readability formulae are usually defined as mathematical equations that can be used to predict the level of reading ability required to understand a particular piece of written material” (Burton, 1991, p. 22). “The basic process in these readability tests involves counting the combination of syllables, words, sentences and paragraphs to estimate the difficulty of the language level used” (Woods et. al., 1998, as cited in Sattari & Wallstrom, 2013, p. 205).

The readability formulae developed in the early period provided a way to predict textual difficulty and created a means to write text materials appropriately for the intended readers (Hiebert, 2012). The formulae provided a good scope of enhancing better communication between writers and readers. “Readability measures have generally been developed as an ‘objective’ measure against writing complexity, and to estimate the reading or education level required for comprehension of the text” (Woods et al., 1998, p. 51). “Most traditional readability formulae are based on two measures that have been verified by many research studies:

i. **Syntactic difficulty** (grammatical complexity), usually measured by sentence length.

ii. **Semantic difficulty** (meaning or word meaning). A common measure of this is word length measured in syllables or number of letters but sometimes semantic difficulty is judged by frequency, either an actual frequency count of the word or the fact that the word does or does not appear on a list of familiar words” (Fry, 2002, p. 287).

Such forms of quantitative readability test contribute to text-specific objective testing of a given text taking into consideration the specific textual variables such as length of the sentence, number of syllables in a word, word familiarity, etc. Jacobson (1998) observed “that shorter sentences are easier to read than longer sentences and short words are easier to read than long words” (as cited in Ulusoy, 2006, p. 324). After applying the mathematical readability formula on specific text, the result comes with a quantifiable number. This numerical value denotes the readability score of the given text.
and it depicts how 'difficult' or 'easy' the text is. Some of the quantitative methods for measuring readability are given below:

- **Lively and Pressey Formula**

  Lively and Pressey of Ohio State University developed the first readability formula in 1923 by developing a statistical method for measuring the vocabulary difficulty of school books (Dubay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). They use the following three different methods:

  i. The number of different words (the vocabulary range).
  ii. The number of “zero-index words,” words not in *The Teacher's Word Book*, the Thorndike list of 10,000 words.
  iii. The median of the index numbers of the words taken from the same Thorndike list of 10,000 words (ibid).

  The researchers depicted “that the median index number was the best indicator of the vocabulary burden of these reading materials: the higher the index number, the easier the vocabulary; the lower the index, the harder the vocabulary” (Dubay, 2004, p. 14, 2007a, p. 47, 2007b, p. 6).

- **Winnetka formula**

  Vogel and Washburne (1928) of Winnetka, developed their formula, called the Winnetka formula where investigators “could objectively match the grade level of a text with the reading ability of the reader. The match was not perfect but it was better than subjective judgments. The Winnetka formula, the first one to predict difficulty by grade levels, became the prototype of modern readability formulae” (DuBay, 2004, p. 14, 2007a, p. 48, 2007b, p. 16) where researchers started evaluating the difficulty of the text through objective testing.
• Lorge Index

Lorge formula is considered to be one of the earliest readability formulae for assessing textual readability. Lorge (1944) published his new formula in the *Teachers College Record* in an article entitled, “Predicting Readability,” which uses three variables – the average sentence length in words, the number of prepositional phrases per 100 words, and the number of hard words not on the Dale list of 769 easy words (DuBay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). Lorge's readability index provided the framework work for developing two of the most popular readability formulae developed by – Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall in 1948 and Rudolf Flesch, also in the same year.

• Flesch Reading Ease Score Formula

Rudolf Flesch in 1948 came out with one of the most famous readability formulae so far in the history of readability studies. Flesch Reading Ease Score is calculated as,

\[
RE = 206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW)
\]

Where,

- \(RE\) = Reading Ease
- \(ASL\) = Average sentence length (i.e., the number of words divided by the number of sentences)
- \(ASW\) = Average number of syllables per word (i.e., the number of syllables divided by the number of words).

The formula produces a numerical score known as Reading Ease (Readability score), ranging from 0 to 100 where 60-70 is regarded as a standard or ideal score. The higher the score, the easier is the text to read. A score of 100 depicts the text as the easiest and 0, the most difficult.

Along with the formula, Flesch also gave a Reading Grade Level chart with the corresponding readability score. The Reading Grade Level tells us the difficulty level of textual materials on the basis of the general educational grade level. The easiest readability score range is written at the 5th school grade level and the most difficult score...
range at the college graduate level. Flesch (1949, p.149), in his famous book *The Art of Readable Writing*, explained the Reading Ease Scale in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Ease Score</th>
<th>Style Description</th>
<th>Estimated Reading Grade</th>
<th>Estimated Per cent of U.S. Adults (1949)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 30:</td>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 50:</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>13th to 16th grade</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 60:</td>
<td>Fairly difficult</td>
<td>10th to 12th grade</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 70:</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>8th and 9th grade</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 80:</td>
<td>Fairly easy</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 90:</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 to 100:</td>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Dale-Chall Formula**

  In 1948, Edgar Dale, Professor of Education at Ohio State University and Jeanne Chall, founder and director of the Harvard Reading Laboratory introduced their readability formula, Dale-Chall formula in two in two issues of the *Educational Research Bulletin* (1948) (DuBay, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). Completely different from other modern formulae, the Dale-Chall formula uses a list of 3,000 easy words. Using the formula requires counting the number of “hard” words—those not on the list. In *Readability Revisited: The New Dale-Chall Readability Formula*, Chall and Dale (1995) updated their list of 3,000 easy words and improved their original formula, then 47 years old (ibid).

- **Fog Index**

  One of the simplest formulae for adult readability testing is the Fog Index developed by Robert Gunning in his *The Technique of Clear Writing* (1952). It is given as,

  \[
  \text{Fog Index} = 0.4 \times (\text{Average sentence length} + \text{Percentage of hard words})
  \]
Here, hard words depict words having more than two syllables. “The fog formula produces a score representing the number of formal years of education required to be able to read the written information” (Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, p. 359). It calculates the readability scores of reading materials from the 4th reading grade to college level. Its ideal score is 7-8th grade level.

• Cloze Test

An attempt to “free up” readability measurement from word and sentence complexity based readability formulae was Taylor’s (1953) cloze procedure (Chall, 1998). In a cloze test, every fifth word is regularly deleted from a text and the respondents are required to fill in the blanks (the deleted words). The number of correct words or the percentage of correct replacement constitutes the readability score for that passage (Bormuth, 1967; Gunter, 2000; Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). The higher the cloze score, the easier the text is. Cloze test measures the individual’s reading skills and the level of understanding of the concerned text. It became one of the popular readability measures that assesses readability of a particular text from the reader’s perspective.

• Bormuth Mean Cloze Formula

Bormuth (1966, 1969) further made more intensive studies in cloze testing procedures. He developed the Bormuth Mean Cloze formula (1969) by using “three variables: number of words on the original Dale-Chall list of 3,000, average sentence length in words, and average word length in letters” (DuBay, 2004, p. 44, 2007a, p. 83). The Bormuth’s formula for Cloze test is given as:

\[ R = .886593 - .083640 \text{(LET/W)} + .161911 \text{(DLL/W)}^3 - 0.021401 \text{(W/SEN)} + .000577 \text{(W/SEN)}^2 - .000005 \text{(W/SEN)}^3 \]

Where:

- \( R \) = Mean cloze score
- \( \text{LET} \) = Letters in passage X
- \( \text{W} \) = Words in passage X
- \( \text{DLL} \) = Number of words in the original Dale-Chall list in passage X
- \( \text{SEN} \) = Sentences in passage X
The cloze score ranges from 30 to 100 where 30 depict the easiest level and 100, the most difficult level.

The Bormuth Mean Cloze formula was later on adapted for measuring the Degrees of Reading 1981 which is given below as:

\[ \text{DRP} = (1 - R) \times 100 \]

Where:

\[ \text{DRP} = \text{Degrees of Reading Power} \]

The DRP depicts a reading ease score on a scale of 0-100 with normally a score of 30 depicting ‘very easy’ and 100 depicting ‘very hard’.

- **SMOG Index**

  In 1969, G. Harry McLaughlin published his SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledygook) formula as,

  \[ \text{SMOG Index} = 3 + \text{Square Root of Polysyllable Count per 30 sentences} \]

  The formula predicts the educational reading grade level of the written text. It calculates the readability scores of reading materials from the 4th reading grade to college level.

- **Fry Readability Graph**

  Another interesting readability measure was developed by Edward Fry (1963, 1968), who attempted to determine the readability of texts with the help of a graph (DuBay, 2004). The Fry graph depicts the reading grade level of written texts by using two variables: word length (based on the number of syllables) and sentence length.

- **FORCAST Formula**

  A comparatively newer formula is the FORCAST formula developed on the basis of a study conducted by the *Human Resources Research Organization* on the reading requirements of military occupational specialties in the U.S. Army by Caylor et al. (1973) (as cited in DuBay, 2004). The formula is given as,
Grade level = 20 – (Number of single-syllable words in a 150-word sample ÷ 10)

This grade level formula which predicts the reading grade level was specifically designed and developed for testing adult technical reading materials.

- Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade-Level Formula

In a project sponsored by the U.S. Navy in 1975, the Flesch Reading Ease formula was recalculated to provide a grade-level score. The new formula is now called the Flesch–Kincaid Reading Grade-Level formula (Kincaid et. al., 1975) is given as,

\[
\text{Flesch Kincaid Reading Grade Level} = (0.39 \times \text{Average sentence length}) + (11.8 \times \text{Average number of syllables per word}) - 15.59
\]

The formula produces a numerical score known as Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level which indicates a school grade level. It is used to determine the difficulty of the text written between lower school grade and college level. It’s standard grade score is 7-8th grade.

These are some of the quantitative readability tests which are commonly and widely used in determining textual readability. There are still a large number of formulae which find their application in various areas of readability studies such as Spache Readability Formula (1953), Linsear Write Readability formula, Automated Reader Index (ARI) (1967), Bormuth Readability Index, Coleman-Liau Readability Formula (1967), Powers-Sumner Kearl Readability Formula (1958) and newer formulae like McAlpine ELFAW (2004), Strain Index (2006), and so on. “By 1980s, there were 200 formulae and 1000 studies published on the readability formulae attesting to their strong theoretical and statistical validity” (DuBay, 2004, p. 2). The applicability of readability formulae in various fields of research studies has increasingly become popular.

Nowadays readability formulae are also available on software for computer applications. Well known and widely used formulae such as Flesch Reading Ease Score, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, SMOG and Fog Index. Newer readability formulae such as Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), ATOS (Advantage-TASA Open Standard), and the
Lexile Framework can be easily calculated by scanning the whole text in the computer based readability softwares (Ulusoy, 2006). “DRP uses the ‘Dale List’ and average number of letters per word; ATOS uses number of words, and average grade level of words, and Lexile Framework uses the sentence length and word frequency” (Gunning, 2003, as cited in Ulusoy, 2006, p. 324).

In the latter half of the 20th century, the idea of testing readability from a subjective point of view came up. This takes into consideration the qualitative aspects of analysing the readability of texts. Many researchers felt that mere testing of textual characteristics does not determine the readability of the text (Selzer, 1981; Spiro et al., 1981; Davison, 1985; Nunan, 1985; Stevens et al., 1992; Steinke, 1995; chalk, 1996; Oliver et al., 1998; Woods et al., 1998; Friedman et al., 2006; Janam et al., 2010). They incorporated the idea that reader characteristics such as the reader’s background knowledge, purpose of reading, personal interest and so on play undeniable role in determining the readability level of the text. Though less qualitative techniques are approached so far as compared to the quantitative techniques, some qualitative methods came to be used in many readability assessments.

The checklist method, one of the qualitative techniques is used by evaluators to check important text and reader variables (Ulusoy, 2006). “The framework has four headings. These are content, format, utility and style. Every heading has its own open ended questions. The content includes questions about the depth of the content, new or difficult vocabulary, new concepts, and appropriateness of the text and students’ prior knowledge. Format has questions about illustrations, introductions, summaries and index. Utility includes questions about activities, teacher’s manual and additional readings. The last part of the framework is style and it has questions about the complexity and cohesion of the text or book” (p. 327). The readers have to answer the open ended questions to assess how readable the concerned text is.

Armbruster and Anderson (1981; 1984) developed a qualitative test known as “Textbook Evaluation Response Form” where the quality of the text can be evaluated through a checklist (Ulusoy, 2006). “The checklist can help evaluators to systematis
their subjective judgments about text quality” (p. 328). In this method, text quality such as writing style, depth of the subject, clarity of the concept, illustrations, organizational features, etc., can easily be evaluated subjectively by the evaluator.

The “Leveling System” is another newer form of qualitative readability assessment. Researchers (Clay, 1991; Peterson, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hiebert, 1999) and publishers (Scholastic, Wright Group, Pearson) have developed leveling text methods for reading instruction (Rog & Burton, 2001). According to Gunning (2003, p. 180), “leveling systems are especially important at the beginning levels of reading where type size, number of words on a page, and helpfulness of illustrations can make a significant difference” (as cited in Ulosoy, p. 329). The leveling method analyses the readability of textbooks subjectively by considering a variety of factors such as vocabulary, sentences, length of the reading text, visuals and illustrations, curriculum, format and text organisation. In this method, evaluators rate the readability level of reading materials, specifically textbooks for school students. The reading materials are ranked level 1, level 2, level 3 and so on the basis of their difficulty level. As the level increases, the degree of difficulty increases. Leveled reading materials assist the evaluator in selecting texts materials for students at their appropriate reading levels.

Chall et. al., (1996) in their *Qualitative Assessment of Text Difficulty, A Practical Guide for Teachers and Writers* use graded passages, called “scales,” from published works along with layouts and illustrations for leveling of texts. In this technique, the readability of the reading materials can be determined by comparing it with the scale passages. The assessment is done through the worksheet provided in the book. “The scale passages were selected on the basis of the following grade-related requirements for the reader:

- Knowledge of vocabulary
- Familiarity with sentence structure
- Subject-related and cultural knowledge
- Technical knowledge
- Density of ideas
- Level of reasoning” (DuBay, 2004, p. 37)
Language plays an important role in communication – expressing and understanding the meaning of the messages. Readability assessment is one of the most important approaches for analysing the language used in printed materials. Today, many people who are concerned about the readability factor in their texts started to value the role of language for writing at different reading level to suit the reading skills of different readers. (DuBay, 2007a). Readability formulae, as a more popular method of assessing textual readability have been widely used in various fields of printed texts.

It is evident "that the first language proficiency increases learning skill and comprehension" (Oakland and Lane, 2004, as cited in Sinha et al., p. 1142). The idea for developing readability formulae has also been felt by many native languages. Regarding readability index in languages other than English, many countries have already formulated the readability formulae in their respective languages. Klare (1988) reported that there are readability formulae for 14 languages ranging from Afrikaans to Vietnamese (as cited in Fry, 2006). Today, there are readability formulae for Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Hebrew, Hindi, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean (Rabin, 1988, as cited in DuBay, 2004). The readability formulae for most of these languages use two major variables – vocabulary and the sentence length (Fry, 2006).

Regarding readability formulae in Indian languages, the concept is still in its infancy. So far, in Indian languages, development of Hindi, Marathi and Bangla readability formulae are reported. The readability formula for Bangla developed by Das and Roychoudhury (2006) consists of two variables – the number of syllables per word and the average sentence length. Sinha et al. (2012) attempted to develop readability formulae for Bangla and Hindi texts by using variables like average word length, average sentence length, "jukta-akshar or consonant-conjunct is consonants occurring together in clusters" (p. 1143), etc. Shirke and Sawant (2003) too developed a readability formula for Marathi language. But the applicability of these regional language readability formulae is not yet extended to mass scale.
All languages have unique structural characteristics. Hence, structural characteristics and “any effective metric of readability should be tailored to address language specificities” (Sinha et al., 2012, p. 1142). Indian languages such as Hindi and Bengali, as compared to English language “are very rich in morphology; they have different grapheme characteristics and their orthography is more phonemic than English; they are head-final and allow free order sentence generation” (p. 1142). Earlier attempts have been made to test the readability of Hindi text by using popular English readability formulae such as Flesch Reading Ease and Gunning FOG (Bhagoliwal, 1961; Bhagoliwal, 1965; Agnihotri and Khanna, 1991, as cited in Sinha et al., 2012) but concluded that readability formulae in English language are not helpful for depicting text difficulty. Hence, there is a need to explore the development of full-fledged usable readability formulae in regional Indian languages including Hindi.

4. Understanding Newspaper Editorials

This research is based on an in-depth analytical study of newspaper editorials. Newspaper editorials are a tool of informing, educating and guiding the newspaper readers just like other forms of writings such as news stories and articles. However, the editorials have a greater responsibility to bring an initiation or a change in the rational thinking abilities of its readers. Newspaper editorials though presented in very few numbers in newspapers, still occupy a position of responsibility and play a pivotal role in the society.

A newspaper editorial, which is usually unsigned, reflects the newspaper’s opinion viewpoint. It highlights the collective opinion of the whole editorial board department. Editorials, with their logical interpretations influence readers to think in a rational manner. News presents information objectively whereas editorials present information within the perspectives of the newspaper’s editorial policy. Editorials are important source of forming public opinion by promoting readers to think critically, raise certain questions and ultimately help the readers to take logical decisions. In brief, an editorial, or sometimes known as a ‘leader’ is an opinionated news article that influence its readers.
According to Duyile (2005), an editorial is a “comment or an argument in support of a particular policy, an action, or an idea whether expressed or latent. It can be an argument exhibiting the logical reasoning of the newspaper using the thoughts of the proprietor for the purpose of persuading the readers (audience) to kick against an idea, policy or an action based on facts available” (as cited in Ate, 2008). Editorials are not the daily news report in the sense that they depict the viewpoint of the newspaper to explain and provide an introspection of the news to the readers. Their aim is to make the readers understand the issues presented in the news so as to enable them to take appropriate actions regarding the issues.

In view of its analytical nature, Okoro and Agbo (2003) defined it as a “a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader” (as cited in Ate, 2008, p. 2). A similar view was presented by Iyorkyaa (1996) who defined an editorial as “a journalistic essay which attempts to:

a. inform or explain;

b. persuade or convince;

c. stimulate insight in an entertaining or humorous manner” (as cited in Ate, 2008).

One of the best definitions of editorial was given by M. Lyle Spencer in his book *Editorial Writing: Ethics, Policy and Practice* (1924) which states that “an editorial is an expression of fact and opinion in concise, logical, pleasing order for the sake of entertaining, of influencing opinion, or of interpreting significant news in such a way that its importance to the average reader will be clear.” In this definition, Spencer talks about newspaper editorials as a piece of information that entertains, influences and interprets through the opinion projected by the writer in the given information.

From the definitions cited above, it can be inferred that an editorial expresses the newspaper’s logic and opinion. “The posture of an editorial is influenced by the policy and philosophy of the newspaper, ownership structure and the political environment in which the newspaper is operating” (Ate, 2008, p. 3). A newspaper editorial always
exhibits the institute's flavour and presents views with a collective approach and not from an individualistic perspective. According to Ukonu (2005), "while other opinion pieces like articles, columns and essays are credited to individuals or joint writers, the editorial belongs to newspaper as an institution – a social institution" (as cited in Ate, 2008, p. 4).

"Editorials are usually organised along three schematic categories. They define the situation and give a summary of the news event. They present an evaluation of the situation – especially of actions and actors" (Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148). Editorial "advance pragmatic conclusions in the form of expectations, recommendations, advice, and warnings (van Dijk, 1992, as cited in Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148). An editorial includes all segments of a news story, specifically the ‘why’ and ‘how’ parts. According to Henry and Tator (2002), "unlike news discourse, editorials are conversations among a society’s economic and power elites, with the public being less of an addressee than spectators" (as cited in Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148).

The number and the position of editorials in newspapers are specific. The number of editorials published in newspapers on certain days of the week varies on the basis of the newspaper’s policy. "Editorials appear at two places in a newspaper. The traditional position is on the editorial page, in the left-hand column under the paper’s masthead. Modern composition of the page often places the masthead at the bottom of the page, and editorials, too may be moved from their traditional position. When an editorial is considered to be of sufficient importance, it may be placed on the front page of the newspaper. In this case, it would be labelled ‘editorial’ and would probably be enclosed in a box" (Roy, 2000, p. 109).

The topics presented in newspaper editorials always carry significant values and societal importance. "It must be a significant topical issue that has been reported in the mass media (print and electronic) either by way of hard news or features. Such an issue must attract public attention and debate" (Ate, 2008, p. 3). Since newspaper editorials try to invoke interest among its readers, the human interest angle in editorial stories is extremely high. Apart from national interest stories, societal issues like armed robbery, deaths, accidents, social issues, etc., which can happen to anybody and which affects
public life are presented exclusively in newspaper editorials. The high human interest factor in editorials is supported by the fact that editorials always cater to the affairs of fellow human beings.

Newspaper editorials as a kind of opinion texts “are different from both news reports and advertisements in that they are supposed to present evaluations and comments about the news events already reported in the newspapers” (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2011, p. 3). Though the editorials and the columns are both opinion articles, they have a demarcation line too. According to Onabajo (2000, as cited in Ate, 2008, p. 18), “most editorials have institutional flavours while columns have personal flavours, a distinction that goes beyond the use of ‘we’ and ‘I’”. Even though “both features and editorials give similar room for deeper and logical analysis of issues” (Ate, 2008, p. 17), they are different in some ways. According to Okoro and Agbo (2003), features are mostly accompanied by illustrations while editorials are not illustrated (photographic illustrations) (as cited in Ate, 2008). Most features like columns carry bylines whereas editorials do not carry bylines (ibid).

4.1 Types of Newspaper Editorials

It is also crucial to point out that editorials can be of different types. While logically analysing certain issues, views can be expressed in various ways through editorials. Editorials, by nature of its purpose and functions are categorised into various types.

According to Roy (2000, p. 110), editorials can be categorised into four types:

i. Editorials that interpret
   These may give further information about a news event. They may explain or interpret an important happening in a way that is not possible in a news column.

ii. Editorials that criticise
   These editorials are pegged to a current news topic or situation, and are critical of actions, standards or problems. Editorials bearing criticism have little value unless a solution is suggested.
iii. Editorials that persuade

These are the ‘top salesman’ of the editorial world. Their basic purpose is to inspire or force someone, perhaps the reader or an official body to do something.

iv. Editorials that praise

A worthwhile project for an editorial column is to praise, congratulate, or commend people and organizations that have done something well. A feeling of goodwill results for such an editorial.

According to Hall (2003), editorials are broadly divided into the following seven categories:

i. Editorials of criticism

They criticise policies or decisions that have created a problem. Criticisms are rather constructive than destructive and solutions to the problem are also suggested.

ii. Editorials of attack

Editorials of attack are almost similar to editorials of criticism except they that are more forceful. Such type of editorials calls for changes to be immediately.

iii. Editorials of defense

Editorials of defense stand up for an individual, for a policy, or an idea that is under attack along with the reasons why they should not be attacked.

iv. Editorials of endorsement

Such type of editorials supports a particular idea, policy or person. It is often used to endorse a political candidate.

v. Editorials of praise

Editorials of praise give credit to a group or an individual who has done a job well which is worthy of recognition.

vi. Editorials of appeal

Editorials of this type appeal to people to support for a worthy cause of any kind by means of charity, encouragement, etc.
vii. Editorials of entertainment

Entertaining editorials depict humour while presenting a point which may not necessarily be hard news. It may focus primarily on lighter issues such as art, music, films, etc.

According to Ate (2008, p. 19), “there are three types of editorials, namely, interpretative editorials, controversial editorials and explanatory editorials

i. Interpretative Editorials

These kinds of editorials are chiefly written with a major mission to explain issues at stake by placing facts and figures at the door post of readers for proper illumination of the day’s intelligence. Interpretative editorials could be positive, negative or even neutral in approach or posture depending on the circumstances and the treatment of the subject matter by the editorial writers.

ii. Controversial Editorials

These kinds of editorials are packaged with the particular mission or mandate to propagate a particular or specific point of view. Controversial editorials’ stock in trade is to convince the reader on the desirability or inevitability of a particular issue while presenting or painting the opposite side in bad light. These kinds of editorials have no place for neutrality and can vehemently oppose a cause or outrightly support it.

iii. Explanatory Editorials

Explanatory Editorials only present the vexing issues of the day for the judgment of the reader. These kinds of editorials only open up thought provoking issues of socio-political and economic interest for the attention of the readers and allow them to judge. Such editorials identify a problem, explain it and allow the reader to find solution to it”.

On a holistic view, there are no specific numbers of categories for newspaper editorials. The categorisation of editorials can be made on the basis of the thought process of the individual analyst. The expression of opinion can be exhibited in varying ways according to the motive and mood of editorial writers.
4.2 Functions of Newspaper Editorials

Newspaper editorials, by definition, provide an in-depth analysis and interpretation of important issues. They provide logical opinion to help the readers understand the issues being discussed in editorials. According to Ate (2006), the “opinion function of the mass media has made editorial writing a celebrated concept for serious-minded newspapers just as news commentary is to broadcast media” (as cited in Ate, 2008, p. 3). Capturing the public opinion function of editorials, Idemili (undated) in Onyeka (2005, as cited in Ate, 2008) depicts “that the editorial helps the reader to bring order out of chaos of news” by providing specific agendas for the public. It tries to highlight both the positive and negative consequences of different issues of the society. In a way, it invokes people to take decisions in certain matters.

According to Ate (2006), editorials “perform the following functions:

i. Criticise or attack socio-political, economic and moral dilemmas of the society.
ii. Illuminate the day’s intelligence by throwing more light to complex issues of the day.
iii. Bring to fore debatable issues and provide an intellectual compass for society to discuss and resolve burning issues.
iv. Defend the underdogs in the society.
v. Endorse or support an issue of public significance.
vi. Influence policy formulation or decision making on certain issues.
vii. Appeal or persuade the readers to accept the rightness or wrongness of an issue”

(as cited in Ate, 2008 pp. 10-12).

Editorials can instigate policy framers and law makers to initiate actions for the cause of the people and the society. A good and powerful editorial provides both information and analysis to its readers on various issues of public affairs happening in the society. Editorials through its rich ideas help in preserving the nation, government and social institutions and cultural norms of the society. So, it is of utmost importance that newspaper editorials be easily understandable for its readers.
Hynds (1990) found that the structure of newspaper editorials has been changed significantly in the past. He observed that the “highly personal, rhetoric-laden editorial of the 19th century was generally replaced by a more institutional editorial emphasizing information and explanation in the middle of the 20th century. They appear to be changing again to increase relevance, readability, and effectiveness” (p. 302). The present study focuses on how well the contemporary editorials structure their contents to make it readable and effective for its readers.

Yet, one aspect which cannot be ignored in presenting an overview of the newspaper editorials is the art of producing effective editorials. Since an editorial reflects utmost importance to the society, the best editorial subjects are those of current interest to the readers (Roy, 2000). Topics related to public affairs deserve editorial space in newspapers. Even though editorials are not hard core news articles, they still need an element of timeliness. Editorials are in fact, the after-effects of contemporary news stories. They present critical analysis, questions, reactions and solutions to current issues of the society.

Since editorials are made to promote critical thinking, they need to be written in a clear and understandable way. In order to make the writing effective, the language and the style of writing are key areas to be considered. “It is an indisputable fact that the style, tone and language coupled with the substance of an editorial are needed ingredients in packaging effective editorials both for print and broadcast media” (Ate, 2008, p. 13). The semantic content and linguistic factors such as words, phrases, vocabulary and sentence structures constitute a major element which overall affects the presentation of the newspaper editorials. All these elements are used to express “rhetorical structures that include imagery, overstatements, understatements, hyperbole (exaggeration), euphemism, and mitigation” (Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148).
5. Statement of the Research Problem

The present research exclusively deals with the in-depth study of the readability of newspaper editorials. Wimmer and Dominick (2005) state that research studies in newspapers and magazines can be conducted in six major areas: readership, circulation, management, typography/makeup, readability, and online media use. Readability research in print media is an emerging research trend that focuses on certain aspects such as language in use, analysis of content, semantic features, reading skills, etc.

Print media articles cater to both news and views section. News section features the factual information whereas views section analyses and explains in-depth the meaning of the news. Owing to its significance, news analysis articles need to be easily comprehensible by its readers. The present study thus, selects newspaper editorials, which constitute a major source of news analysis and interpretation as the subject of research analysis. “Editorial is the mirror of the newspaper’s opinion. It projects the viewpoint of the paper on a particular policy, programme or event. It can inspire, motivate, excite, appeal, criticise, or reject certain idea or policy. The expression of opinion is intended to lead the public opinion, and convert the readers to its point of view” (Mehta, 1992, p. 170).

Newspaper editorials, though hardly acknowledged by readers constitute a major section of the daily news. While the majority of the news messages in a day’s newspaper belong to news stories giving a series of reports on various events happening around the world, editorials interpret in detail the news report presented in the day’s newspaper. In this sense, editorials are considered as one of the most important news messages contained in the newspaper. Editorials project the conscience of the newspaper. They inform readers, stimulate thinking, raise questions, mould opinion and encourage people to take decisions and actions. It is in fact, the conscience of the paper. But contrary to its importance, editorials, on the basis of observation on readers’ newspaper reading habit, comes out to be the least read news article among the various types of news articles in the newspaper.
Reading habit of newspaper readers is an issue highly related with the readability of the textual content of the newspaper. It is the content that determines the audience (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001). It is also evident that newspaper editorials offer a diverse range of theme and content on various issues. The present study explores the various facets of newspaper editorial content and its relation with the readability of the content. Finding out the readability level of newspaper editorials will in fact, provide a platform for restructuring the written matter to suit the targeted readers.

In the Indian context, with literacy rate of 74.04% (as per 2011 census) and 26% of the population still unable to read and write, reading newspapers is a questionable issue. In a country with nearly 70% of the population still living in rural areas (census, 2011), Hindi newspapers still holds a dominant position in terms of circulation and readership as majority of the population has more affinity to Hindi language as compared to English language which is popular only among the urban population. But the importance of English newspapers cannot be ignored as English print media has wider coverage than Hindi and regional language newspapers. India is a diverse cultural country with 22 official regional languages including Hindi (as per the 8th schedule to the Indian Constitution) spoken over different regions of the country. English language press caters to unite the linguistically pluralistic regions of the country with its information content.

Finding out the readability of English language newspapers is considered a worthy step as it has the capacity to reach diverse readers in linguistically pluralistic regions of the country. Moreover, English language is more popular than Hindi while communicating people in regions with diverse regional languages. So, the present study takes up the issue of readability of mainstream English national newspapers of India which has wider reach and coverage. For this purpose, the first five English national dailies of India with highest circulation are selected for analysing their editorial content for one year. High circulation signifies that the selected newspapers have reached different regions of the country.

In the Indian context, readability research is a comparatively new field of study. So far readability researches have been done in the field of education to assess the
readability of school textbooks (Kumar, 1981; Agnihotri & Khanna, 1992; Kaul et al., 1995), farm journalism (Suresh & Vasanthkumar, 2002; Vatta et al., 2010) and comprehensibility of clinical documents (Jhanwar & Bisnoi, 2010). The study of the assessment of readability in the dominant print media form, that is, mainstream newspaper is an innovative idea to predict its comprehensibility among the public (readers). In the knowledge of the researcher (as per the literature surveys), readability of newspaper editorials as a published research study in the Indian context was not found. So, an urgent need to conduct a research study in this area has been felt heavily in the Indian context.

6. Rationale of the Study

Studying editorials is of special significance when analysing the ideological role of news media because editorials are expressions of “the broader ideological stance of the newspaper’s owners and managers” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 93). Since editorials function mainly for the “the expression and persuasive communication of opinions” (van Dijk, 1996, as cited in Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148), the editorials “provide a relevant body of text for the examination of predominant ideological assumptions in a society” (van Dijk, 1992, as cited in Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007, p. 148). So, there arises a need to analyse the efficacy of newspaper editorials which constitute a major source of public opinion formation in the society. For this, the study takes into consideration the comprehensibility of newspaper editorials among its readers by analysing the textual linguistic content.

“Newspaper languages have been the topic of many studies. This implies that there is a general understanding indicating that newspaper language should be referred to as a specific genre of writing” (Hillbom, 2009, p. 8). Westin (2001) investigated the nature of the language style often used in the editorials of different types of English newspapers. He found that newspaper editorials tend to use more informal language structures over the years. Linguistic structure can be a good predictor of textual readability. An analytical study of the newspaper editorials will provide a platform for an in-depth knowledge of the linguistic factors and comprehensibility of the editorial texts.
The concept of reading newspapers has become a worldwide trend among all generations. Some may have a craving for page 3 stories, some for sports news, and some for front page stories and so on and so forth. But the question is: Do we read the newspaper editorials with equal zest? Newspaper editorials are often described as dull, serious, uninteresting, monotonous etc. by people and this may be the reason why people ignore reading newspaper editorials. But from the side of a keen researcher, it would be much appropriate to find out whether the so called above factors are directly related to readability factor of the written text or not. If the text is not readable, the purpose of writing it in the first place gets defeated.

"Readability research is concerned with the difficulties which readers are apt to meet with. This is an important problem, especially with mass communication, since mass communication media cannot function without their messages being understood" (Turksma, 1955, p. 127). Research in the field of printed media has provided a scope for enhancing and producing more effective materials for writers, editors and publishers. Owing to the fact that newspaper editorials contribute in forming public opinion among its readers (public), readers ought to be capable of comprehending the meaning of the message depicted in the editorials. An analysis of its readability level will help us in finding how suitably the newspaper editorials are written for the public.

Producing a readable text depends upon the skills of the writer in selecting easy words and sentences for better comprehensibility of the concerned text. The efficacy of the message lies in the writer’s writing skills. Even though efforts are being made to produce readable news stories from the side of the journalists, “news stories tend to be harder to read than other types of prose, and the trend is towards increasingly less readable stories” (Dalecki et. al, 2009, p. 1). There is indeed, a high necessity to improve the readability level of journalistic writings. Many studies have found that “news stories generally contain longer words than other writings (Fowler, 1978; Lively and Pressey, 1923) and also longer sentences (Gray and Leary, 1935; Seib, 1976)” (as cited in Dalecki et al., 2009, p. 1). Owing to a large number of existing factors – deadline pressures, news writing style and vocabulary burden (Dalecki et. al, 2009; Danielson et. al, 1992), news readability is progressively getting worse.
Circulation figures are taken into consideration for selection of the newspaper samples for the study because it is often assumed that newspapers with high circulation have high readership and consequently high readability. The study will try to prove or disprove this assumption by conducting an in-depth content analysis of the editorials and calculating the readability of the concerned editorials by using well defined readability formula. If a newspaper is found to be highly circulating, there might be something good and attractive about the articles contained in the newspaper that the audience likes. Does this concept count for the newspaper editorials also? Hence, there is a high need to look into the matter of the readability of newspaper editorials of the highly circulating newspapers.

Another issue is the diversity of styles of presentation in newspapers editorials. Editorials are marked by various styles of writing, subject matter and the emotional stance within its expression. Does the diverse style of presentation exhibited by newspaper editorials affect the way of reading and acceptance by its readers? The way a particular newspaper organization expresses its opinion to the public is deeply found in its diverse presentation style. This issue needs to be explored deeply to know the role of the style of editorial presentation in predicting the effectiveness of the editorials among its readers. For this purpose an in-depth content analysis is conducted in order to explore the diversity of styles of editorial presentation. The calculation of the readability of the newspaper editorials is incorporated in the study in order to know the suitability of the editorials of these highly circulating newspapers to its readers.

Proper application of the readability formulae increases the overall degree of audience’s success in reading (DuBay, 2004). Using the formulae appropriately along with the incorporation of good linguistic writing skills enhances the degree of readability of the concerned text by its readers (Klare, 1976; Chall & Conard, 1991, as cited in DuBay, 2004, 2007a). Readability formulae are used while writing texts, in order to adapt them to a broad reading audience (Fry, 2002; Gunning, 2003; Vogel & Washburne, 2006). The main strength of readability formulae is that they are relatively easy to use; an applicability which has increased with the development of computerized programs (Burns, 2006).
Another advantage of using readability formulae is that the formulae are highly validated through many studies (Fry, 1977, as cited in Fry, 2002). Studies have shown that readability formulae “correlate well with comprehension difficulty as measured by reading tests” (DuBay, 2004, p. 15). According to Davison (1988), there are no simple and convenient alternatives (to readability formulae) that would assign more accurate levels of text readability. As observed by many scholars, DuBay (2004) even asserts that they are the only objective method for determining the difficulty of written texts.

The study, hence, would investigate how near the readability of the editorials of the chosen newspapers go with the comprehensiveness by calculating their readability with a properly chosen readability formula. Knowing the readability level of newspaper texts helps us to predict how much suitable the texts are for the general public. Owing to the widespread and heavy competition in the newspaper industry, this will prove to be a wonderful criterion for enhancing the readership, circulation and popularity of the medium among its readers. For the purpose of measuring the readability of the concerned editorials, Flesch Reading Ease formula is used.

Studies have also established Flesch formula as one of the most reliable and tested formula (DuBay, 2004). The Flesch Reading Ease has been shown to correlate very well (.98) with the Dale-Chall Readability Formula (Gilliland, 1972), which in turn has been carefully validated and was the most common in schools for a long time (Klare, 1988). Flesch’s formula has also been validated against other formulae and against expert judgments (with correlations of .61-.84) (Gilliland, 1972). Probably the best known and most frequently used formula was produced by Rudolf Flesch who developed the Flesch Index (Stead, 1977). Flesch formula grew to be the most common formula, at least for text other than pure educational purposes (Klare, 1988). Hence, owing to the fact that Flesch formula is highly tested, reliable and widely used in determining textual readability, the study uses Flesch formula for measuring the readability of the newspaper editorials.
DuBay (2004) has rightly said that “when texts exceed the reading ability of readers, they usually stop reading” (p. 1). According to Hargis (2000), “readability research has made us very aware of what we ‘write at the level of words and sentences’” (as cited in DuBay, 2004, p. 57). The concept of readability and its practical methods of analysis proved to be one of the most interesting ways of analysing the efficacy of texts messages in printed mass media. Effective communication in printed media messages is very much a result of the sender’s way of encoding the messages to suit its readers. If the messages are prepared appropriately by using proper linguistic factors, the texts would be more comprehensible and understandable for its readers.

7. Scope of the Study

In print media, there are a large number of researches being conducted in a wide variety of areas. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2005), print media, specifically newspaper and magazine researchers conduct six basic types of studies: readership, circulation, management, typography/makeup, readability, and online media use (p. 308). “Readability studies are designed to draw inferences from writing style about whether people can understand the message” (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2005, p. 195). In India, owing to the fact that readability research in newspapers is a comparatively new field of study, the present study will yield productive results in the newspaper industry.

Readability research is an emerging trend in many contemporary issues ranging from education, law, business and marketing, insurance, health care, literature studies to journalism and communication studies (DuBay, 2004). Readability researches have been used in these areas to match the concerned text to people’s reading skill. “Studies have shown that easy to read texts improve comprehension, retention, reading speed and reading persistence” (Sinha et al., 2012, p. 1142). The readability formulae have been used successfully in teaching, publishing, Government, military, business and marketing documents to test their efficacy among its readers and ultimately it helped in providing better text.

Popular novelists of 19th century such as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain and nearly all of today’s blockbuster writers including John Grisham, Stephen King, J. K.
Rowling, and Dan Brown write at the 7th-grade level (Dubay, 2004, DuBay, 2007a). Experts today recommend writing legal and health information at the 7th-grade level. Romantic stories and novels, popularly sold in the market, are written at the 7th-grade level and below (ibid). Public information documents such as medical and safety information are always recommended by law to be written at a very easy 5th-grade level (Doak, Doak, and Root 1996).

The need, relevance and scope of the study are felt heavily due to the ongoing popularity and competition amongst the print media production. The success of a printed matter depends on the number of readers who utilize it fruitfully. This takes into account, the understanding ability of the printed text. Readability assessment is one such factor to check how much understandable the written texts are and for what academic grade of audience the written texts are meant for. The present study will thus, take into account the readability level of newspaper editorials and assess the academic grade level at which the texts are written for the public. Knowing the reading grade level of the newspaper editorials would be helpful enough in predicting the degree of suitability of the editorials among its readers.

Many readability studies have been conducted in the 1940s among large-circulation newspapers proving that increasing readability directly increases the readership level of the newspapers (Murphy, 1947; Swanson, 1948; Flesch; 1949). The present study will enhance the overall function of editing and restructuring the written materials. On the basis of the readability of written texts, the written matter can be restructured on a much readable and easier level, thereby increasing more acceptances from the readers. This will, in turn serve as a great tool for enhancing the readership, circulation and popularity of a particular newspaper. A highly readable newspaper text attracts more number of readers as compared to a less readable one.

The present study can go a long way in the wake of improvising the status of print media. This may especially be beneficial to writers, editors, authors and publishers, who with the help of readability research can make their written texts more productive. Especially for newspaper editorials, which are considered to be the least read newspaper
text among other variety of news stories and articles, the study will find structural change for improving the readability and enhancing the popularity of editorials among general readers of newspapers. The maximum efficacy of the newspaper can be achieved when majority of the readers starting reading and understanding the lesser popular texts such as newspaper editorials.

In the light of the discussions made in this chapter, it is seen that readability is an important tool to assess the efficacy of written text. Any approach to effective written communication needs to assimilate the concept of readability in writing and evaluating the written text. Readability formulae have become one of the most popular techniques to measure the comprehensibility of a given text. Research on readability can make writers aware of the diverse factors that affect the reading process. In the next chapter, a series of related literature on readability will be critically reviewed to enable us to identify the research gaps and formulate the research questions of the present study.