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New Paper Reading: The Explaining Factors of Newspaper Reading Behavior of Young Adults

> MASTER THESIS Master Psychology

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# Abstract

Paid newspapers are no longer able to attract young new readers. They are in competition with new media like the Internet. On the contrary, free newspapers gather lots of young readers. The question arises which variables explain newspaper reading behavior of young adults, and whether there is a difference between paid newspaper readers and free newspaper readers. This research tested reading variables among 245 Dutch young adults via a questionnaire. Results show that newspaper reading does not depend on young adult's surveillance needs. Facilitating conditions are very influential in newspaper reading time. When newspaper reading is made easy to young adults, they tend to read them, regardless of their real interest in the news subjects.

# Introduction

The fast advance of television a few decades ago and the Internet in the last decade has changed people's media consumption patterns. Different media are in a continuous time battle with each other. This is also true for news media. The traditional medium, like a newspaper is, is put into an underdog position. This development earns more detailed research, especially among the future generation. This research has its focus on young adult's newspaper reading time.

For many years now, the circulation figures of paid newspapers are declining. Since free newspapers entered the market in the Netherlands, the circulation of paid newspapers decreased with more than 750,000 copies in the period between 1998 and 2006 (PersMediaMonitor, 2007). While the paid newspapers are in tough times, free newspapers are booming. Within 9 years the spread circulation has risen to 1,450,000 copies each working day. This trend, the fall of paid newspapers and the rise of free newspapers, is seen around whole Western Europe and the United States (Lauf, 2001; Peiser, 2000; Gustafsson & Weibull, 1997). In the last quarter of 2007, the circulation of free dailies exceeded the circulation of paid newspapers.

The question arises who read those 1,450,000 copies of free newspapers each day. Bakker (2002) mentioned three options: by substitution, by accumulation (double reading) or by new readership the free newspapers can gather their readers (see Figure 1). It is important to know to what extent the two kinds of newspapers are substitutes (Picard, 1989; Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003). These facts reveal that free newspapers are serving a need of readers that has not been met by traditional paid newspapers. This could have serious consequences for the future of paid newspapers.

Current readership of paid newspapers		Used to read paid	Did not read paid		
		newspapers	newspapers		
No change	Accumulation	Substitution	New readers		
Do not want to read free newspapers	Readership of free newspapers				

Figure 1. Short-term effects of the introduction of free newspapers (Bakker, 2002).

Comparing the loss of paid copies and the rise of free copies, the increase of free newspapers exceeds the decrease of paid newspapers. In his 2004 research, Bakker (2004) calculated a loss of 70,000 copies for paid newspapers against a total amount of 700,000 copies of free newspapers each day that time. Substitution could only be partly responsible for the decline in paid newspapers and the rise of free newspapers. Therefore, cumulation and new readership must be important developments to explain the success of free newspapers. That new readership plays a significant role is shown by Arnoud and Peyrègne (2002). They

found that from the readers of the London (UK) Metro half of them was formerly a nonreader. Unfortunately, these figures are not available for the Dutch free newspapers. The minor share of substitution and the major shares of cumulation and new readership could indicate that paid and free newspapers are attended with different kinds of readership.

According to Picard (2001), the target audience of free newspapers differs from that of paid newspapers. The potential audience, those who are literate, can be split up in three kinds of readers: habitual readers, occasional readers, and non-readers. The habitual readers are those who read newspapers regularly and use them for their information to understand the world. Occasional readers are in search for information and diversion, but they are less committed to spend time and money on it. The third group, non-readers, does not think that newspapers are interesting enough to spend time or money on. In Picard's view paid newspapers mainly focus on habitual readers, while free newspapers try to fulfill the needs of occasional readers (see Figure 2). The research of Peiser (2000) indicates that during the last decades the number of habitual readers has fallen, while the number of occasional readers has grown. This means that the potential target group of paid newspapers has shrunk, but, on the contrary, that the potential target group of free newspapers has extended. For the third group, newspaper non-reading, Peiser found no substantial fluctuations.

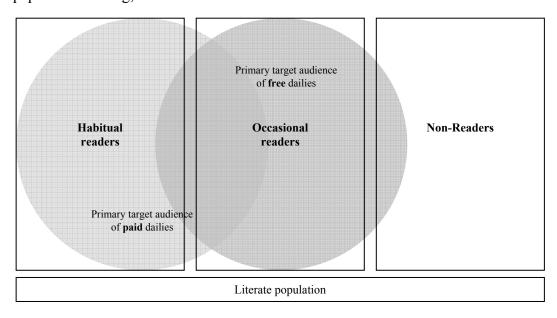


Figure 2. The potential audience of newspapers (Picard, 2001)

Because of the fast rise of free newspapers, it can be concluded that free newspapers are able to meet the needs of many people. In the view of Picard (2001), the need fulfilling is twofold: on the one hand free newspapers are filling time while commuting to work and other activities, while on the other hand free newspapers give basic information about what is happening in the world. This need fulfilling costs the readers nothing but time, which is a wasted resource when people are commuting via public transportation.

In his supranational research, Lauf (2001) found that age has become the most powerful explanatory value to understand the decline in newspaper readership. The reading population of paid newspapers becomes older every year. Paid papers seem to be unable to attract young readers. Schulz (1999) refers to this phenomenon when she talked about 'an erosion of reading habit among the youngest groups'. She questions the common notion that when these young non-readers become older, they will become habitual readers. This negative belief about younger people has 'moral panics' as a consequence (Boëthius, 1995), which occurred more often in the past when new media were introduced (Raeymaeckers, 2002).

On the other hand, for free papers Bakker (2002) safely assumes that they are reaching lots of younger readers. According to research of *Metro International* (Metro International, 2007) not less than 44 percent of daily *Metro* readers are under 34. In 2007, only a small guarter of the Dutch 18 to 34 year aged people said to never read a free newspaper (TNS Nipo, 2007).

Figures from the NOM Print Monitor (2006) indicate that without free papers, 42.9 percent of the 13 to 24 year old youngsters and 48.3 percent of the 25 to 34 year old youngsters are reached. Including free newspapers, these figures raise to 56.2 and 58.8 respectively. The conclusion must be that free newspapers are capable of reaching new reader target groups: young people.

Describing these trends in newspaper business, the question arises which factors can explain these trends. Are individual needs and preferences important for reading of paid and free newspapers? Or do structural factors like availability play a significant role and are personal factors of minor importance? For television news viewing, Webster and Phalen (1997) argued that people have fundamental needs for seeking out news, but the expression of these needs is dependent of the media environment. In other words, personal needs are limited by structural factors. A combination of both explanations is therefore expected. The following sections describe both explanations. Eventually, it leads up to a conceptual model for the current research.

# Young adult's newspaper reading variables

Newspaper reading in general has often been subject to research. This former research provides guidelines for the current research. First, youngsters and their news consumption have been researched for example by Costera Meijer (2006), Raeymaeckers (2004), and Graber (2003). These researchers pass variables for the current research among young adults. These variables concern the surveillance needs of young adults, their preferred news format, the attitude toward the newspaper content, the facilitating conditions for reading, and their reading barriers.

Second, general newspaper research (e.g., Bentley, 2000; Lauf, 2001; Noelle-Neumann, 1997) passes general variables. In addition to the findings of youngster research, this general research offers variables like the role of habit, surveillance needs, social environment, and reading barriers again.

Third, this research has its focus on the difference between reading paid and free newspapers. The first behavior is not very popular among young adults, but the second really is. Research about free newspapers can therefore be very useful. But, former research about free newspapers was quite often more theoretical than empirical. Still the theoretical principles given in this former research reaches guidelines for the current research. The research variables newspaper content, use of public transportation, facilitating conditions, habit, newspaper reading as pastime, and willingness to pay are based on former research on free newspapers (e.g., Picard, 2001; Blackhurst, 2005).

These variables passed by former research fit in a behavioral view on newspaper reading. After a review of the reading variables from literature, a conceptual model is presented.

Young adult's attitude towards news. Newspaper reading by young adults is related to their attitude towards news in general. In her research about young people's viewing of television news programs, Costera Meijer (2006) established a double viewing paradox. This phenomenon is described by Costera Meijer (2006, p.13) as "that their satisfaction about and even interest in 'serious' news does not automatically cause them to watch it, while, vice versa, their contempt for light news programs ('stupid,' 'junk') does not keep them from watching and enjoying them." Thus whereas many people feel obliged to be well-informed, their attention is not caught by serious news, but by dramatic, exciting stories (cf. Bird, 2003). Young people perceive news as very important, but this belief does not lead to watching news programs themselves. In the opinion of young people, news is a basic social service which has to be available when you need it (Costera Meijer, 2006). That means that among youngsters an automatic correlation between actually watching a news program and the significance which is attributed to the same news program is absent (Costera Meijer, 2006). It can be assumed that this double viewing paradox can be applied to newspaper reading as well. Although the existence of reliable and serious newspapers is perceived as necessary, the figures show that young adults do not read them regularly (Lauf, 2001).

Making the news more entertaining is not the solution. In the opinion of young people news has to be important and educational. These serious annotations exclude entertainment (Costera Meijer, 2006). An entertaining news-like program is therefore not perceived as a news program. The "soapification" of the news, which has been done by several news media,

is not what youngsters want (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1998; Costera Meijer, 2006). News has to be reliable in the first place.

The news needs of young adults. As said before, young people do not feel the need to be fully informed citizens. But when it comes to news and current affairs, many young people feel a regular urge to monitor or quickly check the news (Graber, 2003; Zaller, 2003).

Several news media can be used for this news monitoring. The Internet is for example exceptionally suited for news monitoring, but also checking the headlines on text TV is a usual way of monitoring the news. Can the newspaper also be used for young adult's way of news consumption? Comparing free with paid newspapers, it is clear that the format of free newspapers better fits the youth's way of news consumption than the format of paid newspapers does. Free newspapers contain short items, suited for scanning and quick reading (Picard, 2001) and are therefore more capable of fulfilling the needs of young people. A disadvantage of the paper as a news medium is the fixed moment at which it appears. Young people do not like fixed moments to consume their daily news; they want to be able to satisfy their news needs instantly (Costera Meijer, 2006).

This young adult's way of news consumption is called 'snacking news' by Costera Meijer (2006). She defines it as "quickly checking the headlines out of a desire to be on top of the main issues in the news" (2006, p.19). To obtain solid knowledge is not the purpose for news consumption, moreover it has to lead to experience impressions, to start or join in a conversation. This communicative function of the news is more important to young people than the informative function (Costera Meijer, 2006).

Besides this shallow sounding way of news consumption another way of consuming the news exists. Costera Meijer (2006) mentioned 'slow news' on which young people depend for real understanding and experiencing the news. In her vision, "getting a multidimensional picture of a story, political, personal, social, economical etc" (2006, p.20) is the purpose of slow news. Predictable news opinions from only a few sources do not satisfy the younger generation. They prefer to look at a news topic from several directions.

*Newspaper content.* When the newspaper content is taken in consideration, differences are observed between paid and free newspapers. In comparison with paid newspapers, free newspapers are based on short stories designed for quick reading (Picard, 2001). News agencies deliver most of the free newspaper's content, which result only in an overview of national and international news. More important themes are local entertainment, television and sports (Picard, 2001).

These content accents correspond with the content preferences of younger people. Among 16 tot 18 year old Flemish youngsters, especially film, local news, television and crime are perceived as interesting topics (Raeymaeckers, 2004). Uninteresting topics are in

their opinion economics, (inter)national politics and culture. It can be concluded that the contents of free newspapers are more suited for young people than the contents of paid newspapers are.

Habit. As mentioned earlier, Picard (2001) distinguished habitual and occasional readers. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) there is a strong relation between intention and behavior. But, when behavior is performed out of a habit, the predictive power of intention will be weakened. Following Verplanken et al. (1998), Cheung and Limayem (2005) argued that habitual behavior may have lost its reasoned character. Therefore, the way people read their newspaper is dependent of the degree in which the reading behavior is performed out of a habit.

Research has shown that habit is a powerful determinant of newspaper reading (e.g., Bentley, 2000) and that habit is an automatic predictor of behavior (Polites, 2005). The development of a reading habit is influenced by regular access to newspapers during one's younger age. When young people have regular access to newspapers at home, they are more inclined to develop personal reading habits, and tend to spend more time reading newspapers (Bauer, 1993; Bonfadelli, 1993; Noelle-Neumann, 1997; Bogart, 1989). Traditionally, former research had its focus on paid newspapers, since the introduction of free newspapers is quite recent. The relationship between habit and free newspaper reading is still unknown and subject to research.

Facilitating conditions. Besides the described personal factors also structural factors are influencing newspaper reading. In this research, the structural factors mainly consist of contextual aspects. The reading context is able to shape good conditions which facilitate newspaper reading.

An important facilitating condition is the availability of newspapers. Raeymaeckers (2004) calls this the 'access factor'. In her research, half of the respondents had access to newspapers at home on a daily basis. One-quarter answered that newspapers were never available at home. Results showed that young adults who have higher access rates at home tend to spend more time reading newspapers. In extension of this finding, Raeymaeckers (2004) found that 38 percent of the young family members develop a daily reading habit when newspapers are available at home daily. In spite of daily availability, 8 percent of young adults in such households shows no interest for newspapers at all. When young adults have less access to newspapers, rejection of newspaper reading among them increases up to 51 percent. These results confirm the earlier findings that if young people have regular access to newspapers at home they are more inclined to develop personal reading habits, and moreover tend to spend more time reading newspapers (Bauer, 1993; Bonfadelli, 1993; Noelle-Neumann, 1997; Bogart, 1989).

Free newspapers are mainly distributed among passengers of public transportation. Daily commuting from home to work brings along two stimulating reading factors: people have some time to read during their daily trip and every day people are put in touch with newspapers on the public stations. Although these factors stimulate the reading of free newspapers, Picard (2001) argued that free daily development is not fully dependent of public transportation. Also other kinds of distribution points and methods are appearing, like distribution via shops and universities. But it is clear that regular use of the public transportation has regular access to (free) newspapers as a consequence.

It has to be stated that access to newspapers and exposure to news as a consequence, is not necessarily an expression of attention to news (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004). An urge to monitor the world is necessary for real attention to news. The reverse can also be true: lack of exposure to news does not necessarily mean that one has no interest in the news (Van den Bulck, 2006).

Newspaper reading as pastime. Newspaper reading takes the reader some time. Picard (2001) stated that while commuting time is a wasted resource. Therefore, it is expected that free newspaper reading in public transportation has stronger pastime motives than paid newspaper reading has. Paid newspapers read at home have to compete with other time consuming alternatives, which needs a much more conscious choice to set apart some time to read the paper.

Social environment. As the models of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen (1991) already showed, much behavior is influenced by beliefs of other persons. Reading behavior is also subject to such influences. According to several researchers, parent's reading behavior is very important for reading behavior of youngsters (Raeymaeckers, 2004; Cobb-Walgren, 1990; Bogart, 1989; Noelle-Neumann, 1997; Stone & Wetherington, 1979). When parents have a strong reading behavior, their children tend to develop a reading habit. There is also a strong relation between the parent's reading habit and those of their youngsters (Peiser, 2000). Especially the father serves as a role model.

The social environment for most readers of free newspapers differs from most readers of paid newspapers. For paid newspapers the social environment consists mainly of the home family. Because free newspapers are often read in public transportation, the primary social environment is not formed by the family, but by co-passengers. When other passengers have a reading habit, they possibly stimulate co-passengers in reading.

Raeymaeckers (2004) found specific evidence for the existence of co-orientation: the possibility to talk with a relevant other person about what one has read in the newspaper influences the reading frequency. Commuting with colleagues or co-students can therefore

stimulate the reading frequency. Also the presence of family members in households can have positive effects on newspaper reading.

Willingness to pay for news. Nowadays news consuming is free in most cases. Internet access for example opens a world of free news sources. In the words of Picard (2001, p.168), "the only real difference between free and paid dailies occurs in the content market where consumers exchange their time and attention but not money for the content." When on the one hand an increase of free newspapers and on the other hand a decrease of paid newspapers is observed, the role of money has to be questioned. This is especially the case for the younger, future-minded generation.

In recent research among the Dutch population (TNS Nipo, 2007), the willingness to pay for news was measured. Results showed that only 51 percent of the respondents were willing to pay for news. When questioned if they thought it nonsense to pay for the news, 61 percent agreed. This attitude towards news is especially true for young people. Blackhurst (2005) sees the choice of paid newspapers between giving their newspapers away and losing young readers altogether.

News media habits of young Americans consist of constantly grazing sources of news like Google, Yahoo and MSN. That grazing way of news consumption "makes us lose our respect of mere words" and "punctures the authority of newspapers" (Blackhurst, 2005, p.58).

Reading barriers. The content of newspapers is often too difficult to read for the overall reading public (Raeymaeckers, 2000; Stone, 1987). Especially young people experience difficulties when reading newspaper content (Raeymaeckers, 2004). This problem could be an important threshold for reading newspapers. Research showed that people who have a negative attitude towards reading perceive reading as effortful and boring (Raeymaeckers, 2002).

In the eyes of young adults, paid newspapers not only contain too difficult, but also too complex news. Young readers do not have sufficient background information or appropriate frames of reference for understanding that complex news (Raeymaeckers, 2004). They miss the foreknowledge for comprehensive reading. More background information to understand the context of the news is what younger readers prefer (Rager et al., 1994; Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991).

Reading difficulties as well as the complexity of the news can act as reading barriers. When one has to deal with one or both of these reading difficulties, he or she needs a big selfefficacy to start reading newspapers. Reader's self-efficacy is therefore expected as an influencing variable.

Conceptual model. The above mentioned factors are assumed to be able to explain newspaper reading behavior. Very often human behavior is explained in terms of unidirectional causation (Bandura, 2002). According to the social cognitive view (Bandura, 1986) people's behavior is not only based on inner forces nor automatically controlled by external stimuli. Moreover, Bandura (1986) argues that the human behavior can be explained by three interacting factors: personal factors, the environment, and behavior. The interaction of these factors is caught in a model of triadic reciprocality. The earlier mentioned difference between personal and structural factors fits within this model.

For newspaper reading, a conceptual model is given in Figure 3. This model for the current research is inspired by the general framework of Bandura (1986). The explaining reading variables mentioned above can be divided in three factors. First, the personal factors do exist for newspaper reading. Socio-demographics are individual, as well as one's interest in news subjects is. Further, most factors are personal factors. They strongly depend on the reader's own attitude. From the mentioned factors, self-efficacy, surveillance, reading as pastime, willingness to pay, and preferred news format are personal factors. They depend on personal cognitive, affective, and biological aspects.

Second, behavioral patterns can be discerned for newspaper reading. Most important is the young adult's news consumption pattern. In this research it is specified to one's newspaper reading time. Other behavioral patterns, which stimulate newspaper reading, are the use of public transportation and one's habit to read newspapers.

Third, environmental factors are relevant in newspaper reading. For reading, the environment is defined by the facilitating conditions which create an environment that suits reading or suits not. Also the social environment is important for behavior.

It is expected that these three factors operate as interacting factors that influence each other bidirectionally. The conceptual model for newspaper reading among young adults is presented in Figure 3.

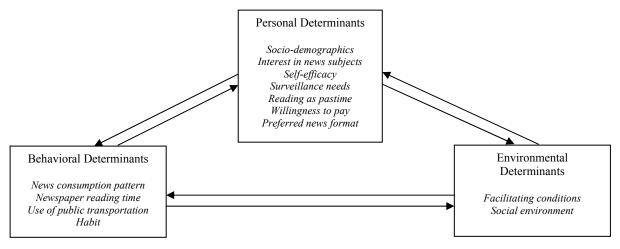


Figure 3. Conceptual model containing the expected newspaper reading variables for young adults.

Kinds of readerships. The mentioned determinants can lead to different kinds of readership. Bakker (2002) distinguishes four kinds: paid newspaper readers, free newspaper readers, readers of both free and paid newspapers, and non-readers. If other news media are also taken into account, the non-readers can be differentiated in two categories: those who do not read newspapers, but do consume other news media (e.g., the Internet and television) and those who do not consume news media at all. This distinction in non-readership is made because it is assumed that the reason why this group does not read newspapers differs between the two categories. For the first non-readership group the main problem could be the misfit of the medium with the preferences of the young adults, while for the second nonreadership group the main problem could be a disinterest for news in general. Table 1 gives a schematic summary of these five kinds of readership.

Table 1 Kinds of newspaper readership

- Free newspaper readers Those who read more days per week one or more free newspapers and do not read paid newspapers (regardless whether they consume other news media as well).
- (2) Paid newspaper readers Those who read more days per week a paid newspaper and do not read free newspapers (regardless whether they consume other news media as well).
- Free and paid newspaper readers (accumulation) (3) Those who more days per week read free newspapers as well as paid newspapers (regardless whether they consume other news media as well).
- Non-readers, but consuming other news media (4) Those who do not read newspapers, but do consume other news media more days per week.
- (5) Non-readers, no news consuming at all Those who never or seldom consume news media.

These five different (non-)reader groups are subject to research. It is supposed that for each of these groups the conceptual model fits, but that the relationships between personal, behavioral and environmental determinants differ between the groups.

# Research questions

To give insight in the decreasing newspaper reading behavior, the reading variables of young adults are subject to research. Therefore, the first research question is as follows: (RQ1) Which variables explain newspaper reading behavior of young adults?

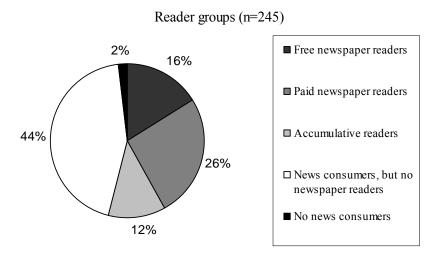
It is expected that these reading variables are not equal between the five reader groups. For further insight into the differences between the reader groups, the following research question is asked: (RQ2) How do these variables vary between different kinds of (non-) readers?

#### Method

# Respondents

The research has its focus on young adults. In accordance with age categories in other newspaper research, the target group was defined as males and females between the age of 18 and 34 years. For administering the on-line questionnaire, the respondent group consisted of 245 Dutch young adults (age: *M*=22.3 yr, SD=4.47; gender: females 56.3%, males 43.7%; education: high school 16.3%, vocational education 4.5%, bachelor 16.3%, master 60.0%, and other 2.9%).

Data has been gathered via a web based questionnaire system. 840 people of the target group were invited by e-mail to fill in the web based questionnaire. During a three weeks period in February 2008 245 respondents filled in the questionnaire completely (response rate: 29.2%). On the base of their filled in news consumption pattern, the respondents were placed in one of the five reader groups, as can be seen in Figure 4.



*Figure 4.* The sizes of the five reader groups.

#### Variables

The questionnaire contained questions from 12 categories. First, the behavior itself was caught into quantitative questions. Second, categories were based on the mentioned reading variables in the literature. Some of these categories were copied from former research, and some were newly formed based on theoretical principles of other authors. The 12 categories were as follows.

News consumption pattern. To get an estimate of how often respondents use seven different news media, participants had to answer on a 5-point Likert scale from seldom or never to almost daily how often they used each of them.

Reading time. This question estimated the amount of newspaper reading time in minutes. There were seven questions, one for each day of the week. The answers were summed to form an estimate of weekly reading volume.

Socio-demographic variables. Socio-demographic variables included age, gender, and level of education. As a background variable, the usage of the public transportation was measured via a 7-point scale from seldom or never to almost daily.

Surveillance. General motivation to monitor the news was estimated via a 7-item factor. The given positions were to be scaled on a 7-point Likert scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). The items were based on Diddi and LaRose (2006).

Interest in news subjects. To indicate the interest of respondents in several news subjects, nine general news themes were submitted. Respondents scored each of them on a 7point Likert scale from -3 (very uninteresting) to 3 (very interesting). The news themes were taken from Raeymaeckers (2004).

News format. The preferences of the participant of how to consume the news were questioned via a 6-items factor with statements which were to be scaled on a 7-point Likert scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). This factor was based on the findings of Costera Meijer (2006) about news viewing by young people.

Self-efficacy. Whether the respondents consider themselves as capable to read a newspaper is measured via the self-efficacy factor. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with five items on a 7-point Likert scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Facilitating conditions. To indicate the environmental aspects of newspaper reading, three kinds of facilitating conditions are measured: money, time, and access factors. This factor is measured again via a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Habit. To get an estimation whether respondents experience newspaper reading as a habit, six questions within one factor were submitted. Again, on a 7-point Likert scale respondents gave their answers from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Newspaper reading as pastime. To indicate why respondents fill their time with newspaper reading, a closer look is taken at newspaper reading as pastime. Seven items were to be scaled on 7-point Likert scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Willingness to pay. This 3-items factor estimated whether the respondent sees paid news as news with surplus value and whether he is willing to pay for news. On a 7-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to agree or disagree. This factor was based on former research of TNS Nipo (2007).

Social environment. To get an indication of the social environment of the respondent, six questions were asked. Six newspapers reading positions were given about family, colleagues, classmates, and other relevant persons. On a 7-point Likert scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) respondents answered whether their situation corresponded with them or not.

These twelve questions were subjected to a pretest to test the usability of the questionnaire. The pretest, in which eight target group members participated, resulted in a couple of textual changes to sharpen the questions. The final questionnaire is added in Appendix A.

# Analysis

Analysis is performed in three steps. First, scale reliability was tested, based on Cronbach's a. Second, analysis of variance was executed. This analysis gave insight into the mean differences between the five reader groups. The third and last step consisted of a regression analysis, to measure the relative importance of each of the factors via their beta's.

#### Results

Taking the news consumption pattern of young adults into account, it becomes clear that the Internet and television are their primary news sources (see Table 2). Even radio is a more important news supplier than newspapers are. It shows that dynamic news media like the Internet, television and radio are more popular than a static medium like a newspaper is. Nonetheless, the largest part of the young adults does read a paid or free newspaper regularly.

Table 2 News sources

News source	Consumption measure			
Internet <sup>1</sup>	3.87 (SD=1.44)			
Television <sup>1</sup>	3.75 (SD=1.39)			
Radio	2.77 (SD=1.52)			
Paid newspaper <sup>1</sup>	2.45 (SD=1.51)			
Free newspaper <sup>1</sup>	2.18 (SD=1.03)			
Mobile phone	1.50 (SD=1.23)			
Other news source	1.18 (SD=0.64)			

Note: 1=seldom or never, 2=1 or 2 days per week, 3=3 to 4 days per week, 4=5 days per week, 5= almost daily.

Among the respondent group, the mean time spend with newspaper reading is 102 minutes per week (SD=82.97). This is the sum of reading time spend to paid and free newspapers. It is remarkable that the mean consumption measure for paid newspapers is higher than for free newspapers, albeit the standard deviation with paid newspapers is bigger. As expected, newspaper reading diverges strongly between the different reader groups. The 'free

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Different between reader groups on .01-level.

newspaper readers group' spend 123 minutes reading, the 'paid newspaper readers group' 144 minutes, the 'cumulative readers group' 152 minutes, the 'consumers of other news media' 62 minutes, and the 'no news consumers at all' only 32 minutes per week.

To explain this newspaper reading behavior, the research tested ten variables under the target group. Eight variables concerned compounded factors. The scale reliability of these eight factors were all acceptable, as can be seen in Table 3. The less high alpha scores of news format, self-efficacy and facilitating conditions are due to their broad scope: these factors cover a broader construct than the five other factors, which is reflected in the alpha scores. The single factors, namely use of public transportation and age, were not submitted to the scale analysis.

Table 3 Scale reliability

Scale reliability	Number of items	Cronbach's α	
Surveillance needs	7	0.86	
News format	5	0.65	
Self-efficacy	5	0.67	
Facilitating conditions	5	0.66	
Habit	5	0.79	
Newspaper reading as pastime	5	0.80	
Willingness to pay	3	0.74	
Social environment	6	0.72	

The results of the analysis of variance (see Table 4) show that all eight compounded factors vary between the five reader groups. The amount of explained variance is shown in Table 5. The used variables are able to explain accumulative readership rather well. For other readership categories the R<sup>2</sup> is quite low. The results emphasize the difficulty to explain newspaper reading. A lot of factors influence young adult's readership. Main factor for all kinds of (non-)readers is habit. But still a large part of newspaper reading behavior remains unexplained. The regression analysis shows the relative influence of each factor on the newspaper reading time. The regression coefficients can be seen in Table 6.

Table 4 Scores and analysis of variance

Scores	Overall (n=245)		Per reader group					
	F-values	Mean	Readers free	Readers paid	Cumulated	Non-readers,	Non-readers,	
		scores,	newspaper	newspaper	newspaper	other news	no news media	
		SD in	(n=38)	(n=63)	readers	media	at all (n=6)	
		brackets			(n=30)	(n=108)		
Surveillance needs <sup>1</sup>	3.19	5.07 (0.99)	4.94 (1.10)	5.13 (0.75)	5.07 (1.19)	5.16 (0.93)	3.76 (1.53)	
News format 1	3.60	3.82 (0.94)	4.13 (0.97)	3.53 (0.87)	4.11 (1.10)	3.82 (0.86)	3.43 (1.33)	
Self-efficacy <sup>1</sup>	5.54	5.51 (0.84)	5.49 (0.77)	5.86 (0.72)	5.69 (0.95)	5.29 (0.84)	5.27 (0.56)	
Facilitating conditions <sup>1</sup>	25.22	4.73 (1.10)	5.26 (0.93)	5.06 (0.83)	5.67 (0.90)	4.15 (0.96)	3.63 (1.57)	
Habit <sup>1</sup>	21.16	3.23 (1.24)	3.39 (1.17)	4.01 (1.15)	3.78 (1.31)	2.64 (0.93)	1.83 (0.81)	
Newspaper reading as pastime <sup>1</sup>	6.53	4.05 (1.21)	4.38 (1.04)	3.43 (1.16)	3.97 (1.19)	4.29 (1.15)	4.40 (1.74)	
Willingness to pay <sup>1</sup>	9.42	3.50 (1.42)	2.82 (1.25)	4.29 (1.56)	3.58 (1.17)	3.32 (1.26)	2.50 (1.05)	
Social environment <sup>1</sup>	4.56	3.68 (0.99)	3.56 (1.04)	5.83 (0.80)	4.00 (1.01)	3.62 (1.01)	2.31 (0.81)	

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Different between reader groups on .05-level.

Table 5  $R^2$  and contributing variables

Reader group	R <sup>2</sup>	Contributing variables (regression coefficients β in brackets)
Overall	0.37	Habit (.35), facilitating conditions (.25), news format (.16), and newspaper reading as pastime (.15)
Free newspapers readers	0.37	Habit (.58), news format (.42), facilitating conditions (.36), and use of public transportation (.37)
Paid newspaper	0.38	Newspaper reading as pastime (.21), news format (.25), willingness to
readers		pay (.20), habit (.21), and social environment (.17)
Free and paid	0.54	Age (.45), social environment (.36), self-efficacy (.19), and habit (.16)
newspaper readers		
(accumulation)		
Non-readers, but	0.27	Habit (.23), facilitating conditions (.38), newspaper reading as pastime
consuming other news		(.21), and age (.17)
media		
Non-readers, no news	0.77	Habit (.88)
consuming at all		

Table 6
Absolute standardized regression coefficients $\beta$ on reading time

Scores	Overall	Per reader group					
	(n=245)	Readers	Readers	Cumulated	Non-	Non-	
		free news-	paid news-	newspaper	readers,	readers, no	
		paper	paper	readers	other news	news	
		(n=38)	(n=63)	(n=30)	media	media at	
					(n=108)	all (n=6)	
Surveillance needs <sup>1</sup>	.08	.12	.09	.09	.04		
News format <sup>1</sup>	.15*	.38*	.22*	.21	.19*	0.54	
Self-efficacy <sup>1</sup>	.06	.10	.10	.20	.00	0.62	
Facilitating conditions <sup>1</sup>	.25*	.27	.01	.12	.34*	1.56	
Habit <sup>1</sup>	.36*	.61*	.23*	.26	.22*		
Newspaper reading as	.14*	.39*	.20	.08	.27*		
pastime							
Willingness to pay 1	.03	.20	.21*	.12	.18*	0.50	
Social environment <sup>1</sup>	.01	.19	.16	.40	.07	0.40	

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Different between reader groups on .05-level (t-test).

The results as given in Table 4, 5 and 6 give answers to the research questions. In reaction to the first question, about the variables which explain newspaper reading, the following results are important. It was expected that surveillance needs were an important indicator of newspaper reading time. However, for these respondents there was no such relationship. Also young adults who do not read newspapers, but do consume news media like the Internet and television have serious surveillance needs. Results show that news media consumption is independent of surveillance needs. One could be even a news junkie, while never reading a newspaper. This finding tends to support the belief that the characteristics of the static medium newspaper do not fulfill young adult's news preferences. Only a gap exists with the young adults with very low news consumption.

Another explaining variable is the existence of facilitating conditions. The facilitating conditions are for readers much better than for non-readers, as the results show. Structural factors like access and time enable young adults to regular reading. Young adults will tend to read a newspaper when their surroundings help them. For example, if they can read a newspaper when they have some wasted time, they will do. If they get in touch with a newspaper regularly, they will be going to read one. This finding can explain the enormous popularity of free newspapers in the Netherlands. Very good facilitating conditions cause high reading rates.

<sup>\*</sup> H0 rejected.

Related to this last variable is newspaper reading as pastime. The results on the variable 'newspaper reading as pastime' support the earlier assumption that free newspaper readers use newspaper reading as a good way to pass time. Reading a free newspaper is a good way to fill wasted time, while for reading a paid newspaper young adults set time apart consciously. One's attitude towards newspaper reading as a good way of pastime is very influential. It suggests that newspaper reading is not a conscious choice that may take some time, but that it is a good 'second choice' when the young adult has some spare time. Although it was expected that the variables 'surveillance' and 'newspaper reading as pastime' should be inversely proportional to each other, results show there is no such relationship. Some young adults do have serious surveillance needs and at the same time they perceive newspaper reading as a way of pastime.

Despite this suggestion, habit is also a very important influencer. The fact that the relationship is very close is enough reason for daily newspaper reading. For free newspaper reading habit is even more important than for paid newspaper reading, although paid newspaper readers show higher habit scores.

The way in which the news is brought to the young adult is also of major importance. The results for newspaper reading in general are ambivalent. If the two kinds of newspaper reading are compared, the result becomes clear: if one prefers the 'snack news format' the reading time heightens for free newspaper readers, if one does not prefer the 'snack news format' the reading time heightens for paid newspaper readers. For the young adults of this respondent group the news format is no distinctive factor between newspaper readers and non-readers.

Money is irrelevant in general newspaper reading. It is only an influencing factor when comparing free newspaper reading with paid newspaper reading. In general, young adults do not intend to pay for news. Paid news offers them no surplus value in comparison with free news.

These variables explain newspaper reading in general. The second research question, how these found variables vary between different kinds of (non-)readers, can be answered by describing the characteristics of each of the different reader groups.

Free newspaper readers. Traveling by public transport is a strong predicting variable for free newspaper reading time. Free newspaper reading is strongly based on habit. To this group of young adults, reading free newspapers has become an automatism. This habit could come into being by their frequent traveling by public transport and by the strong opinion of this reader group that newspaper reading is a good way to pass time. While commuting time is a wasted resource, as Picard (2001) already stated. Free newspaper reading strongly depends on this wasted time. In such a situation newspaper reading is very suitable and could grow

into a habit. The respondent group shows that the snack news format is very well applied to free newspaper readers. They like the fast way of news consumption, which is seen in most free newspapers.

Paid newspapers readers. A dislike of the snack news format (Costera Meijer, 2006) is typical for the paid newspaper reader group. Paid newspaper readers like a more extensive news reportage. This is in concordance with the extensiveness of Dutch paid newspapers. This reader group is also willing to pay for qualitative news. They grasp the surplus value of paid news. Another property of this reader group is its strong dependency of habit. Paid newspaper reading has fixed their newspaper reading in daily reading patterns. It has become an automatism.

Accumulative newspapers readers. Young adults who read paid newspapers as well as free newspapers are positively influenced by their social environment. It can be explained, for example, by reading housemates and reading co-travelers in public transport, who stimulate the young adult to read a newspaper himself. Related to this variable are the facilitating conditions and the self-efficacy of these young adults. They are both positive and shape good conditions for reading. Although cumulative newspaper readers spent the most time on news consuming, their surveillance needs are not bigger than other news consumers who read less minutes a week.

Consumers of other news media. Young adults use a lot of media every day. Research shows that Dutch young adults spend 6 hours a day on media consumption (Breedveld, Van den Broek, De Haan, Harms, Huysmans, & Van Ingen, 2007). Therefore, it is very likely that they are confronted with news during the day. Although they have serious surveillance needs, their extensive media consumption lessens the necessity for newspaper reading to fulfill their needs. These young adults do not decline newspaper reading in advance, but reading has to be facilitated. An important threshold for reading is that they lack good facilitating conditions. It is not an efficacy problem. They also lack the habit of newspaper reading. They see newspaper reading as a good way to pass time in moments of waiting or wasted time. A last characteristic concerns the news format. Young adults of this reader group prefer the 'snack news format'. Paid newspapers do not fit this opinion.

Young adults who do not use news media at all. Two factors determine why they read newspapers so scarcely. Firstly, their believe in their self-efficacy is low. Newspaper reading is a bridge too far for these young adults. Secondly, they are not facilitated by good conditions for reading newspapers. But, neutralizing these facilitating barriers by offering free newspapers at home for instance would not solve the reading problem. Also other barriers, like a lack of basis surveillance needs, would remain.

Difference between paid newspaper and free newspaper readers. On the base of the results, some differences between paid newspaper readers and free newspaper readers can be marked. As expected, the preferred news format differs between these two reader groups. Paid newspaper readers like more extensive news reportage. Another distinctive factor is habit. Free newspaper reading is much more dependent of habit than paid newspaper reading is. Daily use of public transportation enables habit development.

By far the biggest difference between these reader groups is the influence of facilitating conditions. The existence of good facilitations determines the amount of reading for the free newspaper reader group much more than for the paid newspaper reader group. Good availability of newspapers in the public transportation is very important for free newspaper reading. It can be concluded that free newspaper readers are more dependent of structural factors than paid newspaper readers are. That supports the view that free newspapers fulfill a need which did not exist beforehand, but is created by the free newspapers themselves.

Another main difference is the influence of the view on newspaper reading as pastime. Free newspaper readers say they read a newspaper when they have nothing else to do. Paid newspaper readers on the other hand make a conscious choice to reserve some time for reading. This indicates that free newspaper readers have a more passive motivation for reading than paid newspaper readers have.

# Discussion

Young adults are not dependent of newspapers, but when they are facilitated for reading newspapers, they tend to read them. These beliefs of the younger generation about newspapers are indicators of the perspective of newspapers. For their daily surveillance needs most young adults are dependent of the Internet and television. The traditionally strong position of newspapers cannot be applied to the current mainstream young adult. This weakens the future position of newspapers.

That newspapers are not a primary news supplier among young adults, is a fact which is unlikely to change. The properties of dynamic news media like the Internet, fit the desired news format much better than a static medium like a newspaper can. Young people do not like fixed moments to consume their daily news; they want to be able to satisfy their news needs instantly (Costera Meijer, 2006). Young adults with the highest surveillance needs use the Internet and television as news suppliers. Only such dynamic media can fulfill their needs that way. Therefore, the surplus value of newspapers has to be found besides the pure news supply function in which other news media, for example the Internet, perform better. However, this research shows that a subpopulation among the young adults still appreciate the paid newspaper.

Regular reading depends on habit. Therefore, it is important for newspapers to create a reading habit, because habit provides the strongest motivation to keep on reading on a regular basis. Habit creations like the free newspapers do in the public transport, can therefore be successful.

Results show that also the news format is important for news consumption. The news format young adults like can be characterized by very recent news, checking headlines and short articles. The Internet is extremely suitable for such kind of news consumption. In comparison with paid newspapers, free newspapers fit these news format preferences much better. Most free newspapers give the reader a quick overview of the news.

Normally, time is a scarce resource. That means that newspapers are involved in a time battle. They have to compete with other news media. Among the younger generation, newspapers lose their of old strong position. When time is less scarce, young adults see newspaper reading as a good way to pass time. This is an opportunity for newspapers. Waiting time can be very suitable for newspaper reading, while newspaper reading is a good way to pass that time. Especially when waiting time is combined with habit creation, viable newspaper concepts can maintain.

'Quality has its price' is a frequently used statement. But the younger generation is no longer convinced of this 'truth'. Mainstream young adults are unwilling to pay for news. News is perceived as a free product. Paying for news is not even an influencing factor for newspaper reading. Paid news offers them no surplus value. Therefore, it is unlikely that paid newspapers will be mainstream news media in the future, when free news media like the Internet, television and radio are available.

While paid newspapers maybe will loose their important position, it does not mean that paid newspapers' position is taken over by free newspapers. Regular reading of free newspapers does not mean that young adults are dependent of them for their surveillance needs. Maybe the very well fitting structural factors make people read free newspapers instead of the intrinsic value of such newspapers. Exposure to news is not necessarily an expression of attention to news, as Beaudoin and Thorson (2004) already stated.

The question can be asked how to raise the newspaper reading time rates among young adults. Behavior can be changed by either modifying the personal factors like the preferred news format or the structural factors like the facilitating conditions. One's surveillance needs or preferred news format, which are personal factors, will not easily change. Structural factors on the other hand, like facilitating conditions, can be changed, for example by publishers. This research demonstrates the significant influence of these structural factors. Publishers should look for answers how they can meet the future generations on time, availability and price. It has to be taken into account that reading conditions can be improved, but that the initial news

supply function of newspapers seems to be outdated. Other news media like the Internet have taken over that position, because of their more dynamic media characteristics. Opportunities to raise the circulation figures among young adults are therefore limited.

#### Further research

The primary focus of this research concerned newspaper reading. For a good research among the young generation solely studying newspaper reading is not enough. A broader focus, taking the whole news consumption into account, can give more detailed insight into young adult's attitude toward news. On the other hand, it could be very interesting to research the issue more specifically. A sharper focus, with a clear distinction between free newspapers and paid newspapers, could result in sharper conclusions. In this research, for example, newspaper reading time is measured as one variable. In further research it would be useful to separate newspaper reading time in two categories. Paid newspaper reading time as well as free newspaper reading time should be measured. Then, more detailed conclusions could be given.

Besides this, more specific research enables the possibility to test more specific influencing factors. It can have higher R<sup>2</sup>'s as a consequence. The broader scope of this research could declare the relatively low R<sup>2</sup>'s.

A last remark for further research is that this research' respondent group is not representative for the Dutch population. In the respondent group high educated young adults were overrepresented. Therefore, conclusions have to be made with reservation. Future research with a representative respondent group could avert this problem.

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# Appendix A: Questionnaire items (Dutch version)

Sociodemografische kenmerken

Nationaliteit

Leeftijd

Geslacht

Huidige of hoogst genoten opleiding

Nieuwsconsumptiepatroon

Betaalde krant

Gratis krant

*Televisie* 

Internet

Radio

Mobiele nieuwsdiensten

Ander nieuwsmedium

# Leestijd kranten

Maandag

Dinsdag

Woensdag

**Donderdag** 

Vrijdag

Zaterdag

Zondag

# Gebruik openbaar vervoer

Hoe vaak reis je gemiddeld met het openbaar vervoer?

# De wereld monitoren

Ik wil de wereld om mij heen begrijpen.

Het nieuws informeert mij over dagelijkse dingen.

Ik word leergierig van het nieuws.

Ik wil weten hoe de samenleving in elkaar zit.

Ik wil weten wat er zou kunnen gebeuren.

Ik wil op de hoogte blijven van wat de overheid doet.

*Ik wil op de hoogte blijven van het internationale nieuws.* 

# Interesse in nieuwsonderwerpen

Sport

*Internationale politiek* 

*Nationale politiek* 

Cultuur

**Economie** 

*Televisie* 

Lokaal nieuws

Film

#### Nieuwsformat

Artikelen in kranten moeten kort zijn.

Ik lees graag nieuwsberichten die dieper op de zaak ingaan.

Ik wil vooral snel een indruk kunnen krijgen van het nieuws.

Wat ik oppik uit het nieuws, gebruik ik vaak in gesprekken met anderen.

Het is belangrijker dat nieuwsberichten actueel zijn, dan dat ze zorgvuldig geschreven

Als ik de krant lees, bekijk ik voornamelijk de koppen.

# Zelfeffectiviteit

Het lezen van een krant kost mij veel energie.

De leesbaarheid van de krant is goed: ik lees de krant gemakkelijk weg.

Ik heb vaak te weinig voorkennis om een nieuwsbericht goed te begrijpen.

Ik vind het nieuws in de krant vaak te complex.

Ik moet moeite doen om een krant te pakken te krijgen.

# Faciliterende condities

Ik heb voldoende geld om een betaalde krant te kunnen lezen.

Ik reis vaak met het openbaar vervoer.

Het lezen van de krant vind ik een goede tijdsbesteding.

Op plekken waar ik dagelijks kom, tref ik vaak een krant aan.

Als ik een krant wil lezen, kan ik daar gemakkelijk over beschikken.

Ik heb voldoende tijd om een krant te kunnen lezen.

#### Gewoonte

Ik ben verslaafd aan het nieuws.

Ik mis de krant als ik hem niet lees.

Het lezen van de krant is voor mij een dagelijks automatisme.

Het lezen van de krant geeft me een vertrouwd gevoel.

Als ik het nieuws wil volgen, is het lezen van de krant een voor de hand liggende keuze.

# Krant lezen als tijdsbesteding

Ik lees de krant als ik niets beters heb te doen.

Ik lees de krant omdat ik hem nu eenmaal tegenkom op bepaalde plekken.

Voor het lezen van de krant maak ik bewust tijd vrij.

Ik lees de krant als ik mij verveel.

Ik lees de krant als er niemand is om mee te praten.

# Bereidheid tot betalen

Betaald nieuws biedt mij meerwaarde boven gratis nieuws.

Het is overbodig om te betalen voor nieuws.

Ik ben bereid om voor nieuws te betalen.

# Gedrag van relevante anderen

Ik zie mensen om me heen geregeld de krant lezen.

In het gezin waarin ik ben opgegroeid nam de krant een belangrijke plaats in.

Mensen die ik respecteer, vinden dat ik een krant moet lezen.

Ik zie mijn collega's of klasgenoten geregeld de krant lezen.

Ik lees de krant omdat een groot deel van de mensen om mij heen de krant leest.

Andere mensen vinden dat ik de krant moet lezen.

# Appendix B: Questionnaire items (English version)

Socio-demografic characteristics

Age

Sex

Education

News consumption pattern

Paid newspaper

Free newspaper

**Television** 

Internet

Radio

Mobile news services

Other news source

Newspaper reading time

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

*Thursday* 

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Use of public transportation

How often do you travel with public transportation?

Surveillance needs

I want to understand the World.

The news informs me about daily life.

The news makes me want to learn more.

I want to learn about society.

I want to learn what might happen.

I want to keep up with government.

I want to keep up with international news.

# Interest in news subjects

Sports

International politics

National politics

**Economics** 

Culture

**Television** 

Local news

Film

### News format

Articles in newspapers have to be short.

I like to read in-depth articles.

I want a quick overview of the news.

What I get out of the news do I use in small talks.

It is more important that articles are up to date, than that they are written punctually. When I read the paper, I mainly scan the headlines.

# Self-efficacy

Newspaper reading costs me a lot of energy.

The readability of the newspaper is good: I read the paper easily.

Most times I lack the foreknowledge to understand the news item.

Most times the news in the paper is too complicated.

I have to try hard to get a newspaper.

# Facilitating conditions

I have enough money to be able to read a paid newspaper.

I travel by public transportation frequently.

Newspaper reading is a good way to pass time.

*In places I daily visit, I normally find newspapers.* 

When I'd like to read a newspaper, I have easy access to it.

I have enough time to be able to read a newspaper.

# Habit

I am a news junkie.

I miss the newspaper when I don't read it.

*Newspaper reading is part of my daily routine.* 

Newspaper reading gives me familiar feeling.

When I want to follow the news, newspaper reading is a self-evident choice.

# Newspaper reading as pastime

I read the newspaper when I have nothing better to do.

*I read the newspaper because I find it in some places.* 

For newspaper reading I set some time apart.

I read the newspaper when I am bored.

I read the newspaper when there's no one else to talk to.

# Willingness to pay

Paid news has to surplus value to me above free news.

It is useless to pay for news.

I am willing to pay for news.

# Social environment

I see people around me reading a paper frequently.

*In the family I grown up, the newspaper had an important role.* 

People I respect take the view I have to read a newspaper.

I see my colleagues or classmates reading a newspaper frequently.

I read a newspaper because a big part of the people around me reads a newspaper.

Other people take the view I have to read a newspaper.