

NEWSPAPER LOYALTY

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Why subscribers stay or leave
(the abridged edition)

Leon de Wolff

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This publication is the abridged edition of the PhD thesis 'Newspaper loyalty. Why subscribers stay or leave' ('Trouw aan een krant. Waarom abonnees blijven of opzeggen') by Leonardus John de Wolff at the Erasmus University Rotterdam 19 June 2012.

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FOREWORD

This is an abridged edition of some fifty pages of the original PhD thesis of 404 pages. In this edition we present the core of the argument, hint at the line of reasoning and show the bare conclusions. In the PhD thesis Leon de Wolff serves up for the reader the richness of the data in all its splendour, reproduced in multi-colour, state of the art graphs, figures, images, tables and diagrams. There he builds his argument meticulously within the scientific discussion on the subject, justifying it in the scientific apparatus (notes, appendix, bibliography). Bounded by several constraints we present here for the reader the main road through this study, without the overwhelming data and all the academic detours, and only hint at the scientific embedding by enclosing the complete original bibliography.

The reader who wants to explore the argument more fully should definitely dive into the original PhD thesis: *'Newspaper loyalty. Why subscribers stay or leave'* (*Trouw aan een krant. Waarom abonnees blijven of opzeggen'*) by Leonardus John de Wolff at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 19 June 2012.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This introduction is set up as an itinerary. Instead of an address the final destination is an answer to the question why some of the subscribers of a newspaper renew their subscription, even if their newspaper does not supply them with the kind of articles and photographs they prefer, and others do not. The itinerary shows us the roads to take and the obstacles to overcome on our way to the objective of this study.

Three circumstances are responsible for the immediate cause of this study:

1. *The ambivalent position of newspapers.*

On the one hand there is a definite decline of paid newspaper circulation: from 92% of all households in 1975 to 47% in 2010. On the other hand there still is a market penetration of around 50%. The mismatch between demand and perceived supply is so high that it is rational to expect that subscribers would end their subscription en masse. This is not the case. There is a decline over a long period, but not a massive exodus in a short period of time. The question remains how it is possible that some subscribers continue their subscription even if they do not think to get the kind of articles they want to read and the photographs they want to see. Their behavior does not seem to be very rational assuming there is a positive correlation between content and newspaper loyalty.

2. *The lack of empirical data about newspapers.*

Apart from the long-term effort of the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau to document meticulously the time people spend on reading a newspaper there is no empirical study about Dutch

newspapers, let alone about the reasons for the ambivalent position of the newspapers in the Netherlands.

3. *The status of the public discourse.*

The opinions about the reasons why the Dutch newspapers are not based on empirical investigation. The explanations focus on the decline, ignoring the substantial market penetration. We found empirical studies that showed how unpopular it is to investigate newspapers empirically. Of the thousands of publications in highly respected academic journals only a fraction is about newspapers and from this fraction a fraction can be labelled as empirical. The unpopularity of empirical research is understandable. Normative thinking prevents researchers from being interested in the motives of the public, because it does not matter what the public thinks or feels. The authors know what a public want, the theory tells them what they ought to read, and what newspapers have to print.

We want to understand, however, why some subscribers renew their subscription and others don't. To answer this question we have to know how subscribers make the decision to renew, or not renew. With this objective in mind empirical research is inevitable. All conceivable explanations can be the result. No possible explanation must be excluded. Therefore we made sure that all independent variables were connected to one of the three ways that are known to come to a conclusion: the triad *cognitive, affective* and *conative*, also known as *rational, emotional* and *action oriented model*, also known as *analytical, holistic* and *dynamic model*.

We explain this in the chapter about basic assumptions: no monopoly of the rational model. In that chapter we cover three other basic assumptions: *the construction of social reality, pragmatism* and *objective subjectivity*.

In the section about the construction of social reality we follow we follow the dictum: social reality exists thanks to the fact that people construct it. The concept of function is the main tool that helps people to construct social reality logically.

The fact that social reality is ontologically subjective because people construct it, does not mean that social reality is also subjective in an epistemic sense. We can be objective about subjectivity.

The chapters on basic assumptions make the choices we have to make in the chapter on theoretical issues understandable. In that chapter we elucidate on the triad cognitive, affective and conative. We elaborate on the concept of need and we will show how newspaper subscribers struggle with *the weakness of will*.

We will explain why the concept of brand is an outstanding example of the affective holistic way to come to a conclusion, in our case to decide what to read.

Finally we will introduce a way that distinguishes systematically one layout from another in order to test the assumption that layout has an impact on the reader's perception of newspaper supply.

In the chapter on theoretical issues we will explain why we define the concept of brand the way we do.

EXPLANATIONS

Despite the lack of empirical studies on the decline of newspaper circulation, the usual experts came up with numerous explanations, including, dereading, the changing media landscape, individualization, the erosion of civic engagement, the decline of political participation, free newspapers, the Internet, less free time for the young and better educated, a different newspaper experience, a decline in the habit of reading a newspaper, and the depillarization of Dutch society.

A very brief review of the explanations.

Dereading

Dereading, the tendency that people are reading less, especially if they are young, is regarded as an important contributor to the decline of newspaper popularity. It is argued that people read fewer books, magazines and newspapers because they prefer to watch television or surf the Internet. From 1975 onwards, the Sociaal en Cultureel

Planbureau carried out exhaustive research on how the Dutch spend their time. Those studies show that people read less especially if they are young. Adversaries argue that the studies are biased because they did not include reading the Internet, and text messages.

The changing media landscape

The changing media landscape. Over the last 10 years the interaction between the sources of news, the messengers of the news and the consumers of news has changed fundamentally. A relatively transparent and static system has transformed into a nervous pandemonium. In the old days, the news sources – such as governmental organizations – needed mass media if they wanted to communicate with the public.

Individualization

Individualization is the process that increases the autonomy of individuals to organize their own lives, or to phrase it differently. Individualization makes individuals less dependent on the people that surround them. People make their own choices in an increasing range of activities.

Individualization is also seen as a process of self-orientation. Individuals are more oriented towards their own lives than towards public life. As a result – it is argued – people have no need to be informed about a distant, anonymous world. Individualization may end in the erosion of civic engagement. It is argued that this erosion of civic engagement stimulates the decline of readership.

Free newspaper

In the public debate, the development of free newspapers is mentioned as a reason for the decline of paid Dutch newspaper circulation. According to Piet Bakker free newspapers may weaken the position of traditional newspapers but that there is no indication of a great deal of cannibalism as many readers of free newspapers did not read a paid newspaper prior to that.

Internet

The proliferation of internet sites that bring news quickly and, in most cases, also for free, is another mentioned cause. The number of free news sites has increased rapidly in the past ten years and the average number of monthly visitors is increasing with 50-100% or more every year.

Diminishing free time

Diminishing free time for some social categories is mentioned as a reason just as the increased supply of leisure activities. People below the age of 50, especially the more educated, have less free time than in the 1970s. People above the age of 50, as well as the less educated, have more free time. It is argued that a growing number of people no longer experience the newspaper as a necessary medium that you cannot miss, not even for a day. Reading a newspaper the same time everyday is not taken for granted anymore. It is assumed that fewer people read a newspaper out of habit .

Depillarization

The emancipation of Dutch citizens - known in the Netherlands as the depillarization of Dutch society - is mentioned as a cause for newspaper decline. The argument goes as follows: Until the time depillarization became visible, Dutch society was built on pillars: a protestant, Catholic, social-democratic or liberal pillar. Social life took place within the confines of the pillar you lived in, as is said in Dutch. All social categories in Dutch society behaved according to this lifestyle and had their own newspapers. Because of depillarization of Dutch society since the 1960s, people stopped being 'a member' of a newspaper. The members transformed gradually into consumers. The newspapers gradually transformed from a symbol of pillarization into a product, with or without a clear social or political identity. In the 1970s the politically engaged considered the reading of a particular newspaper to be a political statement.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as the identity of Dutch political parties became less clear and large numbers of Dutch voters switched parties

after every election, it became more difficult for newspapers to profile themselves politically.

Despite the gloomy picture of the decline of newspapers, the number of households in the Netherlands with a newspaper subscription exceeds the numbers that should give cause for gloom. On top of that, the number of people that never read a newspaper is negligible. A market penetration of more than 50% needs celebration rather than mourn. Yet the newspaper has lost its firm position in everyday routine, that moment of relaxation, those few minutes of enjoyment - reading a newspaper.

SCRUTINIZING THE USUAL ANSWERS

Most of the explanations for the decline of newspaper sales that are mentioned in the public debate seem to make sense. Isn't it true that all those television stations and Internet sites compete heavily with the old-fashioned paper news? Is it not true that the newspaper subscriber has lost his membership status? And is it not true that more people are much more interested in their own world than in the world of great institutions and grand statesmen?

Nevertheless, the explanations have not been put to an empirical test. A closer look at the structure of the argumentation has made clear that at least five explanations are logically fallacious. The social and cultural factors presented as a cause for newspaper decline do not explain the decline. At best they explain a change in demand. The decline could be caused by a discrepancy between perceived supply and demand. This would be the case if a change in demand did not result in a change in perceived supply.

To illustrate this line of reasoning we take the individualization argument. The argument is as follows: Because of the individualization of society, fewer people, especially young people, are interested in public affairs, fewer people want to know what goes on in politics and more people are focused on the issues of everyday

life. As a result, more people do not have the urge to read newspapers. As a result, the demand for newspapers declines.

The first step in the structure of the explanation claims that individualization is responsible for a change in demand. People, especially younger people, are more interested in their own small world, than in the big world and this change in orientation results in a demand for more practical news, more news about topics that affect everyday life, and less about public affairs, politics and foreign affairs. Whether the assertion is true that, as a result of individualization, people are more interested in their small world than in the big world is not relevant at this point. Even if this statement is correct, the conclusion that follows is not necessarily right. The fact that people are more interested in their own world does not imply that they stop buying newspapers. Individualization may explain a change in demand, but does not explain a decline in newspaper sales, because a change in demand does not necessarily result in reluctance to buy a newspaper.

That could be the case if the change in demand did not affect the perceived supply. If people want a different kind of newspaper and the newspaper adapts to the new demand, why would a consumer stop buying that newspaper? The statement that individualization is a cause for the decline of newspaper sales jumps to this conclusion by ignoring the argument that a change in demand – caused by individualization -has not resulted in a change of supply.

The argument that the erosion of civic engagement and the decline of political participation explain the decrease in newspaper sales suffers from the same fallacy. The erosion of civic engagement could explain a change in demand, but does not explain a decline in newspaper sales. As with individualization, the decline could only be explained if a change in demand did not result in a change of supply. In that case, the discrepancy between demand and supply causes the decline, not the erosion of civic engagement.

There is some empirical evidence that a change in demand does not result in a change of supply. Green (1999) found a lack of adaptation

to a change in demand in the newsrooms of Australian newspapers and discovered that the organizational structure and culture of those newsrooms condemns the papers to continuing failure to implement recommended content changes. His study revealed, as did others before, that some journalists decide to ignore all research findings as a matter of principle. "(...) even basic demographic research work could impinge on journalistic freedom of expression and is therefore best to be regarded with suspicion or, preferably, ignored all together".

After studying how CBS, NBC, *Newsweek* and *Time* decide what they consider news, Gans (1980) wrote that he was surprised to find that reporters had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback from it. They did have a vague image of the audience, but paid little attention to it. "Instead, they filmed and wrote for their superiors and for themselves, assuming, (...) that what interested them would interest the audience".

What about dreading, free newspapers, the Internet and less free time? How do those arguments connect to supply and demand? Less free time implies that people have to decide if reading a newspaper still fits in their limited reading time. The more the newspaper answers to the demand, the bigger the chance that a user will keep buying the paper, even if time becomes scarce. The chance of reading a newspaper increases if perceived supply meets demand.

The same reasoning is applicable against the argument that free newspapers cause the decline of newspaper sales. The chance that newspaper customers stop buying a newspaper increases if they are more satisfied with the perceived supply and demand ratio from free newspapers than with the perceived supply, demand and cost ratio from the paid newspapers. Again the decline must be looked at from a supply and demand perspective.

The impact of the proliferation of online news on newspaper sales can also be looked at from this point of view. If newspaper customers are satisfied with the supplied product there is a smaller chance that they will leave their familiar newspaper for an unfamiliar site. Two arguments remain: a different newspaper experience and the habit of

reading a newspaper. Both arguments are not directly linked to the content of the newspaper, but to social, cultural and psychological phenomena.

Buying a newspaper is not only inspired by its content. "There is evidence that 'something else' besides particular content alone is at work in the attraction of Americans to newspapers, and that the 'something' may be habit," writes Bentley. In defining the demand for newspapers it is necessary to include social, cultural and psychological functions. Then it will be possible to determine the relative impact they have on newspaper consuming behavior.

After this brief analysis of arguments that dominate the public debate about the decline of newspaper sales, the conclusion is that at least five of them do not explain decline. At best they explain a change in demand. The explanation of decline literally jumps to that conclusion.

THE DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The lack of empirical research motivates us to collect a substantial amount of empirical data that gives us the opportunity to determine whether newspaper readers get the kind of articles and pictures they want. In case of a mismatch the question is that despite the fact that they do not get the kind of articles and pictures they want there are subscribers that stay loyal nevertheless. Why are they doing this? Why do some stay loyal and others don't? What causes newspaper loyalty?

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

If there is a change in demand and if supply does not adjust to the change (step 1), there will be a discrepancy between demand and supply. This discrepancy could cause the decline (step 2).

There are two opposite theories of how newspaper readers perceive and evaluate supply: the *analytical-empirical* and the *holistic-affective* approach.

1. The first theory assumes that readers are specific and articulate in their preferences and empirical in the way they determine if the supply meets their demand. They do not merely read their newspaper but scrutinize it.

2. The second theory assumes that newspaper readers are general and biased in the way they judge supply. Their expectations about what a newspaper will offer are so deeply rooted in their minds that the expectations have transformed into convictions commonly known as 'brands'. A brand is both an expectation and a validation. If the brand is strong and positive, the user is not only convinced of what he will get, but knows in advance that he will be satisfied with what the future will bring, even if a test that compares demand with perceived supply shows that the users do not get what they want. In the real world - we assume - newspaper loyalty is not the result of an analytical, logical and empirical comparison, but is the result of a holistic evaluation. If brand image is strong and positive then the consumer remains loyal.

There are three steps in the structure of the holistic argument. The first step is *the relation between brand and product perception*; people see what they expect to see, not necessarily what is there. If the *brand is strong and positive* the perception of supply is positive which results - and this is step two - in a satisfied reader. The third step is the assumption that *satisfied readers are more loyal* than dissatisfied readers.

The question is which of the two theories predicts newspaper loyalty better: the analytical, or the holistic approach.

Marketing theories claim that the less a consumer is able to determine the product's quality, in other words the less a consumer is able to determine if the product is fit for use, the more product perception, satisfaction and loyalty are determined by brand image. The research elaborates on the distinction between *search*, *experience* and *credence* attributes.

The quality of a product with *search* attributes can be determined before purchase. The quality of a product with *experience* attributes can only be established by using it. In case of products with *credence* attributes, it is not possible for a consumer to establish its quality objectively.

The impact of *brand* on product loyalty is stronger with credence or experience attributes than with products with search attributes. If product quality is not tangible, the consumers are more susceptible to expectations of product performance that are moulded by the images of social and cultural environment stored in their heads than in the case of evident quality.

Next to brand, *layout* is a second feature that may indirectly influence newspaper loyalty. Indirectly, because first there may be an impact of layout on the perception of newspaper supply. A layout with many, intense and differently shaped elements induces different expectations of the newspaper's supply than a layout with a few, low-key, similarly shaped elements (1). And secondly there may be an impact of the perception of newspaper supply on newspaper loyalty (2). A combination of (1) and (2) makes for (3) the impact of layout on newspaper loyalty.

Schönbach comes to the conclusion that layout determines the success of a newspaper directly. We found that layout determines the expectation of supply and that this perceived supply predicts newspaper loyalty.

It was said before that there were two opposite theories on the way readers perceive and evaluate newspaper supply: the *analytical-empirical* and the *holistic-affective* approach. This dichotomy can also be labelled as rational and emotional or *cognitive and affective*. Some are not satisfied with this dichotomy and state there are more than two relevant variables, that the dichotomy is in fact a triad. Next to cognition and affection there is the concept of *conation*.

THE HETEROGENEITY OF THE AUDIENCE

Newspaper readers are not a homogeneous category. Some people know exactly what they want and are able to articulate their preferences with some kind of precision and make a comparative assessment of newspaper content. Others are guided by tradition, habit or the need to show their identity. They do not really think about their intentions when buying a paper, let alone make a conscious decision.

It can be assumed that a substantial number of people only know what they want after they have seen what they can get. They may be heavily influenced by the newspaper's brand as they evaluate supply, or they may not be easily swayed by images.

So, if we want to know what influences the decision to cancel a newspaper subscription we should not exclude the possibility that the answer differs from one group of subscribers to the next.

THE PRAGMATIC CONCEPT OF FUNCTION

The pragmatic concept of function is introduced to deal with the problems that accompany the main quests. The concept of function is the theoretical tool for developing a taxonomy to describe newspaper content. This makes it possible to describe readers' preferences. The function of an artefact, like a newspaper, enables a user to accomplish the results he expects to accomplish. If the designer of the artefact intended those results, the ability is called *a primary function*. If the user is able to accomplish results that were not the designer's intention, the ability is called *a secondary function*.

The *primary* functions of newspapers are about its content: the text, pictures, and presentation. The *secondary* functions are the social, cultural and psychological results the newspaper enables the user to realize, like having a moment for oneself, showing one's identity, or proving to be 'one of us'. In order to test the assumption that there is a discrepancy between the demand and supply of newspapers, we first have to describe both primary and secondary functions and compare them.

The pragmatic definition of function focuses on intended consequences. It is action-oriented, which means that it tries to describe and understand the behaviour of agents in a specific situation. In the case of newspapers, the actors are the producers, journalists and users; more specifically the publisher, the journalist and the consumer. Of course actors are part of a system, and as a consequence influence the system as well as being influenced by it. This mutual impact is important if we want to know why consumers behave as they do, or if we want to explain the impact of consumer behaviour on society. But those two interesting questions are not part of our research plan.

We want to focus this study on the behaviour of journalists and users. We want to know how they define the situation they are in, how they construct social reality. We do not want to get into the question as to why. The main tool consumers use in this process of construction is the pragmatic concept of function.

The concept of function helps both the designer and the user. The designer, because it forces him to think what the artefact enables a user to accomplish. The user, because it enables him to be specific about his preferences.

But perhaps users do not want to be specific, or are not able to be specific. Maybe their preferences are very fuzzy and in their realm of vagueness there is no room for analytical tools that assume users to be argumentative and factual in their newspaper consumer behaviour. Or maybe some uses are specific and others are not. Maybe some people are more influenced by the process of institutionalization and socialization than others. If that is the case, this should have consequences for the methods of research. Next to a method that assumes an analytical approach by consumers we should include a more holistic way of reality construction.

THE HOLISTIC CONCEPT OF BRAND

We will measure demand and perceived supply analytically as well as holistically using the pragmatic concept of function and the concept of brand.

The first tool assumes rationality in the decision-making process. This means that consumers try to get facts and intend to use reasoning. It is not important if the structure of the arguments is not logically flawless. The only thing that matters is the intention.

The second tool is holistic. Here logical argumentation is not a necessary condition. Sentiments, emotions and associations will do.

One sees an image, one has a feeling. In the case of a brand, the images and feelings are not idiosyncratic. On the contrary, a brand is only a brand if it is shared by a group of people. One could say that a brand is the institutionalized opinion of a product.

Description

This study starts with a description of demand and perceived supply in order to determine if supply meets demand. It does not try to explain the demand. It does not try to answer the question why people have the preferences they have.

The same counts for supply. We do not try to answer the questions of what determines the choices journalists make, why they write about particular issues and why they present the information as they do, why they adapt to a change in demand if there is one, or why they do not.

The second part of our empirical research has a more explanatory flavour as we want to unveil the relative impact of primary and secondary functions, delivering, brand, access, habit, tradition, price, free papers and media alternatives on newspaper loyalty.

Newspaper subscribers

In 2009 more than 90% of the Dutch paid newspaper circulation was in subscriptions. This probably has to do with the specific Dutch phenomena that is known as 'pillarization', the Dutch answer to the problems of a lot of minority groups within a small country.

The Dutch population has ended up in a confusing situation. On the one hand there is a clear decline in paid newspapers if the growth of the number of households is taken into account (from 92% in 1975 to 47% in 2010). On the other hand, the total number of paid newspapers still is around 4 million, which is almost 50% of all households. This

looks more like an eroding subscription share than an alarmingly low market share. There is a decline in newspaper sales, but there are still a lot of newspapers sold. As more than 90% of the paid circulation is sold by subscription, the decline in this situation is best explained by discovering the determinants of newspaper loyalty. It is a matter of newspaper loyalty if newspaper subscribers exclude the possibility ending their subscription, the proof of a previous commitment to the newspaper in question.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is divided into in a *theoretical* and an *empirical* section.

The *theoretical* section serves six objectives:

- (1) It articulates the *basic assumptions* that influenced the choices we have made in the design and the execution of this study.
- (2) It elaborates upon *theoretical issues* we have to address.
- (3) It explains the *pragmatic concept of function*.
- (4) It describes and explains the *taxonomic model* that is used to describe newspaper content.
- (5) It describes and elucidates the *conceptual framework* this study is based on.
- (6) It stipulates the *hypotheses* that will be tested in the empirical section of this study.

The *empirical* section includes three major topics.

- (1) The *operationalization of the concepts* from the conceptual model into measurable questions.
- (2) The presentation of *the empirical results*, both from the surveys and the content analyses.
- (3) The discussions of our *findings*.

THE THEORETICAL SECTION

In the theoretical section we will give account of our basic assumptions. We will illustrate that social reality is a human

construction and therefore ontologically subjective. We will explain why there is a fundamental difference between “the social construction of reality” and the “construction of social reality.” In the chapter on basic assumptions, we will illustrate what we call our pragmatic approach. How is it possible to make general statements about practice if practice by definition differs from situation to situation?

Next we will address theoretical issues that are relevant to this study. Those disputes are linked to the problem of

- (a) demand,
- (b) perceived supply and
- (c) purchase and loyalty.

Demand

We start the discussion of demand with the controversy between the view that people rationally decide to buy a newspaper because of their need for a particular content and the opinion that buying or reading a newspaper has little to do with content, but everything to do with ritual, habit or emotional experience. In media science these opposing views are represented by what is called mainstream research and cultural studies. In marketing, similar arguments are exchanged between the representatives of mainstream brand theory and the protagonists of experience marketing.

A second set of disputes is about audience. How to define audience? How homogeneous is an audience? What is the distinction between audience, target group and what is called the ‘reader circle’? The question is whether an audience looks for a certain gratification and determines afterwards if the gratification has been obtained or whether the process is much less rational, analytical and content-related; or more habitual, ritual, and determined by cultural mechanisms.

A third issue is the problem of ‘need’. Is there such a thing as need, and if there is, what is the nature of it? Should it be linked to the idea of basic human needs or is it better to speak about preferences, desires, or functions? Needs, preferences and desires can be clear and specific, or vague and fuzzy. We believe that language and thoughts

are bound to be fuzzy and vague. Language itself can cause inevitable imprecision, as is illustrated by the Sorites paradox. A clear, unambiguous and precise language requires so many conditions – some of them rather complicated – that in everyday life nobody will be able to meet those conditions. Even among philosophers and linguists the proper application of those conditions is debatable. We will explain that the existence of words and the processes of institutionalization help people in everyday life to construct social reality as the definition of recurring situations is internalized. People do not always act according to their own standards. Such can be the case when a newspaper reader believes he should start to read a particular article, but because of ‘the weakness of the will’ he starts reading another.

Perceived supply

The first perceived supply problem we address is the difficulty of describing what is offered. Is it possible to describe the content of a newspaper in a way that is both relevant to the practice of designers and users, journalists and readers?

The second issue is the impact of presentation. Schönbach showed that a difference in layout explained newspaper success a little more than a difference in content. We want to find out if a different layout will cause a different expectation for a newspaper.

If brand influences readers’ perception of supply, it influences expectations and even satisfaction. How important is newspaper brand image, both on the level of the newspaper in general (brand category) and in the case of a particular newspaper?

Purchase and loyalty

To what extent is the purchase of a newspaper influenced by the satisfaction regarding perceived supply both in terms of content as well as non-content or by access and opportunity costs? Is there a cheaper way to get the same gratification, or does a marginal improvement of gratification justify the price?

There is a chapter exclusively about a major theoretical notion of this study: the concept of function. We will explain what function is and why the concept is so important to us; why we use the concept of function to specify the object of demand and what is the function of function. This treatise results in a definition of function, *primary* functions and *secondary* functions. We will show the difference between what we call *pragmatic* function and *academic* function. The next chapter is devoted to a taxonomy of newspaper content. This taxonomy is an elaboration of the primary functions of the newspaper. We start this chapter by comparing our approach with similar studies in applied linguistics. After that we define and illustrate the concepts we use, one by one. In separate paragraphs we define and illustrate the seven functions and five perspectives. We distinguish and we define and illustrate what we call areas of interest and the function of presentation. Then follows the theoretical section: a description of the conceptual model that sketches the structure of this study. We will define the various concepts and explain the rationale of the framework. The chapter after this explains the hypotheses that will be tested.

THE EMPIRICAL SECTION

The empirical section starts with a chapter that describes methodological questions: how is the research set up, what techniques are used and why. We combine survey with content analysis. This method enables us to compare demand, perceived supply and the perception of supply of the primary functions. The measurement of the secondary functions is based entirely on the survey. We conducted surveys in 2006 and 2008. The 2006 survey was a random sample of the Dutch public over 15 years of age. (n = 2003) In 2008 we conducted a roughly identical survey. This time the sample was around 4000 and, in addition, the same survey was conducted among the readers of all national newspapers. The magnitude of the second survey makes cluster analysis possible. We will operationalize the concepts that are defined in the conceptual framework into the actual survey questions.

We will summarize the survey results in a separate chapter. This includes a summary of the content analysis and an additional explanation of the method we used, followed by a chapter that contains the test of the hypotheses we formulated.

The last chapter is reserved for the conclusions and possible consequences we draw from the tested hypotheses.

In an epilogue we will paint a panorama, the function of which is to speculate about the future of the newspaper. Of course speculation is not a category that belongs to the domain of media science, except when its pretensions are limited to the logic of discovery and the speculations are merely suggestions for research that could be initiated.

2 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS & THEORETICAL ISSUES

We will address the theoretical issues that are bound to emerge the moment we try to answer the question why some subscribers end their subscription and others do not.

In this study we want to find out why some people cancel their newspaper subscription and others do not. In order to answer this question we have to take a position on the following disputes:

a) About the *meaning of the word* 'newspaper'. Are we talking about what a newspaper is or what a newspaper does? The tangible characteristics, the sheets of paper that contain words and images or the functions it fulfils?

b) About *the need for* a newspaper. How to define need? Are we talking about the need for a newspaper or the need for articles and photo's? Are we talking about the need for articles in general or the need for a specific kind of article?

c) About *fuzzy need*. Not every subscriber is able to articulate his or her newspaper needs. These needs are often vague and fuzzy. Some subscribers only know what they want after they have seen what they can get.

d) About *weakness of will*. The phenomenon that people do not always act according to their own preferences. There are readers who start to read a spicy story, instead of an in-depth analysis although they say they would rather read about politics than entertainment.

e) About the *description of newspaper content*. It is said that there are no words to describe newspaper content. What we have is too vague (sport, politics, etc.) or too specific (how do you rate this article?) A taxonomy that makes it possible to describe newspaper content is yet to be developed.

f) About *how an opinion is made or a decision is taken*. In this case, the decision to start or end a subscription. Is this decision *rational*? Is it the result of time consuming logical reasoning or the result of an *affective* act that comes about in a split second and is not too concerned about details? Or is the decision-making process a *conative* affair and is the subscriber focusing on the practical circumstances of the necessary actions that should be taken: Can I afford the paper? Are free papers a reasonable alternative? Is the paper delivered on time? Do I have the time to read a newspaper and does it make sense if you take the overwhelming supply of news into consideration? And how much time do I spend at the moment reading a newspaper?

DISPUTES

The meaning of the word 'newspaper'

What do people refer to when they mention the word newspaper? For some the question is superfluous because the answer seems so obvious.

What else could it be but the newspaper content, the texts and images with the latest news? The articles and photographs are, after all, the very reason the newspaper was made in the first place. But a newspaper is not always used according to the intention of the designer. Some people do not buy a newspaper to read the latest news, but because it gives them the opportunity to show their identity; its possession gives them the chance to prove to be 'one of us'.

In marketing theory, it is commonplace not to narrow down a product's definition to its intrinsic features but also to take social, psychological and cultural factors into account.

The need for a newspaper.

Everybody who buys a newspaper expects to be more satisfied with it than without it. The very fact of paying money for a paper means that the buyer expects to be better off after the purchase. Before the consumer decides to buy a paper the consumer must be in a state of

mind that makes him receptive to the tempting offers of ads and telemarketers. Or maybe his state of mind does not need any external stimulus at all. To phrase it bluntly, the potential buyer must feel more or less deprived.

It is conceivable that the need to buy a newspaper has nothing to do with the need to be informed, or entertained, but with the need to feel part of a social group, or category, or the need to have the people around me think I belong to a certain social group or category.

Fuzzy need

A newspaper need is called fuzzy when the object of desire remains vague, is formulated in abstract, in broad terms. Fuzzy stands in contradiction to specific. Fuzzy needs are needs like 'interesting' and 'surprising'. It is fuzzy, because it does not make clear what topics or story angles are interesting or surprising. Words like 'interesting' and 'surprising' are fuzzy because they do not indicate any characteristic of the object of need. In case of a newspaper article, it does not tell us anything about the article's tangible characteristics.

Weakness of will

In the real world you can hear some disbelief about what readers say they read in a newspaper. Readers say, for instance, that the first thing they are going to read in the paper is an in-depth article. When they say this they believe it is true, it is their intention to read the article as soon as they get a hold of the paper. But when it comes to it, they start reading an entertaining story that makes them laugh instead. They are not lying when they say that the first article they will read is the one about Iraq. It is just that they do not act according to their own preferences. Common sense says that the heart is stronger than the mind. A philosopher calls it *the weakness of will*.

Individual differences

Consumers are not a homogeneous category. Some people know exactly what they want and are able to articulate their preferences with some kind of precision and make a comparative assessment of newspaper content. Others are guided by tradition, habit, or the need

to show their identity. They do not really think about their intentions when buying a paper, let alone make a conscious decision. So if we want to know what influences the decision to cancel a newspaper subscription, we should not exclude the possibility that the answer differs from one group of subscribers to the other.

The use of the word demand can give the impression that consumers of newspapers are not a passive crowd, but an active audience. After all, the one with the demand has the intention to change his situation; he wants something that is not yet there; he wants to take action.

Demand implies activity.

However, this is not the case. First of all we do not believe that there is only one audience. Secondly we do not assume that all audience members know exactly what they want. What we do believe is that as far the question of an active audience is concerned, there are at least three different types of newspaper users:

- the *proactive* newspaper reader (who know what they want and look for a newspaper that meets their demand),

- the *reactive* newspaper reader (who realize what they want after they have seen the supply) and

- the *opportunistic* newspaper reader (who does not really have a preference and, if there is one, it is vague and it changes all the time).

This position has consequences for both newspaper purchase and the research.

Next to this newspaper subscribers read their newspapers very selectively. Most of the paper content remains unread but different readers read different stories. Size taken into account, the average newspaper reader reads between 11 to 14% of the newspaper articles entirely and 7 to 8% partly. We found an average article score of 16 to 19%; 11 to 14% entirely and 4 to 5 % partly. Two-thirds of the articles were read by less than 20% of the readers. No article has a score higher than 40%. Readers read selectively, readers are picky.

Newspaper layout

Layout is a second feature that may influence the perception of newspaper content. Difference in layout is a better predictor for

success than a difference in content. The expectations of a newspaper's content depend on the intensity, the frequency and variation of the newspaper's layout elements. If there are relatively many layout elements, with different shapes and a high intensity, people will have a different expectation of that newspaper's content than if the layout is built up with a few, low-key and similarly shaped elements.

The sight of a page installs, within a fraction of a second, a clever program in the heads of newspaper readers. The program tells the readers what to expect. The type of subjects, the kind of story angles. The readers are not aware of this process. They do not read a layout, they read a paper, but without being conscious of the way the text and images are shaped, this very shape gives them a clue as to what they will find in the paper.

The difference in layout is described according to three criteria.

- (1) The *frequency* of elements. Is the number of elements of a newspaper page relatively high or low?
- (2) The *variation* of the elements. Are the elements similar in shape or is there variation?
- (3) The *intensity* of the elements. It is high if the designer has made abundant use of images, colour, big letters, bold letters and sans serif fonts.

In the table below you see a detailed description of the criteria.

Table Differences in lay-out of newspapers

Layout A	Layout B	Layout C
Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
No more than 10 elements on a broadsheet page and less than five elements on a tabloid	No more than 15 elements on a broadsheet page and less than eight elements on a tabloid	More than 15 elements on a broadsheet page and more than eight elements on a tabloid
Variation	Variation	Variation
One dominant layout direction. Absence of squares and circles. The horizontal dimensions exceed the vertical dimensions vice versa.	Some dominance in layout direction. Restraint in the use of squares and circles but no absence. The horizontal dimensions exceed the vertical dimensions vice versa.	No dominant layout direction. No absence of squares and circles.
Intensity	Intensity	Intensity
Images do not exceed 25% of the editorial space No more than 40% color Headline space no more than 10% Headlines have a non-sans serif typeface No more than two headlines are bold No dia positive headlines No underlining All lower case	Images do not exceed 40% of the editorial space No more than 60% color Headline space no more than 15% Headlines have both a sans serif and non-sans serif typeface (60/40) No more than 50% of the headlines are bold Max 1 dia positive headline Max 1 underlining Max 1 upper case	Images may exceed 65% of the editorial space Full color Headline space may exceed 15% Headlines have a sans serif typeface Most headlines are bold Dia positive headlines Underlined Upper case

RATIONALISM IN MEDIA THEORY

In media science, the notion that media consumption is influenced by emotional, social or cultural factors that are independent of the immediate media content is increasing. McQuail labels the elements of the model with the triad cognitive, conative and affective: to know, to act and to feel.

The *cognitive* way is analytical and systematic. The partisans of this model patiently collect all relevant facts. The best possible decision arises when they scrutinize those facts thoroughly, put them in the right order, apply the rules of logic while doing so and make a *functional* analysis.

The *affective* way of deciding is not analytical but holistic. The advocates of the affective way of decision-making do not dismantle the problem into the parts they can better understand, but they look at it as a whole; they feel instead of analyse. They consider an artefact as a *brand*. That is to say as a possible experience instead of a bundle functional benefits. Functional gratification is not the reason for the purchase, but the expectation of having a positive experience. The affective way of decision-making is not the outcome of a process but the result of a sentiment, an affection.

The *conative* way is action oriented. The arguments are about the practical circumstances of 'doing'. Do I have the time to read a newspaper? Is the newspaper delivered at all? Is the newspaper delivered on time? Do I have the money for a newspaper?

It must be clear that the three models are a possible way of processing information. If the critics are correct and some variables are not mutually exclusive, the analysis of the empirical data will not only reveal this and will also correct it.

With the core concept of the *cognitive* model, the concept of function and the application of it for newspapers, will be dealt later.

In the *affective* model there is no time-consuming analysis when a newspaper subscriber keeps his subscription without making a list of pros and cons, without comparing his preferences to what is offered or even without realizing what it means for his identity. This non-rational way of decision-making is repetitive, intuitive, associative, or experiential. The people involved make their decisions on the basis of *branding, intuition, habit, tradition* and/or *preference*.

Instead of a *cognitive* or an *affective* bond with newspapers, the relationship could be *conative*. In that case buying or not buying a newspaper is not a matter of serious deliberation or strong sentiments but rather a practical question determined by the circumstances. This *conative* element is the third element of the triad on which the eclectic conceptual model rests.

It is the perception of the user that determines the relevance. If the respondents believe that the functions of a newspaper can be fulfilled by another medium, the two are interchangeable. Price is important to the reader if money is an issue. Whether the price is elastic or inelastic, in both cases price contributes to newspaper loyalty.

It is possible that the readership of free newspapers is independent of the readership of paid newspapers. Nevertheless a relation between the availability of free papers and newspaper loyalty is conceivable and therefore must be included in the research.

In the publishing world it is widely believed that at the end of the day there is only one thing that is important in the decision to continue a subscription or not: whether or not the newspaper is delivered on time every day. Poor delivery as a reason for the cancellation of a subscription, is the dominant assumption.

Time to read a newspaper is a next issue. The number of possible activities to spend free time has increased since 1995, and the amount of news supply also, so we have to process more in less time.

The increased supply of news has consequences. People are bombarded with so many facts that they can feel drowned in the news. The newspaper can have an important function, it puts the facts into its context. Now that the importance of religion and one-dimensional political ideology have eroded, the clergyman nor the

politician play the role of putting the isolated facts into a meaningful picture. The newspaper could fill this void.

FUNCTION

It is not easy to describe what content readers prefer. The criteria that are used for a description must show a difference in what a text or image *is* and what a text or image *does*. The first difference is about the *characteristics* of the text or image itself. The second difference is about the *consequences* the text or image have on the readers after they read the article or seen the image. The editorial content does something with the readers. There is a communicative effect.

Those questions can be answered if the difference is not restricted to text or image, but encompasses the effect on the reader too. Secondly the difference must not be restricted to areas of interest but to other characteristics and effects of an article too.

The concept of functions can be very useful solving that problem. The concept of function is the theoretical backbone of the rational model. In this study we use a concept of function that is connected to a manmade object, designed to enable a user to achieve objectives that are also intended by the designer. We acknowledge the fact that users can assign a function that were not intended by the designer.

This objectives in the following definitions:

- (1) The function of an object enables users to achieve the objectives they intended to achieve
- (2) The *primary function* of an object enables its user to achieve the desired objectives that were *intended* by the designer
- (3) The *secondary function* of an object enables the user of the object to achieve objectives that were *not intended* by the designer. We distinguish three clusters of secondary functions: social, psychological and cultural.

The primary functions of a newspaper are content related functions.

- (1) First of all there is a need for a mix of topics related to different areas of interest, like politics and administration, economy, sports, art, or travel.

- (2) Secondly there are functions in the strict sense of the word, the specific contributions to the objectives readers want to realize, like bare facts, context, elumination, opinion, advice, emotion and entertainment.
- (3) Thirdly clusters of perspectives such as the practical and general perspective and the human, social and institutional perspectives belong to the primary function.
- (4) In the fourth place the tone of the content can make a difference. Is the tone negative, positive, neutral.
- (5) The type of language - personal, formal, or something in between - may influence the desired function.
- (6) Depth can be a content function. A text or image has depth if it acknowledges the complexity, the many layers and many dimensions of reality.
- (7) Layout can have an important influence on function preference. We measure this preference by looking at the variation, frequency and intensity of elements a page is made of.

In order to establish the fact that if a newspaper or even all newspapers contribute to the objectives readers want to realize we must compare demand with supply. We must compare the mix of preferred functions with the supplied functions. Not only as an observer determines supply empirically, but also as newspaper readers perceive the supply.

There is no conceptual framework, not even a clear vocabulary that could be used describing the content of a newspaper. The words that are used by journalists are far from systematic. It is also impossible to describe the preferences of a reader. We will try to develop a taxonomy that enables us to describe the content of a newspaper objectively. The same taxonomy could be used measuring reader preferences. Three groups of criteria are used: specific *functions*, *perspectives* and *areas of interest*.

Functions

We defined the primary function of an object as the ability for a user to accomplish a result using the object that was designed to fulfil that function. What kind of result do the readers of newspapers want to accomplish? In general terms, the result can be *cognitive, conative* or *affective*.

Table Functions

Functions		
Cognitive	<p>1. The bare facts Enables the reader to get acquainted with unconnected facts or events</p> <p>2. Overview Enables the reader to know facts or events that have been put into a context: historical, future oriented or geographical</p> <p>3. Elucidation Enables the reader to know why or how the facts have taken place</p>	<p>Isolated data</p> <p>Putting facts in a context</p> <p>Understanding why or how</p>
Conative	<p>4. Opinion Enables the reader to know the paper's opinion</p> <p>5. Advice and tips Enables the reader to act effectively in a specific situation</p>	<p>Right or wrong</p> <p>What to do?</p>
Affective	<p>6. Emotion Enables the reader to commit emotionally</p> <p>7. Entertainment Enables the reader to amuse himself</p>	<p>Getting involved</p> <p>Pure enjoyment</p>

Perspective

Perspective is the angle from which an issue or an object is viewed. In a figurative sense, *perspective* is the frame of reference from which a reality is observed. *Perspective* specifies the type of questions that are

asked and the manner in which one gives significance to the facts and events around him.

Contrary to the specified and discussed functions, it is not possible to give a complete run down of all the conceivable perspectives. For the groups of newspapers and 'news magazines', there seem to be two clusters which are relevant:

- Practical and general
- Human-oriented, social, and institutional.

The *practical* perspective perceives the world from the angle of people interested in action. Someone who perceives the world from a *general* perspective is not just looking for subjective, personal significance, but asks questions which stretch further than just the boundaries of his own existence.

A *human-oriented* perspective always keeps the human psyche in sight: what moves people, what they say, think, feel and do. The *social* perspective uses social life as its focus: the social contexts and connections, such as groups and society.

The *institutional* perspective is the frame of reference of administration, of politics, of social organizations, of unions.

Any topic can be approached from any perspective. Of course certain topics can imply a certain perspective, but that is not anything more than an implication.

Areas of interest

If you want to find out what subjects readers are interested in, the list of possibilities is impossible to make. A more practical approach is to cluster the subjects in groups we call 'areas of interest': a collection of subjects that are interrelated, domains that readers would like to read about.

3 THE EMPIRICAL SECTION

THE EMPIRICAL SET-UP

In Survey 1 (n = over 4,100) a sample of the population of the Netherlands older than 13 years was asked questions about the variables derived from the triad cognitive/rational, affective/emotional and conative/circumstantial. The questions were about content preference, perceived supply, fuzzy demand, aspiration and behavior, brand score, habit, tradition, medium preference, price, free paper, delivery and time – how much time one spends reading a newspaper and the question how much time there is to read a newspaper.

In Survey 2 (n = over 1,600) the same questions were asked to a sample of the population of national newspaper readers in order to boost the amount of completes of national newspapers.

In Survey 3 (n = over 2,500) a sample of the population of the Netherlands older than 13 years was asked questions about the impact of layout on the perception of newspaper supply.

The survey's questionnaire contains two groups of questions:

- a) Questions that tell us more about the subscribers' profile
- b) Questions that are derived from the conceptual model.

The core of the model consists of three different approaches that could explain newspaper loyalty: the triad cognitive, affective and conative; also labelled as analytical, holistic and situational; or known as rational, experiential and action-oriented.

The dominant underlying assumption of the method is that newspaper readers use reason; they are rational in choosing the newspaper of their preference. It is even tacitly assumed that the decision to read a newspaper at all is the result of a rational process of decision making. It is one of the objectives of this study to find out if it really is the case that people make a list of the kind of articles they would like to read and images they want to see and compare that list

with what they think is supplied: a rational way of making a purchase decision. So the first group of hypotheses tests the assumption that buying a newspaper, or keeping a newspaper subscription is a rational affair.

The functional approach assumes that the decision to be a loyal subscriber is the result of a cognitive process. Yet it is possible that this is not the case. We should consider the possibility that the rationale is not cognitive and analytical, but affective and holistic. The affective way of coming to a newspaper purchase is made in a split second, based on newspaper brand, habit and tradition.

The third group of hypotheses tests the assumption that buying a newspaper, or keeping a newspaper subscription is primarily determined by variables that refer to practical circumstances. Can I afford this paper: price. Are there alternatives for a paid newspaper like free papers? Is the paper always delivered on time? Do I have the time to read a newspaper?

A rational way of decision making assumes that readers are objective in their perception of newspaper supply. That is to say there is no difference between the newspaper content and the perception of the newspaper content. But is that the case? It is very well possible that the actual newspaper supply deviates from the perceived supply. There is reason to believe that the perception of supply is influenced by expectations. And there is reason to believe that expectation is influenced by brand and layout.

THE EMPIRICAL DATA

The first thing that is noticeable when looking at the preferences of newspaper readers at large is that no area of interest really stands out; no topic is highly popular, or is put down with disdain. No subject gets special attention or special neglect. 'Disasters, accidents and calamities' should get more attention than 'reflection on life' and 'arts and culture', but the level stays modest. The proximity of the news, however, shows a clear preference. On average, local news should get 60% more coverage than international news.

Preferences of readers

As far as areas of interests are concerned, the readers of national, local and free newspapers have the same preferences. The research shows no significant discrepancies. If there is a difference, the gap is no more than 1%.

There is a slight difference in preference between the readers of different national newspapers. Most of the differences are between the readers of *De Telegraaf* and the *AD* on the one hand and *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* on the other hand. The free papers could be linked to the first group; the readers of *nrc.next* are more difficult to place. The percentage of politics as a relative area of interest is about the same in *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant*, *nrc.next*, *Trouw*, and *De Pers*: 11 and 10%. *Spits* and *Metro* spend only half of this amount of editorial space on politics. *De Telegraaf* and *AD* fall in between.

The readers of *De Telegraaf* prefer the human perspective to the social, whereas the readers of *NRC Handelsblad* prefer the social to the human perspective. That is if the small differences we measured could be considered as a distinction between the readers of national newspapers.

There also seems to be consensus among the readers of national newspapers as to the preference for a practical perspective.

There are no different preferences between different types of national newspaper readers. This is the case for specific functions, areas of interest and perspectives. This is also the case if we compare subscribers and non-subscribers who read a particular newspaper and this is the case when we compare the readers that pay for their newspaper and those that do not.

Although there are some differences in the preferences of men and women, age groups and gender do not change the general picture of preference. We observed this for areas of interest, specific functions and perspectives. Age and gender have little impact on reader preference with sports as the only exception.

Clusters of dominant preferences

There are clusters of readers with dominant preferences. As a matter of fact, cluster analysis shows there are at least four.

There is a cluster with a special interest in politics, economics, the bare facts, elucidation and the institutional perspective. People who belong to this cluster are fascinated by power.

The second cluster that came out of the analysis has a special interest in arts and culture, society and science. They like articles with an overview, or that elucidate, or are approached from a social perspective.

Both the *power-minded* and the *content-minded* have an open eye for the world they live in. They are not only interested in the questions that emerge from their personal lives. They do not merely focus on the things that they will experience or have experienced personally. Their curiosity goes beyond the horizon of their own existence.

The two other clusters that emerge from the analysis have a different approach. Their curiosity is more often connected to their own experience, to what happens to them personally. Events that take place in the corridors of power only attract their interest if they perceive a personal consequence. If this is not the case and the article does not explain the practical consequences of the new policy, it does not fulfil the function the reader wants to be fulfilled; it does not answer the right questions, the article is less appealing.

In cluster three reflection is not about the social, or political structure and culture, but related to the tangible reality of personal life. Their objective is restricted to improve the quality of their lives, and does not encompass society at large. Therefore we call this cluster *life-quality minded*.

The cluster analysis also produced a fourth cluster with a dominant preference for crime, calamities, entertainment, celebrities, the human perspective and the function of emotion. Reflection is not their forte. They do not live in a room with a view from where they can observe the world. Indeed they want to narrow the world down to their own world, to the problems they encounter in everyday life. They take things as they come; without reflecting about their particular circumstances like the other clusters. Instead of reflecting about

improving their life quality they look for moments of joy and for ways of arousing their senses. We call them the *sensationalists*.

The clusters are not equally distributed. The world-oriented clusters are much smaller than the clusters that focus on personal circumstances: 'my world' is more than twice as big as 'the world'. The power-minded cluster is almost twice as large as the content minded cluster. The research shows that the cluster with special interest in the content of things, in arts and culture and science is by far the smallest; 'the sensation-minded' - the biggest cluster - is four times as big.

Comparing the preferences of the various national daily readers, it is clear that dominant preferences are not equally distributed. The differences become bigger if the comparison is based on a difference in gender, age and particular titles. The power-minded cluster is more popular among male readers than among female readers: 21 and 8%.

60% of the *NRC Handelsblad* readers are power-minded. This is three times more than the number of power minded readers of *De Telegraaf*. The percentage of power-minded readers that usually read the free newspaper *Metro* is 9%. 25% of the readers of *Trouw* have a dominant preference for arts and culture and science. Only a very small percentage of *De Telegraaf* readers belong to this cluster.

The sensation-minded cluster shows an opposite pattern; relatively high percentages for *De Telegraaf*, *Metro* and *Spits* and relatively low percentages for the readers of *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. The cluster with a preference for life quality is not prominent among the readers of *NRC Handelsblad* (7%), relatively strong among the readers of *AD* (23%), whereas *de Volkskrant* has a middle position.

Around a fifth of the national and local newspaper readers do not skip areas of interest a priori. Readers of free dailies skip around 13% as an average. Two-thirds of both the national and local newspaper readers skip between one to five types of articles a priori. For the readers of free newspapers this percentage is lower, but a higher percentage - 28% of them - skips more domains in advance.

As a general pattern there are, indeed, differences in skipping behavior between the readers of the various national newspapers. The widest gap is between *De Telegraaf* and the *AD* on the one hand and the other national newspapers on the other hand.

Mobility, economy, sports, science, reflection on life, social issues, art and culture, media and leisure are the topics of variation. Big differences are politics, sports,

Gender does not make a difference when you look at the readers with aversion; males and females skip as many articles. The skipping intensity is also well distributed among various age groups, with one exception: there is a small gap between the youngest and the oldest groups.

Match or mismatch

The main objective of the research is to determine if the newspaper readers get what they want in terms of content, but also in terms of psychological, social and cultural needs. Demand was put into questions like questions about areas of interest, specific functions and perspectives. We compared demand with the perception of supply that was measured in the survey and not with the results of the extensive content analysis. It is not the supply but the *perception* of supply that determines the readers' behavior.

The overall findings show a clear mismatch between demand and the perception of supply: 76%.

We wondered if the type of newspaper or a specific newspaper title makes a difference. And secondly whether the degree of mismatch coincides with a different kind of content. Is mismatch equally distributed within a title among areas of interest, specific functions and perspectives, or does the type of interest area, specific functions or perspectives make a difference? Finally we wanted to know if a mismatch is the result of abundance or deficiency; is the reader getting too much, or not enough?

National, local and free newspapers appear to have the same distribution of match and mismatch. The discrepancy between

demand and supply seems to be an ironic benchmark. There are slightly more readers of free papers who experience a strong mismatch but this difference is hardly significant. It is remarkable that we also found this degree of match among the subscribers of national newspapers. The experience of different national newspaper subscribers is almost identical.

The discrepancy between the perceived supply of text and images about politics, economy, sports and science and the preferences for these areas of interest is larger than is the case in the other areas. It is remarkable that this pattern is more or less the same in all titles. The distribution of specific functions shows a different pattern. According to most newspaper readers, newspapers are too judgmental, The mismatch of perspectives exceeds 50%. The difference in content between newspapers is a difference in newspaper policy. It was the result of manifest or latent editorial decisions.

The national Dutch newspapers differ in their supply of interest areas. The differences are between and within newspapers, in space of the total content, text, images and headlines. *NRC Handelsblad* underlines three areas of interests: politics, economy, and art and culture. *de Volkskrant* and *nrc.next* put emphasis on art and culture; *de Volkskrant* even slightly stronger, *nrc.next* a little less. Politics also receives more attention in these papers, although less than in *NRC Handelsblad*. However, the two papers give sports more space and economy less. Economy and sports are the two areas of interest that are dominant in *De Telegraaf*.

There is a clear correlation between layout and the perception of supplied perspectives. There is a layout that is expected to be linked to the social and institutional perspective, the social perspective is expected to be emphasized in another specific layout, as layout C is expected to emphasize the human perspective.

It is conceivable that the stated preferences are not a reflection of what people actually read. So we asked respondents to rank the top three

stories that should be read right away and the top three stories the respondent actually starts to read. Based on this ranking we made two lists. The first one ranks the *aspiration*, the second one the *actual behavior*.

Crime, sports, media, new products, games and relaxation have more priority in practice than in theory. Politics, economy, science, education, art and culture are areas of interest with a high level of aspiration.

Brand, habit and tradition

A brand is what customers expect to get. Can they trust the paper, or do they take an unreliable approach into account; does the paper do what it promises, or is disappointment the rule; is the newspaper different from other papers, unique, in a class of its own, an example for other newspapers, a role model, or is it plain, common, drowning in mediocrity? From the consumer's perspective: brand as a construction of the consumer's social reality.

Producers use brand in a different way. A producer's brand does not describe what customers expect, but what the producer wants them to expect. This different way of looking at the concept of brand is captured in different terms: brand image and brand identity. The object is the same and so is the function. However, the perspective is different.

Focusing on the paid dailies, the readers of *De Telegraaf* and *AD* are the most negative about their brand - almost half of them belong to the negative category. Their brand image is similar to that of the free papers.

It is remarkable that a quarter to a third of the subscribers have a negative brand image of their paper. It also stands out that differences between the papers seem to be smaller than the differences between age groups.

Reading a newspaper out of habit is not an act of analytical reflection. The habit of reading newspapers varies strongly with age: the group of people with very strong habit is six times larger for those over 65

than for those between the ages of 25 and 34. Gender seem to make no difference.

The group of people with a very strong habit of reading a newspaper is four times larger among readers of *De Telegraaf* than of *nrc.next* and is more than twice as large among readers of *de Volkskrant* than of the readers of *NRC Handelsblad*.

Among the readers that pay for their paper, the number of readers of *nrc.next* with a very strong habit of reading a new newspaper is much smaller than the number of readers of *De Telegraaf*.

Reading a newspaper out of tradition is not the result of a conscious choice either: the act of buying a newspaper is self-evident, "it goes without saying", "I learned it growing up".

The impact of tradition may change over time and place. Differences among individuals may correlate with generation and reference group. The impact of tradition may change over time and place. Differences among individuals may correlate with generation and reference group.

Instead of a cognitive or a affective bond with newspapers, the relationship could be conative. It means that action comes first. Buying or not buying a newspaper is not a matter of serious deliberation or strong sentiments, but more of a practical matter determined by circumstances. The actors behavior is determined by his or her perception of reality not by that of an observer.

Price is important to the reader if money is an issue; if money is scarce the price of a newspaper makes more difference than if there is money in abundance.

The survey showed that a vast majority of newspaper readers in the Netherlands do not consider their newspaper as too expensive. The pattern does not change when age is taken into account. Gender does not make a difference, neither does the kind of paper one reads, or the title.

Time spent reading a newspaper indicates its importance. We assume that the more time readers spend reading their newspaper, the more important they consider it to read a newspaper; and we assume that the more important a newspaper is in the eye of the readers, the stronger their newspaper loyalty.

People older than 50 read the newspaper much longer than people younger than 50. There are no significant differences in reading time between men and women. A free paper is read more often less than half an hour than a paid paper. The other categories are more or less equally distributed among the various types of newspapers, although there, the reading time of popular papers is a bit less.

In the previous question, we tried to find out how much time the respondents spend reading a newspaper, because we assume a positive relationship between reading time and newspaper loyalty. Two-thirds of younger readers experience the lack of time as strong or very strong. This percentage is about 25 among older readers (50+). A weak experience of lack of time is highest among 35% of the younger readers and more than 75% of the older readers.

The preference for other media, especially the Internet, could have an effect on newspaper loyalty. We measured preferences of medium from three angles:

- (a) Media as a whole (with an outspoken preference for internet and television).
- (a) Internet as a substitute for newspapers. Gender is not a discriminating variable: 43% of males in the Netherlands and 40% of females have a strong or very strong opinion that the Internet is a newspaper substitute. More non-subscribers and people who read a national newspaper without paying for it (e.g. they borrow the paper from a friend or a relative) are strongly or very strongly convinced that the Internet is a substitute for newspapers.
- (b) The preference for a medium is linked to a topic, function, or perspective.

4 THE TESTING

Despite the fact that they do not get the kind of articles they want most subscribers stay loyal nevertheless. Why are they doing this? Why do some subscribers stay loyal and some don't? What causes newspaper loyalty?

An analysis was made estimating the effect of the *cognitive* (primary and secondary functions), *affective* (brand, habit & tradition) and *conative* (price, free papers, delivery, overwhelming news supply, time spent and medium preference) variables on newspaper loyalty. The analysis was restricted to subscribers of newspapers (n = 1.606) in a sample of the Dutch population (n = 4.155) that was representative for age, gender, newspaper purchase and education.

Rational reasoning assumes that primary functions have an impact on newspaper loyalty. If a newspaper does not publish the kind of articles a subscriber prefers, or not the preferred mix of perspectives, or not the preferred mix of specific functions this subscriber will end his subscription.

The survey shows that primary functions have a moderate impact on newspaper loyalty. Primary functions increase the odds on newspaper loyalty with 15,1%, almost four times less than delivery and brand (50,2% and 43,2%).

Some secondary functions increase the odds on newspaper loyalty twice as much than the primary functions, (psychological secondary functions increases the odds with 32,6%) other secondary functions almost have no impact, they decrease the odds on newspaper loyalty with 4,2% and 2,1%.

Brand is an affective connection between a customer and a product. It is not about the functional benefits, but about an emotional bond. A positive strong newspaper brand causes an increase in newspaper loyalty, a negative strong newspaper brands causes a decrease in newspaper loyalty.

Habit and tradition have no significant effect on disloyalty.
Free papers, medium preference, time spent reading, overwhelming media supply have no significant impact on newspaper loyalty

It is reasonable to assume that people who subscribe on a paper that distinguished itself from its competitors because of the quality of its content did so because of its content and that for this group of readers content will explain newspaper loyalty more than in the case of subscribers of popular papers.

However, this is not the case. On the contrary. We repeated the analysis for a different population and separated the subscribers of a quality paper from the subscribers of popular papers. *NRC Handelsblad*, *nrc.next*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* are considered quality papers, *De Telegraaf* and *het Algemeen Dagblad* are considered popular papers.

Amongst quality subscribers, delivery is by far the strongest predictor of disloyalty. Brand has the second largest effect on the odds of disloyalty, followed by psychological secondary functions, price and tradition. The other variables do not affect the odds of disloyalty significantly.

Concluding, it seems that disloyalty among quality subscribers is more influenced by affective factors, while disloyalty among popular subscribers is more strongly affected by conative factors. However, delivery forms a major exception, as non-delivery is an important and influential factor in disloyalty among quality subscribers, while it is non-significant among popular subscribers. It seems that the odds of disloyalty are better predictable for the popular group than for the quality group.

The question to define audience seems to be as old as media science itself. The discussion is dominated by the dissension whether an audience is active or passive. We distinguish four groups:

- 1) People that belong to an *active* audience know what they want (from a newspaper) and are able to put their preferences into words.

- 2) People that know what they want, but lack a precise vocabulary have a *fuzzy preference*.
- 3) It is also possible that people who do not know what they want, do know what they want if they see what they can get. We consider them *reactive*.
- 4) Finally there are people without any preference. We consider them *passive*.

The survey (Dutch population n=4.155) shows that 23% are active; 77% are not.

At first sight the consequence of this result is that it is difficult if not impossible to conduct a survey about preferences, because according to this very survey most of the interviewees are not capable to put those preferences into words. Fortunately 41% say they know what they want if they have a newspaper in front of them and this is what is done during the interviews.

The survey shows that the number of people who act according to their aspiration is by far smaller than the people who don't. Two thirds of the respondents admit they do something they did not intend to do. It is more likely that a respondent untruthfully says that he always read the articles that he should read first than that he admits that he does not act according to his intentions.

As areas of interest are concerned politics, economy, science, reflection and education score higher on the list of aspiration than on the list of behavior. Those areas of interest should be read sooner than is done in practice. The same can be said about the specific function of elucidation. Sports, media, leisure, celebrities, new products and game & relaxation are areas of interest higher on the behavior-list. Those areas of interest are read sooner than should be done. Emotion is on top of the list of specific functions as behavior is concerned

Layout has a great impact on the perception of newspaper supply.

There is of course the argument that the choice of having a paper is very simple: right-wing people read right-wing papers and left-wing

people read left wing papers. We assumed that a mismatch is a cause for disloyalty. But a political mismatch is not a very relevant predictor for disloyalty.

5 CONCLUSION

The **main** conclusion of this study is that newspaper subscribers do not cancel or renew their subscription after a rational comparison of their ideal mix of articles and photographs with the mix the paper supplies. This conclusion has at least two important consequences:

1. the content of a paper has no direct impact on newspaper loyalty.
2. the decision to cancel or renew a subscription is not necessarily motivated by logical reasoning, the way we define rationality.

The **second** conclusion we want to emphasize is that the delivery of a newspaper and newspaper brand contribute by far more to the explanation of newspaper loyalty than any variable in the model. The model contains three kinds of variables: variables that indicates a cognitive, analytical, rational explanation; variables that suggest an affective, holistic, emotional explanation and variables that point to a conative, action oriented, circumstantial explanation.

The **third** conclusion we want to emphasize is that more than three quarters of newspaper subscribers do not have preferences or consider themselves not able to put those preferences into words.

The **fourth** conclusion we want to emphasize is that more people do not always do what they intent to do than there are people that act according to their intentions.

The **fifth** conclusion we want to emphasize is that layout of a newspaper has an impact on the perception of what is supplied.

If a newspaper subscriber does not even consider ending his subscription, we call this newspaper loyalty. Even if he thinks that he does not get the mix of articles and pictures he prefers to stay loyal. The passion for this newspaper is unconditional.

This study is about the origins of newspaper loyalty. It tries to answer the question why some subscribers stay loyal and others don't. There are people who think that the answer to this question is so obvious that a study like this is redundant. In the old days it was simple. Left-wing people buy left-wing papers and right-wing people buy right-wing papers. Nowadays we don't know exactly what is left and right, political parties don't, people don't and newspaper don't. So it is difficult to confirm one's identity with a newspaper. Buying a particular newspaper, having a particular subscription does not show the world anymore who we are, as in the old days.

To put this supposition to a test we asked the interviewees to their political preference. They had six possibilities: left, center left, middle, center-right, right and none, or don't want to answer. At another moment during the interview (43 questions earlier) we asked to characterize all the national newspapers according to the same classification. If the newspaper had the same political preference as the interviewee we call the conclusion a match, in all other cases we call it a mismatch. Now we have the variable match and mismatch we could calculate the regression of political preference on newspaper loyalty. There is no relation between the two.

Internet, steady, but slower

The conviction that the Internet is a substitute for a newspaper, especially among the young is another widespread alleged cause of newspaper decline.

An extensive survey that we undertook -the core of this study - reveals that only 9% of the Dutch population between 13 and 25 years of age are very firm in their opinion that the Internet is an alternative for a newspaper.* The young share this conviction with the oldest age groups: 50-65: 7% ; >65: 6%. The all age percentage is 11. Among the young more respondents disagree than agree with statements that underline a positive attitude towards the Internet (58%). In the age group between 50 and 65, the percentage that disagrees is 64%. Above 65 it is 71%.

We are not playing down the importance of the Internet, but as was shown the impact of other variables is more substantial.

The regression between newspaper delivery and loyalty e.g. is even four times stronger than the regression between newspaper content and newspaper loyalty.

Content brand and newspaper loyalty

An analysis among a sample of the population of the Netherlands stratified for age, gender and location showed a significant relation between content and newspaper loyalty indeed, yet the contribution is so small that changing newspaper content does not increase newspaper sale.

This is an unexpected conclusion, for common knowledge and suppositions of most people that work in the industry of newspaper publishing think the reverse is true. Maybe there is a substantial impact of content if we make the same calculation for a population that consists of only quality paper subscribers (*NRC Handelsblad*, *nrc.next*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw*). The unique selling point of those papers is the quality of its content. We may therefore safely assume that a subscriber of a quality paper takes a subscription because of its content. So we repeated the analysis for a population that consists only of subscribers of the Dutch quality papers *NRC Handelsblad*, *nrc.next*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw*.

In the quality sample content plays no part in the explanation of newspaper loyalty. In the popular sample content makes a contribution, but it is small.

Closing the gap between demand and perceived supply improves the lopsided relation between demand and supply, but after the improvement the publisher will not sell more newspapers than before. Content has no substantial impact on newspaper loyalty. It increases the odds for disloyalty with 15,1%. It is ironical to see that public-oriented journalism is not the most profitable option, is not per se commercial.

The contention that content has no substantial impact on newspaper loyalty does not exclude a substantial indirect impact. The survey shows a more positive brand relates to a smaller mismatch and vice versa.

The significance is small. But the significance is measured looking at the entire content, all the articles, graphs, photos and drawings are taking into account, whereas we think that the perceived supply is especially determined by the perception of the leading texts and images, such as the opening of page one and three, the major picture of page one, three and five, and that the perception is influenced by expectation, by the size of the pictures and fonts, the frequency of layout elements, the variation of those elements, and the intensity of the layout elements.

When we take all this into consideration a change of feature articles and a change of layout can influence sales if it reinforces or contradicts the brand.

The weakness of will

The original problem is that there is a difference between the intention to do something and the execution of the intention. This is e.g. the case if a reader intends to read an article he sees in the paper that explains why there is an economic crisis going on; but when the moment arrives to start reading he does not read the article he intends to read, but he starts to read a column written by somebody he knows to be hilarious most of the time. This phenomenon is known as the weakness of will.

This study explains that an astonishing 67% of the 4.155 respondents admit to have a weak will. Those people were asked to tell us what they should read first and what they do read first by allocating a total of hundred points over areas of interest, specific functions and perspectives. The results were presented in six lists per category: area of interest, specific functions and perspectives. Three lists with the ranking of what should be read first and three lists with the ranking what actually was read first. On top of the 'should list' of areas of interest we see successively politics, disasters, accidents and

calamities and society. On top of the 'do list' we see successively disasters, accidents and calamities, crime and sports. On top of the 'should list' of specific functions figured elucidation that is on place five (out of seven) on the 'do list'. On top of the 'should list' of perspectives we see social perspective. That is not on top of the 'do list'. On top of that list is the human perspective.

Subordination of the rational model

An important conclusion we can draw from the empirical research is the subordination of the rational model. The analyses make it perfectly clear that the rational way to look at social reality is not the only way to look at it.

The way reality is constructed and the way functions are defined is not always rational. People can behave affective, or conative and can come to a conclusion in a way that does not include reasoning. Bounded rationality is the vision that rationality is not always possible. According to the advocates of bounded rationality people cannot be rational, because they have not all the information they need to be rational, or they lack the skills to be rational. People want to be rational but they cannot be rational. We think there are psychological profiles and situations in which people don't want to be rational. They come to a decision without a process of reasoning. Why? There is no reason why.

People cannot reason without words. If a person has no words to his disposal that enables him to articulate his preferences he cannot make clear what his preferences are. In the sense that he cannot explain what his preferences are, because he does not have the words to utter his preferences.

Search, experience and credence attributes

We made note of the difference between products with and without undisputable specifications. In marketing they are known as products with search, experience and credence attributes. The quality of

products with the search attributes can be determined at the purchase.

Who buys a black banana?

The quality of products with experience attributes can be determined as we use them. Who goes back to a restaurant that was bad and expensive?

The quality of products with credence attributes can never be determined. What is the quality of gasoline?

A newspaper is not a search product. This is not difficult to decide. You don't know if the article is 'fit for use', or not 'fit for use', if you have not read it. Deciding whether a newspaper article is a product with experience or credence attributes is not so evident. The answer depends on the possibility to determine at face value and objective (epistemologically objective) the quality of an article. If the answer is yes then newspaper articles have experience attributes, if the answer is no newspaper articles have credence attributes.

Why it is important to make the distinction? In itself it is not important, but there is a discussion going on whether products with credence attributes are more sensitive to branding. The result of the surveys strongly suggest this is the case, because (1) only 23% know what they want and can put it this demand into words, and (2) brand has an important impact on newspaper loyalty. Most demands are fuzzy and rough and do not give a specific outline of the articles and photographs the subscriber wants to read. Those subscribers are very susceptible of the security and sense of belonging offered by a brand, on the one hand and a brand enables a reader to react against a quasi-tangible opponent.

A reader can have a very strong negative opinion about a newspaper he never has read. He cannot imagine that he will ever read the newspaper, let alone buy it.

Next to brand, layout influences a readers expectation what is in a newspaper. Layout is defined as the way newspaper elements are distributed and shaped. We distinguished the frequency of elements. Are they shaped in the same way (e.g. most shapes are horizontal rectangles) or in variety of ways (e.g. shapes can be horizontal or vertical rectangles, square or circles). The third criterion is the

intensity of elements: the size of the fonts, the fonts are standard or bold, underlined, or not, sans serif, or serif, images are colored, or black and white, images are big, or small.

On one side of the spectrum we find a layout of a paper that scores high on frequency, variation and intensity, on the other side a paper that scores low.

The survey shows that a different layout results in a different content expectation and therefore in a different perception of supply.

EPILOGUE

For the people involved, the most important question has been consistently avoided throughout this study; that is: what is the future of the newspaper?

An obvious reason is that it is difficult, if not impossible to study the future empirically. We must be very careful asking people to assess their own future behavior. It is much more reliable to ask about intentions. Newspaper loyalty is about intentions. A subscriber is loyal if he does not even think about ending his subscription (In The Netherlands around 90% of the people that pay for a newspaper have a subscription).

The second reason is that this study is about the newspaper and its subscribers. We did not include the advertisers. To provide a reliable answer to The Question (Will there be a newspaper tomorrow?) the motives and behavior of advertisers must be known.

In the meantime, we make assumptions based on long experience. We think that the printed newspaper will be marginalized. Not because the printed newspapers lack readers, but because the printed newspapers lack advertisements.

Basically there are two things a newspaper publisher can do: decrease the costs and increase the income. Newspaper publishers are faced with four kinds of costs: the cost of paper, the cost of distribution, the cost of printing and the cost of content.

The costs of paper and printing are more or less fixed. A publisher has to follow the market. It is impossible to cut in the cost of distribution, as it becomes more difficult every year to find enough 'delivery boys'.

The price of content is the only expenditure a publisher can cut without jeopardizing tomorrow's paper. The only way to increase income is to change the medium: the newspaper on the screen of a tabletcomputer such as an iPad. This transformation generates new ways of presenting content using different media.

At the same time, the publisher will notice that he has control again over what used to be the fixed costs of paper and printing. Paper costs are reduced to zero and the cost of printing is replaced by computer costs which are a fraction of what the publisher spends on printing presses.

In comparison with the distribution costs of a printed newspaper, the price you pay to distribute data to a tablet computer is negligible. This is what we assume and perhaps someone will test this assumption and expand the study of newspaper loyalty.

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