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## FREE SHEET NEWSPAPERS VERSUS TRADITIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS: COMPETING OR COMPLEMENTARY? AN EMPIRICAL COMPARISON OF THEIR GRATIFICATIONS TO READERS

This study assesses the competition between free sheet and traditional daily newspapers in the newspaper market of Milan, Italy. The student sample being investigated represents a major target group for free sheets. The theoretical basis is the niche theory by J. Dimmick. The theory is applied to four gratification dimensions for readers which are extracted by a factor analysis and analyzes competition by measuring the niche breadth of each newspaper, the niche overlap and a superiority index concerning the delivered gratifications.

Results indicate that readers receive a higher gratification by traditional daily newspapers in the information/orientation dimension. Free sheets deliver roughly equal gratifications on the overview/topicality and the habit/mood dimensions. The free sheets' strength lies especially in fulfilling an entertaining function, which is reflected by their superiority on this dimension. They score well here, especially in the judgement of female readers. Implications for the potential competition between the two newspaper types in the readers' market are discussed in light of these results as well as further findings concerning use patterns and brand perceptions.

*Keywords:* media competition, niche theory, uses-and-gratifications, newspaper market, competitive strategy of newspaper publishers, free sheets.

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## 1. Introduction and Objective

Free daily newspapers have established themselves as part of the print media in more than 50 countries. Every day more than 40 million copies are distributed to readers, especially commuters in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia (World Association of Newspapers 2007: 4).<sup>1</sup> A significant part of the global circulation can be attributed to Metro International S.A. which launched the first daily free sheet newspaper, *Metro*, in Stockholm in 1995.<sup>2</sup> The long-term consequences of this development for the newspaper industry and especially the nature and degree of competition between free and traditional paid for dailies is still unclear. In case free sheets would cannibalize the business of paid for newspapers, strategic responses of traditional newspaper publishers to the free sheet concept would be different than if no such negative effect occurred<sup>3</sup>. Cannibalization may happen in the readers market as well as in the advertising market. In the readers market one may look at circulation trends before and after the introduction of free sheets to judge the effect on paid circulation in this market. The disadvantage of such an approach is that these trends may be influenced by third factors. To study competition between free sheets and paid for newspapers in the readers market, we instead looked at gratifications obtained from traditional daily newspapers and free sheet newspapers and the actual competition from the recipients' perspective in this respect. The niche theory by Dimmick, which has been transferred from ecology, forms the central theoretical basis of this analysis. The empirical study was conducted in Milan, Italy, a market with three free sheets at the time of the research – *Metro*, *Leggo* and *City*, the first of them already launched in the year 2000 in this city.

<sup>1</sup> The website of the Dutch media expert Piet Bakker regularly offers updated analyses on free sheet newspapers. Accessible under: <http://www.newspaperinnovation.com>; accessed on 11 June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The first issue of *Metro* was published in Stockholm by *Modern Times Group*; the founding of the *Metro International S.A.* holding based in Luxembourg only took place in 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Strategic responses to free sheets have been analysed by Picard (2001).

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

The uses-and-gratifications approach and especially the niche theory for the analysis of competitive relations are applied to explain the motivation and function of media use in this paper. At the beginning of the 1990s, Dimmick (1993) linked the niche theory to the findings of uses-and-gratifications research to explain substitutional relations between different media. According to Dimmick each medium occupies a certain niche defined by the functions assumed by the user.

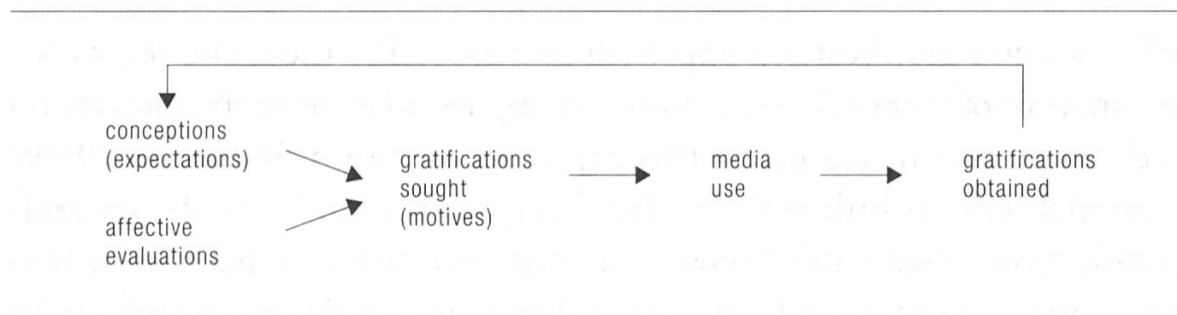
### *2.1. The Uses-and-Gratifications Approach*

At the beginning of the 1970s the popular uses-and-gratifications approach was enhanced by the so-called discrepancy model. According to this model it is not sufficient to examine the needs which motivate to use media. Instead it has to be scrutinized which gratifications are sought by the recipients when using media (gratifications sought) and which gratifications are actually obtained (gratifications obtained) (Palmgreen 1984: 51 ff.; Schönbach 1984: 63). At the beginning of the 1980s, Palmgreen takes up the discrepancy model and links it to the expectancy-value concept by Ajzen and Fishbein (Fishbein 1967: 477 ff.). His aim is to explain how the motives of use are connected to the actual media behavior.

In the center of the process model he developed (see Figure 1) there are the motives, i.e. the gratifications sought by the recipient in media consumption. He sees them as a product of expectations and evaluation (Palmgreen 1984: 56), whereas Palmgreen defines expectations as probability that an object has a certain characteristic or that a behavior entails a certain consequence (Palmgreen 1984: 55). These expectations differ from individual to individual and are, among other factors, influenced by the social environment and culture. On the other side, Palmgreen sees evaluations as strength of an affective attitude, either positive or negative, towards a characteristic or the consequence of a behavior (Palmgreen 1984: 55). If someone, for example, considers it to be important to form his or her own opinion (evaluation) and believes that a daily newspaper delivers the background information he or she needs to form his or her



*Figure 1: Process Model of Media Use According to Palmgreen*



Source: Palmgreen 1984: 56.

own opinion (expectation), the motive to regularly read the daily newspaper will develop.

In the tradition of the uses-and-gratifications approach those media and non-media opportunities which are situationally available to a person to obtain a certain gratification – are called “functional alternatives.” The uses-and-gratifications approach assumes that people are able to assess how capable every single alternative is to deliver a certain gratification. The choice between media types and media contents is based on this assessment – under the condition that the pre-selection was made in favor of a medium and against a non-media alternative (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld 1983: 100).

## *2.2. Types of Gratification: Newspaper Functions*

As shown by the Palmgreen model, the media selection is determined by expectations on gratifications towards the media on the part of the recipient. On the part of the media, these expectations correspond with the functions a medium fulfills from the recipient's view (Schmitt-Walter 2004: 50). The fulfillment of functions producing gratifications obtained determines the competition between the different media.<sup>4</sup> If, from the recipient's point of view, two media offer nearly identical gratifications, they are exchangeable on the functional level.<sup>5</sup> In general daily newspapers fulfill the following functions (Dorsch 1984: 316 ff.):

<sup>4</sup> As functions fulfilled should result in gratifications obtained these phrases may be used synonymously.

<sup>5</sup> In this case, other determinants of media selection, e. g. availability, are neglected.

- Informational function: Coverage of local and political events
- Service function: Event notes, radio and TV programs, small ads etc., i. e. service information with a high user value for everyday life
- Orientation function: Editorials, op-eds and background reports help the reader to be “up-to-date” with regard to current events
- Instrumental function: All functions resulting from the characteristics of the medium newspaper concerning their usage, e. g. availability in space and time and the freedom of choice with regard to the contents being read
- Everyday life function: By transferring everyday knowledge, the daily newspaper contributes to the accomplishment of everyday life; it enables the recipient to perceive offers of urban life and presents topics for social contacts
- Habitualization function: Reading the newspaper becomes an integral part of the daily routine

With regard to the motives for turning to free sheet newspapers the findings are considerably less sound. In this regard, there is only the independent study by Pezzoli (2005) dealing with the functions of free sheet newspapers from the recipients' view. As an additional function of free sheets, mainly the recreation function (Italian: *disimpegno*) is identified here: A simple language and the focus on entertaining contents (e. g. horoscope) make newspaper reading relaxing and free of effort.

In the following the identified functions will be represented by a detailed set of gratifications and the differences and similarities of gratifications that are obtained by reading traditional newspapers and free sheets are analyzed.

### *2.3. The Theory of the Niche by Dimmick*

For the determination of the competitive relation between media types the theory of the niche which has been borrowed from ecology is highly suitable. Initially this theory was used to explain the competition and coexistence of living organisms in an ecological communion in which only limited resources are available to the populations for survival. The existing resources such as food and living space determine the

environment in which the population lives (Dimmick & Rothenbuhler 1984: 105).

In 1984, Dimmick & Rothenbuhler transferred the theoretical framework of the theory of the niche to the American media industry. Here, the individual media types are considered as populations competing in the same environment for a limited pool of resources. The authors define the advertising budget invested in the media as resources on which the media depend (Dimmick & Rothenbuhler 1984: 105). The niche a medium occupies is defined according to the extent of dependency on local or national advertising revenues.

However, it is too short-sighted to limit the necessary resources for the media to advertising revenues. Analogous to the demand theory, the time spent for media use is an indicator for the subjectively obtained benefit the recipient reaps from media use. As recipients turn to those media from which they most likely expect certain gratifications, the real competition between the media types takes place on that level (Schmitt-Walter 2004: 31). At the beginning of the 1990s Dimmick also followed this argumentation. In a study on competition between TV, cable TV and video which was published in 1993, he takes a further step and links the assumptions of the uses-and-gratifications approach to the theory of the niche: As recipients turn to the media because of the gratifications they seek, the gratification dimensions a medium offers its user may be considered as resources (Dimmick 1993: 138 ff.). Consequently Dimmick analyzes the competition between the entertainment media mentioned above on the basis of their "[...] ability to provide gratifications and what we call gratification opportunities" (Dimmick 1993: 140). The former is circumscribed by the concept of gratifications obtained as it is known from the uses-and-gratifications tradition: the subjective benefits a recipient reaps from using a medium. The gratification opportunities are defined by Dimmick as the characteristics of a medium which either support or diminish the possibility to receive gratifications from the medium. (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford 2000: 230). Gratification opportunities of the newspaper comprise for example the location and time independent availability allowing the reader to use it wherever and whenever he wants to.

#### 2.4. *The Central Concepts of the Theory of the Niche*

The theory of the niche comprises three key concepts on the basis of which, on the one hand, the functional niche of a media type, and, on the other hand, the relations between media may be described.<sup>6</sup> The niche itself may be described by the range of all gratifications obtained.<sup>7</sup> This so-called *niche breadth* defines the degree of specialization in certain functional dimensions a medium offers the recipient. On the one hand, it can be examined across all dimensions: A medium is called a generalist if it fulfills various functions for the recipient, i. e. occupies a broad niche. TV, for example, delivers informational and entertainment gratifications equally ("generalist"), while videotext, which is mainly used out of rational informational motives, occupies a more narrow niche ("specialist"). On the other hand, the niche breadth may be calculated on the basis of the individual gratification dimensions: With regard to the dimension "information," a sports paper only delivers informational gratifications regarding sports news, while a daily newspaper with general contents covers a broad range of topics. Therefore, with regard to the dimension "information," the daily newspaper occupies a broader niche than the sports paper.

The relations and with it the possible competition between media may be determined arithmetically by the extent of the *niche overlap*. It shows to what extent both media types offer the recipient the same benefit. As the recipients only have a limited time for daily media use, they have to choose between different media. The more similar the functions fulfilled by the media are, i. e. the more the functional niches overlap, the stronger is the competition between the media (Schmitt-Walter 2004: 32).

While the niche overlap allows a statement on how similar the gratifications by the media are, the so-called *superiority index* provides information

<sup>6</sup> Initially, the ecological niche theory rests on a spacial conception which is still reflected in the central concepts of the theory. As to Dimmick: "The root metaphor of the theory is a spatial one. The key concepts [...] reflect this spatial origin" (Dimmick 1993: 137).

<sup>7</sup> For a general definition of the concepts see Dimmick & Rothenbuhler 1984: 291 ff.

“[...] whether one or the other of a pair of media provides greater gratification [...]” (Dimmick 1993: 146). A medium with a significantly higher value than another with regard to a gratification statement or a dimension is considered as superior by the recipient. The significance of the superiority index becomes clear in the following chapter.<sup>8</sup>

### *2.5. Consequences of a Competitor's Entry*

In the long term, the recipients adjust their media use behavior in favor of the superior medium. According to Dimmick this can lead to two possible consequences. On the one hand, in the long run, the inferior medium completely disappears from the market (principle of competitive exclusion). Taking into account the history of the individual media types, this is rather unlikely. The second option is more probable: The inferior medium reduces the extent of niche overlap by changing its functional niche and switching to a niche with less pressure of competition (competitive displacement). Schmitt-Walter exemplifies this process by the radio which in the course of history developed from a multi-functional medium in the post-war period into an entertaining daily background medium (Schmitt-Walter 2004: 33) to escape the competition of new media such as television. The concept of “competitive displacement” is comparable to the concept of “functional reorganization” formulated by Mutz, Roberts & van Vuuren in 1993: Following the emergence of a new medium, the traditional media are not used less by the recipients, but simply in a different way (Mutz, Roberts & van Vuuren 1993: 51 ff.)<sup>9</sup>. However, for one of the two scenarios happening at all, according to Dimmick two conditions have to be fulfilled: First, readers roughly obtain the same gratifications from the new medium as from the older medium: overlap must be high. Second, the newer form must be superior to the older form. (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford 2000: 234).

<sup>8</sup> The formulas used for calculation of the concepts will be specified below in the results section.

<sup>9</sup> See the study by Mutz, Roberts & van Vuuren (1993: 51–75) on consequences of the launch of a new medium competing with the functions of existing media: displacement or reorganization. In the latter case certain functions remain with the old medium and it repositions itself based on these functions.



Only if both conditions are fulfilled, the coexistence of the media is threatened; the inferior medium will be displaced in the long term or escapes displacement by repositioning.

## *2.6. Relevance for the Present Study*

In a study on the competition between e-mail and telephone, Dimmick, Kline and Stafford showed by using the niche theory that there is only a weak substitution between the two communication media, as e-mail and telephone occupy different functional niches in the recipients' perception (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford 2000: 227 ff.). The theoretical framework therefore seems to be suitable to explain the competitive relation between traditional media types and media types which only became part of the media offer recently. The study presented here focuses on the competitive relation between traditional Italian daily newspapers and free sheet newspapers which entered the market in 2000. In this case, the theory of the niche may be applied on different levels (Dimmick 2003: 40 f.). On the level of monetary resources of which the revenues of both newspaper types consist, the traditional newspaper is a generalist: It draws on both sales and advertising revenues. The free sheet newspaper, on the other hand, is a specialist on this level of abstraction; 100 percent of its revenues depend on the advertising market.

As mentioned at the beginning, competition is analyzed here from the recipients' point of view. Therefore the focus lies on the definition of the niches of free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers on the functional level. Dimmick enlarges the niche theory which initially regarded the media types as decisive factors, but not the media users, to comprise the recipients' point of view by including the uses-and-gratifications approach. According to this, the recipient's choice of media is determined by the gratifications obtained and the gratification opportunities linked to a medium. The gratifications obtained are measured on the basis of individual items which may be condensed to superordinate functional and gratification dimensions with the help of a factor analysis. Thus, Dimmick identified for the American entertainment media for example a cognitive and an affective gratification dimension which was also taken into account for the study presented here (Dimmick 1993).

With the help of central concepts allocated by the niche theory such as niche breadth, niche overlap and superiority index, the competitive relation between the two newspaper types may be quantified and adequate conclusions for media practice may be drawn.

### 3. Research Questions

First of all, the research focus lies on the use behavior with regard to free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers. This includes on the one hand the intensity of newspaper use. The assessment of the daily utilization time of exclusive readers and readers of both newspaper types may provide an indication whether the additional use of the free sheet newspaper reduces the time spent on the traditional newspaper or whether the free sheet newspaper is simply used in addition. Out of this, reader types may be identified which will be presented in the following. Another focus lies on the content which is mainly used.

These considerations lead to research question (RQ) 1:

*RQ 1: How are the two newspaper types used and how intensely do the readers attend to the two newspaper types?*

In the center of research interest, however, are the gratifications the readers reap from reading free sheets and traditional daily newspapers. Depending on the function the two newspaper types fulfill for their recipients, the niche the newspaper types occupy from the recipients' point of view develops. This leads to research question 2:

*RQ 2: Which gratifications are delivered by reading free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers and which gratification dimensions are relevant in this process?*

The research questions 3 to 5 address the three core concepts of niche theory:

*RQ 3: Which breadth do the functional niches occupied by free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers have with regard to the different gratification dimensions (niche breadth)? Are there any differences in the niche breadth between readers of both newspaper types and the respective exclusive readers of one newspaper type?*

*RQ 4: How far do the functional niches occupied by free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers overlap with regard to the different*



*gratification dimensions from the point of view of the readers of both newspaper types (niche overlap)?*

A high niche overlap of the two newspaper types does not necessarily induce that one of them is threatened in its existence. For this, the second condition of the niche theory as formulated by Dimmick has to be fulfilled: One medium has to be considered as functionally superior in comparison to the other one. This leads to research question 5:

*RQ 5: Is, from the point of view of the reader of both newspaper types, one of the media, free sheet newspaper or traditional daily newspaper, superior to the other (superiority index)?*

In the recipients' heads there is an overall impression of the characteristics of the media – an image (Lieber 1995: 2). On one side, the image is formed by the reader's own experience with the medium, on the other side it is influenced by the image imparted by the medium itself. In any case it influences the choice of a medium. Above all the attitude towards a medium as a potential source of gratification affects users' choice (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kommunikationsforschung 1975: 150). Therefore research question 6 deals with the image of both newspaper types:

*RQ 6: Which image do free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers have?*

Furthermore it is interesting to find out which emotional significance free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers have for their readers. Information on this is given by the reader involvement:

*RQ 7: Is the free sheet newspaper able, despite being available at no charge, to build up an emotional involvement of its users, or do readers rather feel loyal to traditional newspapers? Are there differences in the perceived reader involvement between exclusive readers of one newspaper type and readers of both types?*

#### 4. Methodological Approach and Data

As mentioned above, the geographical frame of reference is Milan, Italy. In the Italian newspaper market, free sheet newspapers have developed considerable market strength within a few years; especially Metro, Leggo and City and later on E Polis have dramatically changed the supply structure

of the newspaper market.<sup>10</sup> By 2006, 46 % of the total circulation of the Italian daily press is allotted to free sheet newspapers.<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, the Italian newspaper market has had a strong political appeal and lacks a national boulevard title. The entertainment function was fulfilled mainly by *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and magazines, as far as print media are concerned. As in the view of the former president of FIEG (Italian Newspaper Association), this focus on quality newspapers was a major reason for the lower total per capita newspaper circulation in the Italian market, compared to other European countries. The growth of free sheets should in his opinion therefore be understood as an analogy to the establishment of boulevard newspapers in other countries.<sup>12</sup> Although the study presented here reflects a specific market, when keeping that focus in mind, results of our study may tentatively be compared to the competition between free sheets and quality newspapers in other countries.

To answer the research questions a quantitative study approach was chosen. In March 2006 a standardized survey was conducted among Italian university students of the State University of Milan (*Università degli Studi di Milano – Statale*) containing questions on the functions and images of free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers as well as gratifications delivered by reading. Although the sample is not statisti-

<sup>10</sup> In July 2000 *Metro International* opened up the market for free sheet newspapers with the launch of the free paper *Metro* in the big metropolises of Rome and Milan. Subsequently the national publishing houses Rizzoli Corriere della Sera MediaGroup S.p.A. and Caltagirone Editore S.p.A. followed in the course of 2001 and published the free sheet newspapers *City* and *Leggo*. Until today all three media enterprises continue their expansion in the free sheet newspapers sector so that in the big Italian cities often three or more free sheet newspapers compete for public favour at the same time. The structure of all three newspapers is comparable. The first section comprises national and international news, followed by local news and sports, politics are mainly omitted. A large section with local service and event information is a dominating element. The volume is between 28 and 36 pages, four-colour. The editorial teams are kept lean, and a significant part of editorial content is taken over from news agencies, esp. *Ansa*, *Agi* and *Adnkronos* (Pezzoli 2005).

<sup>11</sup> In 2006 3.6 million national and 2.0 million regional and local traditional newspaper copies faced 3.65 million national and 1.1 regional and local free sheet newspapers (WAN 2007: 402).

<sup>12</sup> Di Montezemolo (2002): Una industria moderna che guarda al futuro con fiducia e con qualche timore. *Tecnimedia* 33: 3.

cally representative for the whole readership, students are a core target group of free sheet newspapers. This is reflected by the sociodemographic profile of Italian free sheet readers, where students show the highest affinity with free sheets of all professional segments (see Appendix 1).

The main survey was conducted from 7 to 15 March 2006, resulting in 258 cases for the data analysis. The data analysis first comprised a factor analytical determination of gratification dimensions fulfilled by newspaper types from the recipients' point of view. Afterwards the competitive situation between free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers in the four dimensions resulting from this was examined with the help of the index calculations of Dimmick's niche theory. At this, the statements could also be differentiated according to reader type.

## 5. Results

One of the aims of this study was to learn more about the use patterns for both newspaper types<sup>13</sup> (research question 1). Results of the survey are summarized here in short. When asking for which parts of the free sheets are read "most times" it is interesting enough, that national and local news rank highest with about 60 % of respondents compared to more entertaining content elements like cultural life (50 %) and celebrities news (35 %) as well as service elements like event announcements (35 % and lower). Looking at gender differences in answering this question, men are more heavily reading politics and especially sports than women and women more about news, especially local news, cultural life, health, celebrities, cinema and event announcements in this sample. While national news rank top amongst the paid for newspapers (between 80 % and 60 % depending on specific titles) – only topped by 100 % of politics read "most times" by readers of political newspapers like *Unità* – and thereby are read even more heavily than in free sheets, gender

<sup>13</sup> Traditional daily newspapers include the nationals *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Giorno*, *Libero*, *La Stampa*, *L'Avvenire*, *Il Mattino*, *Liberazione*, the political newspapers *Il Manifesto* and *L'Unità* and the local/regionals *L'Eco di Bergamo*, *La Provincia*, *Il Giornale di Brescia*, *Il Cittadino di Lodi*, *La Padania*, *La Prealpina*. Business and sports newspapers were excluded. Free sheets are *City*, *Leggo* and *Metro*.

differences follow the same pattern as those of readers of free sheets. While 93 % of readers of paid for newspapers read them at home, this is the case only for 2 % of free sheet readers. Free sheets are read while commuting and in the university.

Four reader segments result from answers about the frequency of use of the newspapers:<sup>14</sup>

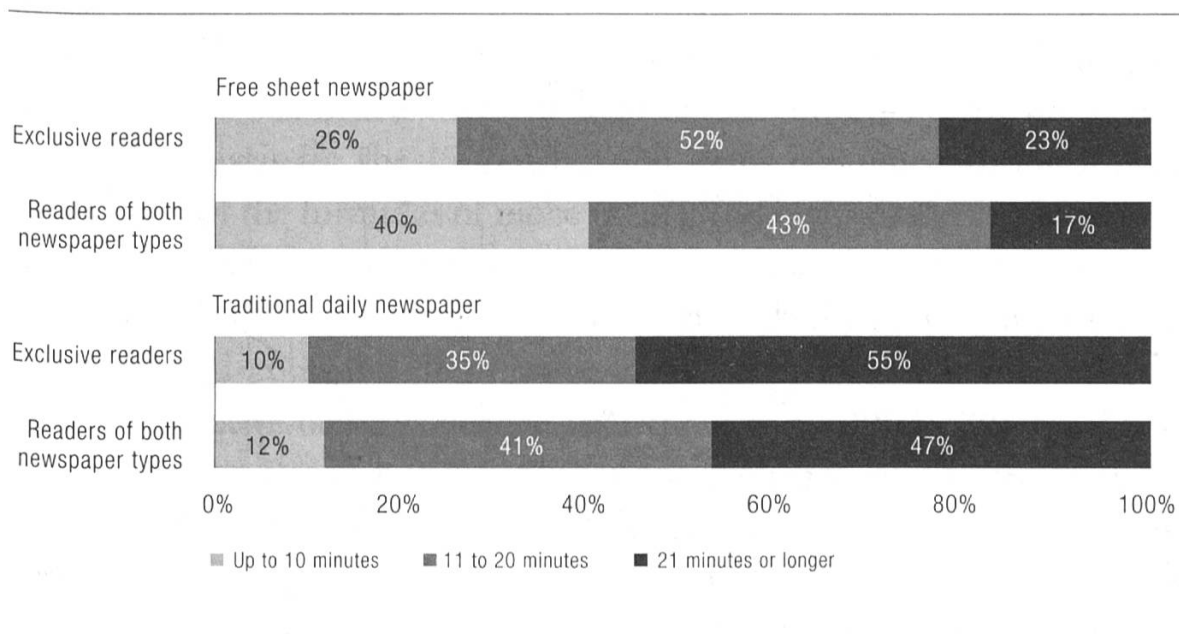
- 1) *Readers of both newspaper types*: students who at least once a week read or scan the pages of both free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers (N=145 / 56 %);
- 2) *Exclusive readers of free sheet newspapers*: students who at least once a week read or scan the pages of free sheet newspapers, but use traditional daily newspapers only once a month at the most or never (N=66/26 %);
- 3) *Exclusive readers of traditional daily newspapers*: students who at least once a week read or scan the pages of traditional daily newspapers, but use free sheet newspapers only once a month at the most or never (N=40 / 15 %);
- 4) *Non-readers*: students who read or scan the pages of both free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers once a month at the most or never (N=7/3%).

As only the readers are able to evaluate the newspaper, only the reader types 1) to 3) are interesting for further examination.

Figure 2 shows the time usage of these three reader segments for both types of newspapers. Bars 1 and 3 reflect the time usage of the "Exclusive readers," bars 2 and 4 the time usage for the reader segment "Readers of both newspaper types" for reading free sheets and traditional newspapers respectively.

The fact that there is only a slightly higher time usage of traditional newspapers ("21 min. or longer" = 55 %) among their exclusive readers, compared to the usage of these newspapers by readers of both newspapers

<sup>14</sup> The question concerning the frequency of use also gave the result that free sheets are read more often than paid for newspapers in the sample: 77 % say, that they read free sheets at least more than one time a week, and 41 % "each day or "nearly each day," while this is the case for traditional newspapers only for 50 % and 19 % respectively.

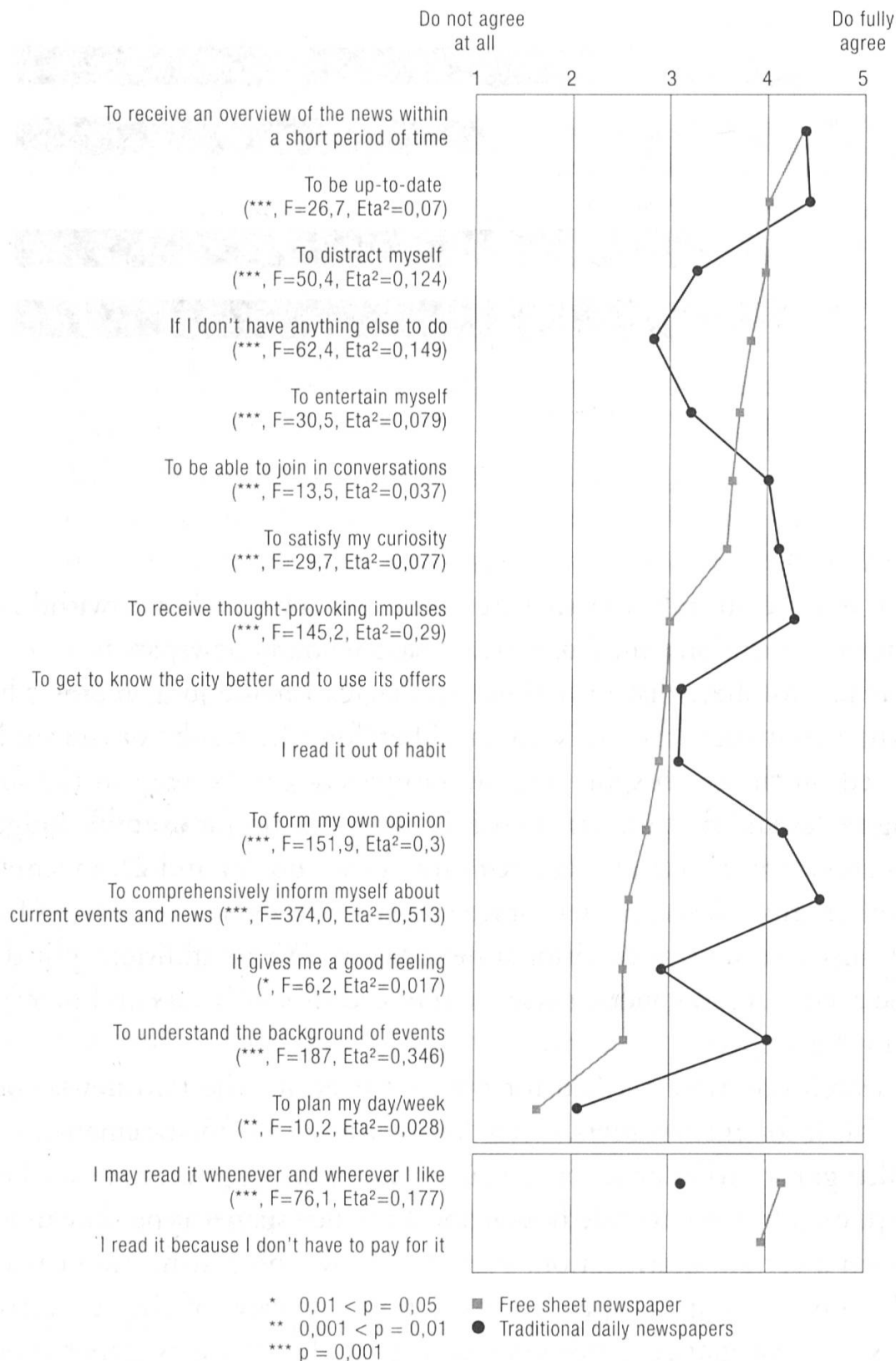
*Figure 2: Daily Reading Time According to Reader Type*

(47%), may be an indicator that free sheet newspapers do not withdraw significant utilization time from the traditional daily newspapers.

One has to obey, that only those readers can make judgements who read the newspapers they talk about. Therefore the results of the study are based on thorough splits into subsamples as can be seen in the following tables and figures, wherever it is necessary. So for example judgements about free sheets are counted only for groups 1) and 2), meaning they either are exclusive readers of free sheets or readers of both types but not exclusive readers of traditional newspapers. We in addition split the sample according to gender, since we found different habits and perceptions in this respect.

Research question 2 asked for the gratifications the two newspaper types fulfill for their readers. They are measured by 15 statements, the so-called gratification items. The readers of a newspaper type were asked to mark on a five-point scale how helpful the newspaper type they use is to obtain a certain gratification. Figure 3 shows the gratification capacity of both newspaper types from the point of view of the respective readers. At first glance it becomes clear that the two newspaper types offer their readers gratifications on different levels. With the exception of three gratification items, the respondents consistently consider reading

*Figure 3: Gratifications Obtained According to Newspaper Type*





the traditional daily newspapers as more or equally helpful to obtain the gratifications mentioned.

The relation between free sheet newspapers and traditional national newspapers is examined with the help of the concepts of niche theory. A factor analysis for the 15 gratification items is a precondition for the application of the formulas of niche theory and helps to identify the super ordinate *gratification dimensions* (Dobos & Dimmick 1988). The main component method is used for extraction. When interpreting a factor, a meaningful common description of the gratification items charging on the respective factor is needed (Backhaus et al. 2003: 289 ff).. Three items turned out to be unsuitable for the execution of a factor analysis. The variable-specific Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion (KMK) lies below the value of 0.5 required by Kaiser and Rice for “Is helpful to be able to join in conversations,” “Is helpful to get to know the city better and to use its offers” and “Is helpful to plan my day/my week.” Therefore they are gradually excluded from the analysis. Table 1 shows the factor loadings of the remaining items on the extracted factors; the explained total variance according to the varimax rotation is 71 percent.

The *first factor* consists of five statements which, except for the item “To satisfy my curiosity,” above all represent cognitive stimuli for newspaper use. In the following, the factor will be called “*information/orientation*.”

The *second factor* aims at the affective gratification dimension: Reading offers entertainment and prescinds from every day’s sorrows. Taking up the newspaper is not cognitively motivated, the medium is used for mere amusement. The factor is called “*entertainment/distraction*.”

The *third factor* reflects the habitual function of the newspaper: The readers get used to the ritual of the daily use and reading the newspaper becomes a part of their daily routine, imparting safety and leaving a good feeling. This factor may be denoted “*habit/mood*.”

The *last of the four factors* aims again at the cognitive dimension. However, this time it is not about detailed information, but about the mediation of general knowledge. The newspaper enables a quick overview of the current news and updates the reader. This factor will be called “*overview/topicality*.”

In the following, the index numbers of niche theory will be calculated for the four gratification dimensions represented by these factors.



*Table 1: Factor Loadings of the Gratification Items*

Gratification item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Opinion-forming	0,890	(-0,030)	(0,062)	(0,024)
Comprehensive information	0,810	(-0,279)	(0,090)	(0,088)
Thought-provoking impulses	0,793	(-0,121)	(0,106)	(0,166)
Backgrounds	0,771	(-0,157)	(0,166)	(0,120)
Curiosity	0,682	(0,281)	(0,150)	(0,209)
Entertainment	(0,125)	0,801	(0,181)	(0,110)
Distraction	(-0,215)	0,790	(0,121)	(0,131)
Amusement	(-0,303)	0,564	(-0,227)	(-0,256)
Habit	(0,049)	(0,026)	0,889	(0,101)
Good feeling	(0,281)	(0,155)	0,810	(0,047)
News overview	(0,054)	(0,124)	(0,056)	0,909
Up to date	(0,469)	(-0,037)	(0,128)	0,676
Intrinsic value	3,593	1,821	1,638	1,485
Explained variance in %	29,9	15,2	13,7	12,4
Scale reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)	0,87	0,59	0,71	0,64

Main component analysis; Varimax rotation; factors with intrinsic values > 1 were extracted. Basis: readers of free sheet newspapers (N=205–209), readers of traditional national newspapers (N=149–151)

The *niche breadth* (research question 3) may be regarded on both the macro and the micro level. When calculating the niche breadth on the macro level, all surveyed gratification items would be aggregated to one figure. As, however, in the present case both free sheet newspaper specific and traditional daily newspaper specific gratification items have been formulated, the niche breadth on macro level does not produce a reasonable conclusion. Therefore it is preferred to examine the niche breadth on the four micro dimensions identified above. They measure the ability of a medium to deliver gratifications on a dimension and

may be calculated as follows according to the formula by Dimmick (Dimmick 1993: 144 ff.):<sup>15</sup>

$$B = \sum_{n=1}^N \left[ \frac{\left( \sum_{k=1}^K GO_n \right) - KI}{K(u-1)} \right]$$

With

- u, l = upper and lower scale limit (with the upper scale limit describing maximum agreement)
- GO = gratifications obtained
- N = number of respondents
- n = first interviewee
- K = number of scales used for the presentation of a gratification dimension
- k = first gratification scale of a dimension

The range of values of the niche breadth lies between zero and one. The upper limit is reached when the respondents consistently agree at maximum to the gratification items of a dimension. A high value indicates a generalist orientation within a dimension. On the other side, according to Dimmick, a low value indicates a specialist orientation.<sup>16</sup>

In the following the niche breadth for the four dimensions “information/orientation,” “entertainment/distraction,” “habit/mood” and “overview/

<sup>15</sup> The formulas for the calculation of niche breadth, niche overlap and superiority index emanate from ecology and initially merely required a nominal data level. Dimmick (1993) adjusted the formulas to the metric data level as it is usually used in social sciences.

<sup>16</sup> For the interpretation of niche breadths on micro level the following has to be taken into account: Arithmetically, the niche breadth is nothing more than a measure for the average degree of agreement across different items. A very low niche breadth arises if the respondents do not agree or only agree reluctantly with all items of a dimension. The low value of the niche breadth therefore shows an altogether low gratification capacity on a dimension. A high niche breadth arises from a consistently high agreement with all gratification items of a dimension so that it is absolutely possible to talk of a generalist orientation. The interpretation of a *medium niche breadth* is difficult. It may arise if *either* an overall mediocre gratification capacity is adduced on the dimension or if one statement of the dimension experiences high agreement, while others only experience a low one. The use of the term “specialization” would only be adequate in the latter case and altogether rather appears reasonable when regarding the niche breadths on macro level. For this methodical modification of niche theory also see Schmitt-Walter 2004: 165.

Table 2: Niche Breadth Depending on Gender, Reader Type and Total

Gratification dimension	information/orientation	entertainment/distraction	habit/mood	overview/topicality	N
Women					
<i>Free sheet newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,44	0,73	0,45	0,83	89–90
Exclusive readers	0,56	0,70	0,45	0,84	47–49
Total	0,48	0,72	0,45	0,84	136–139
<i>Traditional national newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,82	0,55	0,51	0,85	69–72
Exclusive readers	0,76	0,49	0,51	0,85	19–20
Total	0,8	0,54	0,51	0,85	88–92
Men					
<i>Free sheet newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,44	0,69	0,37	0,75	52–53
Exclusive readers	0,49	0,72	0,48	0,78	15–16
Total	0,45	0,69	0,39	0,75	67–69
<i>Traditional national newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,83	0,53	0,46	0,85	40–42
Exclusive readers	0,81	0,36	0,45	0,90	17
Total	0,83	0,48	0,46	0,87	57–59
Total					
<i>Free sheet newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,44	0,71	0,44	0,80	143
Exclusive readers	0,54	0,71	0,45	0,83	62–65
Total	0,47	0,71	0,43	0,81	205–208
<i>Traditional national newspapers</i>					
Readers of both newspapers	0,82	0,54	0,49	0,85	109–114
Exclusive readers	0,78	0,42	0,48	0,88	36–37
Total	0,81	0,51	0,49	0,86	147–151

Basis: readers of free sheet newspapers (N=205–209) and of traditional national newspapers (N=149–151).

topicality" shall be regarded. In addition, they were determined broken down by reader type and gender.

On the "information/orientation" dimension, the traditional daily newspapers prove to be functional generalists (0.81); they offer their readers a multitude of gratifications and therefore occupy a very broad niche on this dimension (see Table 2). By contrast, free sheet newspapers only offer a mediocre gratification capacity (0.47).

Free sheet newspapers display their strength among other things with regard to "entertainment/distraction;" they offer their readers a broad range of gratifications on this dimension (0.71). Regarding the fulfillment of such affective functions such as entertainment and distraction, they prove to be generalists. The traditional daily newspapers, on the contrary, are only fairly suitable to fulfill these functions (0.51).

On the gratification dimension "habit/mood," the evaluation of the two newspaper types is very similar. Both free sheet newspapers (0.43) and traditional daily newspapers (0.49) only show mediocre gratification capacities. Neither for the readers of free sheet newspapers nor for those of traditional national newspapers the reading is an especially fixed habit.

Both newspaper types offer high gratification capacities on the dimension "overview/topicality." The niche breadth of free sheet newspapers is 0.81 and thus only slightly smaller than that of the traditional daily newspapers (0.86). However, this dimension is only covered by two items. Therefore it is not expedient to talk of a "generalist orientation." The niche breadth can rather be assessed as an overall high agreement regarding the constituting items.

On the basis of the niche breadth the positioning of a medium in the functional room may be described. In fact, the niche breadth already provides evidence to how far the niches occupied by free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers are similar to each other. For the actual measurement of the similarity of the gratifications obtained, however, the measure of the *niche overlap* (research question 4) is available, with the help of which the direct competition of two media may be quantified. The higher the niche overlap, the higher is the reciprocal competitive pressure. A small niche overlap indicates a complementary relation between the media as, in this case, they deliver different gratifications to recipients

(Dimmick, Kline & Stafford 2000: 233). The formula of niche overlap (O) according to Dimmick is as follows (1993: 144 ff.):

$$O_{i,j} = \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N \sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^K \frac{(GO_i - GO_j)^2}{K}}}{N}$$

With  
*i, j* = medium *i* and *j*  
*GO* = gratifications obtained by *i* and *j*  
*N* = number of respondents using *i* and *j*  
*K* = number of items

The minimum value of niche overlap is zero and (quite unusual) stands for maximum overlap; it is reached if the evaluation of two media by the respondents is identical. The upper limit of niche overlap results from the difference of the upper and the lower scale limit. As the gratifications obtained were measured on scales from one to five the maximum value in the present case is four. Values close to four indicate a low niche overlap occurring if the evaluations by the respondents differ strongly. Table 3 shows the niche overlap of the identified gratification dimensions (research question 5):

However, Dimmick points out that the measure of niche overlap does not state whether a gratification dimension is significant for a medium from the recipients' point of view: "Because low-overlap values may occur due to respondents' ratings at either the low or high end of the scales, it is necessary to inspect the *GO* means and to consider the substantive meaning of the positions on the scale when interpreting the overlap measures" (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford 2000: 232). A high niche overlap may actually also be observed if two media which are compared to each other do not at all or hardly offer a gratification.

As the analysis of niche breadth showed, it is one of the main functions of traditional national newspapers to offer informational and cognitive stimuli. There is no competition between free sheet and traditional national newspapers on this gratification dimension (3.26) (see Table 3). The range of contents offered by free sheet newspapers obviously is not sufficient to enter the original domain of traditional national newspapers: extensive (background) coverage, interpretation of and comments on current events.

The situation is different with regard to the affective gratification dimension "entertainment/distraction." The evaluation by readers of both



*Table 3: Niche Overlap Depending on Gender and Total*

Gratification dimension	information/orientation	entertainment/distraction	habit/mood	overview/topicality	N
Women	3,23	1,11	0,41	0,52	72
Men	3,29	1,08	0,58	0,54	45
Total	3,26	1,09	0,48	0,40	117

Scale from “0=maximum overlap” to “4=no overlap”. Basis: readers of both newspaper types evaluating free sheet newspapers and traditional national newspapers (N=117).

newspaper types on this dimension only differs slightly regarding free sheet and traditional daily newspapers. Both newspaper types are granted the ability to satisfy escapist needs, to entertain with diverting articles and to distract from everyday life (1.09). On this gratification dimension there is definitely a moderate competition which will have to be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

Very high niche overlaps occur on both the dimensions “habit/mood” (0.48) and “overview/topicality” (0.40). The analysis of the niche breadths shows that in this case, both newspaper types only adduce mediocre gratification capacities. Thus, the strong competition on this dimension is only secondarily relevant. Both free sheet newspapers and traditional national newspapers largely fulfill the function “overview/topicality” for their readers. The niche overlap shows that both newspaper types very strongly compete on this dimension.

As next step, the analysis of the *superiority index* has to clarify whether both newspaper types actually adduce the same subjective benefit or whether one of them is superior to the other, which, in the long run, would threaten the existence of the inferior newspaper (research question 5).

The formulas of the superiority index (S) according to Dimmick are as follows (Dimmick 1993: 144 ff.):

$$S_{i > j} = \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N \sum_{k=1}^K (m_{i > j})}{N}$$

With  
*i, j* = medium *i* and *j*  
*m<sub>i > j</sub>* = scale sum of the scales of a gratification dimension on which medium *i* is rated higher than medium *j*  
*N* = number of respondents rating *i* higher than *j*

$$S_{j > i} = \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N \sum_{k=1}^K (m_{j > i})}{N}$$

With  
 $m_{j > i}$  = scale sum of the scales of a gratification dimension on which medium  $j$  is rated higher than medium  $i$   
 $N$  = number of respondents rating  $j$  higher than  $i$

With the help of a significance test it can be determined whether the differences between the superiority indexes only occur accidentally or whether they are significant. If there is a significant difference on one gratification dimension, the medium can be considered as superior to the other in delivering that gratification (Dimmick 1993: 147). If this is not the case, both newspaper types may theoretically continue to exist in the chosen niche constellation; there is probably only a small danger of replacement (principle of competitive exclusion), and there is no need to change the occupied functional niche (competitive displacement).

As can be seen from the formula, the superiority indexes initially were calculated across all items of a dimension. However, when choosing this approach it does not – as Dimmick himself recognizes – become clear to which extent each individual item contributes to the total value of the superiority index (Dimmick 2003: 85). Hence he proposes to calculate the superiority indexes individually for each gratification item. This study also follows this recommendation.

On the dimension “*overview/topicality*” both newspaper types impart to their reader facts he or she has to know to be up-to-date. But, as table 4 shows, the superiority indexes do not differ significantly. Thus the free sheet newspaper as a new medium is not able to dispute the competence of the traditional daily newspapers to deliver a general overview of events. Following Dimmick one can expect the competition on this dimension without crowding out effects for traditional dailies.

There is an interesting finding on the dimension “*entertainment/distraction*” with regard to female readers. From the point of view of the female readers looking for distraction and amusement, free sheet newspapers are superior to traditional national newspapers (see Table 4). This may be attributed to the observation that the entertaining contents of free sheet newspapers are more appealing to a female readership (fashion, gossip, horoscope, etc.). The moderate competition between the two newspaper types on this dimension may in the long term result in female



*Table 4: Superiority Indexes of Free Sheet Newspapers and Traditional Daily Newspapers in Comparison*

Gratification item	Free sheet newspaper	Traditional newspaper	df	F-Test F
Women				
Opinion-forming	/****	4,50	/	/
Comprehensive information	/****	4,69	/	/
Thought-provoking impulses	/****	4,54	/	/
Backgrounds	/****	4,35	/	/
Curiosity	4,18	4,68	47	6,921**
Entertainment	4,03	4,42	48	2,028
Distraction	4,57	4,00	48	4,132*
Amusement	4,34	3,60	52	7,523**
Habit	4,00	3,95	40	0,020
Good feeling	3,71	3,66	42	0,030
News overview	4,88	4,80	38	0,273
Up to date	4,87	4,91	46	0,162
Men				
Opinion-forming	/****	4,39	/	/
Comprehensive information	/****	4,73	/	/
Thought-provoking impulses	/****	4,48	/	/
Backgrounds	/****	4,32	/	/
Curiosity	4,57	4,57	27	0,000
Entertainment	3,94	4,30	27	2,336
Distraction	4,39	4,50	32	0,213
Amusement	4,35	3,67	31	2,481
Habit	3,30	4,00	26	3,200
Good feeling	3,29	3,47	23	0,172
News overview	4,75	4,63	23	0,253
Up to date	/****	4,67	/	/

Basis: readers of both newspaper types evaluating one newspaper type higher than the other on an item. It was abstained from calculating the superiority index of one newspaper type if it was considered as superior by less than five interviewees. (Possible values between 0 and 5).

readers increasingly choosing free sheet newspapers when looking for distraction. For women whose newspaper use is mainly motivated by looking for distraction, free sheet newspapers therefore prove to be a suitable substitute. However, the niche breadths have shown that female readers of both newspaper types use traditional national newspapers mainly for information and for receiving cognitive impulses (see Table 2). Hence it is more likely that the use of traditional daily newspapers is not stopped but that they are still used to satisfy this gratification.

The analysis of niche overlap did not result in a similar evaluation of the newspaper types with regard to "information/orientation." Thus there is no competition for the recipient's attention on this dimension. Free sheet newspapers cannot dispute the competence of the traditional daily newspapers in the field of detailed background coverage. Actually, nearly nobody values the gratification capacity of free sheet newspapers on these items higher than that of the traditional national newspapers so that no superiority index may be calculated for the former.

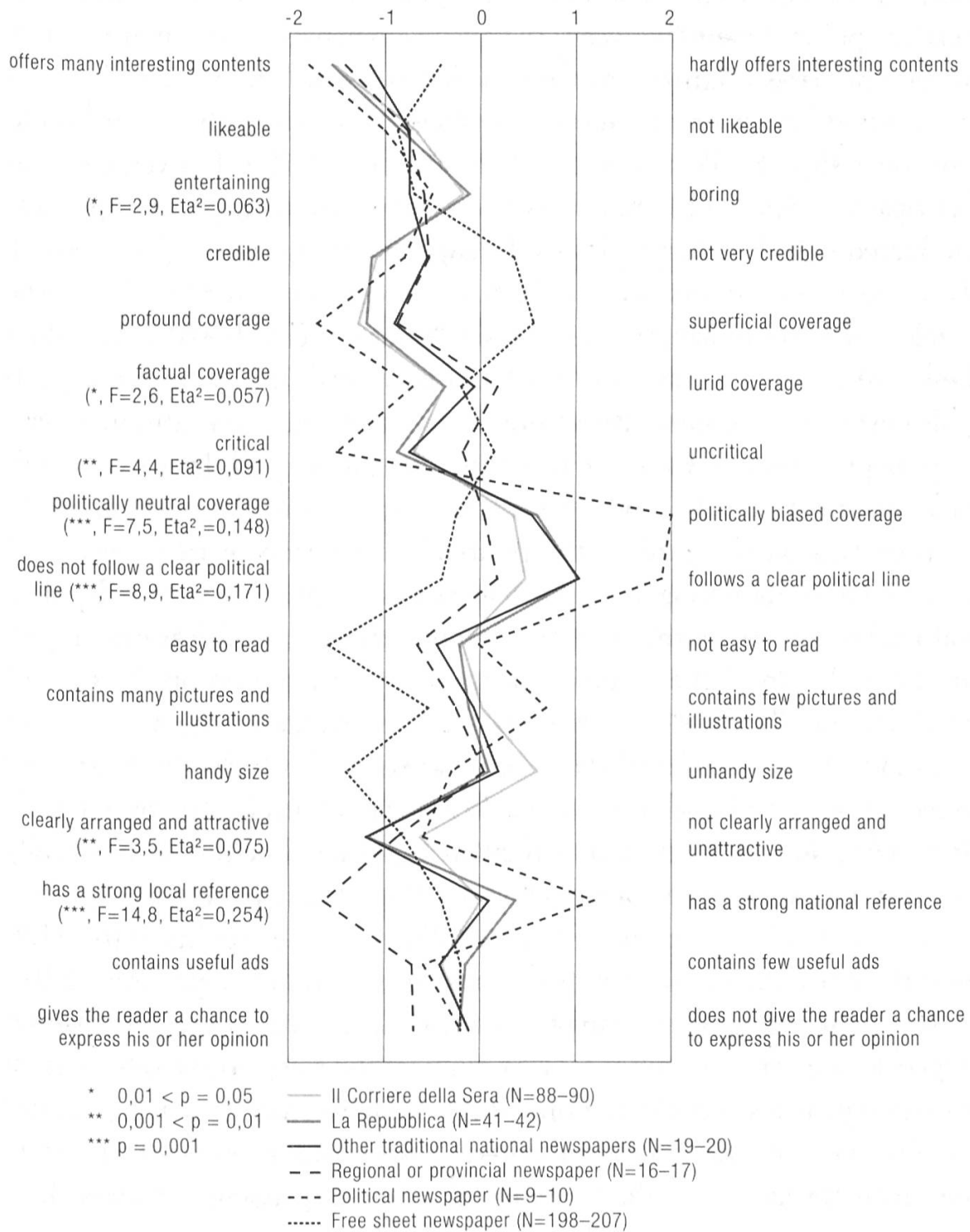
Regarding the dimension "*habit/mood*," a less important gratification dimension for the use of newspaper types, none of the newspaper types is superior to the other. Only the male respondents show a tendency to prefer the traditional national newspapers on this dimension.

It may be concluded that free sheet newspapers offer their readers lower gratifications than traditional national newspapers on nearly all gratification dimensions. The only exception is the ability of free sheet newspapers to distract the readers and their special suitability for amusement. With regard to these aspects, the female readers consider them to be superior to the traditional national newspapers.

The decision to use a certain medium is made according to Palmgreen's "Expectancy-value-model" on the basis of the expectations concerning the utility of a behaviour. These expectations of the recipient may be influenced by the image ascribed to the medium by the user which was analyzed in an additional part of the research (research question 6). The image was captured with the help of a semantic differential with values from -2 to +2 (including 0 as neutral value). Figure 4 shows the evaluation of 16 selected bipolar pairs, the so-called image items.

The bipolar pairs cover different image components. The first three items comprise the affective evaluation of the newspapers. Especially the

*Figure 4: Image of Free Sheet and Traditional Daily Newspapers*



item “likeable/not likeable” shows the emotional relation of the reader to a newspaper type. As figure 4 shows, free sheet newspapers and traditional daily newspapers have a similarly high degree of likeability from their readers’ point of view (between -0.7 and -1), whereas women consider free sheet newspapers significantly more often as likeable than men.<sup>17</sup>

With the help of the items “credible/not very credible,” “profound coverage/superficial coverage,” “factual coverage/lurid coverage” and “critical/uncritical,” the journalistic quality of the newspaper types was evaluated, which rather expresses the cognitive impressions of the readers. Free sheet newspapers show deficits with regard to credibility and the quality of the coverage, they are considered as less credible (0.4) and their coverage is evaluated as lurid (0.6) and uncritical (0.2). For the respectable coverage of contents the respondents rather trust in traditional daily newspapers; they prove to be more suitable for the fulfillment of cognitive quality demands. There are clear differences in the opinion of the respondents with regard to the political orientation of free sheets and traditional daily newspapers. Free sheet newspapers are assigned political neutrality (-0.3); the students do not perceive a political orientation in the make-up of the editorial parts (-0.4). Depending on the type of traditional daily newspaper read the students evaluated the political orientation of the traditional daily newspapers very differently. While the regional and provincial newspapers do not leave a succinct picture regarding their political orientation – they are considered neither as politically neutral nor as politically biased (0.1) –, political newspapers, as expected, have a clear political profile: They are following a clear political line (1.9) and their coverage is unanimously considered as politically biased (2.0).

Free sheet newspapers may especially score with regard to formal aspects. They are easy to read (-1.6), support the reception of information by using pictures and illustrations (-0.5) and have an extremely handy size (-1.4). The evaluation of formal criteria of free sheet newspapers therefore confirms the suspicion that the high disponibility assigned to free sheet newspapers is based especially on the formal characteristics of the newspaper type.

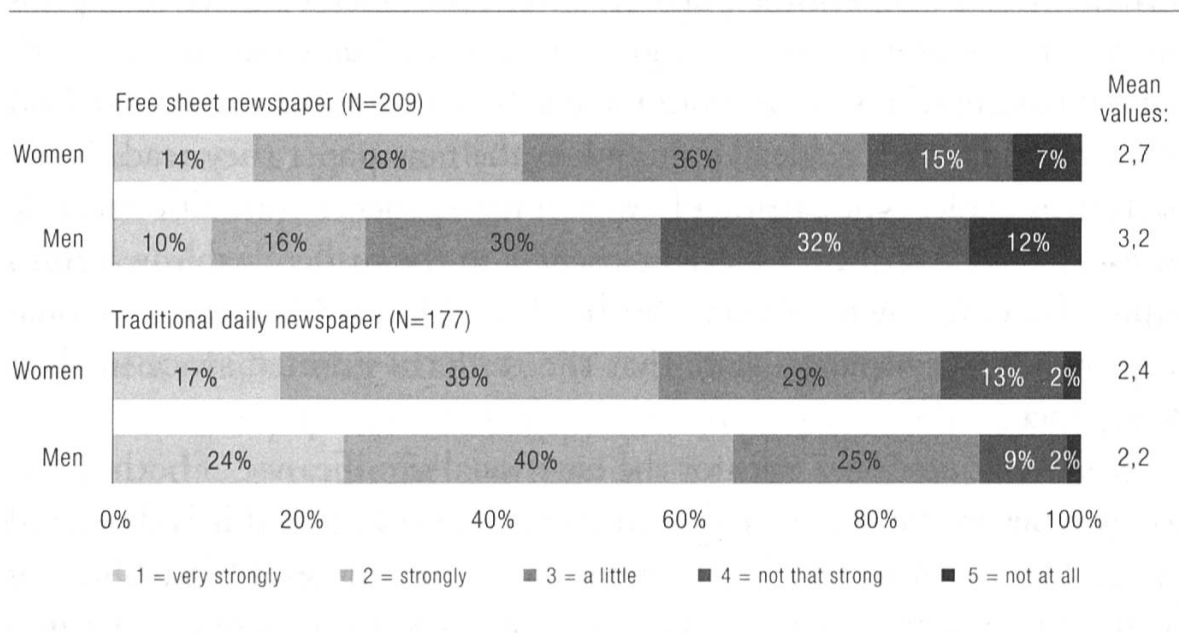
<sup>17</sup> The mean values of both genders differ significantly:  $F=9.5$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2=0.045$ , significance=0.002.

With regard to the quality of the ads the two newspaper types hardly differ. With the help of the polarity “gives the reader a chance to express his or her own opinion/does not give the reader a chance to express his or her own opinion” it shall be examined to what extent the readers can find themselves or other readers’ opinions in the newspaper they read. None of the newspaper types, neither free sheet newspapers nor traditional daily newspapers, is ascribed a special closeness to the reader enabling him to express his or her own opinion (-0.1 bis -0.2). Only the readers of regional or provincial newspapers state that the reader is granted space in their newspaper (-0.7).

Research question 7 asks for the emotional significance of both newspaper types in the students’ life. In readership research, this is described by the concept of “reader involvement” (in German: Leser-Blatt-Bindung [LBB]). In empirical studies, the reader involvement is mainly measured with the help of “involvement or appreciation scales.”<sup>18</sup> In the study presented here the reader involvement is measured with the help of the dispensability question: In the hypothetical case that a newspaper was no longer published, the students stated to which degree they would miss the newspaper they read most frequently. On the one hand the degree of missing is an indicator for the personal connection and the emotional affinity of a reader with his or her newspaper. On the other hand it can be considered as an indicator for the benefit arising from media use. A reader who would not at all miss the newspapers he or she reads obviously does not benefit from reading, or only to a small degree, and therefore can relinquish it.

The analysis of the dispensability question in the student sample shows a relatively clear picture: It would obviously be easier for the interviewed readers to relinquish use of free sheet newspapers than of traditional daily newspapers (see Figure 5). On the five-point dispensability scale, with “1” meaning that a reader would miss a newspaper very strongly and “5” meaning that a reader would not miss a newspaper at all, free sheet newspapers have a mean value of 2.9 (N=210). The traditional daily newspapers would on average be missed a little more (2.4; N=178).

<sup>18</sup> Focus Media-Lexikon: <http://www.medialine.de>, keyword “Leser-Blatt-Bindung,” accessed on 5 June 2006.

*Figure 5: Degree of Missing of Newspaper Types Depending on Gender*

However, it can be stated again that free sheet newspapers appeal more to the female students than to the male students: 42 % of the female readers of free sheet newspapers state that they would miss the morning reading of a free sheet newspaper “strongly” or even “very strongly;” of the male readers only one fourth (26 %) make this statement.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the traditional daily newspapers the differences are not that strong; female and male readers would miss them to approximately the same degree (58 % vs. 64 %, see Figure 5). Altogether it can be recorded that traditional daily newspapers are rather able to establish an emotional relation with their readers than free sheet newspapers.

## 6. Conclusion and Limitations

On the important dimension “information/orientation” the traditional national newspapers prove to be generalists not threatened by free sheet newspapers. They possess a far lower gratification capacity on this dimension and do not represent a competitive substitute in this respect. On the

<sup>19</sup> The mean values of both genders differ highly significantly:  $F=7.8$ ,  $\eta^2=0.036$ , significance=0.006.



other hand, free sheet newspapers display their strength with regard to delivering affective gratifications to recipients. Accordingly they show a generalist orientation on the dimension "entertainment/distraction," i.e. the readers consider them as capable of offering entertainment, distraction and amusement. In sum, they are considered as significantly more suitable for delivering distractive and entertaining gratifications.

In contrast to the exclusive readers of traditional daily newspapers who do not try to obtain affective gratifications by reading, the readers of both newspaper types use the traditional daily newspaper also for escapist reasons, thus showing a higher entertainment orientation when reading the newspaper which may be one reason for their interest in free sheet newspapers.

Both traditional national newspapers and free sheet newspapers offer their readers a high degree of actual news and topicality in a confusing world. In this case the functional niches of both newspaper types overlap. However, the free sheet newspaper as a new medium is not superior to the traditional national newspaper, i.e. it is not able to offer a higher gratification here. Following Dimmick's assumption the competition on this dimension will therefore probably be without severe consequences for the traditional daily press. On the other hand readers of free sheets receive about the same level of gratification concerning this factor at a price of zero whereas they have to pay for it to obtain it from traditional newspapers. Indeed readers rank this gratification quite high (3.94, see Figure 3). It would be interesting to gain evidence on readers' willingness to accept gratification losses, or a different gratification profile at various prices including the price of zero. In future research this could be analyzed e.g. by conjoint analysis which would further enhance the understanding of the probability of a threat which traditional newspapers might experience from free sheets in the readers market.

There is no reason to speak of a strong habitualization of use regarding both newspaper types. The gratification capacities of the relevant dimension "habit/mood" are evaluated on a similarly low level by the readers of both newspaper types.

With regard to the image forming newspaper characteristics the study displayed deficits of free sheet newspapers regarding credibility and quality of the coverage compared to traditional dailies. Accordingly it would be easier for the interviewed readers to abandon the free sheet newspaper



than to relinquish the traditional daily newspaper, with free sheet newspapers appealing clearly more strongly to female students than to male students. In this regard free sheet newspapers especially score with formal characteristics. They are easier to read, strongly work with pictures and illustrations and have a handy format. Thus obviously a practical, updated infotainment medium developed which, in the examined readers market, hardly competes directly with established daily newspapers. It offers the existing newspaper readers, especially the younger media users, additional gratifications and opens up new reader groups. This is also confirmed by current data, e. g. of the Swiss newspaper market where free sheet newspapers have registered a rocketing growth since approximately 2001, but hardly at the expense of the circulation of established newspapers – not even amongst the readers under 30 (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft [Swiss Confederation] 2007: 20).<sup>20</sup>

This paper does not exclude competition between free sheets and paid for newspapers on the advertising markets, which should be analyzed in further research. Competition in the ad market between free and paid for newspapers may be assumed to be heavy and has many aspects, which are not part of this study, but should be considered for a thorough understanding. This also concerns the categories of ads: do free sheets attract the same categories of ads and the same advertisers or different ones as those in regional or national newspapers. How strong is the competition with paid for newspapers compared to the competition on the internet? Since free sheets reach young readers they may, in general, stabilize print advertising budgets, which otherwise would move to the internet.

Finally, the authors are aware that the degree to which the results can be generalized is limited in so far as every newspaper market has different

<sup>20</sup> Thus the newspaper *20 Minuten* has meanwhile become the most read newspaper in Switzerland and is unchallenged above all among the very young readers. The free sheet newspapers could increase their cumulated range in the reader group from 15 to 29 years from 17 % to 43 % from 2001 to 2006, while the traditional newspapers in total only lost slightly from 60 % to 56 % in this age group – in the age groups above 30 the range of the traditional daily newspapers even remained stable or increased slightly; Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft (Swiss Confederation)/Bundesamt für Statistik (Federal Census Bureau) 2007: 20.

characteristics. More studies in other newspaper markets with the same methodological approach should be conducted in order to see to which extent results are comparable. The study presented here reflects the market in Milan, where free sheet newspapers are obviously a complement to the existing quality newspapers. The delivered entertaining and service function fill a gap in the newspaper market. An advantage of the study was the fact that the three free sheets investigated in the study were quite homogeneous.<sup>21</sup> Keeping that in mind, results of our study may be compared to the competition between free sheets and quality newspapers in other countries in subsequent studies.

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<sup>21</sup> See the results of the content analysis by Pezzoli (2005).

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*Appendix 1: Socio-Demographic Structure of Free Sheets' Readership in Comparison to the Italian Population*

	Readership of free sheets (in % of 100)	General Italian popula- tion (in % of 100)
Sex		
Male	55	48
Female	45	52
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Age (years)		
14–17	7	5
18–24	15	9
25–34	19	18
35–44	20	18
45–54	17	15
55–64	10	14
65+	12	21
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Education		
University degree [it. laurea]	10	7
University-entrance diploma [it. diploma media superiore]	34	26
Secondary school [it. diploma media inferiore]	39	39
General-education secondary school [it. licenza elementare]	16	29
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Profession		
Entrepreneur [it. imprendi- tore/libera professionista]	4	3
Craftsman [it. artigiano]	9	9
Top executive [it. dirigente]	5	3
Employee [it. impiegato]	21	14
Labourer/salesman [it. operaio/comMESSO]	16	16
Housewife [it. casalinga]	11	11
Student [it. studente]	19	10
Retired person [it. pensionato]	12	22
Jobless [it. non occupato]	3	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Eurisko (2004): Free Press – analisi della readership. Milano.

