

Surveys about why people read news

One source of useful information about why people consume news, and what are their wishes and demands regarding news, we can find in research done by news agencies and newspapers. Faced with declining readership¹, newspapers have conducted a wide range of studies in order to better understand the readers, their needs, and why they read the newspapers (the goal is usually "to build readership--to reach the people who aren't reading us and to keep the people who are reading us reading" or to "figure out how we can get more people reading the newspaper more often"). Here we report on several of these studies. One of the central message for news industry is that they should not only change, but learn how to constantly change. Readers are changing more rapidly, and news(papers) industry has to constantly adapt, and track the readers and their motivations for reading the news.

Writing a review of these studies is faced with several problems. The main problem is that these studies and surveys are not aimed for researchers, but for editors and people that make money from news. Therefore, they are sometimes too generic, not available on line (for less than 500\$), available only in notes of someone who listened a presentation. Still, they contain interesting facts, and here we will try to extract some useful information from it, and relate it to our work on NewsML. This is work in progress, so do not be too critical about the document. We hope that these survey can provide some material for building hypothesis about better news systems.

We will present several of these studies, including:

1. Content Intelligence survey "With So Much Content on the Internet, Why Do People Still Read Newspapers?"
2. Some reports of The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE)
3. The Survey conducted by Progressive Partnership
4. Some speculative articles
5. One simple taxonomy of reasons why people read newspapers
6. Problems that disabled users face when they are accessing the newspapers
7. Some texts about new forms of news, beyond news sites and portals

1. Content Intelligence Survey: With So Much Content on the Internet, Why Do People Still Read Newspapers?

In the survey conduct by "Content Intelligence" in 2001², they asked a simple question: "With So Much Content on the Internet, Why Do People Still Read Newspapers?". Two key responses emerged from their survey:

- First, people enjoy the newspapers **portability** because they can take it wherever they go, and
- Second, the readers say that **the newspapers contains information they cannot get from another source-information**.

Other, less frequent, responses that netted some notice were that **newspapers contained better or more detailed information** than they can get elsewhere, while some older readers said that **newspaper reading had become a habit**. A small percentage noted that they **don't like reading from a PC screen**.

1.1 Portability of newspapers

The portability factor is perhaps a less expected winner, but it is compelling when considered along with two other findings:

- 46 percent of the survey audience (more often the younger and less affluent) told that **their newspaper reading location habits varied daily**, and
- those who expressed a preference for the portability factor also tended to be **younger, less well educated**, and **less affluent**.

However, this also lead to an interesting question:

If portability and "anytime/anywhere" usability are key factors in newspaper readership, especially among younger readers who are driven by a mobile and varied lifestyle, *then what might be the outlook for newspapers if wireless, mobile reading devices or smart cell phones become commonplace?*

This is definitely a good motivation for research on accessing news from mobile and other pervasive devices.

1 http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/narrative_newspapers_audience.asp

2 <http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/aug01/mcintyre.htm>

Related to the topic of portability are also two funny articles from CyberJournalist.net. The first one is “Top 10 Reasons for Reading a News Site”, and the second is the reaction to it “Top 10 Reasons for Reading a Newspaper”:

Top 10 Reasons for Reading a News Site ³ (Oct 2005)	Top 10 Reasons for Reading a Newspaper ⁴ (Nov 2005)
1. My news site has never stained my clean shirt or my car seat.	1. My newspaper has never crashed, gone down, or flashed animated ads at me.
2. Anywhere I travel, my news site goes with me. It doesn't pile up while I'm away.	2. Anywhere I travel, my newspaper goes with me. I don't need a laptop or a wireless connection or a PDA.
3. I can listen to my news site's podcast while standing, while eating, while riding a bus, OR while I drive my car.	3. I can read my newspaper while standing, while eating, while riding a bus, but not while driving my car, which is just as well since I should be paying attention to the road.
4. If I read a story I like, I can send it to a friend without a stamp.	4. If I read a story I like, I can tear it out and save it, and not have to pay to read it 30 days later.
5. My news site doesn't just have sections -- it's customizable, and it shows my wife and I exactly what we're interested, separately.	5. I don't have to sign in or customize or register or remember passwords to read my newspaper. And I often enjoy articles in my newspaper on topics I wouldn't normally think I'd be interested in.
6. I'll give you the battery advantage. But my news site has each apartment listing with detailed descriptions, photos and a precise map. My newspaper says "Downtown, 2 bd/2 bt, 5 appl., ht & ht wtr, balc, d/i pool, n/p, n/s. \$1200"	6. My newspaper has high-resolution pictures and type on large pages that load almost instantly, making it easy to browse and enjoy.
7. My news site never gets stolen off my doorstep or delivered late. Or wet.	7. My newspaper is cheap, disposable and easy to replace. If it's lost or stolen, it's no big deal.
8. My news site doesn't need to be recycled.	8. My newspaper is not made of unrecyclable toxic materials.
9. If my news site makes a mistake, they correct the original story, and when I read that story later, I will see the corrected version. My newspaper may not be broken, but it could be wrong.	9. If my newspaper makes a mistake, the correction is posted with an explanation. It's not sneakily applied to the original story after I've read it.
10. I can read my news site in a light breeze.	10. I can read my newspaper sitting outside on a nice day in the sun, even if a breeze is blowing, because I know how to fold a newspaper.

1.2 Lack of information?

One-quarter of respondents in the study cited the **exclusiveness of the information offered by newspapers** as their reason for reading or subscribing to them. This finding is especially interesting considering that **participants in the study were typical Web-enabled respondents**: log onto the Web multiple times daily; often stay online for 45 minutes or more; and have typically visited the website of the newspaper they read at least on an occasional basis.

The key question is why, when readers are logged on daily, they don't get the essential information they need from the newspaper Web site and dispense with the “dead-tree” version altogether?

A part of the answer to this question is connected with **age related issues**. Those 55 years of age and older were most likely to think the newspaper had unique information they couldn't get elsewhere, along with, surprisingly, **those who accessed the Internet most frequently** (ten or more times daily). Older users said they looked in newspapers for community and regional general and business news and for obituaries. Those with very high Web access frequency (10 or more times per day) tend to prefer the Web as their source for all information, but they are **turning to paper newspapers because they cannot easily get some types of information or content from the Web**.

This finding also illustrates the point that **finding news on the Internet is still very problematic**.

1.3 Accessibility is more important than quality

Perhaps one disappointing sign for the newspaper industry is that **only 4 percent of the audience said that they like reading the newspaper because they like the writing or news reporting style**. One conclusion of the study is, therefore, that newspapers cannot count on the quality of their editorial work to retain readers because readers don't share the same perceptions about newspaper editorial quality.

This leads to an interesting conclusion. *The readers are looking for information they can easily find, and are considering quality secondary to accessibility of information.* For our NewsML this can also be an interesting motivation. Even if the news items are not written in award-winning style, users will still accept it provided that they can easily access and find it.

³ <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/002994.php>

⁴ <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/003021.php>

1.4 What type of content readers want

So what unique information do people get from a newspaper that they cannot get elsewhere? The big winner was **local and community news** of differing varieties and **utility data for housing and employment**. One common thread of such data is: **they provide news or useful information about the local area that is not readily available elsewhere, unlike, for example, professional sports news, which is readily available in a variety of media.**

This finding is not new, but surprisingly, newspapers often fail to communicate such information. Newspaper industry critics agree that it is, ironically, this local content area that has suffered most as major papers acquire each other, trim staffs, and consolidate news operations. This unique, high-value, local content is key to the success of numerous free and paid local weekly newspapers. Further, it shows why a growing universe of independent, niche and alternative newspapers serving ethnic neighborhoods and other audiences exhibit growing circulation numbers while big-city dailies continue to decline.

For NewsML, this may motivate the importance of having annotation about location of news, and easily access to news based on user location.

1.5 User profiles and content needs

There is interesting correlation with user profiles and information the users want. Age, gender, education level, salary, employment, demographics, and frequency of Internet usage significantly influence readers' information needs:

- 57 percent cited community or regional news, **correlating dramatically with increasing age**;
- 36 percent said community or regional business news, **correlating with increasing age and with shorter length and lower frequency of Internet experience**;
- 32 percent pointed to employment and job information, **strongly correlating with lower income and younger age** (especially under 25), but this response was also popular across most demographics;
- 29 percent listed community or regional sports, **correlating with increasing age**;
- 42 percent pointed to obituaries, **strongly correlating with sex (female) and advancing age**, while those who have more Internet experience or access the Internet more frequently and those with a better education gave this response less frequently;
- 24 percent cited education and school news, **strongly correlating with sex (female) and age (under 25)**; and
- 22 percent said real estate information, **correlating with sex (female) and younger age groups**.
- Younger **females with incomes under \$25,000 and lower educational attainment** were the most likely to avoid reading **political news and commentary**, the respondents most likely to read such news and commentary were **males with graduate educations and annual incomes over \$75,000**.

For NewsML, this can also highlight the importance of annotation of news so that it can more easily be matched with user profile.

Additional source on what different age group read is US study on newspapers read by teenagers⁵.

1.6 What users can easily find elsewhere? What's Not Exclusive?

When respondents were asked what content is in the newspaper that they can't get elsewhere, **political news and commentary** earned only a 16 percent response, indicating that this audience has **found other sources** for this information **or does not want this information at all**. Political news and commentary has long been a bedrock readership area associated with newspapers, but now it appears that readers are either going elsewhere for their political news or don't want it at all.

In addition, the respondents said the following subjects areas (in ascending order, all single-digit responses) are not uniquely available in a newspaper, i.e. these are clearly information segments in which readers are not interested or for which they have found other (and perhaps, better) media sources, including the Internet:

- family and parenting information;
- national business news;
- health and fitness information and environmental information (tie);
- personal finance and investment information;
- science and computer/technology news; and

5 http://www.usaweekend.com/04_issues/040411/040411teen_survey.html

- professional sports (tie).

One of the main conclusion of the survey results, which agree with other industry surveys, suggest that **local news will be the kingpin of future newspapers because it is their only truly unique feature**. While all kinds of national and international news and sports, not to mention classifieds and real estate ads, are available from a multitude of Web sites and other media sources, **for now no website can match the comprehensive local reporting capability of a newspaper-a capability that readers clearly want**. At some point, perhaps Web-based alternatives to the local news resources of local newspapers may arise, but at a time when the financial industry has completely lost confidence in Web media, that short-term prospect seems very remote. While newspapers may be successful in capturing and maintaining their hold on the local news franchise if they work at it, their business model, highly dependent on local and classified advertising that may move to the Web, is far less certain to survive.

These findings can also be potentially useful in NewsML systems, for example, to influence the ordering of the news.

2. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) Reports

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) has a number of reports that are aimed at editors looking for improving their newspapers. They also fund the Readership Institute⁶, which conducts a number of studies.

2.1 Leveraging Newspaper Assets

One interesting source is their 2000 report called Leveraging Newspapers Assets⁷. One of the most interesting finding for our NewsML work is their emphasis that the **news should not only give data, but also have to have more context**.

These are the key findings of their report are:

- Newspapers should be **an intelligent agent** operating on the reader's behalf, offering expertise and authority. Newspapers need to be better explainers, to **help readers connect the news to their lives**.
- Newspapers should be **as local as possible** on consumer information.
- Newspapers should **empower readers**. The so-called soft news should be harder, **more fact-filled**.
- Readers want news connected to them-with more **break-out boxes of where to write for information**. With Q&A columns that address reader questions.
- Re-emphasize the basics. Newspapers must remember that accuracy is more than just getting the facts right. It's about **getting the right facts-with adequate background and proper context**.
- **Local news is the name of the game for a long time now** (see The Local News Handbook⁸). The survey suggests that newspapers should broaden the definitions of local news. It recommends that newspapers **go beyond the simple reporting of official actions** to provide more in-depth reporting. "That means more digging. More non-traditional sources. **More context.**"

2.2 Readership Institute study: Why People Read Newspapers

More recent study (2004) conducted by the Readership Institute⁹ confirms many of the known facts, but also introduce some new insights. Some well known facts include: "Better content, especially community news, brings in readers. Variety helps. Service greatly affects readership (people aren't likely to subscribe if the paper doesn't arrive, or shows up late or wet)."

However, there are some interesting and surprising findings.

- The most vital step is making the paper easier to use; contemporary touches such as **more attractive design, extensive use of color and informational graphics matter less than heavy promotion and easy-to-understand organization**.
- **Advertising and service** sometimes outrank editorial content in luring readers.
- Readers want **shorter stories in some cases** (about weather), **but longer ones in others** (about science and technology); **fewer stories on some topics** (crime), but **more on others** (community activities, lifestyles, global relations and "how we are governed").
- The research **encourages more narrative-style writing**, more awareness of **how ads help draw readers to editorial content**, and special attention to attracting readers who are young, African American or Hispanic.

⁶ <http://www.readership.org/>

⁷ <http://www.asne.org/kiosk/reports/98reports/leveraging.htm>

⁸ <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=2908>

⁹ <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=3505>

Perhaps the main conclusion is that "**newspapers that put more emphasis on understanding and responding to consumers**" were more likely to gain readers.

3. The Survey conducted by Progressive Partnership

In 2005 Progressive Partnership conducted the study about what people believe newspapers offer that other media lacks. The study was commissioned by the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society, and presented the NS INSIGHT Research Conference 2005¹⁰¹¹. The study explored the advantages of ethnographics in terms of understanding and interpreting the behavior of the consumer.

In a little confusing and criticized¹² overview of this survey, it is stated that the factors which news consumers demand include:

- Empowerment: readers want **knowledge** that empowers them in their daily activities
- Reassurance: readers want news **that connect them to their world**
- Companionship: readers want a **company** during their rest/break times (e.g. on a train).
- Quick updates: readers want to get a **quick "bite" at the headlines**, being constantly but easily and briefly updated with most important news.

This study also reports that benefits of newspapers include **portability, privacy, selectivity, intimacy**, the fact that it's **flickable** – whereas the Internet is searchable – and the fact they are **multi-functional**. Newspapers build more personal relationships as they **help readers live their lives**, both through the editorial and advertising.

4. Some speculative articles

In an independent review, based on his experiences as a journalist Jarred Cinman, give five reasons why people read (news) content:

1. Reason one: Because it's part of a bigger story. When writing content, try to **tie it into a bigger, existing story that already has some interest**.
2. Reason two: Because it's useful. Make content useful, authors can:
 - Offer **practical advice**, which is at the same time not simple common sense (this is usually found by focusing on what their particular talents or skills are).
 - **Review, summarize** or **clarify** other popular or topical information.
 - Offer **personal experiences** - provided these can be learned from.
 - Offer **summaries of research, interesting facts and figures**: this is the kind of content people can re-use themselves, and it is always sought-after.
3. Reason three: Because it strikes a common chord
 - Powerful common experiences are often **emotional**. "Experiences writing office memos" is likely to get 0 digs. "Almost dying in a car accident" or "My experience being shot in a hijacking", because these are emotional and strong experiences, may well appeal to others with similar stories.
 - **Causes** are gold content. Causes can be anything from issues that have arisen in an office environment to things with global significance. Because people care about causes, they are drawn to content about those causes.
 - **Get people talking**. Content that invites discussion and debate is also a natural magnet for crowds. This is achieved by offering comment facilities with each piece of content, and publicising how many people have commented on each piece. The more that do, the more that do.
4. Reason four: Because there's a quick payoff
 - **The quickest payoff possible is a visual, particularly a striking photograph**. It takes an **instant to consume**, and the impact can be as great as that contained in a whole book. Second prize is **diagrammatic content**. And third is what is now called "scannable" content.
 - **By scannable content**, I mean that a reader can **get the message without having to read in the traditional way**. Putting a headline and tagline under a news story is a simple form of making content scannable. On Web pages, and documents for that matter, a lot of thought needs to be put into how to make the content

10 <http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/BEHIND/ANALYSIS/050407read.shtml>

11 <http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/Documents/Publications/pr2005/cep-insight.htm>

12 http://www.editorsweblog.org/news/2005/04/advice_for_saving_the_newspaper.php

consumable in bite-size chunks, adaptable to the time the reader is willing to spend. They can drill into the content by stopping and reading more closely if something grabs them.

5. Reason five: Because it's **controversial**

- Applied with the right intention and care, controversial content can act as a lead in to other content behind it. This is the basic sales strategy that newspapers employ, and it never fails.

5. Toward Taxonomy of reasons why people read newspapers

Interesting short article from Times of India¹³, the authors gives a simple “taxonomy” of reasons why people read news. The main problem with this article is that it is very short, and does not reference its sources.

People read a newspaper for various reasons. From time to time research on this subject has been carried out in the US. A gist of some of these studies and some well-accepted perceptions are stated below:

- **For Information and Interpretation of Public Affairs:** The 'serious' side of newspaper coverage.
- **To provide a framework for Daily Living:** From lists of events and advertisements published on a daily basis
- **For respite:** The relaxation or entertainment value of the daily newspaper.
- **For social prestige:** Many readers felt the newspaper was important not just because it gave them information, but because it enabled them to appear more informed at social gatherings.
- **For social contact:** Human interest stories, personal advice columns, gossip pieces and their variety provided much more than respite from daily routine.
- **To match one's wits against others**
- **To feel reassured of their position & existence in their environment**
- **Plain habit** was also mentioned as an important reason for many to read a newspaper.

These 8 broad statements have been further dissected into 48 specific reasons:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. To be informed about daily events | 22. To find out tips on stock purchases |
| 2. To get information for daily living | 23. To appear exclusive |
| 3. To provide a framework for one's day | 24. To feel self-reliant/inclusive |
| 4. To get the cultural tools to become upwardly mobile | 25. To avoid conversation |
| 5. To feel assured of one's existence | 26. To create a comfort zone |
| 6. To match one's wits against others | 27. To enhance relaxation |
| 7. To be reassured about one's own usefulness | 28. To feel renewed and refreshed |
| 8. To find satisfaction in reading good writing | 29. To experience gender equality (women) |
| 9. To pass time | 30. To impress others |
| 10. To find out what's new | 31. To give a start for the day |
| 11. To appear important | 32. To boost status |
| 12. To signal authority | 33. To improve one's English (Dutch/...) |
| 13. To be part of a select group | 34. To prepare for GD/Interviews |
| 14. For self-expression | 35. For entertainment |
| 15. To project a particular personality | 36. For leisure |
| 16. To raise self worth | 37. For spiritual enlightenment |
| 17. To feel young | 38. For sports |
| 18. To maintain solitude | 39. To find out what others want to know |
| 19. To help appear in control | 40. To understand the evolving political scene |
| 20. To know what friends are up to | 41. To perceive what's changing |
| 21. To find out what is on sale | 42. To know about events and accidents |
| | 43. To know about moods/frolics of celebrities |

13 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/22958479.cms>

- 44. To get a handle on major societal issues
- 45. For the establishment to know what the influences are saying
- 46. For the adults to know what the smart-set is doing
- 47. For teenagers to pick up the guises of the adult world
- 48. For utilitarian value (train/ movie timings)

Work of Bernard Berelson

In a nice article from Newspaper Research Journal from Fall 2001 "No newspaper is no fun--even five decades later"¹⁴, they report on their study about why people read the news. Their conclusion is:

- *The simple answer to the research question "can newspaper readers articulate why they feel a need to read?" is "no." But as Berelson and other researchers have found, there are no "simple" answers in communications research. The secret of media uses lies not so much in the message, but in "the desirability of reading."*³¹ Berelson

What I found more interesting in this article is description of early work in news consumption, particularly the work of Bernard Berelson. In the 1948-49 edition of Communication Research, Bernard Berelson of Columbia University wrote "What 'Missing the Newspaper' Means," an analysis of the **1945 New York newspaper delivery strike** seen through the eyes of the would-be readers who didn't get their usual daily paper. Berelson was not alone in researching the impact of the strike. He referred to concurrent research projects in which surveys were used to determine the methods people used to keep up with the news while the strike was on, the parts of the paper they missed most and the degree to which their pining for the newspaper increased as the strike continued.¹ The strike lasted 17 days and was so effective at stopping circulation that most New Yorkers were effectively deprived of their regular paper.

But Berelson thought that "**missing the newspaper**" was less a statement of physical loss than it was of **social and psychological trauma**. His research focused on **what people felt when the paper didn't arrive and why**.

Berelson conducted his study at a time when the scholars of a rapidly modernizing western society were grappling with **what to make of mass media**. John J. Pauly painted a fascinating picture of this period in "**Interesting the Public: A Brief History of the Newsreading Movement**."² A major train of thought at this time, Pauly said, **concentrated on the role and responsibility of readers in democratic societies**. He quoted journalism professor Raymond Nixon as declaring in 1933, "**The greatest danger to society is not the way papers are edited but in the way papers are read.**"³

Contemporary to Berelson was Edgar Dale's textbook, **How to Read a Newspaper**.⁴ Pauly said the book was widely adopted by American high schools and held that **one must regularly read a newspaper to be a responsible member of democratic society**. The newsreading "**habit**" that Berelson found in his subjects, then, was said to have a **societal basis** in addition to a personal preference basis.

In recent research, Barnhurst and Wartella⁵ found that the daily paper performed **a variety of non-news functions for families - a source of art projects, a focus for family time, an object of entertainment, a patching material for shoes with holes and even a cudgel for hitting the dog**. Like other researchers, they found that the uses of newspapers sometimes defied logical explanation.

The **effort to find logic in media** use was central to uses and gratification research. Much of this early work focused on the audiences of radio soap operas. Applied to almost every medium since, this research often emphasized the entertainment aspect of mass media,⁶ theorizing that the consumption of media output is motivated by the gratification of certain individually experienced needs of audience members, rather than the strength of the media themselves. It broke from the concentration on media effects of the 1930s and 1940s. As Halloran⁷ said, **it diverted researchers from the habit of thinking of what media do to people. Instead, it directed them to look at what people do with the media**.

Much of **uses and gratification research** tries to quantify media use by fulfillment of **four needs**:

- diversion (an activity that diverts or amuses or stimulates),
- personal relationships,
- personal identity and
- surveillance.⁸

Although less specific, these categories roughly follow **Berelson's five-point typology**:

- Information about public affairs (surveillance),
- tools for daily living (personal identity and perhaps diversion),
- respite (diversion),
- social prestige (personal relationships) and

¹⁴ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3677/is_200110/ai_n8968676/pg_1

- social contact (personal relationships and personal identity).

While uses and gratification tried to look deeply into the individual for **psychological motivations for media use**, the **media dependency theory** was developed to **explain the sociological drivers of media use**. As Merskin explained, most people today live in an environment saturated by media messages.⁹ The central question of media dependency research, she said, is "**how did our world become so dependent on mass media, and how do mass mediated messages affect our lives?**"¹⁰

Media dependency theory says that as society has become **more urbanized, life has become less organized** around traditional social groups like church and family. Instead, **the mass media provide support and guidance to get people through daily life. As a result, modern citizens become "dependent" upon the media, including their daily newspaper.** Sandra Ball-Rokeach, one of the pioneers of this theory, took it another step by framing "media-system dependency." This extends the original notion of dependency to a societal level, proposing that the capacity of individuals to obtain their own goals is contingent upon the information resources of the media system of the society in which they live.¹¹

The habitual use of media is well documented. Matthew Ehrlich¹² reviewed sociological and psychological literature to show that **"ritual" was an appropriate concept for the study of journalism**. This ritual is reflected in newspaper columnist Karen McCowan's¹³ experience when **a change in editors of the Tribune Media Services' crossword puzzle feature unleashed a national outburst of emotion**. "We were really shocked at how personally people take the puzzle," McCowan quoted TMS assistant editor Eve Becker. "Some said we'd wrecked their mornings, or that they could no longer finish the puzzle on their commute."¹⁴

Berelson's observation that people sometimes read newspapers for the sheer enjoyment of the activity was expanded into **the play theory of communications by Stephenson**.¹⁵ Stephenson asserted that, **rather than unproductive leisure, play is an important part of the human experience**. He calls this **"subjective play"** and **sees the reading of newspapers as a prime example**. Reading the newspaper is:

- voluntary,
- not necessarily related to daily life,
- can be done with a sense of disinterest yet creates a certain sense of order,
- casts a light spell on the reader and
- involves a sense of self identification.¹⁶

If viewed as play in Stephenson's sense, newspaper reading takes on a role quite different from that postulated by most media researchers.

From these comments, he was able to identify five special uses for newspapers that regular readers seemed to desire:

1. Information and Interpretation of Public Affairs:

The tribute Berelson's readers paid to the "serious" side of newspaper coverage was **not limited to the front page**. They were also interested in **editorials, columns and commentaries**, which left them **dissatisfied with broadcast news as a replacement**

2. Tools for Daily Living:

The many **lists, rosters, regular features, advertisements and calendars** routinely published by newspapers were severely missed. Readers mentioned the **obituaries, stock listings, retail ads, weather forecasts**, recipes and (as World War II was just wrapping up) notices of troop-ship embarkations.

3. Respite:

The relaxation or entertainment value of the daily newspaper was very highly rated by the readers. Berelson said reading "provides **a vacation from personal care by transporting the reader outside his own immediate world.**"

4. Social Prestige:

Many readers felt the newspaper was important not just because it gave them information, but because it enabled them to **appear more informed at social gatherings**. Berelson found it interesting, that for some people, what was critical was **not that the content of the newspaper was good, but that it was good for something**

5. Social Contact:

Berelson's final attribute of newspapers lays the groundwork for the media dependency theory discussed later in this paper. He found that the **human interest stories, personal advice columns, gossip columns** and their ilk provided much more than respite from daily routine. Many people, he found, used them as guides to prevailing morality, insight to the private lives of others and indirect "personal" contact with distinguished people. A few readers even said they missed the papers because, in a way, **some of their "friends" resided in their pages in the form of columnists or regular features**.

Even after he had pulled together this list of reported newspaper attributes, Berelson found something missing in his analysis. Where the direct answers to his questions showed categories of desire, the follow-up conversations showed a less specific type of attraction to the newspaper.

He **attempted to find answers in psychology** but found little pertinent literature except for that relating to oral fixation. When talking about how they missed the paper, many respondents mentioned a glass of water, a cup of coffee, an appetizer, a piece of candy or something else they would put in their mouth. In a footnote, Berelson said that **newspaper reading may "serve the function of a pacifier for adults."**²²

As he found no published theory to rely upon, Berelson turned to the comments of his respondents and cataloged them under his own list of "non rational" uses. **The context of the newspaper creates an unusual set of human conditions, he said.**

- It is inexpensive and easy to acquire.
- Unlike books and magazines, it can be "**conveniently taken in capsules**" (read a bit at a time) and
- it is the most readily available and most easily consumed mass medium.

The prime emotion these factors provide readers, Berelson speculated, is a sense of security or at least insecurity when deprived of it. One of his respondents said it bluntly: "I am like a fish out of water... I am lost and nervous. I'm ashamed to admit it."²³ This describes the **ritualistic and near-compulsive character of newspaper reading**, although whether the security leads to the ritual or the ritual leads to the security is a chicken-and-egg question. Either way, Berelson found strong evidence of compulsive or ritualistic behavior among his respondents. Many read their paper in the same way at the same time every day. At least half of the respondents freely referred to the "habit" of newspaper reading, some using strong descriptions: "Something is missing in my life. I am suffering! Seriously. I could not sleep, I missed it so."²⁴

To be fair, **not everyone missed the newspaper**. A minority of respondents told Berelson they were a bit relieved to be without news of crime, war and mayhem. Nevertheless, Berelson concluded that his study showed that **newspaper reading has value per se in our society**.

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6. Problems of disabled people to access news

Although news industry has significantly changed, it seems that news sites have not at all improved accessibility. As the study of AbilityNet shows¹⁵ the web sites of the UK's **ten most widely read newspapers are failing to meet minimum accessibility standards on their web sites**, effectively barring millions of disabled people, and potentially breaking the country's Disability Discrimination Act. In this way news sites are **preventing up to 15% of the population from enjoying the benefits of accessing news and current affairs on-line**. Not only is this a problem for a blind user, but there is a **potential market of 1.6 million registered blind users as well as a further 3.4 million with disabilities in the UK**, according to the charity HumanITy. Preventing them from using the standard keyboard, screen and mouse set-up with ease, e-businesses are **losing out on some £50 - £60 billion per year**, says AbilityNet.

Many disabled people are also being excluded from the benefit of up-to-the-minute on-line information and current affairs provided by our top newspapers. For many disabled people, especially **those with restricted mobility and/or visual impairment, access to the news on-line is an important way of staying in touch and abreast of the knowledge that most of us take for granted**.

While there are commercial and ethical reasons for making web sites accessible, there is also a legal reason: any site that fails to meet basic standards of accessibility is taking a risk of breaching the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995.

Wired also reported¹⁷ that Web news still fails blind users. "It's frustrating to use the Web for news reading, I think you can get information faster on TV or radio than you can on the Web. Websites are cluttered with links and graphics. It's easier to sit down and listen to the news on TV or radio." "Most websites, especially news sites, aren't designed for use by people who can't see -- although they easily could be; they just aren't." "There's definitely a need for more sites which can provide quick and direct access to information which is accessible," Bartlett said. "People with disabilities of any kind need crisis information as much as anyone else."

[Retinitis Pigmentosa International](http://www.retinitisinternational.org/) (RPI) provided a special description of the broadcast on Cable Radio Network to over 10,000 radio stations. RPI described the onscreen telecast using TheatreVisionTM, an innovative process that incorporates a special descriptive soundtrack that runs concurrently with the spoken portions of the program. Some other initiatives include services that read newspapers by phone¹⁸.

7. Toward new forms of news, beyond news sites and portals

In an interesting article "What Newspapers and Their Web Sites Must Do to Survive"¹⁹ the authors argue that, despite of hundred millions of dollars of investments, **simply turning newspapers into Web sites proved not to be a solutions**:

- Nielsen//Netratings and ComScore Media Metrix report that the average newspaper Web site user in the United States **visits only two to four times per month**, spending **less than 35 minutes on the paper's Web site each month**.
- Nielsen//Netratings statistics in NYTimes.com's [online media kit](http://www.nytimes.com/online-media-kit) say that in July 2003, the average user among that site's 8,283,000 unique monthly users **visited only 5.74 times that month**, and spent **less than 35 minutes**

15 <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/content/oneoffs/Newspaper%20eNation%20report.pdf>

16 <http://www.out-law.com/page-4083>

17 <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2001/09/47054>

18 http://www.nfb.org/nfb/Newspapers_by_Phone.asp

19 <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/business/1078349998.php>

using the site all that month.

- By comparison, a 2002 [survey](#) by the Readership Institute of the Media Management Center at Northwestern University reported that the average newspaper reader **reads the paper 3.4 times per week** (14.7 times per month), spending an average of **28.2 minutes per day with the paper**²⁰.

The authors of this article also argue that the real solution for the news industry's future **doesn't revolve around simply adding multimedia to generic editions**. It instead will require that the newspaper industry:

- Use new technologies to match the newspaper's existing cornucopia of content to **satisfy each individual reader's unique mix of interests**
- Understand that **neither newsprint nor the Web nor digital editions nor wireless is the answer**, but that the **true convergence of all those into a single unitary product** not only is necessary but likely within 10 years
- **Focus less on the industry's ability to produce content and more on its unique service of delivering to people a complete package of content** -- a change that requires newsrooms and corporations to go beyond traditional definitions of "news" or "syndicated sources."

This article also reference the June Forrester 2002 study "Re-Engineering The News Business"²¹ which concludes that as audiences fragment, **news outlets will wring more value from content by using technology to change how news is packaged and delivered**. Modules of **news-on-demand** will emerge from collaborative efforts.

As an interesting source of information, there is also David Brin's vision of a future²² in which the world is plastered with e-info -- virtual Post-It notes, e-advertisements and other data -- that we can access via glasses, earbuds and other technologies that link wirelessly to databases and instantly deliver information to us.

20 <http://readership.org/consumers/data/consumersmedianewspapers.pdf>

21 <http://www.forrester.com/ER/Research/Report/Summary/0,1338,14569,FF.html>

22 <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1078288485.php>