

THE IMPACT OF FREE NEWSPAPERS ON U.S. MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at free newspapers, focusing on the modern era beginning in 1995, to better understand the impact these publications have on paid newspapers. The theory revolves around the question of media substitutability, that is, is there evidence that free newspapers substitute for paid ones? This is tested with four measures on a set of ten matched newspapers, one with a free competitor and one without a competitor. The four measures are the following: readership data, including average weekday readership and 5-day cumulative audience, single copy sales and total circulation. These measures were examined before and after the introduction of the free newspaper. There was also an examination of the readership demographics. Finally, a modified content analysis was conducted to learn more about free newspaper characteristics and coverage. There was a lack of support for substitution as the experimental paid newspapers' readership and circulation was not significantly different from paid publications in the control markets. In addition, there were significant differences in the readership demographics. There were also general differences between the free and paid newspapers content and characteristics based on a modified content analysis of the free publications.