

# The Characters and Structure of Readers of Freely Charged Newspaper

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Received: May 13, 2011      Accepted: June 8, 2011      Published: October 1, 2011

doi:10.5539/ass.v7n10p141      URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n10p141>

*Thanks for the support by Panmedia Institute ("PMI", <http://panmediainstitute.com/>) with the items number 20114-008*

## Abstract

This studies focus if any relationships of substitution, replacement, and complementarities between freely provided newspaper and the charged newspaper markets. To answer this question, an investigation of what character of these free charged newspaper readers and how this group is structured are needed. This research, in the subject of the readers of Guangzhou Metro, through random sampling selected, received 225 copies of effective papers. This research discovers that, from the point view of characters of free charged newspaper readers as Guangzhou Metro, it is mainly young instead of rich which is as the publisher claimed; And from the point view of the existence of the group structure, according to the relationship with traditional charged newspaper, readers could be divided into three groups: cumulative readers, substitutive readers, new readers. In these three groups, cumulative readers occupy the highest fraction, substitutive readers' turn up, is not in a high rate, and mainly in partial replacement, new readers' group supports the traditionally charged newspapers in an oblique way. This report shows that freely charged newspapers haven't post a threat to the traditional charged newspaper, and have double effect of replacement and complementation, the latter effect being bigger than the former.

**Keywords:** Free daily newspaper, Traditional paid daily newspaper, Guangzhou metro, Survey

## 1. Introduction

After 1995, the "Metro", a commercial and free newspaper was founded in Sweden. Taking the Metro for the representative, the growth of the free newspaper brings opportunities and challenges to the traditional pay newspaper. In the western world, much traditionally paid newspaper's circulation had been in a continuous decline in the past ten years. In 1995-2005, the traditional pay newspaper's circulation in Europe has fallen by 12%. The circulation in the United Kingdom and Germany, which are the two biggest markets in the Europe, had dropped by 15%. In other markets like Greece, Denmark, Ireland, Hungary and the republic of Chechnya, the decline is more serious. During the ten years, however, the circulation of the free newspaper all over the world had increased from 20 million copies to 23 million copies. In 2007, the circulation was 40 million copies. In addition, the relevant research indicates that, in 1995-2005, free newspaper has occupied a larger segment in the newspaper market, and gained an important share (Bakker, 2005). In Europe, the market share of the free newspaper has been over 20 percent. In Ireland, Denmark and Spain, the comprehensive circulation of free newspapers is even more than the paid newspaper. In these countries' markets, also including Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden, the highest circulation newspaper is the free newspaper. And the comprehensive circulations of free newspaper are over 1 million copies in Canada, the United States, Hong Kong, South Korea. On the other hand, the traditional pay newspapers, are facing the challenge of losing the young

audience (Lauf, E, 2001), while the free newspaper declared that they attract a large number of young, educated and professional audiences. Like the Metro, it announced on its Web site that 66% of Swedish "Metro" Readers are between 18 to 39 years, 74% of Metro readers have a job and 48% of the readers have university degrees or above.

Free newspaper just appeared in China a few years ago. So far, only 4 newspapers with official number are free of charge in China—Shanghai Liberation Daily Press Group issued 'I Age' on March 16, 2004, Nanjing Daily Newspaper Group issued the 'Oriental Guardian' on May 15, 2006, Guangzhou Daily News Group issued 'Guangzhou Metro' on October 1, 2006, and the Beijing Daily Newspaper Group's issue 'Beijing Star Daily' transformed into Metro on November 27, 2007. However, compared with the overseas fully competitive markets, the famous free newspapers, such as the Swedish newspaper Metro, failed to enter the mainland market because of the policy and other factors in China. Thus, China's free newspaper, in fact, in some urban areas form a unique monopoly market structure and this monopoly situation can continue to maintain for a considerable period of time. For example, the Shanghai Metro gives the "I TIMES" paper the exclusive franchise for 8 years, which means there will be no more other free media accessing to the metro in 8 years. That is to say, not only the foreign free newspapers can not enter our free newspaper market, but also the other local traditional pay newspapers.

However, free newspapers of our country will always, more or less, have an effect on the traditional pay newspaper's circulation. Is it alternative, or complementary, or irrelevant between the free newspaper and the pay newspaper? To solve this question, we need to explore the characteristic of the readers and the sample structure.

## 2. Literature review

The previous research of free newspaper focused on the characteristics of it, and on its competition with the paid newspaper (Wilkinson, 2001, Arnoud, & Peyrègne, 2002). Piccard (2001) analyzed the market and functions of the free newspapers, and pointed out that main audience of the free newspaper is short-term or temporary audience, not long-term audience and not due to readership. Piccard also predicted that as the free newspaper mainly interests the accidental audience of traditional newspaper, therefore, the effect of free newspaper substitution will be very low. In many European countries, the volume of circulation of traditional pay newspaper has fallen before free newspaper appeared, Wadbring (2000) traced back to Sweden's three largest circulation of paying newspapers in 1990, in Stockholm (first free newspaper --"metro newspaper" is issued in Stockholm, Sweden), and found that the pay newspaper's circulation of this three companies had dropped from 1990 to 1995, not the only declined in 1995. When free newspaper appeared, it is also hard to find there is a relationship between and decline of circulation of pay newspapers. And in Germany, Luxembourg and Norway, there is no free newspaper in these countries, but the circulation of pay newspaper also declined, especially in Germany, the level of it decline is over than the European average level.

In theory, the framework of analysis of free newspaper's success and pay newspaper's circulation decline is not apparent when both of them are associated together, this is because the decline of pay newspaper's circulation may be effected from various factors, such as young readers do not like to read in nowadays, or almost don't read pay newspaper (Lauf, 2001). The percentage of readers under 35 of pay newspaper in Western Europe continues to drop (World Association of Newspapers, 2006). But young readers don't read the traditional pay newspapers for various reasons, for example, the importance place of other media and the existing various forms of entertainment channels such as TV, computer games, mobile phones, and Internet (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004), rather than rise of the circulation of free newspaper.

However, some empirical studies have shown, the emergence of free newspapers, the original readers of the traditional paid newspapers reduce the purchase of traditional. For example, the Communication Research Center of the Chinese University of Hong Kong conducted a random sample telephone survey in 2005. The survey found that since the emergence of free newspapers, 20% of respondents said they reduced the purchase of paid newspapers (Zhang & Zhang, 2010). The communication Research Centre conducted a telephone survey in April 2009. Through the diagnoses of the readership of free newspapers and charge newspaper, they found that free newspaper may bring different consequences to the readers market, including the "same", "cumulative" (double reading), "add" (new readers) and "change" four possible audience flow. It now appears that it has both "cumulative"(double reading) effect (the traditional charge newspaper readers also read the free newspaper now), there are "new" (new readers) effect (the original people who do not read newspapers now read). Moreover, the opposite, the "change" effect (people who read charge newspaper before now read the free newspaper). From the figures, "cumulative" (double reading) and "new" (new readers) in macroscopic effect, are better than "change"

micro-effects of a stronger, but the some newspapers that have lost readers face the real threat (Su, 2009).

In practice, a considerable number of traditional newspaper issuers believe that free newspapers is a threat to the charge newspapers, and will take away a large number of paid newspaper readers. Canada's Globe and Mail newspaper publisher Philip claimed that the circulation of the charge newspaper decline due to the free newspaper (Richard, 2006). The emergence of free newspapers, which causes either the effectiveness of alternative or complementary has become one of the focusing issues to researchers. To understand the problem, the key point is to explore what kind of groups make up the readers of the free newspaper-----do they change the habit of reading charge newspaper, or never read charge newspaper before?

In addition, understanding the characteristics of the free newspaper readers, have become more and more important with the development of free newspapers. Are there any difference between readers of free newspapers and readers of traditional newspapers? Free newspaper publishers claim that their readers are "young and wealthy". For example, China's Guangzhou Metro declares that 50% readers' income is between 4000-10000 RMB, age 18-54 years old accounts for 67%,58% of readers have degree with in university or above, and 45% of readers are administrative staff. Although Mahoney and Collins (2005) confirmed the free newspaper readers are young, there is no evidence show they are rich (Mahoney, Kathleen, Collins and James, 2005). So we need more studies to confirm or disprove the contradiction between the researchers and the practitioner.

### 3. Methodology

Our research takes the readers of Guangzhou Metro as the subject. Guangzhou Metro is funded both through the financial support from its sponsor, Guangzhou Daily, and its governing unit, Guangzhou Daily Group and through the advertising revenues. It's published every weekday and there are more than 24 sections in each piece. Guangzhou Metro also has a large daily circulation of 200,000, sometimes even up to 300,000 (Zeng, 2006). According to the statistics above, we can draw a conclusion that the number of the subject of our research, the readers of Guangzhou Metro, is 200,000 at least.

Our research group has designed a questionnaire, which includes sex, age, educational background, professional, income level, their attitude to free daily newspaper and the reading frequency as the content. All the respondents fall into two main groups: the readers who have ever read a piece of paid daily newspaper and the readers who never take reading a piece of paid daily newspaper as a habit and these two main groups are also asked to tell the causes of their own reading habits. What's more, some items in our questionnaire are set up logically. For example: the eighth question in a questionnaire, which is only for a reader of Guangzhou Metro, is what your reading frequency of Guangzhou Metro is, then comes with 5 options. If a respondent has chosen the 5th option "NEVER" as the answer to the eighth question, this questionnaire was certainly invalid because the subject does not satisfy the conditions in our investigation.

In this study, the pre-test questionnaire, including questions and answers need to spend an average of about 3 minutes, which happens to be the time traveling one station, and which meet the requirement of 3-5 minutes to make an intercept survey. To reduce the refusals and answering disorderly, it requires that the investigators tell the respondents the time beforehand.

The pattern of this study is to give the questionnaires face to face and retrieve data immediately. The interviewers of the study are 50 students who attend the Curriculum entitled "Running and Managing of Media". These students will be divided into the number of 2-7, ranging from 11 groups, each team will set a leader and the rest are crew. Each member issue and retrieve 5 questionnaires and the leader take the charge of supervision. After training, each interviewer reached the Metro subway station of Guangzhou and got interviewees by simple random sampling in November 2009 in different time. After the survey, according to the pre-arranged requirements, interviewers checked the questionnaires. If invalid questionnaires were found, they were required to do the re-investigation. And finally we obtained 225 valid questionnaires, not one of them was invalid questionnaires. Such a series of measures ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability.

### 4. Results

We obtained the following data after we checked and input the statistics from 225 valid coded questionnaires into the software SPSS:

#### 4.1 Analysis of the sample data

4.1.1 The personal characteristics of the sample consist of the following:

A. The gender composition of the sample in Table 1 (see Appendix A):

B. The sample statistics show that the percentage of male readers of Guangzhou Metro News is a little higher

than the female readers (53.8%vs46.2%).

#### 4.1.2 The age composition of the sample in Table 2

The histogram below shows the age composition in Figure1 (see Appendix B).

We can see that the age of the sample is normally distributed (The black curve in the middle is generated by a computer calculation as the normal curve). Furthermore, most readers are young people. We can see that 25% of the readers are below 24.5% of them are below 27 and 75% of them are below 33.

#### 4.1.3 The readers' educational background in the sample in Table 3 (see Appendix A)

The histogram below shows the readers' educational background in Figure 2 (see Appendix B).

The statistics show that the percentage of Junior and below (including junior or below and high school or technical secondary school) is 17.8%, while college and undergraduate accounts for 71.9%, and postgraduate or above accounts for 4.9%.

#### 4.1.4 The occupation composition of the sample in Figure 3 (see Appendix B)

We can see from the statistics that the percentage of managers, technical workers and staff of enterprises or corporations are 11.1%, 15.1%and 24.9%, which added up to 51.1%.In addition, students account for 15.6% among the people surveyed.

#### 4.1.5 The incomes of the interviewee in the sample in Table 4 (see Appendix A)

According to the table above, we can work out that people with relative higher incomes (above ¥4000) account for 37.8%, and people with relative lower incomes (below ¥4000) account for 62.2%.

In all, from the five characteristics discussed above, we can draw a conclusion that the readers in the sample are most likely to be young people around 28. Their education backgrounds are most likely to be junior college or undergraduate. They work for companies or are still in campus and their incomes are not that high.

### 4.2 Analysis on the attitudes and behaviors towards Guangzhou Metro News

As for the overall assessment of Guangzhou Metro News, 10.2% of the sample thinks it "really great", 56.4% for "good", 30.2% for "just so so", and 3.2% for "bad", while nobody thinks it "terrible". That means most people choose "good" for their answers.

As for the frequency to read the News, 23.6% of the sample reads it every day, 49.3% of them several times a week, 10.2% once a week, while the rest 16.9% less than once.

As for the habit in reading the News, people who chose "read every of it" account for 21.3%,"most of it" account for 52%,"some of it" account for 17.8%,while the rest 8.9% chose "only titles".

As for whether to pass on the paper after reading, 46.2% of the sample chooses "no", 46.2% people for "one or two people", 4.9% for "three to four people", and 2.7% for "over five people".

As for whether to take away the paper after reading, 77.8% of the sample chooses "yes", while the rest 22.2 "no".

The statistics shows that years of publishing earn Guangzhou Metro News a good impression among readers, which reflects from the quantity (reading frequency) and quality (reading habit).But we should notice the two main reasons for what people choose Guangzhou Metro News: one for free, the other for killing the time on the metro, which is intrinsic to newspaper free of charge. Meanwhile, at present there is only Guangzhou Metro News one kind of free newspaper for Guangzhou Metro. Therefore without being under the competition, people consider less about its issuing and its contents, which accounts for why in the reasons to read the News, the two substantive indexes:"the contents are easy to understand", which represents for contents, and "convenience", which represents for issuing, cannot get a major share of all the options. However, issuing and contents are two key points for a newspaper. For a free newspaper, related research shows that issuing is the most important. That is to say, at present, such good assessment for the News does not originate from core competitiveness: issuing and contents, but rather comes from its monopoly position and its characteristic of killing time which exactly meets people's need. Once there is more choices in the future metro newspaper market, the Guangzhou Metro News will be challenged.

On the other hand, the proportion of "taking the paper away" after reading is rather high, nearly reach 80%.Obviously compared to taking away to pass on to other readers, people have their reasons to do that, because 46.2% people, almost a half, would not pass the paper on to others when finish reading and another 46.2% of them only pass it on to one or two readers. As a reading staff to kill time, Guangzhou Metro News

would lose its functional significance if taken away from the metro. Therefore some measures are necessary to prevent it from being taken away so that more people would have the chance to read it, which would increase the rate of being read. Because the quantity of readers=calculation\*the times of being read, we can attract more advertisers which enlarges the incomes from commercials by increase the quantity of readers under the circumstances of unchanged calculation.

#### *4.3 Analysis on Guangzhou Metro News' readers' behavior towards traditional paid newspapers*

Readers of both Guangzhou Metro news and paid newspapers are 177 is, which account for 78.7% of the sample. The rest are Readers for Guangzhou Metro News only, which account for 21.3%. The following are these two kinds of peoples' detail in Table 5 and Table 6 (see Appendix A).

The readers who read both Guangzhou Metro News and other paid newspapers mainly purchase the newspapers individually. They read newspapers quite often, and the most choice are Guangzhou Daily and Nanfang DuShi Daily. While readers for Guangzhou Metro News only reject the other paid newspapers most probably because of these reasons ,“enough available information from radio, TV or internet”, “too busy” or “not used to read newspapers”.

However, both kinds of readers have chosen Guangzhou Metro News, which leads us naturally to the question that how did this reading behavior happen? Bakker (2002) has built an alternative theory/model to explore the alterations and changes about the readers in the newspaper market. Bakker claims that with the appearance of a free newspaper, the following four cases may occur:

4.3.1 The readers of paid newspapers would not change their reading behaviors despite they may also choose the free newspapers.

4.3.2 Paid newspapers readers would turn into free newspapers readers, which mean substitution effect exists.

4.3.3 Readers would choose not only paid but also free newspapers, which we can call” dual reading”.

4.3.4 Some never read newspaper before would be turn into new readers due to the free newspapers.

Here Bakker integrates the above four cases in the following chart which reflects the free newspapers' short-term dual effect in Table 7 (see Appendix A).

According to Bakker's theory framework, in addition that our interviewees in the sample are all free newspapers' readers, here we only consider dual effect, and substitution effect and new readers affect that listed above. We consider substitution effect first. In the questionnaire, the 19th question is set as “Whether not choosing paid newspapers because of the choice of Guangzhou Metro News: (1) no. (2) Yes. There are six people chose “yes” as their answer. This group of people have chosen only one option in Guangzhou Metro News and paid newspapers, which means “completely substitution” that obviously belongs to substitution effect. On the other hand, we may also concern about “partial substitution”, which means reading Guangzhou Metro News decrease the chances and time for other paid newspapers .In this way we can discover the substitution effect more comprehensively. Therefore, we have the 18th question: to read Guangzhou Metro News ,you feel you have more or less chance and time for other paid newspapers: (1) less. (2) More. (3) Stay the same. There are 28 people have chosen “(1)”, that they got less chance and time, which can be regarded as “partial substitution”. If we add the number of both “completely substitution” and “partial substitution”, we get 34, which are the number measures the substitution effect of free newspapers.

Then we consider about the dual readers under the influence of dual effect. The number for dual readers can be work out in this way: we deduct the people that feel less chance and time for other traditional paid newspapers(the people belong to “partial substitution”) from Guangzhou Metro News and other paid newspapers both readers, that is to deduct 28 from 177 we get 149. Similarly, we can work out the new readers connected to the new readers effect: to deduct the people who have chosen not to read other newspapers because of Guangzhou Metro News (the people belong to “completely substitution”) from the people who only read Guangzhou Metro News but not other paid newspapers, that is to deduct 6 from 48, we got 42 as new readers. All these statistic and Table 7, we can obtain Table 8:

From Table 8, we may draw a conclusion that all three types of readers obviously exists. Furthermore, readers of dual effect comprise the major part of Guangzhou Metro News. Guangzhou Metro News is both a substitution (substitution effect) and a complementary (meet the new readers' need). However, we should notice that the substitution effect mainly shows as partial substitution rather than completely substitution. In addition the percentage of readers of substitution effect is lower than that of new reader's effect, which indicates the substitution effect of free newspapers is weaker than its complementary effect.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Through the aforementioned data analysis of Guangzhou Metro Daily, we may draw the following conclusions:

According to the readers of free newspaper like Guangzhou Metro Daily, you can know that the readers' main characteristic is young, but not as wealthy as the publisher alleged, their income only belong to the middle level because most of them are staff and students. These young white collar or allowed do not work many years or do not have a job yet. Though they are very stylish, their income is limited. From the actions and attitudes of the readers, you can see that the evaluation and reading quality of Guangzhou Metro Daily are quiet good, but its circulation rate is not high. Due to most readers take it out of the Metro, Guangzhou Metro Daily will lose its function of killing time and its necessity of passing round if it was taken away from the metro. Finally, the main function of Guangzhou Metro Daily is helping readers to kill time, so the content and issue of it are still have plenty of room for development.

According to the composition of free newspaper readers, considering the relationship between free and traditional newspaper, the free newspaper readers can be divided into the following three types: readers of both two kinds of newspaper, alternative readers and new readers. Firstly, In the three types of the crowd, most of readers are reading both traditional and free newspaper, that is, most of the free newspaper readers are from the traditional, and this kind of readers do not change their original time and chance of reading a newspaper, the free newspaper for them is just a method to kill time in the metro, so there is no threat from the free newspaper to the traditional one. Secondly, the appearance of alternative readers imply that the appearance of readers who change the chance and time of reading traditional newspaper. Although the crowd is still not high, and they are mainly to reduce the time of reading traditional one, instead of completely change the reading chance and time of traditional newspaper, it is necessary to know further information about the cause of the case and what kind of countermeasures should be taken. Finally, the new readers who did not read newspaper in the past read the free one now. It is not only an attractive point for the free press but also valued for the traditional newspaper to pay attention to. Because new readers may not look for traditional newspaper, but they have begun to see a free press, that is, they have started to form the habit of reading newspapers. And there are reasons that someone do not currently read traditional newspaper, such as the busy work and the need to pay for it. Once get over these reasons, there may be paid back to the traditional newspaper reading ranks. Therefore, from this angle, free press, attracting new audience, and indirectly give opportunity to the traditional newspaper. From this sense, free press for the traditional newspaper also had a complementary role.

In conclusion, the data from Guangzhou Metro Daily show that the free newspaper is still not form a threat to the traditional newspaper, there are replacements and of complementary, the two kinds of newspaper are complementary role than the replacement

As a descriptive study, a testament to the free press, this preliminary study can excavate more, for example: What preferences to the content do readers of free newspaper have? What do they think about the advertisement of free newspaper? Do they influence by the advertisement? In spite of the three kinds of readers, there are still other kinds of readers. There are people who prefer traditional newspapers to free one, there are people who read none of newspaper. What characteristic do they have? And what psychology and social factors influence them?

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Table 1.

	frequency	percentage
Male	121	53.8
Female	104	46.2
Total	225	100.0

Table 2.

Quantity	Valid	225
	Missing	0
Average value		28.77
Median		27.00
Plural		29
Standard deviation		6.833
Variance		46.696
Percentage	25	24.00
	50	27.00
	75	33.00

Table 3.

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Junior or below	9	4.0	4.0
High school or technical secondary school	31	13.8	17.8
Junior college	67	29.8	47.6
Undergraduate	107	47.6	95.1
Postgraduate and above	11	4.9	100.0
Total	225	100.0	

Table 4.

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
¥2000 or below	59	26.2	26.2
¥2001-¥4000	81	36.0	62.2
¥4001-¥6000	55	24.4	86.7
6001-8000	21	9.3	96.0
¥8001 or above	9	4.0	100.0
Total	225	100.0	

Table 5.

	Readers of both Guangzhou Metro news and paid newspapers(177)
The major way to get paid newspapers	(1) personal subscription 15.8% (2) personal purchase 53.7% (3) unit subscription 25.4% (4) others 5.1%
The frequency to read other newspaper	(1) every day 42.4% (2) several times a week 47.5% (3) once a week 5.1% (4) less than once a week 5.1%
Other newspapers in choice (more than one answer is acceptable)	(1) Guangzhou Daily 63.8% (2) Nanfang Dushi Daily 56.5% (3) Yangcheng Evening News 27.7% (4) New Express Daily 7.9% (5) Information Times 9.6% (6) South Weekend 11.9% (7) Nanfang Daily 17.5% (8) others 6.2%
Time or chances for other newspaper besides the Guangzhou Metro news	(1) decrease 15.8% (2) increase 5.6% (3) stay the same 78.5%

Table 6.

	Readers for Guangzhou Metro News only(48)
Whether not choosing paid newspapers because of the choice of Guangzhou Metro News	(1) No 87.5% (2) Yes 12.5%
The reasons for not choosing paid newspapers (more than one answer is acceptable)	(1) enough available information from radio, TV or internet 41.7% (2) poor contents of other newspapers 0% (3) not worth the money 22.9% (4) too busy 39.6% (5) not used to read newspapers 35.4% (6) others 2.1%



Table 7.

Readers of paid newspapers now		Readers of paid newspapers ever (not anymore)	Non readers
would not change the reading behavior for paid newspapers	Dual reading effect	Substitution effect	New readers effect
Non readers (to free newspapers)	Readers of paid newspapers		

Table 8.

	Readers for free newspapers (225 people in sample)		
	Dual effect	Substitution effect (partial and completely)	New readers effect
Number of people	149	34	42
percentage	66.22%	15.11%	18.67%

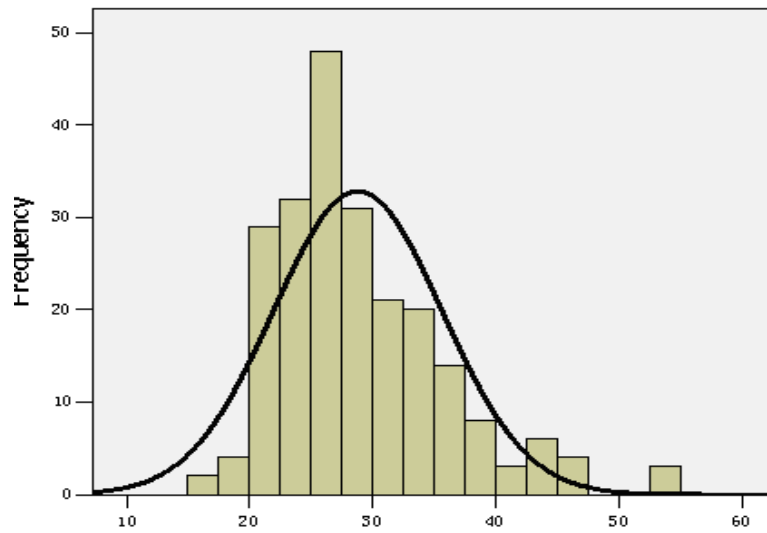


Figure 1.

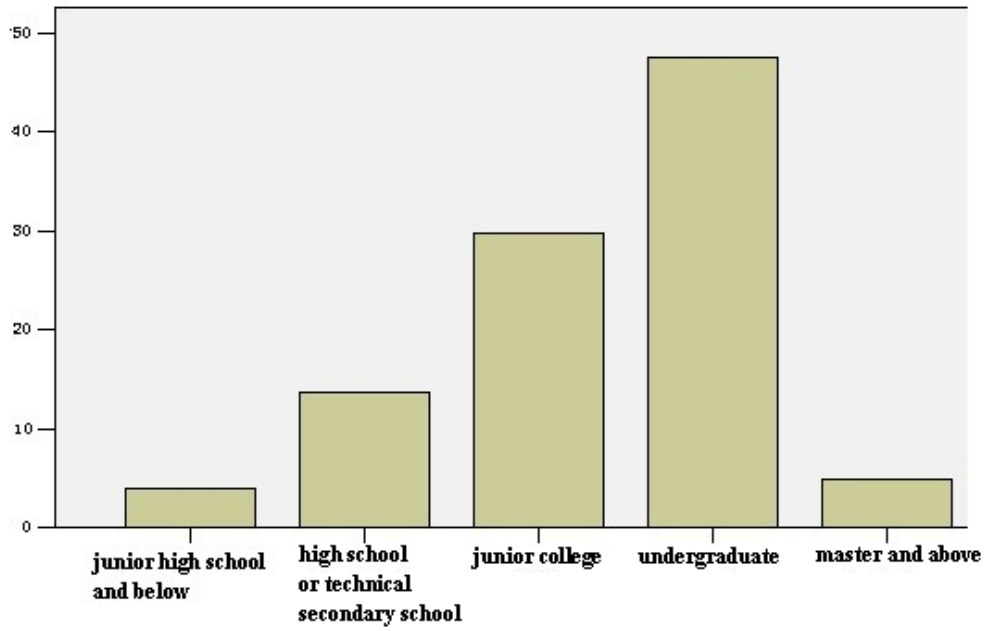


Figure 2.

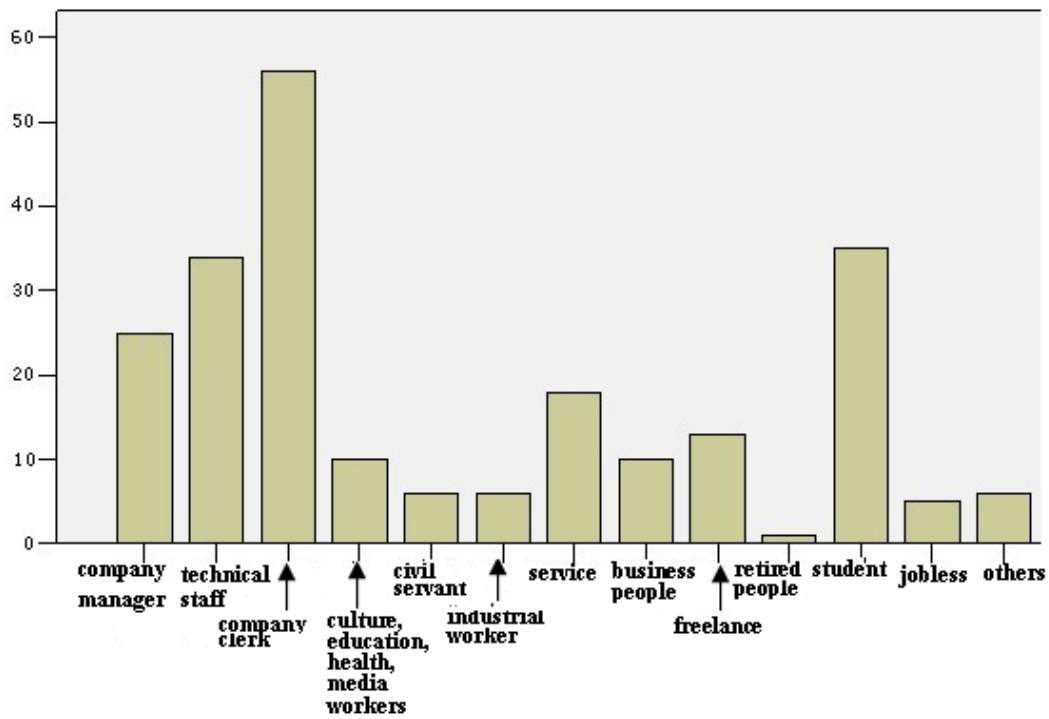


Figure 3.