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**Magazines and Social Media Platforms:  
Strategies for Enhancing User Engagement and Implications for Publishers**

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**Abstract**

Using theoretical perspective of uses and gratification and big five personality traits, the current research examines magazine readers' social media behavior by exploring users' preferred social media platforms for connecting with magazines and specific genres and motivations behind doing so. In addition, we also examine engagement strategies that are most likely to attract more readers and retain the interest of current users. Finally, we explore the relationship between accessing magazines via social media platforms and various personality types. To answer the above questions, we employ two studies utilizing focus group discussions and survey method. The findings indicate that most people expect magazines to have a presence on major social media platforms, and people indicate varying motivations for accessing magazines' social sites, including an opportunity to get relevant product recommendations and targeted messaging. In addition, users suggest various engagement and content management strategies that may help publishers optimize their social media presence. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.

**Keywords:** magazines; circulation; new media; social media; engagement; magazine readership; focus groups; audience survey

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## Introduction

The overall circulation of magazines in the United States has been falling consistently since 2008.<sup>1</sup> To maintain and expand the reader base, many print magazines are expanding into the digital realm. According to one report, there has been a 300% increase in the social media activity undertaken by magazine publishers.<sup>2</sup> This trend of shifting toward the digital is only going to grow, given 65% of U.S. adults and 90% of young adults regularly use some social media platform.<sup>3</sup>

Despite a shift toward the digital, many magazines still struggle to retain reader base and create a loyal, engaged community of online readers. To understand the social strategies that may help magazines enhance user interest and expand their reader base, publishers first need to know the kind of readers who are more likely to access magazines' social media platforms, their personality type, relevant psychographic variables, and motivations that drive these individuals to connect with a magazine's social media platforms. Kristoffer Boyle and Mary Zuegner<sup>4</sup> call for further research to examine what strategies may benefit magazines as they struggle with their circulation numbers and try to entice users into the digital realm.

This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by examining the abovementioned issues. Specifically, using the theoretical perspective of uses and gratifications<sup>5</sup> and big five personality traits,<sup>6</sup> we conducted two studies. Study 1 utilized focus groups to understand the primary motivations that drive people to connect with magazines on social media platforms and engagement strategies expected from the magazine publishers. Study 2 employed survey method to understand the relationship between personality type and intentions to connect with magazines on social media. Information regarding the kind of individuals who are more likely to access magazines' social media platforms, motivations for accessing, and strategies that would garner the most engagement from the key stakeholders can aid magazine publishers in developing effective social marketing and digital engagement strategies. The knowledge of the effective strategies may help the magazines by driving more traffic to magazine websites and by enhancing the user base and creating customer loyalties. An increase in website traffic could potentially lead to higher advertising and associated e-commerce revenues and may be of use to the industry as a whole as magazine publishers struggle to find solutions to dipping readership and decreasing market share.<sup>7</sup>

## Literature Review

### Social Media and Magazines

Ellison and Boyd<sup>8</sup> define social media sites as “a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (3) can consume, produce, and/or can interact with streams of user generated content provided by their connections on the site”.<sup>9</sup> Social media strategies are now treated as an integral part of integrated marketing communications (IMC) and help in organizations' promotional efforts by facilitating interaction between the organization and its customers and among the customers themselves.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, most stakeholders expect organizations

to have some presence on social media platforms, and a lack of it is considered unacceptable and non-normative in this day and age.

Magazines have also caught on to changing times, and despite declining circulation of print magazines, online circulation of digital editions is on the rise.<sup>11</sup> Research by Ritter Communications indicates that most publishers see value in being present on social media but do not have the knowledge of how to do it optimally.<sup>12</sup> Based on audience research, this study examines and proposes engagement strategies that publishers could implement to optimize their social media channels, which may have significant implications for magazine publishers.

Previous research indicates that magazines continue to serve people's needs for information on diverse issues, including health, fashion, parenting, automobile, business, and politics, among others. Research also indicates that although print circulation numbers of magazines are plummeting, the magazines saw a 300% increase in activity on their social media platforms in 2015, more than the growth of the social media platforms themselves.<sup>13</sup> This information suggests that although absolute numbers of print magazine circulation are down, people may access magazines via alternate means, such as various social media networks. Thus, magazine publishers may have the opportunity to provide targeted content that can enhance engagement from the readers and may also drive website traffic and associated ad revenue. Indeed, Magazine Media Factbook<sup>14</sup> indicated that 2016 could see a further rise in magazines' social media activity, and publishers should devise strategies to engage their audience efficiently and consistently.

Although social media activity on a particular publication's channel could contribute to spreading positive buzz about it, enhanced interaction on these platforms also implies giving up some degree of control in the hands of the users.<sup>15</sup> In other words, given the nature of social media platforms, an audience that engages with magazines can critique the content put forth by the magazine, create new content on that magazine's social pages, interact with fellow readers, and express both positive and negative emotions online. This may pose a challenge for the publisher, who may lose some level of control over the content given the possibility of the content going viral and creating reputational risks for the organization. However, the same characteristics of social media platforms and their affordances also provide an enriching environment that leads to a diversity of content and fostering of new ideas. For example, because of the manner of communication exchange on social media networks, various organizations, including publishing houses, could use information exchange on these platforms to their advantage by monitoring and listening to the activity, which may enhance their understanding of consumers' needs and preferences.

A thorough knowledge of consumer interests, motivations, and needs could help in creating and delivering content that is expected, is of utility, and is of utmost interest to readers. Furthermore, an individual's social media presence on a publisher's digital platform also implies an interested user given the proactive initiation of the relationship undertaken by the individual by clicking the "Like" or "Follow" button on the magazine's social media pages. This interest could result in brand loyalty and an overall positive sentiment for the publication. Although some research suggests that social media presence could help magazines with their readership rates,<sup>16</sup> scholarly research on which genre of magazines is most likely to be followed online and where users are most likely to follow these magazines is still scant. Therefore, the first research question we propose is:

RQ1: What genre of magazines is most likely to be followed online and on what social media platforms?

### Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement could be defined as “consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions”.<sup>17</sup> Sashi (2012) defines engagement as “intimate long-term relationship with customers”.<sup>18</sup> Any user interaction with media could also be considered engagement.<sup>19</sup> As these definitions demonstrate, the basic concept of social media engagement remains the same and involves some activity with the relevant online community either in the shape of behavioral-, thought-, or feeling-related outcomes that may be manifested in the form of online conversation, content sharing, or content creation, among other responses. However, the process of engagement and the outcomes associated with that process may differ depending on the context in which it is being considered. For example, in the context of journalism, online engagement is often viewed as a collaborative activity between a journalist and the core audience or user base, which may result in co-creation of news.<sup>20</sup> In the context of some business entities, politics, activism movements, and non-profit organizations, engagement could be considered an act of listening to provide better customer service and increase audience participation, involvement, and commitment.<sup>21</sup>

Individuals can engage with content on social media platforms in two ways. They can either be involved casually, for a short amount of time, without engaging in deep cognitive thought processes, or they can be invested more deeply, usually for a longer term, and by processing content in a more thorough manner.<sup>22</sup> An example of a less engaged customer would be one who merely provides simple feedback, such as “liking” an image on a social media platform, while a more engaged customer would be one who “actively engages in co-creation,” such as producing content for the brand.<sup>23</sup> Both long-term and short-term engagement have implications for the organization. However, a more enduring long-term relationship can generate stronger connections, a wider user base and brand advocates, user-generated content, and ultimately, a loyal user base willing to spread positive word of mouth about the brand.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of journalists, a study by Bullard<sup>25</sup> found that most journalists engaged with users in a casual manner rather than interacting with them in a more meaningful and engaging way. The authors state that a deeper engagement between journalists and users on social networking sites could help further basic principles of journalism, building stronger community ties and helping facilitate free speech and the democratic process, in general.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a study by Meyer and Carey<sup>27</sup> suggests that journalists could influence the level of user participation and engagement in online news forums by creating a sense of virtual community. The engagement takes place when journalists assume the role of active moderators in these forums along with the capability to provide anonymous comments.

Previous research indicates that in order to develop a loyal readership base, magazines have to diversify on social media and devise strategies that will enhance user engagement.<sup>28</sup> However, few studies identify what those engagement strategies should look like, specifically for magazines. In this study, we conceptualize engagement based on Khan<sup>29</sup> and define any interaction with a magazine’s

social media content as engagement. This interaction could be purely behavioral (e.g., content sharing), emotional (e.g., liking of the content), or cognitive (e.g., content consumption) or a mix of any of the above, such as behavioral and cognitive (e.g., commenting on the content). Magazines are in a unique position in that they can elicit both casual engagement (such as liking of some content), especially via posting visual content, and more thought-provoking engagement (such as eliciting user reactions to a piece of content) via posting both visual and textual content.

Furthermore, although magazine readers who consume and interact with online content could be considered content users, they could also be, from a business standpoint, considered customers. Therefore, in this study, we do not make a distinction between a magazine user and customer given the reciprocal nature of the relationship and interchangeable use of the two terms in our description. As evidenced by prior research, deep engagement may result in stronger brand loyalty,<sup>30</sup> which, in terms of magazines, could mean a more influential reader and subscriber base. Furthermore, according to Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)<sup>31</sup> attitudes formed via elaborated, thoughtful processing could result in stronger attitudes that are more resistant to change, leading to more devoted, lifetime readers. Therefore, it would be beneficial to publishers to use strategies that are most likely to garner high levels of engagement. However, due to the lack of relevant information regarding ways to enhance engagement among magazines, we ask:

RQ2: What engagement strategies are preferred by readers of various magazines on magazines' social media platforms?

### **Social Media Motivations**

The need for social connection is one of the primary motivations reported for using Facebook.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps users on social platforms of various magazines want to connect with others like them either to garner advice on topics such as fashion or parenting or just to observe trends prevalent among other similar individuals. Indeed, research by Malthouse et al.<sup>33</sup> suggests that information seeking, ego enhancement, and entertainment motivations behind magazine readership cut across all genres of magazines. However, this research did not explore how such motivations might translate to following the social media platforms of various magazines.<sup>34</sup> In other words, despite having information regarding why people may read magazines in general, research is lacking on motivations that drive people to follow the social media platforms of these publications.

A theoretical perspective that may explain why people follow social media platforms of magazines is uses and gratifications theory, which posits individuals as active media users who choose certain media to gratify particular needs.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the theory predicts that reasons for using particular media would predict media use behavior.<sup>36</sup> For example, a recent study explored six different motivations, such as affection and attention seeking, behind photo-sharing behavior on social networking sites.<sup>37</sup> Another study found that interpersonal and information-seeking motivations are two of the primary reasons behind Internet use in general.<sup>38</sup> Yet another study found interpersonal reasons, including feelings of support, as primary motivations for using Facebook and MySpace.<sup>39</sup>

Knowledge of the motivations for why people may connect with social media platforms of particular magazines could predict future behavior regarding access, including accessing a magazine's

website and partaking in digital content. This information could help editors know why their magazines' digital platforms are being utilized, which could help publishers tailor platforms with content that is most expected by users, resulting in an enhanced positive experience for the user. Lastly, although previous research examines content on magazines' Twitter pages<sup>40</sup> and the overall strategy for social media use by magazines,<sup>41</sup> little is known about why individuals access these particular channels. Therefore, we propose our next research question:

RQ3: What motivations predict engagement with magazine's social media platforms?

### **Social Media Personality Type**

The Big Five personality traits typology provides an effective way to understand human behavior and suggests that, in general, personality can be divided into five personality descriptors, namely: extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.<sup>42</sup> The research suggests that these categories should be considered as broad abstractions regarding human behavior that might subsume more specific characteristics and behavioral traits. For example, the dimension of extraversion is characterized by traits such as talkativeness and excitability. The broad dimension of agreeableness would include traits such as kindness and being affectionate. Neuroticism is usually characterized by traits such as anxiousness and moodiness. People considered high on conscientiousness may have more specific traits such as being more thorough and thoughtful. Openness-to-experience suggests more specific traits such as being imaginative and having a variety of interests.<sup>43</sup>

The previous research demonstrates that Big Five personality traits influence how people use social media.<sup>44</sup> For example, individuals high on extraversion and openness were more likely to and those high in neuroticism were less likely to use social media.<sup>45</sup> The effect of personality type is also dependent upon age and gender of the user such that openness to experience was moderated by the age of the user and neuroticism was moderated by the gender in determining social media use.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, specific social media use was linked to personality type in a study by Hughes et al.<sup>47</sup> The authors found that Facebook use was linked to extraverted individuals who were also high in neuroticism, and Twitter use was linked to individuals high in extraversion and openness but low in conscientiousness.<sup>48</sup> Together, these findings suggest that personality traits could have an influence on following magazines on social media. For example, individuals high in extraversion may be more likely to engage with content on magazines' social media channels than those high in neuroticism, as previous research has established a link between extroversion and social media use.<sup>49</sup> However, due to the lack of any conclusive evidence linking personality type to magazine readership, such relationships remain a speculation, at best. Therefore, to understand how personality type is related to the usage of magazine's social media platforms, we propose:

RQ4a: How is personality trait linked to following magazines in general on social media?

RQ4b: How is personality trait linked to following different genres of magazines on social media?

## General Methodology

As mentioned above, we conducted two studies to understand the relationship between connecting with various magazines on their social media platforms, motivations behind it, and personality type. Study 1 employed qualitative focus group methodology and study 2 utilized quantitative surveys. The institution's board for conducting responsible research approved the study before data collection was initiated for both study 1 and 2.

### Study 1 Method

We employed focus groups in study 1 to understand why people access magazines on social media platforms and their expectations regarding the content from publishers on magazines' social media pages. We applied a qualitative method to explore the phenomena because focus groups allow researchers to delve deeper into the issues regarding which not much preexisting information can be found.<sup>50</sup> Focus groups should be employed in exploratory research as they provide a chance for participants to voice their opinions in their own words, in a relatively relaxed manner.<sup>51</sup> In addition, inherent flexibility in focus group design allows for the possibility of probing the relevant or confusing topics further.<sup>52</sup>

Related research has also employed focus group methodology. For example, a study that examined how pregnant women engaged in social comparison with pregnant celebrities featured in celebrity magazines used focus group discussions to understand the issue in depth.<sup>53</sup> Another study utilized focus groups with teenage girls as a sample to examine whether they perceived a fit between women's magazines and their teenage spin-offs.<sup>54</sup> Hinnant and Hendrickson<sup>55</sup> explored readers' reactions to celebrity health news using focus group discussions. Yet another study examined attitudes of Japanese and American women toward magazine images and how the critical evaluations of the two groups differed by culture.<sup>56</sup> These examples illustrate that focus groups are a suitable method to understand questions of a more exploratory nature and provide us confidence in employing this method in the current study.

### Participants and Procedure

The data for study 1 was collected through four semi-structured focus group discussions. The focus groups, which lasted a little more than half an hour on average, were conducted in a conference-style room between the months of November 2015 to February 2016. We decided to stop data collection after the fourth focus group as no new information was revealed and preliminary informal review of focus group notes indicated data saturation. The central questions that focus groups explored were: 1) the kind of magazines that participants followed on various social media platforms; 2) motivations behind connecting with magazines on various social media sites, and 3) expectations regarding content on magazines' social pages.

The participants for the focus group discussions were students enrolled in various communication courses at a large Midwestern university. Participants received extra credit in exchange for their participation. Of the 27 participants, most were females (n = 24) and seniors (n=20).



## Data Analysis

All the discussions were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Later, one of the researchers transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. All participant identifiers were removed and replaced by a number. The study employed thematic analysis to analyze the focus group discussions because the procedure reflects how research participants construct meaning about their lived experiences and helps in making sense of seemingly unrelated materials, especially with qualitative data.<sup>57</sup> Such a procedure helps to categorize the data for extracting meanings.

Two of the three authors carefully read and open coded each of the four focus group transcripts individually. The coding procedures illuminated different aspects of using magazines on social media platforms. Next, the two researchers organized the codes into categories and found the emerging themes. To increase the internal validity of the data, the two researchers reviewed the transcripts together one more time and re-examined each other's codes to agree on the final themes.

The study employed several steps to enhance internal validity, such as triangulation by asking the same questions in different ways, probing, and asking follow-up questions to explore topics in detail. In addition, we also conducted member checks. The focus group discussion facilitator, at the end of each session, summarized and presented the most important points to the participants to check for accuracy and agreement.

## Study 1 Results

### Genre and Platforms

The first research question explored the genre of magazines that participants in the research were most likely to connect with on various social media platforms. In general, all the participants used at least three social media platforms. These platforms, when ordered by the frequency of their use, were: Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, Snapchat, Tumblr, and LinkedIn.

Most participants believed that magazines should have a presence on social media if they want to catch up with the new generation. One participant said:

It is important for every company to have social media presence regardless of what it is. I believe all magazines definitely should put their contents online if they want to catch up with the new generation.

Fashion, celebrity, lifestyle (including health and fitness), and travel are the most popular genres of magazines that the participants connected with through social media platforms. Magazines whose social media platforms were repeatedly mentioned by the participants in a positive light were: *National Geographic*, *Cosmopolitan*, *People*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, *Esquire*, *Women's Health*, and *Architectural Digest*. The participants indicated that they followed these magazines because of the high visual content they use on their social media platforms. For example, the social media account of *National Geographic* magazine was mentioned a couple of times especially in the context of images. One participant said:

I follow *National Geographic* photos and food-related magazines. They are more visual, and the quality is much better online.

In general, most participants followed magazines on Twitter and Instagram. Specifically, participants preferred Instagram to follow magazines because of its striking visual content and its popularity among youth. Furthermore, participants felt it was easy to share visual content on Instagram because the majority of their friends used it, too. As one participant stated:

I follow *National Geographic* because I love traveling. This magazine has good photos, and you would never feel bored going through them. There are no facts and figures, and (they) teach you, at least, one thing every day. Instagram is the best social medium to follow *National Geographic* because the qualities of pictures are awesome. They have super long captions, so if someone is interested to know more about the pictures, they can get the necessary information in the caption.

Twitter was also a popular medium to follow magazines because of the way information was presented in a quick and succinct manner. A participant stated:

I read *Rolling Stone* on Twitter. The stories are shorter, easy to read, and less content and more visual stuff. We can skip unwanted stuff easily. Sometimes reviewing the headlines would be enough.

Although Facebook was mentioned as one of the platforms used by these groups of participants, primary motivations for use were to connect with family members who were more active on Facebook. Still, few participants did report using Facebook for connecting with magazines.

### Engagement Strategies

The second research question explored readers' expectations from publishers, which could lead to enhanced engagement on magazines' social media platforms. Our findings suggest that the strategies that draw readers to follow a magazine on social media are user-friendliness and choice. Specifically, participants suggested that providing options such as searching for content, downloading and storing articles, and saving links for later enhances user-friendliness. The choice to click (or ignore) and scroll through the articles was also mentioned. These features are especially significant for the participants, as they identify themselves as the generation of "Instagramification" and the "skim generation." A participant said:

I think our generation wants to skim everything and not really sit down and read everything; that is probably why the print version went out of style.

Another participant remarked:

Even if they make it skimmable, we would still skim. We skim the skim. This is what our generation is known for.

Another engagement strategy that emerged from the data was the ability to choose between shorter or longer versions of the articles. Although most participants preferred less textual content

and suggested that they preferred the shorter versions of articles, the ability to choose to have more details was important to some participants. The dialectic tension was apparent. On the one hand, participants explicitly stated that they liked blurbs because they stand out; are easier to read; increase the ability to skim the article; and, with an image, caption, and a headline, often provide adequate information on an issue. On the other hand, participants stated that they liked the inclusion of links because that gave them a choice to delve deeper into the issue if they so desired. The following quote by a participant further illustrates this finding:

We want content but less wordy, if it makes sense [succinct]. For example, if I see a feature on Jennifer Lawrence, I don't want to read four pages about her. I just want to know what is cool about it. Instead of reading a long article, I want to see the same thing in a shorter content. I want to consume what's going on in the industry, but at the same time, I don't want to spend too much time absorbing that information.

However, a few participants acknowledged the importance of longer articles. They said they would read longer articles on two conditions. One participant highlighted that short stories can be found anywhere, but it is rare to find detailed and investigative articles. For example:

If I find a story about how a concussion permanently injured this football player, I would definitely read. What I want is a human-interest piece that you cannot find in any other magazine that is not *Sports Illustrated*. Because you can find news about anything, but having a reporter spending a couple of months digging into a fascinating story would be something unique to an individual platform.

Further, social media posts that have *BuzzFeed*-style listicles were more popular among participants. As one participant stated:

*Cosmo* always has things like 15 ways to food [sic] or 15 ways that study matters, things like that, and you know that they are telling you, at least, one good thing out of this list that you can totally follow and learn something from it. I like those types of list, for example, 30 reasons why the bachelors are this and that. Even if it seems stupid, I like to read those lists because something positive comes out of it.

One of the other strategies that seemed to draw engagement from readers was the use of multimedia, especially videos. A few participants suggested that magazines should incorporate videos as part of their content to attract more readers, as "this can be a change in the presence of magazines on social media." One of the participants explicitly stated that she is likely to click on posts that carry short videos.

I watch a lot of food-related videos and contents. For example, the 30-second videos that show a recipe. It will teach you how to do cool things. They are very easy, and I can actually make those. They do it in 30 seconds, but obviously, that takes much longer if we make it.

Another striking finding of the research was the ability for people to engage in mutual interaction. Magazines on social media provide a participatory sphere where readers can not only

interact with the content but also engage with other readers interested in the magazine and with magazine publishers. The participants particularly liked this feature because it provides them with a choice to engage in interaction. The participants suggested that they engaged with magazine content on social media in different ways including liking, commenting, re-tweeting, sharing, ranking stories, favoriting, and saving it for future use, among others. A few participants said this option provided them with a “voice” to share their opinions about the magazine. A participant mentioned:

Magazines on social media provide us with an opportunity to read other people’s comments and know what they think about the articles we like. Also, we can share it with friends, re-tweet, or comment about it.

### **Motivations to Engage with Magazines on Social Media Platforms**

The third research question explored primary motivations that drive people to connect with social media platforms of various magazines. One of the main motivations for engaging with a magazine on social media was the accessibility of magazines across multiple social media platforms and various devices. Participants stated that unlike print magazines that they would most likely browse at a grocery store, airport, or beauty salon, they could go through magazine articles on social media anytime and anywhere. For example, a participant stated:

I usually like to read stuff in bed. I like to read magazines on my phone because I do not have to turn the light and bother my roommate or anyone or sit down. I can go through everything just lying in bed.

Another key motivation to follow magazines on social media was the availability of free content. Most of the participants said they no longer subscribe to paper magazines. However, social media provide them with free access to magazine articles. One participant said:

I don’t tend to pay \$3.99 for a magazine. If something catches my attention, I go online and look for that topic and the person.

Another participant noted:

A lot of time when I have had a magazine, there is only a select few articles that I actually care to read or interest me. So, it is just a lot easier to look for it online and be able to scroll through relevant things. It doesn’t make any sense paying for something (when) more than half of the stuff (is) not relevant to you.

The participants felt that the magazine content they receive through social media is more targeted and tailored. If they like or share something, they subsequently see similar content in their social media feed. One participant noted:

I like that characteristic of social media because they are tailored for a niche audience.

Another participant remarked:

Yesterday, I was looking at DSW shoes, and I noticed their ads were popping up on my Facebook page. I think it is cool that social media tailors what your interests are.

### Summary of Study 1 Findings

In general, focus group findings indicate that most people expect a magazine to have a social media presence, at least on the most popular platforms. Ease of use, availability of content in various forms including videos and visuals, ability to choose between a long or a short version of an article, and the chance to communicate with others interested in similar content seemed to drive the engagement. *BuzzFeed* style listicles and articles with visuals were very popular. Primary motivations for connecting with magazines on social platforms were the availability of free content, convenience of access, and a chance to get targeted and tailored messaging.

### Study 2 Method

Study 2 employed a survey design to understand whether personality type of an individual indicated the preference for a particular genre of magazine. In addition, we also examined whether a link existed between personality type and following the magazine on social media platforms. Having access to such information could help publishers further tailor content and target to individual users more effectively.

### Participants

The survey was hosted on survey design website [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com), and participants were provided extra credit in exchange for completing the survey. Of the 134 participants, the majority were females ( $n = 98$ , 77%), Caucasian ( $n = 112$ , 88%), and, on average, were 20 years old ( $SD = 2.42$ ).

### Measures

**Intensity to use various SNS.** We measured SNS usage, primarily with respect to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, with the 6-item scale developed by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe<sup>58</sup> using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. A sample item is, “\_\_\_\_\_ is part of my everyday activity”. Six items were repeated for each of the abovementioned social media platforms. Participants were most likely to use Instagram ( $\alpha = .95$ ;  $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ), followed by Twitter ( $\alpha = .97$ ;  $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ), followed by Facebook ( $\alpha = .91$ ;  $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ). The social media platform that was least likely to be used by this audience was Pinterest ( $\alpha = .96$ ;  $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ).

**Personality type.** We used the 44-item measure developed by John and Srivastava<sup>59</sup> for assessing personality type. A 7-point scale, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), asked participants to respond to statements such as “I see myself as someone who is talkative” or “can be moody.” Of the five personality types, extraversion ( $\alpha = .87$ ;  $M = 4.86$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) and neuroticism ( $\alpha = .83$ ;  $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) were measured with 8 items each. Agreeableness ( $\alpha = .83$ ;  $M = 5.37$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .80$ ;  $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) were measured with 9 items each. Openness was measured with 10 items ( $\alpha = .80$ ;  $M = 5.10$ ,  $SD = .80$ ).

**Magazine use behavior.** Two questions were asked to assess participants' social media behavior related to magazine use. Participants were asked to indicate whether they followed any magazines on social media platforms. In addition, participants indicated their frequency of following different genres of magazines on a 7-point scale, 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). A total of 72% of the participants reported following magazines on social media.

### Study 2 Results

Research question 1, asking the genre of magazines that was most followed on social media platforms, was explored again in study 2 using quantitative measures. Results indicate that participants were most likely to follow fashion ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ) and celebrity ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ) magazines on social media platforms. Participants were least likely to follow news magazines ( $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = .19$ ) and family magazines ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) on social media platforms (Table 1).

Research question 4a asked how personality traits were linked to following magazines (in general) on social media and 4b asked how personality traits were linked to following specific genres of magazines on social media. To test RQ4a, an independent sample *t-test* was conducted to compare whether following magazines on social media differed based on the personality type of an individual. Only level of agreeableness significantly differed between people who followed magazines on social media ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) and those who did not ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = .75$ ),  $t(132) = 1.98$ ,  $p = .05$ . No other significant relationships were found.

Table 1: Genre of magazines by their frequency on a 7-point, 1 (never) to 7 (always) scale

Genre	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fashion	4.10	2.63
Celebrity	3.59	2.25
Health and Fitness	3.04	2.01
Travel	2.95	1.92
General interest women	2.70	2
Home décor	2.34	1.70
Science and technology	2.18	1.54
General interest men	2.18	1.54
Family and parenting	1.51	1.16

News	1.03	.19
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*M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation

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To test RQ4b, which asked whether a relationship exists between personality type and following different genres of magazines on social media, we ran multiple linear regression with the intensity of use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest; participant age; and gender added as control variables. Personality type extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism were added as independent variables, and different genres of magazines were added as dependent variables. The only magazine genres impacted by the personality type in the current research were general interest men's magazines and travel magazines. Specifically, for general interest men's magazine, the results revealed that the model was significant,  $F(11, 113) = 2.54, p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .20$ . Agreeableness personality type negatively predicted  $b = -.24(.18), t(113) = -2.43, p < .05$ ; neuroticism  $b = .19(.16), t(113) = 1.91, p = .05$  and openness  $b = .17(.17), t(113) = 1.92, p = .05$  positively predicted following general interest men's magazines on social media. Openness personality type also predicted connecting with travel related magazines  $b = .23(.23), t(113) = 2.36, p < .05$ .

In addition, gender significantly predicted connecting with the following genres of magazines: general interest men's and women's, fashion, celebrity and gossip, and health and fitness. Specifically, being male predicted an interest in connecting with general interest men's magazines  $b = -.24(.42), t(113) = -2.15, p < .05$ , whereas being female predicted an interest in connecting with general interest women's,  $b = .38(.54), t(113) = 3.44, p < .01$ , fashion  $b = .31(.67), t(113) = 2.93, p < .01$ , health and fitness,  $b = .29(.53), t(113) = 2.60, p < .05$ , and celebrity and gossip  $b = .22(.58), t(112) = 2.07, p < .05$  magazines.

The intensity of use of Instagram predicted following the fashion magazines,  $b = .19(.15), t(113) = 1.97, p = .05$ . The intensity of use of Pinterest predicted connecting with fashion,  $b = .19(.12), t(113) = 2.05, p < .05$ , fitness,  $b = .25(.10), t(113) = 2.45, p < .05$ , home décor magazines,  $b = .23(.09), t(111) = 2.30, p < .05$ . and celebrity and gossip magazines,  $b = .24(.11), t(112) = 2.60, p < .05$ . Twitter use intensity predicted following of general interest women's magazines,  $b = .20(.09), t(113) = 2.22, p < .05$ . No other significant relationships were found. Next we discuss the implications of these findings.

### Summary of Study 2 Findings

Results of the survey indicated that participants were most likely to follow fashion magazines and least likely to follow news magazines on various social media platforms. Personality type agreeableness was related to following magazines on social media, in general. Specifically, the agreeableness trait was negatively related to, and the traits of openness and neuroticism were positively related to, following general interest men's magazines on social media. In addition, personality type openness was also related to following travel-related magazines on social media.

Participant gender also had an influence on intentions to connect with magazines on social media as did the intensity of use of various social media platforms.

### Discussion

This research comprises two studies to understand primary motivations behind accessing various magazines on different social media platforms, main engagement strategies preferred by readers, and how various personality types influence connecting with magazines on their social media platforms. This study used mixed methods, focus group discussions and survey, and the theoretical perspectives of uses and gratification in the realm of social media and Big Five personality traits.<sup>60</sup> Many interesting findings emerged that potentially have important implications for magazine publishers for attracting readers and enhancing their user base.

Results from both the focus group discussions and the survey suggest that people are most likely to follow fashion, celebrity, health and fitness, and travel magazines on various social media platforms. These findings are in line with the Magazine Publication Association Report (MPA) for 2015,<sup>61</sup> which found that *National Geographic* and *Vogue* were among the top five most-followed/liked magazine brands on social media. Our findings were, however, not in line with the MPA report (2015) in terms of where people were most likely to follow these magazines. The focus group participants in our study stated Instagram and Twitter as places where they are most likely to connect with magazines, whereas the MPA report suggests Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus as the leading platforms of choice for people to connect with various publications.<sup>62</sup> In fact, not a single person in our study mentioned Google Plus. This discrepancy in findings could be a consequence of the convenience sample employed in our study and a relatively small sample size, potential limitations of our research. However, a recent Pew poll suggests Instagram as one of the fastest-growing platforms among 18- to 24-year-olds.<sup>63</sup> Given the average age of our participant, around 20 years, the findings are hardly surprising. Furthermore, demographics of our population, young, college-going females, may also have contributed to the findings suggesting a preference for fashion, fitness, and celebrity genre magazines. Therefore, future research should repeat our study with a more diverse and larger sample, employing random sampling strategies for increased confidence in the reliability of our findings.

One finding that stood out from our survey was that the intensity of Pinterest use predicted intentions to connect with fashion-related, health-fitness, home décor, and celebrity-gossip magazines on social media platforms. This finding may be important given the overall intensity of Pinterest use was relatively small in our sample ( $M=3.10$ ,  $SD = 2.0$ ). However, the findings suggest that those users who do use Pinterest are likely to connect with a particular genre of magazines on social media platforms. Indeed, Pinterest use has been associated with a “novel form of scrapbooking and collage” for users with aspirational ideas, such as wedding planning and undertaking home improvement projects.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, though not surprising given the preponderance of Instagram users in our sample, the survey results indicate that intensity of Instagram use predicted connecting with fashion magazines on social media platforms. Indeed, participants in the focus groups also indicated that they used Instagram to keep up with the latest fitness and fashion trends.



Our findings suggest that the participants gratify different needs (such as home décor and fashion) utilizing specific platforms that are more likely to cater to those needs. This finding has implications for publishers in that they should not only be concerned about the platforms where most people congregate but also target and push content that is geared toward motivational use of specific platforms. For example, *Vogue*, a magazine focused on fashion, would most benefit from targeting users on Pinterest and Instagram as opposed to, say, Facebook, given our findings that most people prefer fashion based content in the form of visuals that is more likely to be accessed on Pinterest and Instagram.

In addition, our findings have implications for enhancing advertising effectiveness and delivering targeted messages to the readers. In fact, one of the participants in the focus group mentioned the possibility of personalized product recommendations as one of the advantages of connecting with various magazines' social media platforms. Indeed, the research suggests that personal and social experience motivations are related to advertising engagement.<sup>65</sup> These researchers explored their questions regarding advertising engagement in the context of print magazines, and given the social connectedness of social media platforms, one would expect the advertising engagement effect to magnify when magazines are accessed via social platforms, something future research should explore further. Instagram launched its shopping feature in fall 2016, and magazines can benefit from forming collaborations between retailers and their readers such that magazine followers (e.g., on Instagram) could click the latest trends and shop right from a magazine's social media page. This sort of advertising model could have a tremendous impact on revenue for the magazines and justify the time and money spent on engaging users via social media platforms.

Moreover, our participants mentioned the ease of sharing ideas, including fashion looks and workouts, on social media platforms. A regular monitoring and listening program can provide publishers with information they can use to create targeted messages to further enhance reader engagement and promote products, thereby generating revenue via native advertising strategies. This could be especially attractive to advertisers in various magazines because previous research suggests that the social nature of social media platforms influences parasocial interaction that predicts impulse buying on social commerce platforms.<sup>66</sup>

Another striking finding of our study was the relationship between openness personality type and a preference for following magazines related to travel on various social media platforms. Although we did not find many other interesting relationships that were significant, this trend suggests that repeating the study with a larger sample may yield important findings that could be of use in the tailoring of content by personality type. For example, if monitoring software suggests someone interested in travel and the outdoors, perhaps publishers can push more relevant and tailored content that may enhance stronger engagement and, in turn, lead to more loyal readers and eventually brand advocates and influencers.<sup>67</sup> This would not only result in a positive affect among users but may also attract more individuals with similar interests, thereby enhancing the reader base.

We also found that personality trait agreeableness was negatively related to following general interest men's magazines on social media, whereas those high in neuroticism and openness were more likely to connect with publications on social media platforms. This finding should be explored further as it has important implications for content generation and advertisers. For example, perhaps

individuals high in agreeableness are more likely to use their face-to-face interpersonal network than relying on magazines for advice compared to those high in neuroticism. Alternatively, those high in neuroticism may be more likely to analyze online content and thus may be more likely to follow the social platforms of various magazines to keep up with the latest information. Similarly, openness personality type could also indicate a general curiosity to engage with the content and may explain why it predicted engagement with general interest men's magazines. Of course, this is a speculation that invites further research.

A preference for succinct visual content was another important finding from our research. *National Geographic* was repeatedly mentioned in various focus groups, and people preferred it for its compelling visual content. With the growing popularity of Instagram and a diminishing attention span of individuals,<sup>68</sup> visual content provides a perfect way to reach people who may otherwise ignore textual content. Therefore, in order to garner greater engagement, publishers should strive toward generating targeted information that has useful and engaging visual content.

Our results also suggest that most of the participants access the magazines through their mobile phones. To increase subscription and click rates, the content has to be made mobile-friendly. This finding is extremely important as it concurs with other surveys, such as one done by Pew Research Center in 2015, which indicates that for some of the best-selling magazines, such as *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, *Wired*, *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, the online traffic via mobile phones far outnumbered the online traffic via desktops.<sup>69</sup> Given that 64 percent of American adults own a smartphone of some kind,<sup>70</sup> magazines need to go where the audience is.

### Strengths and Limitations

Our research is not without limitations. The focus group method and convenience sampling limit the generalizability of the finding to a larger population. At the same time, focus groups provide an in-depth look at the issues about which not much information exists and help in generating enough data to provide some initial, useful insights on the topic. Furthermore, our sample, though convenience based, consists of avid magazine readers and active social media users. Young, college-aged women are active on social media platforms and are avid consumers of content related to fitness, fashion, and celebrity news. Therefore, while the majority of the sample for both the focus group discussions and survey research limits our ability to make larger claims in terms of the effectiveness of the study, given the target audience of magazines focused on fashion, fitness, and celebrity news, our study provides some useful information. Therefore, despite employing a non-probability based sample that was relatively limited in size, the sample was purposive in nature in that they could provide experiential and informational insights that could benefit the industry.

Lastly, to the best of our knowledge, we have not found recent research utilizing Big Five personality traits with magazine readership and how that emerges in the social media landscape. Given that past research has found a relationship between preference for advertising type with personality type,<sup>71</sup> it would be logical to extend this into the social media landscape and see how the relationship unfolds in the context of magazine advertising on social media. Moreover, creating content that matches with different personality types would lead to stronger user interest and more brand loyalty. Our findings indicate that readers prefer targeted messaging and tailored product

recommendations on social platforms. Magazines could use such information as it may help in generating ad revenue via enhanced product sales and support the magazine industry in staying afloat. Of course, replicating the study with a more diverse sample would be immensely beneficial to the publishers and provide more useful information in terms of message targeting and enhancing engagement.

### **Conclusion**

The current research examined user motivations for garnering enhanced following and engagement on magazine's social media platforms. In addition, we also examined the relationship between personality type and social media use in the context of magazines. Findings from the focus groups and survey have important practical and theoretical implications for magazine publishers. Magazine readers expect publishers to maintain an engaging and relevant social media presence. Therefore, in order to build readership and keep current readers interested, magazine publishers need to understand audience expectations, monitor their social platforms, and evolve with the users as they venture out to newer social media platforms.

## Notes

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