

Learning to Share: Magazines, Millennials, and Mobile

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If “Facebook me” was the tech catchphrase of the first decade of the 21st century, “I’ll tweet at you” might be the slogan-elect of the second decade. While Facebook users can “like” a magazine’s official page and gain direct access to the title’s social community and its accompanying content and content producers, Twitter provides a non-linear network of social sharing where information can be consumed by users outside of an existing network of self-identified brand consumers. Indeed, the alchemy of social media and social sharing options has both disrupted magazine content consumption patterns and enhanced opportunities to expand audience reach.

This essay considers recent industry research that examines how Millennials—the generation born after 1980—use technology and consume magazine content. It also offers examples of social media approaches employed by magazines with a Millennial audience demographic. This analysis provides an overview of how magazine content creators adapt their social media strategies to reflect their titles’ missions and audiences. This essay’s goal is to illustrate ways editors and content managers use specific social media tools to increase reach and cultivate audience loyalty.

The analysis begins with an overview of Millennials’ social media use and how they consume magazine content. It then examines the social strategies of six publications with large Millennial readerships.

Who Are the Millennials?

A Pew Research Center (2010) study locates the Millennial generation as the American population born after 1980, as they are the first to become adults in the new millennium. This demographic follows other generations nicknamed in various ways in popular culture, such as Generation X and Baby Boomers. The Pew study suggests that the Millennials are more racially and ethnically diverse, less inclined toward religion, and likely better educated than older generations. Perhaps most pertinent to this essay is the finding that the Millennials are the first generation always connected with social media and technology—to the extent that more than eight in ten Millennials report placing their cell phone next to their bed while sleeping. This generation further distinguishes itself from other demographic groups by having the highest levels of positive attitudes about technology, as

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well as by believing that new technology makes life easier, brings people closer to their friends and family, and allows people to use their time more efficiently (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The Millennials' optimism about technological progress is evident. Their generation includes the highest percentage of adults who own a smartphone (79% of ages 18 to 29 versus 56% of all American adults) (Smith, 2013) and regularly use social networking sites (83% of ages 18 to 29 (Duggan & Brenner, 2013)).

The intersection of Millennials' use of social media and their adoption of mobile technology—specifically smartphones—is at the core of this essay. This group as a whole has almost limitless opportunities to connect to anything and anyone, and arguably, Millennials expect some level of engagement in return. The novelty of such a social system is that it allows a user to create networks that are both self selected and self managed. In addition, given the prevalent use of non-hierarchical social networks such as Twitter, where a user can follow anyone who does not have protected tweets, there is massive opportunity for digital non-place-based interpersonal communication. It is within this digital space that computer-mediated communication and non-hierarchical social media diminish conventional communication boundaries such as location and access (Kim, Kim, Park, & Rice, 2007).

The Millennials' high level of social media engagement and mobile technology adoption has tremendous implications for the future of magazine publishing, in that this dynamic invariably increases the consumer expectations of anytime-anywhere digital magazine content. The Association of Magazine Publishers (MPA, 2012) reports that 83% of Millennial smartphone owners access magazine-branded mobile applications using a digital newsstand, with an average of 2.6 magazine apps downloaded. Of those surveyed, 76% reported that they wanted the option to share this content, most often from food, news, and sports magazine apps, with their friends (MPA, 2012; Raphael, 2012). In addition, MPA (2013) reports that 47% of social media users who also read magazines post magazine content to Facebook, and 56% of these readers follow a magazine on Twitter, with more than half of this group (51%) retweeting articles from the magazine's Twitter feed.

Given that this generation includes the 18-to-24 demographic, a segment that the publishing industry considers “hard-to-reach” (MPA, 2013, p. 5), it is valuable to consider the social media strategies of magazines with a large Millennial audience. The next section synthesizes the media kits and social media profiles of six publications:¹ *Game Informer Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *MAXIM*, *Glamour*, *ESPN The Magazine*, and *Seventeen*. It also considers how these titles approach audience engagement using platforms tailored to mobile devices.

¹ All the media kits of this selected sample cite a median audience age of 18 to 29.

Magazine Social Media Presence²

This essay considers engagement between publication and audience via Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest—the three social networking sites with the highest percentage of Internet users (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). According to a Pew Research Center study conducted in November 2012, 67% of Internet users have a Facebook account, 16% are registered with Twitter, and 15% use Pinterest (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

Table 1: Twitter: Micro-blogging and linking in a real-time network

Name of magazine	Twitter handle	Tweets	Following	Followers
<i>Game Informer</i>	@gameinformer	22,278	114,676	128,903
<i>Cosmopolitan Magazine</i>	@Cosmopolitan	13,780	1,084	402,944
<i>MAXIM Magazine</i>	@MaximMag	11,465	5,683	168,824
<i>Glamour</i>	@glamourmag	23,670	437	282,121
<i>ESPN The Magazine</i>	@ESPNMag	4,988	424	84,323
<i>Seventeen Magazine</i>	@seventeenmag	25,443	1,811	504,133

Table 2: Facebook: Social networking with individuals, interest groups and fan pages (“likes”)

Name of magazine	Likes	Talking about this
<i>Game Informer</i>	172,745	3,605
<i>Cosmopolitan Magazine</i>	1,883,850	38,613
<i>MAXIM Magazine</i>	689,885	34,521
<i>Glamour</i>	969,277	34,501
<i>ESPN The Magazine</i>	12,166	101
<i>Seventeen Magazine</i>	1,768,463	40,419

Table 3: Pinterest: Content sharing virtual collections of images and videos

Name of magazine	Boards	Pins	Likes
<i>Game Informer</i>	NA	NA	NA
<i>Cosmopolitan Magazine</i>	18	1,313	159
<i>MAXIM Magazine</i>	3	50	0
<i>Glamour</i>	84	3,387	321
<i>ESPN The Magazine</i>	NA	NA	NA

² The data were collected on November 12, 2012.

<i>Seventeen Magazine</i>	55	2,165	2,341
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Analysis of Audience Engagement

#4: *Game Informer Magazine* (circulation: 6,734,672)

According to the *Game Informer* (2012) media kit, the magazine reaches “more men 18–34 than any other magazine on the planet,” with 8 million subscribers and 34 million total reach. The material cites an audience that is 84% male, with a median age of 27.

Game Informer has the most robust Twitter presence in the group of analyzed magazines, and the magazine’s website offers the most opportunities for the audience to interact, both with each other and with editors. On its home page *Game Informer* engages audiences through polls and user blogs, where visitors can join a “community” that gives them commenting and blogging privileges. The home page also lists the magazine’s editorial masthead, along with the email addresses and Twitter names of all staff members. In that sense, *Game Informer*’s digital presence, through both the Web and social media participation, illustrates a magazine engaged with its Millennial audience and even collaborating with audience members to make its product both relevant and useful. It engages audiences with the print product, then encourages them to supplement this conversation by using its various platforms and social media tools.

#15: *Cosmopolitan* (circulation: 3,036,112)

According to the *Cosmopolitan* (2012) media kit, this Hearst publication is the “most effective magazine to reach major market segments,” including the largest number of women between the ages of 18 and 34. The media kit further highlights the magazine’s college market reach and cites 6.88 readers per copy.

Of the three social networks, *Cosmopolitan* is most engaged with its Facebook community, offering the highest number of likes and second highest “talking about this” hits. The magazine is also moderately active on Pinterest, the virtual bulletin board that allows users to “pin” images from the website onto their own boards as well as follow a magazine brand’s board. *Cosmopolitan*’s website offers minimal opportunity for audience engagement, with the exception of the “Cosmo Confidential” Q-n-A forum. The magazine’s strength appears to be in its Facebook interactions and its Twitter teasers about fashion, beauty, and sex tips that link to the magazine’s website.

#19: *MAXIM* (circulation: 2,518,879)

According to the *MAXIM* (2012) media kit, this 15-year-old magazine, owned by Dennis Publishing, considers men between the ages of 25 and 34 as its prime audience. While the magazine’s Twitter and Facebook presence is strong, it is neither a leader nor in last place in engagement. *MAXIM*’s website, cited in its media kit (2012), is the “ultimate guy’s lifestyle site that covers everything a guy is looking for with an eye for the most beautiful women on the web.” The site allows users to comment on stories and share via

Twitter and Facebook. In addition, website users can submit images of women for contests. In short, while *MAXIM* attends to Millennial audience engagement, the magazine's strongest pull seems to be the legacy print brand and its relatively high readership.

#23: Glamour (circulation: 2,329,005)

This top-selling Condé Nast magazine offers little age demographic detail in its media kit (Glamour, 2012), stating only that 80% of its audience members are between the ages of 18 and 49. Regardless, the magazine is part of this analysis because of its myriad social media opportunities. As illustrated in the tables above, *Glamour's* Twitter and Facebook presence is substantial, but it is *Glamour's* Pinterest activity that is most notable, with 84 boards, 3,387 pins, and 321 likes. However, given Pinterest's user-profile—97% women, whose age span is similar to *Glamour's* demographic—the magazine's heavy engagement with Pinterest users seems entirely logical (Pitts, 2012).

In addition to these social networks, *Glamour* expands reader engagement opportunities via two supplemental websites—Glamour-scoop.com (2012) and Glamspotters.com (2012). Both depend on audience input and allow users to tweet, like, or pin every image. Glamour-scoop.com features contests and sweepstakes that offer clothes and beauty products as prizes, along with gift guides. Glamspotters is a site where consumers can join a “Glamspotter panel” and take surveys about clothes and beauty products. Indeed, it seems that *Glamour* is attempting to reach and engage its already sizeable audience by innovating additional platforms that complement its expanding social strategy.

#28: ESPN The Magazine (circulation: 2,077,806)

The social presence of *ESPN The Magazine*, launched by ESPN Inc. in 1998, is similar to that of *MAXIM* in that the magazine's most valuable asset is likely the legacy print brand and its solid audience of Millennial males. According to the magazine's media kit (ESPN, 2012), “ESPN The Magazine delivers more M18-34 than any other magazine.” While *Game Informer* might take issue with this statement, few could dispute the power of a magazine affiliated with a sports brand that reaches 107 million fans per week (ESPN, 2012). While the magazine's Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest presence pales in comparison to others examined in this essay, *ESPN The Magazine's* parent company, ESPN Media, seems to act as social media proxy for all ESPN brand extensions. For example, @espn has more than 5 million followers.

#33: Seventeen (circulation: 2,019,175)

Although *Seventeen's* circulation numbers are the lowest of the six magazines examined, the Hearst publication's social media presence surpasses all other titles in terms of Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest engagement. The *Seventeen* media kit (Seventeen, 2012) cites 16.5 as the median age of its audience, with the majority of readers being females between 16 and 19 years old. Although *Cosmopolitan* nearly matches *Seventeen's* Facebook numbers and *Glamour* offers more pins on Pinterest, *Seventeen* follows more of its audience

members on Twitter and likes more pins on Pinterest than the other magazines with a primarily female readership. Although the magazine does not offer readers additional avenues to become tastemakers and influencers per se, its social media statistics indicate engagement on a much broader scale.

Conclusion

Given the nature of social media such as Twitter and Pinterest, a virtual world conceptually devoid of hierarchy, one might conceive users' self-worth as determined by how others value their input. In the realm of brand-based social media, the attention to two-way audience engagement is integral, as it both cultivates loyalty and develops new relationships (Chuang, 2010). And while this two-way model might seem a bitter pill for high-end magazines such as *Vogue* (2013) and *Esquire* (2013), whose respective media kits proclaim the magazine as "cultural barometers" and "authoritative voice," *Seventeen's* social strategy illustrates how a magazine catering to a market once thought to be obsolete can actually expand (Clifford, 2008). Indeed, adopting such an audience-first approach that privileges mobile device usability might increasingly become a mandate for magazines hoping to cultivate their Millennial base.

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