# THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF

# AUDIENCE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS IN DIGITAL MAGAZINES

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the many people who without their guidance, wisdom,

love and support, I would never have been able to complete this venture. Above all, I

would like to dedicate this to my mother Judy, my father Gerald and my sister Julie, who

have inspired me to be more persistent, patient, knowledgeable and empathetic while

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# THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS IN DIGITAL MAGAZINES

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the audience engagement of millennial digital magazine readers through a perspective of uses and gratifications theory. A survey was distributed to 175 college students to discover why digital magazine readers read and consume digital magazine content in their everyday lives (following four core motivations based on past uses and gratifications research). These recorded reasons were then compared against the subject's self-stated likelihood to click on a digital magazine link that features a singular photo, a photo gallery or a video. The results of said survey found that readers preferred the singular photo presentation more than a gallery of photos or a video. Further, respondents stated that they were more likely to read a digital magazine for uses and gratifications of information and entertainment rather than that of personal and social identification, although there was no correlation found between certain uses and gratifications and a particular form of presentation media.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Journalism organizations, advertising agencies, and marketing firms all strive toward a common goal when putting together a product: How can this product be improved to appeal to as many potential consumers as possible? From the journalistic perspective, research into this question heavily revolves around audience engagement and interaction with a particular product or service. Why do audience members interact with a service? What uses or gratifications do they get from consuming a product? How likely are members of a specific, focused community to follow a consumer trend found in other consumer research?

News publishers look at audience engagement and audience size because of advertising revenue they gain from online publications. People look for a specific measurement, which they can compare to other organizations to track their popularity in the marketplace (Nelson, 2018). We are in the midst of a market trend within journalism and advertising companies toward rationalizing and understanding audience interests and distinguishing between audience analytics (systems that capture information) and audience metrics (quantified measures of output by those systems) (Zamith, 2018). Through new audience information systems, such as web analytics, the influence of the audience on the news construction process is increasing (Tandoc, 2014). Web analytics are making journalists more aware of their audiences needs and interests than ever before. However, they should beware not to become an on-call worker only delivering the news that the public wants to hear or reacts to (Tandoc, 2014). Metrics can also be imprecise

and hard to understand if one doesn't have a background in audience analytics and metrics (Usher, 2013).

Clicking on a story gives an audience member some form of power in the journalistic power structure. The more editors learn about analytics and audience metrics, the more sensitive they are to quantitative data when considering news in the news cycle (Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2012). Monitoring online audience metrics can affect the gatekeeping process because it enables journalists to more accurately take the preferences of the audience into account (Welbers, van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, & Schaper, 2016). Magazines need to make up for their dwindling sales in print and digital properties, and a way to build up more readers is to cater to what audiences read more often (Tien Vu, 2013). While much of the study around consumer metrics relies on surveys and ratings data, it should be noted that consumers make their decisions at the story level (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). Page views/impressions/requests are counted when a user's browser requests a page from a website server. One is counted as a unique visitor/user if a unique IP address visits a website at least once during a certain observed period (Bhat, Bevans, & Sengupta, 2002).

From a theoretical perspective, this study will explicitly look at why certain digital magazine readers use and consume digital magazines and attempt to discover what gratifications they get out of consuming them. By following a prompt used in other uses and gratifications research, this survey will serve as another example of audience analysis to strengthen the academic understanding of digital magazine reader behavior by way of a reader questionnaire. Additionally, this research will explore what qualities of digital

magazine article presentation are more favorable than others and why certain readers prefer certain content and presentations over the other.

The real-world application of this study will be two-fold: On one hand, this study will allow digital magazine readers the opportunity to voice their interests and disinterests of trends and common concepts in the digital magazines they read. Often times, while there are more opportunities than ever for digital magazine readers to voice their opinions in the form of social media posts and online comment sections, it can often feel like these vocalizations are sent against the wind and never reach their targets. This study will rectify that in the sense of being saved in academia and preserving the interests of magazine readers in this day and age.

Secondly, this research will be beneficial for not only consumers, but for digital magazine companies as well. Now more than ever, journalism companies are paying attention and taking note of audience preferences on trackable content using trackable audience metrics and analytics. Headlines and social media posts are outfitted with the most effective keywords and phrases according to search-engine optimization. With this study, digital magazines will have access to consumer data that can help them oversee their own content and budgeting plans. The select results of this particular survey should serve as a tool and reference book that digital magazine companies can refer to for gauging their own content. What do readers like and dislike? What would they like to see more or less of? What's missing and what's over-saturated? In theory, this study will help companies attempt to answer those questions. The findings of this study will potentially be used as a detached form of market-based research that can be used in gauging

audience engagement of young/college-aged adults for the presentation of static images versus dynamic images versus videos.

Pursuing the interest of young digital magazine readers is vital for staying up to date on the interests of upcoming consumers. Millennials are slowly becoming America's dominant consumer purchasing power, amassing a population of approximately 80 million people and counting (Loda & Coleman, 2010). But, there is a "paucity" of information available in academia that researches the media choices and preferences of millennials, specifically relating to digital magazines (Loda & Coleman, 2010). For print and digital publications like magazines, gaining a greater understanding of the current and future audience (who are more likely to read digital news than their middle-age and senior-age counterparts who more often read print and watch broadcast news) will be extremely beneficial for anticipating what younger readers consume and enjoy (Mitchell, 2016).

**Goals of this study**

The goal of this study is to try and chip away at that ever elusive million-dollar question that journalism companies try to answer: How can we gain more readers? Granted, not every digital magazine is the same. Some are national, and some are community-based. Some release new content every day, and others are released periodically on a weekly or monthly basis. But all share a similar goal in trying to expand their consumer base to as many readers and followers as possible. The goal of this survey will be to observe if there are any trends and ideas that can be seen over a wide variety of readers and, in theory, could potentially represent reader trends in digital media as a whole. Photos can stimulate readers to read magazine articles as well as to beautify

pages, making them more enticing for the reader to read (Idogun, 2015). This will be

specifically observed through the target age range of millennial, college-aged readers

who are the most prominent readers of digital magazines and who will potentially still

represent magazine readers in the future.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past 30 years, many journalism organizations and fields have fallen into dire straits. Print newspaper and magazine sales in particular are dwindling (Barthell, 2017) and broadcast news audiences, as well as print readers, are growing older (Mitchell, 2016). Respondents who identified as Republican were 23.5 percent more likely to be classified as mainstream media skeptics as opposed to respondents who identify as Democrats (Jones, 2004). Job losses in journalism fields going back to the 1990s were only exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, where newspaper sales in the United States decreased by 30 percent (Flew, 2010). These trends are extremely disheartening for a collective of organizations whose goal is to serve as a "voice for the voiceless" and bring attention to important information that can help their readers lead more autonomous lives. After all, trust in communication sources to explain nuances and inconsistencies of government and organizations is paramount to maintaining the American democracy.

One such way to help better interact with a potential surrounding audience is by studying audience preferences. With the increased use of technologies like social networking and analytics, journalism organizations now have more precise tools than ever to accurately read into a particular site's audience preferences. Knowledge of an audience member's preferences on the click-ability of a piece of content will be the focus of this study, specifically looking at the uses and gratifications reasoning behind their decisions.

**History of Media Companies Studying Audience Preferences**

The aforementioned climate of economic instability and distrust from portions of the general public has led to more newsrooms jumping head-first into studying their website's analytics in order to bolster their online readership statistics in an attempt to ultimately increase online advertising revenue (Tandoc, 2014). This fascination with analytical metrics to expand audiences is hardly new in most newsrooms (Zamith, 2018). During the Great Depression, organizations began taking surveys of reader preferences and behaviors as a way to prove to advertisers their ads were effective in the publication (Napoli, 2011). At the same time, print magazines began working with researchers to develop surveys to gauge audience engagement in "through-the-book" and "recent reading" tests (Kinnear, Horne, & Zingery, 1986). Print magazines have also utilized concepts such as special interest editions as well as benefitting from "pass along readers," who would share print copies among their friends so that the number of people reading the magazine was greater than the actual subscription numbers would indicate (Kinnear et at, 1986). Forty years after the Great Depression, companies implemented computers and hired specialized consultants to discover specific data that would help bring about the most readers and viewers (Napoli, 2011, Welbers et al, 2016). Over the last four decades, news organizations have used marketing companies like Nielsen for market research to learn about the general interests of their audience (Tien Vu, 2013). Today, web companies and digital news organizations use server logs and tracking software to analyze web traffic coming to their site (Benbunan-Fich & Fich, 2004).

**Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory describes the reasoning behind why media consumers interact with and consume the media content they regularly consume. The

theory, developed in the 1940s, was one of the first theories that studied consumer preference and allowed consumers to voice what properties they interacted with and why they consumed the media they chose (Cantril, 1942). Reasoning can be as simple as finding entertainment or information in the product, or as complex as retrospection and inspiration to pursue one's life goal (Carter, 2013).

In regards to digital magazines, uses and gratifications theory is the most straight-forward and organized theory for understanding the overt as well as underlying reasons as to why readers interact with the content that they choose to do so with.

**Shifts in Audience Preferences**

Media companies have changed how they have measured audience engagement, which shows audience consumption habits have evolved. Journalists have historically paid little attention (or they would at least have to be spurred in order to listen) to audience opinions, citing their want for independence from the audience and a distrust of audience news judgment, among other reasons (Macgregor, 2007, Gans, 2004, Flew 2010). But, the interactivity and the immediacy of platforms on the Internet have forced the hands of traditional journalists who may not have been always looking out for the input of readers (Tien Vu, 2013). One of the consequences of journalists just now taking readership numbers seriously has been a fragmentation of mass media and the proliferation of alternative media sources (Napoli, 2011, 2012). Given the recent instability of their economic foundations, journalists are increasingly focusing on the input of the audience. This interest has inspired research into both direct and indirect reciprocal journalism studies to specifically look at how journalism consumers interact with companies, as well as how they interact with fellow consumers after a piece of

content comes out (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). In this definition, direct reciprocity refers to a reader directly interacting with an author's content on a social media site like Facebook or Reddit, which directly involves the author and the consumer, while indirect reciprocity involves a reader interacting with an author's content in the sense that they share and refer to the content with other people in their specific social circle, expanding the reach of the content (Lewis et al, 2014).

Multiple studies have shown that news organizations have to strike a balance between hard-boiled public affairs like the minutes of a city council meeting alongside the softer entries like sports, weather and leisure that the public often prefers (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Gans 2004; MacGregor 2007). News organizations are finding a need to strike a balance as gate-keepers and agenda-setters for the public to write about content that is important for readers to live more autonomous lives, which may be topics that are hobbies and not facets of democracy. At the same time, many organizations don't want to deprive their audience of the content they already consume, although the thought process of including audience preferences in the journalistic process is debated by the many within the journalism field (Welbers et al, 2015). Some journalists and editors are even going one step beyond audience analytics sites like Google Analytics and Chartbeat to promote popular articles to even more people through a recent trend from the early 2010s referred to as "algorithmic journalism" (Anderson, 2011). Companies like Visual Revenue and JumpTime Traffic have created data programs that track real-time metrics to determine the best location for content based on previous benchmarks on the site and potential revenue for each piece of content (Sonderman, 2011). These recent trends and businesses all exemplify an industry-wide attention

focused toward maximizing their digital properties in order to bring in as many readers as possible.

Some companies dive into analytics to learn about the kinds of content that readers are identifying with the most, though this can lead to a slippery slope of placing more emphasis on softer, consumer-friendly content than public affairs (Nelson, 2018). Other groups try to create a brand of customer loyalty by reaching out in a more personal form of audience engagement through social media or community outreach projects (Nelson, 2018). Some even hire specific companies to consult with on how to drive readership in a time of distrust in mainstream media and less-than-appealing economic outlooks for journalism companies (Nelson, 2018). Point being, journalism companies are willing to utilize any strategy and tool at their disposal to collect any available portion of consumers or advertising dollars.

The shift from predominantly print to predominantly digital advertisements has been cited as one of the biggest contributors to economic decline for most print and digital news organizations. Websites like Craigslist that offer no-cost advertising of products and services struck a blow to newspaper classified sections and advertising revenue over the past twenty years (Tien Vu, 2013). However, writers like Marshall McLuhan had noted as early as 1964 that the press' economic prosperity was on unstable ground (McLuhan, 1964). "The classified ads (and stock market quotations) are the bedrock of the press. Should an alternative source of easy access to such diverse daily information be found, the press will fold" (McLuhan, 1964: 186). This premonition was fast-tracked in the 1990s with the development of the Internet and the mass-spread of web-based programs and services (Nerone, 2013). Online advertising first started to

appear in 1994 and ballooned to a $8.2 billion industry by 2000 during a time of mass-experimentation and research during the still-inflating Internet bubble (Hollis, 2005). Unfortunately, many advertising and business firms felt that Internet advertisements at the time would not overtake the enticing allure of television or radio broadcast ads, and withdrew faith and investments in the online advertising sphere for a few years during the first decade of the new millennium (Hollis, 2005). Eventually, interest returned within a few years, albeit with significantly less hype and interest than a decade earlier (Hollis, 2005). Although it has fluctuated throughout the past 30 years, online advertising remains a crucial staple of digital website design and presentation decisions.

**The power of online journalism as a check and balance on governmental power**

In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom with a republican-style system of governance, the mass media press is often seen as a "fourth estate" that holds the other institutions accountable for their actions by reporting on them to the public (Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2011). Online social media has emerged as a communication platform that has become something of a "fifth estate" of communication that has made sending messages between citizens and organizations easier than ever (Newman et al, 2011). This estate has risen to power by giving additional and collective voice to the general public to raise concern to problems in society not addressed by corporations or governments in power (Valenzuela, 2013). Additionally, there is a clear trend of Internet users coming to news sites through referrals from online social media (Newman et al, 2011). Mainstream media companies have seen a sharp rise in the number of referrals from Facebook, Twitter and other online social media sites (Newman et al, 2011). Use of search engines like Google or Yahoo! to specifically find webpages

(as opposed to directly seeking out specific pages) has declined from 64 percent in 2009 to 61 percent in 2011 because of more online social media referrals (Newman et al, 2011). Although admittedly, there is a contingent of Internet users who express more distrust in the mainstream media than non-Internet users (Jones, 2004).

**Aspects and history of digital magazines**

Research has shown that the most frequent users of online websites and digital books in general tend to be teenagers and young adults while the number of people who admit that they subscribe to six or more magazines increases with age, capping off with nearly 48 percent of respondents over 70 saying they do (Gordon, 2011). The proverbial golden goose of print profitability will come from finding a way from utilizing the best aspects of print (in-depth, direct analysis and quality of content) and digital (fresh content that is updated often, low costs of distribution) into one, singular product (Flew, 2010). Companies should avoid "rearviewmirrorism" where they utilize a new technology in the same fashion of the previous technology the former is destined to succeed, such as the Gutenberg Bible imitating a medieval manuscript or web pages appearing as printed pages would "on paper" (Hartley, 2002).

As early as the 1980s, magazine companies like Acorn User began using tools like "electronic mail" and online noticeboards as well as computer networks to write copy as opposed to traditional typewriters (Quinn, 2011). As technologies were developed in the 1980s and early 1990s like the Apple Macintosh and Adobe's Illustrator, Photoshop and PDF software, magazine companies now had more user-friendly tools to experiment and dive into the new frontier of the World Wide Web (Quinn, 2011). In 1995, IPC Magazines launched the only edition of "UnZip," what was advertised as "The

U.K.'s first fully interactive magazine on CD-ROM" after the Daily Telegraph claimed the title for the first newspaper online (Quinn, 2011). On through the new millennium, e-versions of print magazines were converted and released on PDF formats. Websites like YouTube were utilized for launching and marketing content and more online-based content like podcasts and online-exclusive videos were reported on in major publications (Quinn, 2011). The release of the Apple iPhone in 2007 (and especially the iPad in 2010) gave magazine companies a new set of tools and delivery systems to help bring content to their reader base in a clean, user-friendly format (Quinn, 2011). The iPad possessed the familiarity of the iPhone as well as the functionality of a standard computer that allowed companies to develop specific applications for their content as well as iPad versions of print magazines where readers could "scroll through" colorful designs with interactive and sometimes web-exclusive content (Flew, 2010, Silva, 2011). It should be noted that these applications and e-versions were not free from criticism, such as slow loading times, accidental unwanted link clicks and certain links not appearing as interactive or clickable, as well suffering from similar journalism woes of poor application sales and paid subscription figures (Quinn, 2011, Silva 2011). News companies beginning to utilize new consumer technology like the iPad shows a willingness to find any and all avenues to regain a stable economic and informational foothold in the industry.

Because both print and digital magazines usually base their content around lengthy feature articles, readers tend to spend more time on magazine sites than for different publications and topics (Owen, 2018). According to the Association of Magazine Media, 91 percent of adults stated they had read print or digital magazines in the last six months, as well as 95 percent of readers under 25. One study documented that

on average, digital magazine readers viewed pages for 20-30 minutes as opposed to the

average web site visit which usually lasts around eight-to-nine minutes (Gordon, 2011).

Nearly 60 percent of interactive magazine readers were considered "heavy readers" who

read more than 10 books a year (Gordon, 2011). Over 75 percent of digital magazine

readers stated that videos featured with an article helped enhance their magazine reading

experience (Gordon, 2011). Respondents to this study also stated the inclusion of extra

photos, slide shows, extra audio and flash animation all added to the reading experience

in some way (Gordon, 2011). Magazine readers under 20 years old, who will soon grow

into the majority generation of news readers, were the age-group found to be most

interested in digital extras included in online magazine articles (Gordon, 2011).

Because magazines often cover niche audiences and subject matter, they are

prime locations for specifically targeted marketing from advertisers (Kim, Lee, Jo, Jung

& Kang, 2015). The nature of a magazine being "pushed out" to subscribers or regular

readers makes advertising much more appealing on a digital magazine page than a

standalone website that the advertiser has put together with the hopes of "pulling in"

potential customers (Gordon, 2011). Respondents cite that they found interactive

magazine advertisements to be the most "helpful or interesting" compared to

advertisements found on e-mail newsletters, website banners, television or radio (Gordon,

2011). Additionally, digital extras like video and animations have been shown to increase

a reader's interest in clicking on an advertisement if they have at least a slight interest in

the product (Gordon, 2011).

Digital magazines especially have been regarded by industry professionals and

academic circles as the next popular horizon in journalism within the next few years

(Silva, 2011). As opposed to its print counterpart, digital magazines stand out in the respect that they are designed for the specific attention of online readers with animation and larger type, clickable multimedia and sharable articles, as well as interactive advertisements that are featured on various positions on the webpage (Gordon, 2011). Diving deeper, digital magazines provide more storytelling tools for writers and editors like interactive quizzes, augmented reality or special designs for individual stories or features to give the reader a more guided experience (Silva, 2011, Gordon, 2011). Where a print magazine is a one-way delivery system of information, digital magazines can be customized to give readers a greater sense of interactivity and ways to voice their opinions about the article or prompts raised on the page (Gordon, 2011). The digital magazine experience is a reading experience in of itself.

**The effects of static imagery versus dynamic imagery**

Although tests have shown results where images and videos received more clicks than the other in particular surveys, it should be noted that the content of the media itself is the most important aspect to enticing readers (Hsiao, 2018). Native video formats on social media like Facebook Live and short-texted video clips has led to an increase in online video consumption in recent years (Newman et al, 2018). Additionally, Reuters research found that a majority of online news video consumption happens on third-party websites like Facebook and YouTube rather than news publisher's websites themselves (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropolous, Levy & Nielsen, 2018). However, American and Northern European news consumers from all age groups do not enjoy consuming video content as much as their Asian counterparts. (Newman et al, 2018).

**Aspirations of this study**

This particular study will attempt to cultivate information from digital magazine readers in order to build a greater understanding of what they believe the chosen magazines they regularly read and keep up with do well and what they would like to see more of from digital magazines in general. Readers can voice their pleasure or displeasure about certain presentations or interfaces of information in an open and intellectual environment. With these outlooks and opinions from readers, magazine companies can assess their own content and presentations to judge how to proceed in the modern news environment where viewers have more power than ever to decide which organizations will receive their subscriptions and page views. Additionally, this will signal to advertisers what organizations and methods are collecting the most readers, and therefore, what places their advertising might appear in next to get as many eyes on their products as possible.

It should be noted that this study will attempt to discover the correlation between audience engagement as well as uses and gratifications specifically relating to digital magazines. Much of the information available for digital magazines, specifically looking at audience engagement, only focuses on singular aspects and terms this study will focus on. For example, previous studies have been based around eye-tracking studies that cover the focus of website homepages (Djamasbi, Siegel, & Tullis, 2010), studying the analytics of major newspaper websites, looking at the uses and gratifications readers feel they get out of travel print magazines, (Carter, 2013) etc.

This study will specifically look at audience metrics (defined as the quantified measures from which audience preferences are inferred) as opposed to audience analytics (the systems that capture a range of audience behaviors; Zamith, 2018). Both advertisers

and news organizations use differing statistical categories to track certain kinds of audience metrics to determine the popularity and effectiveness of advertisements and news articles. Audience metrics on total users and page views to a site are important for news websites because they can be used to entice more high-profile advertisers to the site (Napoli, 2012; Benbunan-Fich et al, 2004).

**The goal of this study is to set out and test whether there is a relationship between audience preference and engagement (through the factor of click-ability) of digital magazine content previews with four different dimensions of digital magazine uses and gratifications.** "Click-ability" is a factor of measurement that attempts to discover how likely someone is to engage and "click" on a digital link. Said digital link is referred to as a "content preview" to serve as any number of media formats like articles, videos, photos, etc. The belief is that digital magazine readers who read digital magazines for a wide variety of reasons (uses and gratifications) should correlate with a high-interest in clicking on a content preview link. The four dimensions that will be focused on are information, entertainment, social identity and personal identity. A hypothesis and justification for each dimension is listed below:

Pew Research Center data from 2012 has found that people enjoy the drama and excitement of reading a good story and witnessing it personally unfold. Hunter Qualitative Research data found that teenagers and young adults found YouTube videos to be more entertaining than cable television, citing relatability with online personalities and digital content making them feel good about themselves (Spangler, 2015). But, it should be noted that an overabundance of media properties being introduced at the same time can be overwhelming to consumers (Sarma, Devevey, Balod, Hartman, Hussain,

Merani & Vilhena, 2018). Thus, I hypothesize the following: **H1: Entertainment is positively related to reader engagement with content previews.**

The most agreed upon reason why people read books is that they enjoy learning new information and gaining more intelligence (Pew Research Center, 2012). A study by Communications MDR found that documentary watchers are more likely to watch a documentary if there is more information available about documentary subjects they are already interested in (De Rosa & Burgess, 2014). Online readers are more likely to read a website they consider credible and one that gives factual information that can back-up claims (Nielsen, 1997). A survey from BuzzSumo found that long-form articles went more viral and had more shares on social media than shorter articles (Kagan, 2017). Thus, I hypothesize the following: **H2: Information is positively related to reader engagement with content previews.**

People share content because they want to promote a cause or simply to stay in touch with their friends and followers on social media, according to a study from Social@Ogilvy and Survey Monkey. On the same note, people are looking to utilize the "social" aspect of social media in building connections and partnerships online (Forbes Communications Council, 2019). Fifty-nine percent of articles shared on Twitter are never clicked on or opened, showing that social media users are sharing many articles online but less than half are read by other users (Gabielkov, Ramachandran, Chaintreau & Legout, 2016). Companies like Instapaper and Readability have been created to keep track of articles sent to you from friends or articles you have come across that you want to save to read later. Therefore, albeit not as strongly as for entertainment or information,

I hypothesize the following: **H3: Social identity is positively related to reader engagement with content previews.**

Magazines specialize in covering niche topics in great detail and basing their subject matter around specialized topics not heavily focused on in broader publications and broadcast programs. *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines were a mainstay in black households in the United States for decades while modern readers continue to support them to cover stories important to their communities (Carter, 2016). Millennials have been found to be incredibly loyal to brands because the brand is an extension of who the purchaser wants to appear to be as an individual (Schawbel, 2015). Social media has allowed people to further showcase their personal identity through commenting on posts online they find important or interesting to one specific person or to all of their friends and followers on social media (Gündüz, 2017). Social media users cite personalizing content as an enticing concept for social media brands in the wake of security scandals on social media sites (Copp, 2018) Thus, I hypothesize the following: **H4: Personal identity is positively related to reader engagement with content previews.**

# CHAPTER 3: METHODS

A quantitative Qualtrics survey was distributed to several professors at a Midwestern university, who in turn, distributed said survey to their students by way of a simple and convenient volunteer sample. The survey was administered digitally over a computer with an Internet connection so that subjects felt relaxed and as close to their own magazine-viewing habits like at home or at work and could choose to elect whether they would want to complete the survey or not. The survey asked respondents to think about their digital magazine reading habits and answer truthfully to questions asking about the genres of magazines they read, how many they read on a regular basis and on what technological devices do they consume digital magazine content on. (A full version of this survey can be found in the section of this thesis titled "Appendix").

This study borrowed and consolidated several items used in past uses and gratifications media research, representing four different dimensions (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985, Hanson and Haridakis, 2008) mentioned in the hypotheses at the end of chapter two. The information division was measured with four [4] items, such as "*It helps me understand different viewpoints from my own*." The entertainment division was measured with four [4] items, such as "*I consume it when I'm bored*." The social identity dimension was measured with four [4] items, such as "*It helps me build relationships with others*." The personal identity dimension was measured with four [4] items, such as "*It helps me keep up with topics that are relevant in my social circles*." A full list of all items can be found in the Appendix section.

Subjects were then presented a screen that showed three sliders that ranged in

positions from 0 to 100. The points on the slider represented their agreeability with the statements presented to the left of the slider, with 0 marking no agreeability at all and 100 signifying total and complete agreeability with said statement. Subjects were asked how likely they were to click on a digital magazine link if the preview for said article included a particular media item. The three items that subjects were asked to compare were a singular photograph related to the link, a gallery of photographs related to the link and a video related to said link. Students then filled out the survey and listed simple demographic identifiers like their year of birth and their year in school (freshman, sophomore, etc.).

Once enough responses had been recorded, the results of the survey were analyzed in a R environment (R Core Team, 2018) for analysis. The data was then examined through a linear regression model to justify its significance as well as to efficiently and properly identify any notable responses and if one answer received more support than another. In addition, the audience engagement variables would be compared against the uses and gratifications reasoning's to discover if there were any overlapping interests or signifiers of engagement based on uses and gratifications.

**Data**

In total, the survey was distributed to and completed by 175 students. 17 students (9.71%) listed their age as 19, 67 (38.29%) as 20, 61 (34.86 %) as 21, 18 (10.29%) as 22, 10 (5.71%) as 23 and 2 (1.14%) as 24. Furthermore, 17 (9.71%) identified as freshmen, 113 (64.57%) identified as sophomores, 21 (12%) identified as juniors, 18 (10.29%) identified as seniors, 2 (1.14%) identified as graduate students, 3 (1.71%) stated they at least had a high school diploma or an equivalent and 1 (0.57%) stated they had some high

school but no diploma. 150 (85.71%) listed their race as "White/Caucasian," 13 (7.43%) listed it as "Black/African American," 6 (3.43%) as "Asian/Pacific Islander," 2 (1.14%) as "Hispanic/Latino" and 4 (2.29%) listed their race as "Other." Regarding gender, 145 (82.86%) respondents identified as female and 30 (17.14%) identified as male.

For motivating factors behind digital magazine reading consumption (based on uses and gratifications theory), entertainment selections had a mean selection rate of 2.2 with a standard deviation of 1.17. Responses under the category of information received the highest favorability of the four categories. A mean of 2.31 responses were chosen from the "Information" section of the survey, with a standard deviation of 1.25. Social identity only received a 0.94 response selection rate overall with a 1.00 standard deviation. Personal identity received a 0.89 mean selection rate with a 1.05 standard deviation, making it the least popular motivation of the four categories of uses and gratifications studied in this survey. A breakdown of these statistics can be found in Table 1.

The reliability of the three items used to measure likelihood of engagement with digital magazine content previews was accepted as Cronbach alpha was .70. Singular photos received the highest favorability of the three media presentations with a mean response of 75.68 and a standard deviation of 18.68. Photo galleries received a mean answer of 45.69 and a standard deviation of 25.54 while video presentations received a mean score of 44.82 with a 23.76 standard deviation for recorded subjects. A breakdown of the results of the survey can be found in Table 1. Figure 1 displays the breakdown of responses for the audience engagement portion of the survey in the form of a histogram. Gallery and video both follow something of a bell-curve shape where the means peak

around a score of 50 before dwindling as they get closer to the absolute scores of zero or 100. Photo was shown to be extremely popular with heavy interest in scores peaking around 75.
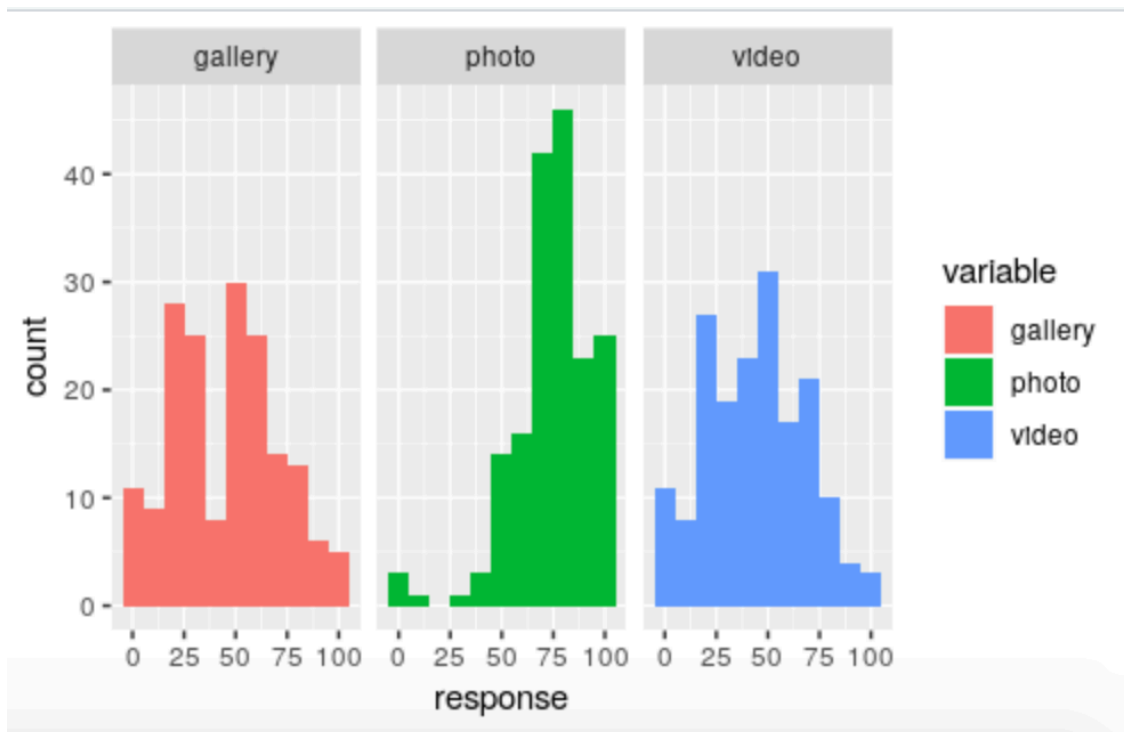


Figure 1: Histogram of click-ability of media type

|  | N | Mean | S.D. | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 175 | 20.67 | 1.05 | 21.00 | 19 | 24 |
| Photo | 175 | 75.68 | 18.6 | 76.00 | 0 | 100 |
| Gallery | 175 | 45.69 | 25.54 | 49.00 | 0 | 100 |
| Video | 175 | 44.82 | 23.76 | 44.5 | 0 | 100 |
| Engage | 175 | 5.54 | 1.81 | 5.55 | 0 | 10 |
| Entertain | 175 | 2.2 | 1.17 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Inform | 175 | 2.31 | 1.25 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Social | 175 | 0.94 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Personal | 175 | 0.89 | 1.05 | 1 | 0 | 4 |

Table 1: The statistics of the observed variables in the survey

# CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

**Digital Magazine Reading Habits**

For part one of the thesis survey (looking at digital magazine reading habits in general for survey recipients), 12 students (6.74%) voted they consumed no digital magazine content in their everyday lives. 83 recipients (46.63%) stated they consume "a small amount" of content, 66 (37.08%) stated "a moderate amount" of content, 16 (8.99%) stated "a large amount" and 1 (0.56%) stated "Nearly all of my online content consumption."

For the number of hours of consumption/interaction/reading of digital magazine content, 4 (2.25%) stated they read 0-1 hours of digital magazine content per week. 60 (33.71%) selected 1-2 hours of consumption, 7 (3.93%) stated 3-6 hours, 35 (19.66%) chose 7-9 hours and 72 (40.45%) picked 10-12 hours of magazine consumption.

Twenty-seven respondents (15.25%) stated that they follow zero magazine accounts on social media websites, 111 (62.71%) said they follow 1-5 accounts, 9 (5.08%) selected 6-10 accounts, 4 (2.26%) selected 11-15 accounts, 4 (2.26%) selected 15-20 accounts and 22 (12.43%) chose over 20 accounts.

With regards to social media sites that survey recipients follow digital magazine properties on, 50 recipients (28.09%) selected Facebook, 104 (58.43%) selected Instagram, 75 (42.13%) selected Snapchat, 107 (60.11%) selected Twitter and 10 (5.62%) selected an "other" social media site.

Out of the 10 categories of magazine genres surveyed, "Pop Culture" was the most highly favored category with 121 (67.98%) selections. Followed behind was "News"

with 107 (60.11%) selections, "Fashion" with 88 (49.44%) selections, "Style" with 82 (46.07%) selections, "Sports" with 58 (32.58%) selections, "Food" with 53 (29.78%) selections, "Health and Wellness" with 47 (26.4%) selections, "City" with 21 (11.8%) selections, "Other" with 10 (5.62%) selections and "Mechanics" with 2 (1.12%) selections.

For which device respondents stated they normally consume digital magazine content on, "Smartphone (App or website itself)" was far and away the most popular selection with 163 (91.57%) selections. "Computer" followed behind with 87 (48.88%) selections, "Tablet" with 4 (2.24%) selections and "Other" with 4 (2.24%) selections.

**Audience Uses and Gratifications**

For audience uses and gratifications, "It entertains me" was voted the most popular selection of the 17 choices with 158 (83.6%) selections. "It informs me" finished in second with 152 (80.4%) selections, followed by "I consume it when I'm bored" with 122 (64.6%) selections. "The content is relevant and useful to my life" finished right behind with 115 (60.8%) selections, "It helps me keep up with topics relevant in my social circles" received 95 (50.3%) selections, "It improves my life and inspires me to try new things" received 89 (47.1%) selections, "It helps me understand different viewpoints than my own" received 83 (43.9%) selections, "I enjoy the personalities/writers/content of the magazine" received 76 (40.2%) selections, "It's part of my routine/habit" received 71 (37.6%) selections, "It helps me escape from everyday life" received 57 (30.2%) selections, "I enjoy sharing its content online and offline" received 43 (22.8%) selections, "I've been reading this publication for a long time" received 42 (22.2%) selections, "It's a part of my personal identity" received 36 (19%) selections, "I feel like this publication

is an extension of my personality and world view" received 31 (16.4%) selections, "It helps me interact with others" received 24 (12.7%) selections, "It helps me build relationships with others" received 19 (10.1%) selections and "Other (please explain)" received only 4 (2.1%) selections.

**Means of motivating factors**

Altogether, the analysis explained only 4 percent of the variance in the response to the variables. The first hypothesis posited that entertainment would positively relate to "clickability" with content previews. Results from the regression model — as shown in Table 2 — found that this relationship was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The second hypothesis posited that information would positively relate to reader engagement with content previews. Results from the regression model — as shown in Table 2 — found that this relationship was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The third hypothesis posited that social identity would positively relate to reader engagement with content previews. Results from the regression model — as shown in Table 2 — found that this relationship was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The fourth hypothesis posited that personal identity would positively relate to reader engagement with content previews. Results from the regression model — as shown in Table 2 — found that this relationship was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

|                    | Engagement              |
| ------------------ | ----------------------- |
| (Intercept)        | 10.83*** (3.93)         |
| Age                | -0.23 (0.22)            |
| Education Level    | 0.15 (0.26)             |
| Race (White)       | -0.72* (0.40)           |
| Gender (Woman)     | -0.18 (0.37)            |
| Entertainment      | -0.05 (0.13)            |
| Information        | -0.15 (0.13)            |
| Social Identity    | 0.22 (0.17)             |
| Personal Identity  | -0.15 (0.16)            |
| Observations       | 175                     |
| $R^2$              | 0.04                    |
| F Statistic        | 0.97 (df = 8; 165)      |

*Note:* *p** p*** p<0.01

Table 2: Dependent variable results for audience engagement variable

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there was any correlation between the motivating uses and gratifications factors of millennial-aged digital magazine readers and the click-ability of digital content previews based on attached media. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between the uses and gratifications motivation categories and reader engagement with content previews. To test these hypotheses, an online survey was distributed to members of an under-represented demographic of young adults within digital magazine readers, asking questions about their digital media behaviors and motivations for engaging digital content previews. The survey responses were then used to examine the relationships between four different motivations for engaging digital magazine content — information, entertainment, social identity and personal identity — and their self-reported likelihood of engaging in content previews of digital magazines based on media attachments like photos, photo galleries or videos.

**Findings**

The results and analysis of the survey data found no evidence that motivations predict the likelihood of engaging digital content previews. Thus, at least for young adults, this study found no evidence supporting the hypotheses that particular user motivations would be more likely to favor a particular presentation of one form of media presentation over another. These findings are interesting given previous research indicating a greater consumer interest in video than photos (Hsiao, 2018) and videos on

average receiving more likes and shares on social media than photos or plain text (Jayasingh & Venkatesh, 2015).

While none of the hypotheses were supported, the efforts and findings of this survey were not in vain and did not return fruitless. Variations in the responses to the different presentations of digital content previews suggest room for future research to explore how different motivations may relate to different modes/forms of content previews. For example, when comparing the mean likelihood response scores for items asking about likelihood of engaging in digital magazine content previews, the single featured image scored higher than the photo gallery and video presentations. This is a remarkable finding given the previous research presented in chapter two documenting how video presentations in articles increased the attentiveness of readers and made the overall media consumption experience more pleasing.

One finding that stood out to me in terms of general readership habits was the fact that a sizable minority of survey recipients do not follow any digital magazine companies on social media (15.25%). This was very surprising to me given young adults heavy interest in social media and reading of digital media in general, as stated in the literature review in chapter two. Additionally, the results that Snapchat was still a very popular media site for following digital magazine companies (especially over Facebook) despite the brand suffering a large user drop in recent years.

**Implications**

One important takeaway from these findings lies in the discovery information and entertainment reasons were found to be more significant motivators in why digital magazine readers consume the content they choose to in their everyday lives than

personal identity or social identity reasons. This can be used in future planning by digital magazine executive boards in understanding the kind of content as well as the presentation of content they can present to their readers. It should be noted that magazines that take great pride in presenting content regarding certain identities both social and personal shouldn't view these results and eschew from their mission statements. Rather, these findings can be strategically used to build and expand their audience base by thinking of new ways to present content in either a more informative or entertaining fashion.

Seeing as though these results indicate that information and entertainment are greater retaining factors for readership and consumption rather than extensions of their own personal or social identities, it would be worth exploring the factor of retaining readership into more of a habit in future research. Readers who come to recognize a digital magazine brand for providing a hip and original presentation of content they find informative and entertaining could find a place for the brand in their social media feed, thus potentially creating a new and consistent member of readership.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The obvious limitation of this research is that it only focuses on a small segment of the millennial population at this Midwest university. Further research can be focused on looking at other universities or age ranges in general (such as high school-aged teenagers or older millennial adults).

It should also be noted that over 80 percent of respondents were either white and/or female, as well as two-thirds of respondents identifying themselves as 20 or 21 years of age, signifying a heavy concentration in certain areas of focus. While there was a

majority of respondents identifying in a majority aspect of one part of the demographic identifiers, it should be noted that there was still a variety of respondent's background presenting an element of diversity in the results.

In regards to the heavy concentration of female representation in the data sample, the presentation of digital magazine examples was absent for a number of women's interest publications like Ladies Home Journal, Better Homes and Gardens and Cosmopolitan could be beneficial for stimulating more potential digital magazine reader minds in future research.

It should be noted that the survey listed several terms that may be construed to be "journalism jargon" to those unaware of terms like "photo gallery," "featured image" or "content preview", which may have impacted their decision-making during the survey process. In future research, the survey listings should appear to be as simplified as possible to be understood by as wide of a potential audience as possible.

Further research can attempt to gain a more in-depth understanding behind the psychology and mindset of magazine readers as to why they choose certain sections of content over others. This would go beyond a simple survey in a study involving eye-tracking of a website within a laboratory setting or even isolating a subject and observing how they interact with a digital magazine with as minimal observation interference from the researcher as possible.

Further research can also focus on different parts of digital magazine culture (such as social media presence, specific genres of content or the pros and cons of print magazines versus digital magazines). Since this thesis could only focus on one aspect of digital magazine culture, there is still a bountiful array of research that can still be

accomplished in the future to gain a greater understanding of the overall magazine culture.

Psychological insights can also be focused on in future studies. There are certain decisions readers make one day while scrolling through their social media feeds that may be different another day. A more in-depth insight (potentially through a qualitative analysis) could be implemented by future researchers.

Through a uses and gratifications mindset, looking at different answers and potentially implementing them in future studies could be useful to discover how favorable or unfavorable the reasons are. While an additional option of "Other (Please List)" was presented to subject takers if they felt they knew of another reason why they consumed digital magazine content, less than one percent of subjects elected to select this option (and none of these respondents listed an "other" option after selecting said option). Adding new selections and omitting others may influence new choices for survey takers and may be of interest for future researchers.

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# Appendix

## Information Statement

inform

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study that we are doing to examine the relationship between digital magazine reader's reading habits compared with the reasoning as to why they consume the digital magazine properties that they do. If you are interested, this form will explain what will happen if you join the study.

Research studies help us to learn new things and test new ideas. Taking part in a research study is voluntary. You are free to say yes or no, and you can stop taking part at any time, without giving us a reason, with no penalty or loss of benefits.

We are inviting you to take part in this research because you are a millennial-aged digital magazine reader. We will only include you in the study if you first give us your permission. We are asking for at least 100 people to take part in the study. John Heniff in the School of Journalism is the Principal Investigator of this study.

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to document your digital magazine reading habits in your everyday life. This will include digital magazines that you interact with on a website's homepage or on your social media feed(s). Questions will include how many publications do you read, what motivates you to read said magazines and on what kind of platforms do you consume content on. You will be in the study for about 10 minutes. There is no cost to you for taking part in this study.

If you have any questions right now, please e-mail jbhdzb@mail.missouri.edu or call (708) 692-0617. You may also contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573- 882-3181 if you have any questions about your rights as a study participant; want to report any problems or complaints; or feel under any pressure to take part or stay in this study. If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 888-280-5002 (a free call), or emailing MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu.

By selecting 'Yes' below you confirm that you are at least 18 years of age and agree with the procedure of the survey.

○ Yes

○ No

---

digmagdef

This survey will examine the digital magazine reading habits of millennial-aged digital magazine readers. *Digital magazines are publications that produce long-form and in-depth journalistic content for a particular niche or subject*. *Examples* of digital magazines can *include* properties such as *Sports Illustrated, Time Magazine, National Geographic, Esquire or Newsweek*.

Digital magazine properties can be accessed by way of the the property's homepage or the magazine's account on a social networking site like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat, to name a select few.

Before clicking the arrow to begin the survey, *take a moment to reflect on your digital magazine reading habits and what publications you enjoy and consume on a regular basis*. Click the arrow below to begin the survey.

**Q1** How often would you say you consume/read/interact with content from digital magazines? (Examples of digital magazines can include properties such as Sports Illustrated, Time Magazine, National Geographic, Esquire or Newsweek)

- ○ None
- ○ A small amount
- ○ A moderate amount
- ○ A large amount
- ○ Nearly all of my online content consumption

**Q2** How often (in hours per week) do you consume/read/interact with content from magazine companies digitally?

- ○ 0-1 hours
- ○ 1-2 hours
- ○ 3-6 hours
- ○ 7-9 hours
- ○ 10-12 hours
- ○ 12+ hours

**Q3** How many magazine accounts do you follow on social media websites? (Examples of digital magazines can include properties such as Sports Illustrated, Time Magazine, National Geographic, Esquire or Newsweek)

- ○ 1-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 11-15
- ○ 15-20
- ○ 20+

**Q4** What social media sites do you follow magazine accounts on?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Other

☐
kind

⚙

**What kind of magazines do you follow or read on a consistent basis?**

☐ Sports

☐ News

☐ Fashion

☐ City

☐ Pop Culture

☐ Health and Wellness

☐ Style

☐ Mechanics

☐ Food

☐ Other [               ]

☐
device

⚙

**What device do you normally consume digital magazine content on?**

☐ Computer

☐ Smartphone (App or website itself)

☐ Tablet

☐ Other [               ]

**Information:**

☐ It informs me

☐ It helps me understand different viewpoints than my own

☐ The content is relevant and useful to my life

☐ It improves my life and inspires me to try new things

**Entertainment:**

- [ ] It entertains me

- [ ] I consume it when I'm bored

- [ ] It helps me escape from everyday life

- [ ] I enjoy the personalities/writers/content of the magazine

**Social Identity:**

- [ ] It helps me keep up with topics relevant in my social circles

- [ ] It helps me interact with others

- [ ] I enjoy sharing its content online and offline

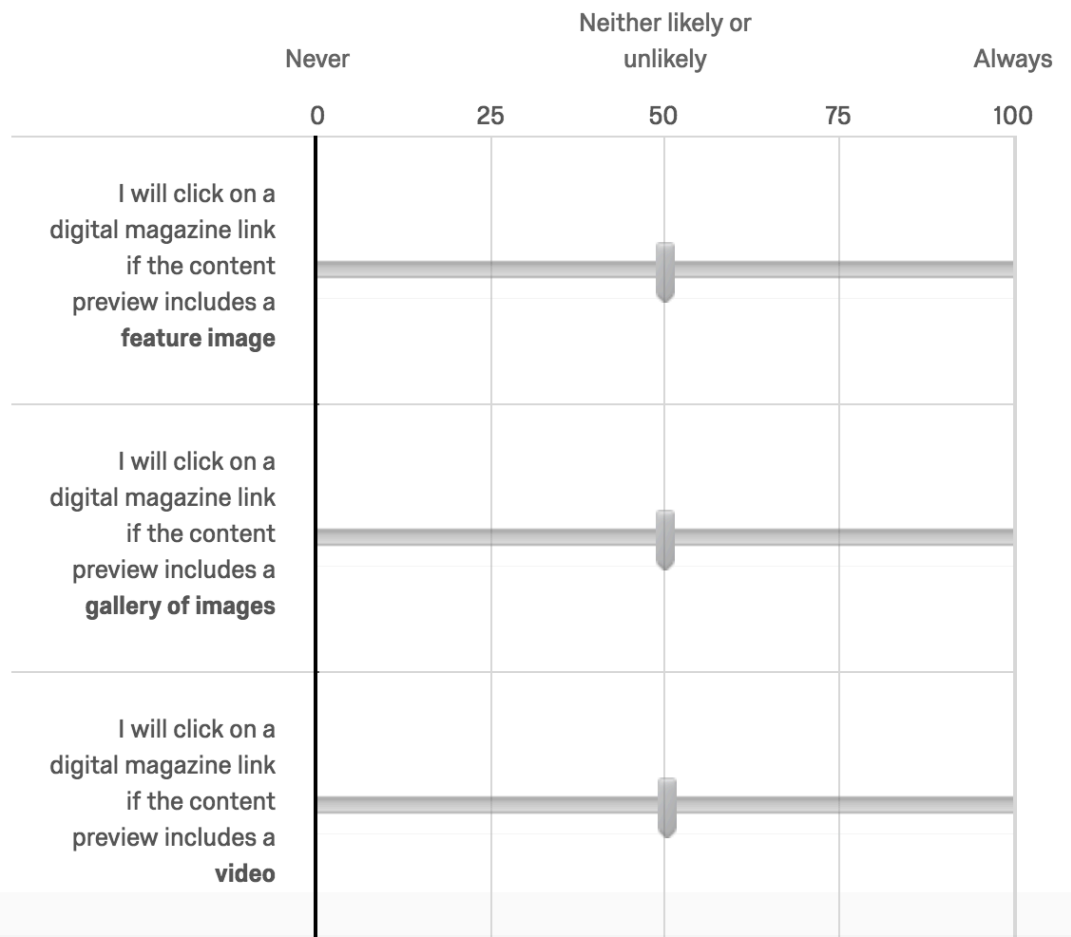- [ ] It helps me build relationships with others

**Personal Identity:**

- [ ] It's part of my routine/habit

- [ ] I've been reading this publication for a long time

- [ ] It helps me keep up with topics relevant in my social circles

- [ ] I feel like this publication is an extension of my personality and world view

Move the slider to reflect the **percent likelihood** that each statement applies to you:

click

Neither likely or
unlikely

Never                                                  Always

0              25              50              75              100

I will click on a
digital magazine link
if the content
preview includes a
**feature image**

I will click on a
digital magazine link
if the content
preview includes a
**gallery of images**

I will click on a
digital magazine link
if the content
preview includes a
**video**

**born** ☑

In what year were you born?

2000 ⇕

**Click here to edit choices**

---

**edu** ☐

What is your year of education?

○ Some high school, no diploma

○ High school diploma or equivalent

○ Freshman

○ Sophomore

○ Junior

○ Senior

○ Graduate Student

---

**gender** ☐

What is your gender?

○ Man

○ Woman

○ Non-binary

race

**What is your race?**

○ White/Caucasian

○ Black/African American

○ Hispanic/Latino

○ Asian/Pacific Islander

○ American Indian

○ Other [                    ]