

Introduction

What is a magazine?

The basics are simple. Edited, Curated, Metered, Designed, Scheduled, Permanent, Time Stamped. As magazine, editor and blogger Chris Maillard notes. ‘It’s always been difficult to establish what a magazine actually is, and near-impossible to get a consensus on that’ (Maillard 2013).

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‘The answers are many and varied, involve both logic and emotion, invoke both history and prediction, and leave us just as uncertain after we have heard them as we were before we raised this query’ (2012: 4). As Houston writes, ‘Over the last decade magazines and magazine publishing have changed beyond recognition. No one really knows what a magazine is – or should be – anymore. What was once a simple noun has become the subject of an existential debate along the lines of “Is there a God?” or “Can violence ever be justified?”’ (2013).

At its simplest we could excavate etymology, as Harper (2001) has, and trace the word magazine back to the 1580s, as a ‘place for storing goods, especially military ammunition’. In Arabic *makhazin* is the plural of *makhzan* meaning ‘storehouse’. The more contemporary meaning dates from the first time the word magazine was used in the title of the *Gentleman’s magazine* in 1731, ‘which was so called from earlier use of the word for a printed list of military stores and information, or in a figurative sense, from the publication being a “storehouse” of information’ (Harper 2001).

But that is far too general. A book is a storehouse of information. So is a newspaper for that matter. The storehouse however does direct us to the miscellany – ‘a form marked by variety of tone and constituent parts’ (Beetham 1996: 1) – and the first magazines did indeed display miscellaneous content that distinguished them from newspapers or books (although books can be a miscellany too). Historians disagree as to which was the first magazine. Apart from Edward

Cave's *Gentleman's magazine* that first used the word, some cite the German *Erbauliche monaths-unterredungen* in 1663 (Morrish 2003: 5). Others name the French *Journal des scavans* in 1665 (Davis 1988), *The English ladies mercury* in 1693 or Daniel Defoe's *Review* in 1704 (Wood 1956: 3–4). No matter which was first, even in these early decades the miscellaneous content that distinguished the 'magazine' from a newspaper or book is already not precise enough to allow miscellany to define the medium. Editors did not throw just *any* content into their magazines. *The ladies mercury*, with its questions from readers and discussion of matters relating to love, was a collection of textual items that were quite different to the news and longer articles on domestic affairs and national policy of *The review*. *Journal des scavans* contained condensed versions of books, bibliographies and the obituaries of writers. *The gentleman's magazine* was initially a digest, aggregating content from other sources and after a decade began to include original material. But this miscellaneous content was carefully selected via the filtering mechanism of an editorial philosophy devised by the editor with a particular readership in mind.

Magazine needs to be understood as more than a discrete object; it needs to be considered as a range of practices. But are ways of *understanding* magazines – as technologies.

A daily newspaper which brings you news and views every 24 hours remains fresh only for a short period of time. Your reading appetite slowly vanishes after the first read and you may not touch it again for a serious analytical reading because we have the radio, television, internet, social network etc. with us throughout the day. They constantly inform us the happenings of the day with text, pictures and sound no matter where we are or what we are doing. Unlike newspapers, a magazine never reports daily news. But we flip through its pages almost every day and re-read the contents till the next issue of the magazine reaches us. Sometimes we refer the select contents many times for several months as it documents information which is valuable and relevant over a period of time.

Magazines deal with socio-cultural and political issues more deeply than daily newspapers. They have a special feel and mission and exhibit even an overall special tone.

The magazines are generally read more attentively during leisure time. Its language and style of presentation is quite different from newspapers.

The variety and richness of the content, its social focus and visionary perspectives are more valued by the readers.

The success of a magazine is based on intelligent observation, imagination and consistency in articulating the views on all matters of public life.

A magazine is a publication that is issued periodically. It generally contains essays, stories, poems, articles, fiction, recipes, images etc.

Magazines are directed at general and special audience, often published on a weekly or monthly basis.

The word "magazine" is derived from Arabic word *makhazin* or "storehouse," which contains a collection of facts and fiction, all bundled together in one package.

Gentlemen's Magazine, founded in 1731 is considered as the world's first magazine. Then we had *The Economist*, *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Life*, *People* etc.

In the present age of the tablet and social media, the idea of a "magazine" is returning to its storehouse roots.

Functionally, a magazine still represents the idea of a bunch of thematically-related content put together as one package.

A magazine can also be considered as a cabinet of curiosities; i.e. a display case in which interesting, unusual and occasionally 'eccentric' objects are collected and displayed as a conversation piece or an expression of the writer's wide-ranging interests or tastes. The readers are treated with a fascinating, mind-expanding and unique set of wonders they had never dreamt of.