

Magazines, Megazines, and Metazines

What Is a Magazine in the Twenty-First Century?

Tim Holmes

Introduction

The question about what a magazine is, or isn't, has by now surely been won, been lost, been declared a draw, been abandoned in a fit of pique ... hasn't it? No, it would appear that despite the long drawn-out debate (see Holmes and Nice 2012, chapter 1), it hasn't. It hasn't because the premise of the question keeps changing as the ways that people use media, and particularly digital and social media, evolve. It hasn't because magazine-like media entities continue to be invented and used in ways that make them candidates for inclusion in the taxonomy.

Here's an interesting metaphor, drawn from a magazine about wildlife, for how perspectives on what is or isn't a magazine can legitimately differ. The Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) is a seabird that many of us would, in our ignorance, classify rather generally as a small seagull. Like many birds, kittiwakes have moved into urban areas and adapted man-made landscapes for their own purposes. In the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, in the northeast of England, there is a colony of kittiwakes that nests on the Tyne Bridge. The magazine story itself is about how not everyone welcomes the presence of these birds but the author makes the point that, "As far as kittiwakes are concerned, the bridge is a cliff, but in a different setting. It looks quite different to us, but it provides most of the same features" (Mason 2018, p. 34).

I will argue in this chapter that it is the features that are important, not the setting, when it comes to debating what is or is not a magazine. Dr. Samir Husni (n.d.), whose impressive credentials include being the founder and director of the Magazine Innovation Center, as well as professor and Hederman lecturer at the Meek School of Journalism and New Media, University of Mississippi, is also known as Mr. Magazine. On his website of the same name, there is a strapline that reads, "If it is not ink on paper, it is not a magazine". (Mr. Magazine n.d.). He is right, of course, but right in the sense that the opponents of Newcastle upon Tyne's kittiwakes are right: it's a bridge, not a cliff – but in the absence of a real cliff, it will perform the functions of a cliff very well indeed for the birds that use it. Are media consumers who use non-traditional structures for magazine-like purposes to be denied the opportunity to think of them how they like? Are we who study those uses to be strictly limited by a historical straitjacket that forces us to consider only old issues of *Vogue* or new issues of *Cereal*? Or, as Andrew O'Neill notes in his history of the highly contested musical genre heavy metal, is it the case that, "Ultimately, genre labels are unimportant. The map is not the territory. They exist as a descriptive guide, but the boundaries between genres are all porous" (O'Neill 2018, p. xxi)?

The metaphor above might help to illustrate a point but it does not explain what “magazine-like purposes” are, nor does it provide a solid framework for analysis. For the former I draw on the General Theory of Magazines expounded in *Magazine Journalism* (Holmes and Nice 2012); for the latter a useful model is provided by Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, who proposes that the industrialized world has been through three industrial revolutions and is entering the fourth (Schwab 2017).

The theory of magazines states:

1. magazines always target a precisely defined group of readers;
2. magazines base their content on the expressed and perceived needs, desires, hopes, and fears of that defined group;
3. magazines develop a bond of trust with their readerships;
4. magazines foster community-like interactions between themselves and their readers, and among readers;
5. magazines can respond quickly and flexibly to changes in the readership and changes in the wider society (loc. cit.).

Although the primary focus in this definition is on what *magazines* do, it is equally important to note the functions of *members of the readership group* in the relationship – they are a cohesive community of interest; they express, explicitly or implicitly, a set of information needs; they trust (and are trusted); they interact with one another; and they change, either because group membership rotates or because their information needs change in response to external stimuli or personal development. All these factors count toward determining the “magazine-like purposes” of both the media entity and the community of interest.

In his book *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Klaus Schwab briefly delineates three phases of industrial development that precede the current situation in which machines are smart and technologies are fusing “across the physical, digital and biological domains [making] the fourth industrial revolution fundamentally different from previous revolutions” (op. cit., p. 8). Although sketched rather than analyzed deeply, with a little customization the precursory phases provide a useful framework on which to map out an evolutionary history of magazines. In Schwab’s timeline, the first industrial revolution occurred with the shift from reliance on animals, human effort, and biomass as primary sources of energy, to the mechanical power enabled by using fossil fuels. In fact there is a strong argument that the roots of the first revolution can be more accurately dated to Gutenberg’s perfection of the printing press and movable type circa 1439 (Eisenstein 2012, p. 13; Steinberg 2017, p. 17). Not only did this permit and encourage the spread of knowledge essential to the flowering of the first phase of industrial development, it also allowed the invention of the magazine form. Whether the very first was *Gynasceum, sive Theatrum Mulierum* (1586, fashion plates) or *Erbauliche Monats-Unterredungen* (1663, edifying philosophical discussions) or *Journal des Scavans* (1665, book reviews), the form is accurately defined by David Abrahamson as bringing “high-value interpretative information to specifically defined ... audiences” (Abrahamson 1996, p. 1).

Landmark inventions from the post-printing press phase include James Hargreaves’s spinning jenny (1764), Arkwright’s water frame (1769), Trevithick’s steam locomotive (1803) and, of course, Koenig and Bauer’s steam-driven printing press, the first two of which were installed by *The Times* of London in 1814. The key magazine from this period was undoubtedly *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, founded by Edward Cave in 1731. Not only was it the first periodical to feature the word “magazine” in its title, it concerned itself with improving the social, cultural, and economic capital of the landed gentry who were its intended consumers, including ways of incorporating inventions of the industrial-agrarian revolution into their farms and estates. Cave’s publication was also taken as a model by other publishers, including Benjamin Franklin who, in

1740, planned to launch America's first monthly magazine. However, his *General Magazine* ended up second to bitter rival John Webbe's *American Magazine* by a few days (Lemay 2006). Neither magazine lasted very long.¹

Many would agree the canonical book to be *An Inquiry Into Nature And Causes Of The Wealth Of Nations* by Adam Smith (1776). Smith's book famously contains the description of a pin-making factory where the various stages of production are separated into discreet operations, thus delineating the principles of the division of labor that permits higher productivity, greater output, lower prices – and mass production.

Schwab puts mass production at the heart of the second industrial revolution, but allies it with a change of power to electricity. A plausible date for the start of this second phase would be 1882, when public power stations employing electric generators began operation in London and New York. Both used direct current (DC) which had significant drawbacks for long-distance power transmission in comparison with alternating current (AC) systems. The decisive engagement in the ensuing Battle of The Currents was fought at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair between Thomas Edison (DC pioneer) and George Westinghouse (who had licensed Nikola Tesla's polyphase AC induction motor). Westinghouse (and AC) emerged the victor, but the practical advantage had already been demonstrated in Lauffen, Germany, where an AC generator went into service in 1890. One of the earliest pioneers of the electrically powered printing press was Thomas Davenport of Vermont, USA, who in 1840 used his self-built electric rotary press to publish his own magazine, *The Electro-Magnet and Mechanics Intelligencer*, in which he described such impossible devices as electrically powered trains, pianos, and cars (Wicks 1999, p. 69). Electricity took a surprisingly long time to supplant steam as an industrial power source, but by 1906 British newspaper proprietor Edward Lloyd was printing *Lloyd's Weekly* and the *Daily Chronicle* on electrically powered Hoe² perfecting presses (Vick n.d.).

One name permanently associated with mass production is Henry Ford, but it was Ransom E. Olds who created the first automobile assembly line for the Oldsmobile Curved Dash in 1901 (Berger 2001). The Model T did not get going until 1908, but before either car hit the road, English publisher Illife had launched the world's first weekly motoring magazine, *The Autocar*, in 1895. This was as much a statement of faith in the future of the motor car as it was a commercial venture, but the fact that it is still appearing every week is a strong argument for the correctness of the decision.

Mass production encouraged the development and professionalization of a raft of new marketing techniques, including branding and advertising, and it was during this phase that a sustainable business model for magazine publishing was developed. Credit for realizing the potential of advertising revenue to subsidize production costs and allow more affordable cover prices is divided between Cyrus Curtis (*Ladies Home Journal*, 1883), Frank A. Munsey (*Munsey's Magazine*, 1889), and Samuel McLure (*McLure's Magazine*, 1893); whoever it was, the new model allowed magazine publishing to expand and flourish at a time when manufacturers were increasingly aware of the need to reach potential customers and persuade them to buy – it's all very well having the means with which to create a cornucopia of artifacts, but their value is only realized when a sale has occurred. For this to happen, potential consumers must be made aware of availability, they usually need an idea of cost or level of expenditure, of the specific benefits of a particular product, and where the item can be located. As a grossly oversimplified generalization, branding concerns itself with explaining the benefits that will accrue to the customer (Clifton and Simmons 2003; Holt 2004), and advertising takes care of the rest. When combined with the forms of popular mass communication readily available at the time – newspapers and magazines – the right conditions were formed for the enduring business model characterized so well by Abrahamson: “delivering ... readers to a group of manufacturers or distributors with the means and willingness to advertise their products and services to them” (Abrahamson 1996, p 28).

Curtis or Munsey or McLure saw this model could be used to the benefit of both partners in the arrangement – the manufacturer and the medium. Although none of their magazines

was concerned with two wheelers, bicycles make a good example. The bicycle went through a long period of design evolution, from the *Laufmaschine* invented by Baron Karl von Drais in 1817 (also known as the Draisine), through a succession of *velocipedes* pedaled through the front of two equal-sized wheels, to the *ordinary, or penny-farthing*, perfected in the 1870s with its gigantic front wheel and tiny rear. The *ordinary* may have had many great characteristics but its tendency to pitch riders off head first when the front wheel hit a bump or pothole somewhat counted against it becoming a popular means of transport, and the difficulty of adjusting the ratio between pedals and wheel made it relatively inefficient. There was still a large gap in the market for a bicycle that was much easier and safer to ride for ordinary mortals, preferably one that was also straightforward to manufacture. The gap was filled in 1885 when John Kemp Starley designed and made what came to be known as the *safety* bicycle for the Rover brand. The safety was a bicycle as we have known it – a diamond frame with equally sized wheels at either end, pedals in the middle of the diamond connected to the rear wheel with a chain running over gears. Starley, who came from a family of renowned engineers, did not patent his design and it was soon adopted and adapted by most other cycle manufacturers. It was simple to make and could be standardized, which helped to lower costs and increase sales; by 1889 Rover had created a version for women that did away with the top tube of the diamond frame, widening the market further and, incidentally, giving rise to conditions that fomented a moral panic around female cyclists and their rational attire.³

With a standardized design across the industry (the global industry as it happened) manufacturers began to compete in the market on price and brand promises; some makes became the reliable way of getting to work, others sought glory on the racetrack for their sporting mounts. All needed ways to alert consumers to their wares and persuade them to purchase. The magazine related point of this? A study of Muddiman's *Tercentenary Handlist of English and Welsh Newspapers, Magazines and Reviews* (Muddiman and Roland 1920) shows that between 1875 and 1900 there were 31 cycling magazines launched in the UK. Enthusiasts on the one side could meet manufacturers and distributors on the other, through the medium of the magazine. Publishers were clearly happy to facilitate the encounter. This was not restricted to the British Isles – in the USA, according to Norcliffe (2001), cycle manufacturers accounted for up to 10% of all advertising in US periodicals by 1898.

The third industrial revolution, *pace* Schwab, began in the 1960s with the development of digital systems and rapid advances in computing power, that was “catalysed by the development of semiconductors, mainframe computing (1960s), personal computing (1970s and 1980s) and the internet (1990s)” (Schwab 2017, p. 7) Marshall McLuhan, perhaps the foremost cultural critic of the electric age, certainly thought that this phase marked a revolutionary change from the era dominated by Gutenberg's mechanical invention: “Obsession with the older patterns of mechanical, one-way expansion from centers to margins is no longer relevant to our electric world. Electricity does not centralize, but decentralizes” (McLuhan 1994, p. 36).

The idea of decentralization certainly seems to accord with the postwar boom in magazine publishing (Abrahamson 1996; Johnson and Prijatel 1999) that resulted, at least in part, from the alignment of three key elements – the growth of viable specialist subject areas, increased emphasis on individual identity (often expressed through conspicuous consumption) and the capitalist commodification of leisure. Hobbies, interests, and leisure activities pursued outside work became important markers of identity, and the adoption of specific magazines reinforced those personal choices, the more so when alternative titles became available. Choosing *NME* over *Melody Maker* (both British music weeklies at their peak in the 1960s) became a subcultural marker of authenticity as much as a musical preference. Erving Goffman's (1972) canonical, but in many respects extremely dated, work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was published at the start of the electric era. It incorporates the concept of “front” as “that part of an individual's

performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to determine the situation for those who observe the performance” (p. 32); important elements of front are the “assemblages of sign-equipment” (p. 33) providing the accessorizing details that reinforce the part the individual is playing. Goffman focused on physical settings such as “furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props ...” (p. 32) and a specialist magazine proclaiming the actor’s adherence to high fashion or powerful automobiles would certainly work as a prop. (Of course, the individual can also be genuinely interested in the subject matter.)

Despite McLuhan’s dictum about decentralization, the electric age in and of itself gave rise to new interests and tribal identities that could be colonized by enthusiasts and commodified by magazine publishers. For example, *computers and automation* is widely credited with being the first computer magazine. It was launched and self-published by Edmund C. Berkeley as *Roster of Organizations in the Field of Automatic Computing Machinery* (1951–1952), before changing its name to the slightly snappier *The Computing Machinery Field* (1952–1953), then *Computers and Automation*.⁴ The name changed in 1973 to *Computers and Automation and People*, as Berkeley’s focus changed from the machines to the ways in which humans interacted with them, and then finally to *Computers and People* in 1975. The magazine ceased publishing in 1988.

Berkeley’s magazine was aimed at the scholarly and serious-minded end of the community of interest but it did not take long for hobbyists to be catered for. *Popular Electronics* was launched by the Ziff-Davis publishing company, which was soon claiming it to be the world’s largest-selling electronics magazine (Holley n.d.). The January 1975 edition of this title can claim to have had a significant effect on developments in the personal computing industry. According to a story published on *Fast Company*’s website in January 2015, this issue was bought by Paul Allen because it had a cover story about the Altair 8800 minicomputer (McCracken 2015). Allen shared it with his fellow Harvard undergraduate Bill Gates, they wrote a program in Beginner’s All-Purpose Symbolic Instruction Code (BASIC) for the Altair and formed a company called Micro-Soft to market it. Thus began the personal computer (PC) industry, but also the computer/electronics publishing sector, which has grown into a multi-branched field that covers everything from professional practice to gaming.

The electric age also gave rise to several significant effects for material conditions of production in the magazine industry. One of the first fruits was phototypesetting, which began the process of taking typesetting out of the realm of mediaeval metalworking, with its hot lead sloshing around machines like the Linotype, and into relative modernity with the Linofilm (no technology based on photography, which had been around for 100 years by this point, could be called truly modern). The machines necessary for the physical creation of magazine pages became more compact, more digital, more flexible, and more based on personal computer technology (Hicks and Holmes 2002, pp. 126–132). By the 1990s it was possible to fit most of the necessary components (a PC with desktop publishing and photo-processing programs, a scanner and a large number of storage disks) onto an office desk. Although the costs of paper, printing, and distribution remained high, other barriers to entering the market with a new magazine came tumbling down, which was good news for anyone with an idea they wanted to see in print and, perhaps even better for established publishers, who could both cut costs and risk launching more marginal projects.

As we can see, the first three phases of Schwab’s timeline fit well with observable developments in the magazine industry. Before considering how the fourth and current phase might work it will be useful to provide a triadic taxonomy that allows a more granular discussion of how magazines fit into the broader media ecology suggested by the theory of successive industrial revolutions. In keeping with the main characteristics of the different eras, three categories that suggest themselves are: magazines, megazines, and metazines.

Magazines

This is the base category, as it were. It covers everything that Mr. Magazine (see above) believes is necessary for a magazine: print on paper. The history is well charted and it does not take a long or deep investigation to discover that traditional print-on-paper magazines continue to be launched. A glance at the trade press (*InPublishing, Folio*) or magazine organization websites (FIPP.com, Magazine.org) shows that print launches in categories as varied as children’s education (*Little Baby Bum Songs and Stories*, D. C. Thomson, February 2019), music festivals (*FestWorld*, Festworld Entertainment, March 2019), and true crime (*Crime Monthly*, Bauer, April 2019 – one of two print magazines Bauer launched that month, the other being the crafting title *Take A Break Makes*) make the news with some regularity.

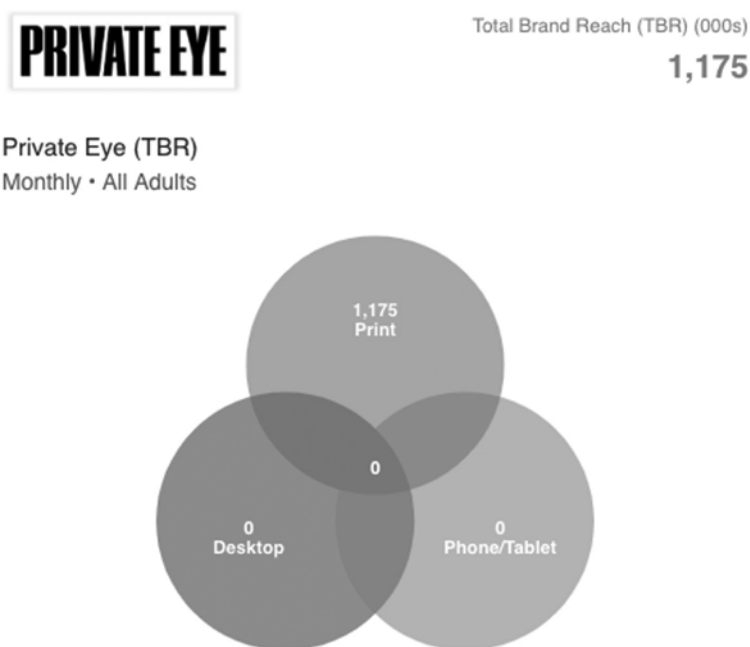
Magazine aficionados who are tired of being told print is dead will find such news encouraging, but a new print magazine from a commercial publisher will rarely stand alone. At the very least there are likely to be satellite media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram pages to reinforce the brand, but at the other end of the scale, the printed magazine may be a relatively small part of a much larger entity. Take *Little Baby Bum Songs and Stories* as an example. It is just one ingredient in the media mix of El Bebe Productions, a brand that produces content and products for pre-school children. A cynic might be forgiven for thinking the company has found new ways to sell old, and uncopyrighted, nursery rhymes after looking at the website (<http://elbebeproductions.com>), which features toys, books, DVDs of animated songs and merchandise such as dribble bibs; the magazine itself is listed in the Products tab of the main web page and it is revealing that the cover of the launch issue proclaims in the bottom right hand corner, “As seen on YouTube.” It is not hard to understand why a paper-based magazine might be a useful part of the overall offering, with the main reason being its physical materiality: “Colouring in!” is one of the cover tasters, and while it is technically possible to “colour in” outlines on a tablet, the act of rubbing crayons or pencils against paper provides a different sensory experience (also on the cover, “DIY Sensory Play Ideas!”) that seems likely to appeal to parents who would like to afford their child a range of haptic sensations and keep time spent in front of a screen under control.

The most important factor in the definition of a magazine (for this taxonomy) is that the print element is the primary focus and digital satellites are secondary. For reasons Megan Le Masurier explains in Chapter 7, this makes such magazines likely to come from the indie sector, but one of the most successful indie mags is *Private Eye*, perhaps the antithesis of “indie” in everything except its independence. For those unfamiliar with the title, it is a satirical fortnightly, printed on A4 size⁵ newsprint quality paper. It has its roots in a juvenile magazine founded by four public schoolboys (“public school” in the UK meaning one of the top-echelon private schools), was developed during their years at Oxford University and launched properly in 1961. It is full of jokes both good and bad, and it attacks with equal savagery politicians, cultural icons, and anyone else who is seen to be lying, cheating, or acting hypocritically. It has a lot of cartoons and, the key to its success, a lot of investigative journalism, often into areas that mainstream media cannot or will not examine (see Kevin Lerner in Chapter 26). This willingness to poke its nose into everybody’s business, to kick over the stones and see what wriggles away, seems to have had a correlative effect on its circulation figures in recent years – coincidentally, or not, the years in which information disorder⁶ has dominated news discourse.

Official figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC; www.abc.org.uk) show *Private Eye*’s growth over the past three years; it hit a record figure for a single issue with the Christmas 2016 edition, at the end of the year in which the USA elected Donald Trump as its president and the UK voted to leave the European Union. Subsequent audit periods showed an upward trend that has, in the most recent figures (July to December 2018) begun

to level off. However, at 233 869 it is still the leading title in the news and current affairs sector, comfortably ahead of *The Economist* (162 100 – although *The Economist*'s global figures are significantly larger).

ABC provides forensic metrics for circulation but the publishing industry also likes to measure audiences. In the UK this task was handled until 2018 by the National Readership Survey (NRS), but because NRS methodology was based almost entirely on print it was considered unfit for purpose in the digital age and the organization was superseded by the Publishers Audience Measurement Company (PAMCo). PAMCo's survey methodology includes print but also captures phone, tablet, and desktop data to provide a metric for total brand reach across all platforms (see Tan 2018). The results are freely available on the organization's website and they provide a useful guide to the taxonomy being proposed here. Looking at the data available for *Private Eye* at the time of writing, PAMCo's results show clearly that it is a *magazine*: the Venn diagram illustrating the degree of overlap between platforms shows Desktop 0, Phone/Tablet 0, Print 1 175 000.



The Venn diagram shows overlap of readership between platforms

Source: image courtesy of PAMCo.

Megazines

If *Private Eye* is a good example of a *Magazine*, *The Economist* will stand as the initial example of a *Megazine*. Ironically, it is not signed up to PAMCo, but it is a committed member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation and has worked with that organization to clarify its total brand

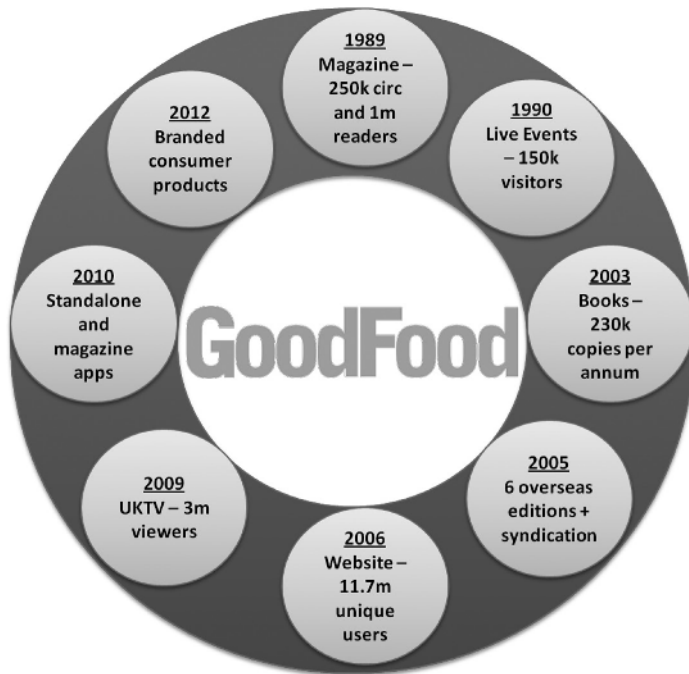
reach (ABC 2019). Data results from ABC show 10 categories in which The Economist's circulation and reach are measured:

Data results for 'ECONOMIST'		
Name	Company	Type
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	WeChat
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Weibo
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Google+
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Consumer Magazines
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	LinkedIn
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Brand Reports
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	YouTube
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Instagram
The Economist	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Line
Economist App (Classic)	The Economist Newspaper Ltd	Online

Source: image courtesy of ABC.org.uk.

However, that is not a full account as it does not include the title's Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr results, nor the radio/podcast that can claim six million streams and downloads a month (Walker 2018). Deputy editor Tom Standage made it clear how important the various digital platforms were in both spreading awareness of the title and driving readers toward the main offerings of print or digital editions in an interview he gave to journalism business-to business (B2B) title *Press Gazette* in 2016 (Ponsford 2016). One of the reasons for revising the methodology for ABC data was to emphasize the importance of the digital edition; as Marina Haydn, *The Economist's* managing director of global circulation, explains in that 2019 ABC case study, "The new reporting has enabled *The Economist* to articulate greater engagement with its products, particularly for digital editions which had previously been understated" (ABC 2019, n.p.). In this proposed taxonomy, then, *The Economist* is not a *Magazine*, it is, thanks to the surrounding panoply of digital offshoots and different platforms, a *Megazine*. We can see it is strong in its print-on-paper form but to focus on print to the exclusion of everything else that comprises *The Economist* as a media brand is to ignore reality. Yes, it is still a magazine in the traditional sense, but the print element is just one ingredient in a much larger, more complex recipe.

And recipes literally lie at the heart of what might be considered an archetypal *Megazine* – *BBC Good Food*. When Nick Brett and Peter Phippen⁷ were charged with developing BBC television content into other forms of content that could be monetized through the corporation's commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, some of the decisions made themselves – *Top Gear* could be directly translated from screen to print, for example – but others were more oblique. There was no program actually called *Good Food*, but there was *Food and Drink*, a popular show that ran from 1982 to 2002, and other food-related programming that could be drawn on to create a portmanteau magazine concept.



Source: image courtesy BBC Worldwide.

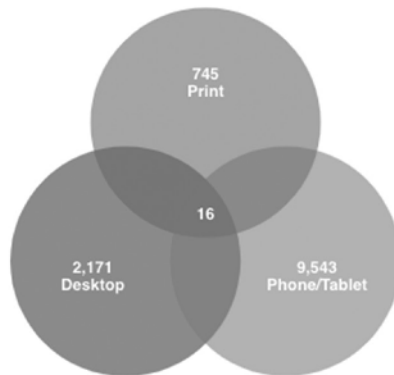
The magazine launched in 1989 and was almost immediately followed by the launch of the Good Food Show, and then a series of brand-related developments, the most important of which have been the website and the apps, especially the fully responsive version that made the content easily accessible on mobile devices. The PAMco data clearly shows the relative importance of print, desktop, and mobile versions within the overall brand.



Total Brand Reach (TBR) (000s)

11,626

BBC Good Food (TBR) (U)
Monthly • All Adults



The Venn diagram shows overlap of readership between platforms

Source: image courtesy PAMCo.

What the brand dial diagram above does not show is a development that has not yet reached fruition, the BBC Good Food live experience. The print magazine's reputation rests on its guarantee to test recipes multiple times before they are published, in a scientific attempt to ensure results can be replicated. This task is undertaken in the BBC's test kitchens which are currently not accessible to the public. But what, Nick Brett thought, if you could make those kitchens visible and turn them into a brand experience – watch the food being tested, eat it in a restaurant, buy the utensils with which it is being prepared or the crockery on which it is served? As it happens, in the UK *BBC Good Food* was beaten to the actualization of this concept by *Good Housekeeping* (a *Magazine* that has definitely evolved into a *Megazine*), which opened a shiny new iteration of its Good Housekeeping Institute to visitors in 2014. (The Good Housekeeping Institute was originally established in 1900, and in the USA its live-experience version opened to visitors in 2009.)

There is another aspect of print magazines that is credited with increasing importance for the *Megazine* concept: the front cover. Simon Kanter, editorial director at Haymarket Media in the UK, is a passionate advocate of the front cover acting as a poster for the brand as a whole. He is responsible for a lot of B2B and customer titles, many of the latter being controlled-circulation publications that are mailed to members of professional organizations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (which has two titles: *People Management* and *Work*). The magazine brand is expected to play an important role in adding value to the membership fee, so Simon Kanter's titles are expected to excel in all aspects of magazine craft – design, contents, compelling storytelling, haptically satisfying paper choices, and so on. But above all else, he emphasizes the importance of the cover as a page able to stand in its own right and generate engagement. Clearly, this is an encouragement for people to look at the rest of the print magazine – and getting people to look at something they are sent for free, whether they want it or not, is a big task – but even more importantly the provocativeness, pleasure, and creativity of the print front cover should raise awareness of the brand (and organization), and encourage engagement on social media. The ensuing network effect can then help bring new casual readers into the top end of the digital funnel and begin the process of converting them, via carefully constructed steps, into engaged readers and then paying subscribers.

This general policy is echoed in many current publishing strategies. In March 2019, *Folio*, the North American news and information site for publishing professionals, analyzed how *Wired* leverages all the platforms under its umbrella: an app, a paywall for digital subscriptions, a series of themed newsletters, an OTT⁸ video channel, and live experiences that fall into three categories: B2B, B2C (business to customer), and custom events for brands. There is also the feted print magazine, of course, but the changing attitude to, and relative importance of, print can be judged by this statement about a “refresh” to the design, made by editor-in-chief Nick Thompson and quoted in the *Folio* story:

Thompson clarifies that the refresh doesn't equal a redesign, and that while a complete overhaul of print might have been the right approach a decade ago, “it's probably not the right approach right now. The days of big redesigns with art directors staying up all night and things pinned to the wall and late night decisions on fonts, those days are done.” Going forward, he says that any change made on one platform should be reflected across all of them, since they're all integrated. (Barber 2019, para. 14–15).

Within the taxonomic category of the *Megazine*, print is just one part of a bigger mix and, given the idea of the poster effect, having a print avatar of the brand in your hand is perhaps the equivalent of the “brand experiences” that *Campaign* (the bible of the British advertising industry and another of Simon Kanter's charges) reports on increasingly frequently. *Time Out* was the original and best “what's on” magazine for London, but now it is published in cities around the world and the brand has branched out into food markets. As *Campaign* reported in

March 2019, *Time Out* has reinvented its revenue model to incorporate food markets that will be worth up to 35% of total revenue (McAteer 2019). But rather than just being a bolt on brand extension, the experience was rooted in and has grown out of the magazine's history. As McAteer explains, it started in Lisbon in 2014:

Editors saw the opportunity to turn an historic city market into the Time Out Market. It's hailed as the world's first food and cultural market experience rooted wholly in editorial curation. The best chefs, drinks and experiences are handpicked by the publication's writing team which test, taste and review what the city has to offer. (McAteer 2019, para. 6)

Time Out Market now claims to be one of Portugal's biggest tourist attractions,⁹ and the value generated by this conflux of curation and gastronomy was not lost on Time Out Group's CEO Julio Bruno, who launched the drive to expand the concept into cities around the world. The goal is to have Time Out Market function not just as a food destination but as a curated "experience" that is integrally linked with the editorial brand, working "hand-in-hand with the publication's online and print presence to drive traffic and readership across the 315 cities it's physically in," so that the benefits flow "in both directions as millions of visitors to Time Out Market results in growing interactions with the *Time Out* brand which in return drives eyeballs and awareness, increasing our relevance for advertisers" (McAteer 2019, para. 14). As Bruno concludes:

We are synonymous with the best of the city and that is why Time Out Market is the perfect extension of our brand – we curate the best of the city, and now we bring the best of the city to our audience. This is something we can own, more than other media companies. (McAteer 2019, para. 21)

Metazines: Affordance as an Analytical Tool

Before moving on to the third and final element of the taxonomy, it will be useful to introduce a theoretical concept that may help us to both understand the repercussions of the Time Out Market and unravel the meaning of the *Metazine*. That concept is the affordance. My first encounter with affordance was in a video about doors that did not operate in a readily predictable way, published by the online magazine *Vox*.¹⁰ Doors that appeared to invite a user to pull them turned out to need pushing ... or sliding one way or the other. Trying to work out what lay at the root of this inconvenience led *Vox* to a spry old geezer named Donald Norman, whose classic book *The Design of Everyday Things* dealt with exactly this problem (among others). Norman defines affordance as "the relationship between a physical object and a person ... a relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine how the object could possibly be used" (Norman 2013, p. 11).

The reason the doors confused users was because they did not offer a straightforward relationship between what they could do and what the user thought he or she could or should do with them. The affordance was not immediately obvious. Norman did not invent the concept, which was first coined by James J. Gibson, a psychologist, who used it to describe what an animal's environment provides or furnishes it with: "I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment" (Gibson 1979, p. 127).

In fact, the concept of affordance is capable of interpretation in different ways, across different disciplines. We have already seen two above and, as an introduction to their chapter "The affordances of social media," Bucher and Helmond (2017) provide a very useful primer on the subject.

As they note, the term is “multivalent” (p. 261), and, in addition to Gibson’s relational affordance and Norman’s perceived affordance, they outline descriptions of technological, social, and communicative affordances that have been used by scholars in different fields. In the spirit of Derrida’s bricolage (Derrida 2001), it is possible to contrive an elucidation of affordance that draws on several useful aspects of interpretation and that will provide us with an effective lens through which to consider the *Metazine*.

In the context of this chapter, the two most useful varieties of affordance are *perceived* and *communicative*. The *perceived* variety reflects an emphasis on the relationship between object and agent. The *communicative* type of affordance is relevant for two reasons: first, the concept of communicative affordances is widely used in studies of communications facilitated by mobile devices, which is an important consideration for the *Metazine*; second, because of Bucher and Helmond’s observation that “the range of social contexts in which mobile communication takes place afford new forms of social identity, as well as the modification of tacit codes of social interactions” (p. 264).

Donald Norman tells us: “An affordance is a relationship” (2013, p. 11). It is a well-documented characteristic of magazines that readers form strong bonds with them (Hermes 1995; Beetham 1996; Korinek 2000; Consterdine 2002) – and what is a strong bond if not a relationship? Norman and others also emphasize that an affordance is not a fixed property of the object or the agent; that is to say, the notion of a *relationship* explains how the same aspect of the environment or object can provide different affordances to different people, and even to the same individual at another point in time. In this sense, a magazine (to use the word in its generic sense) can be considered an affordance, or rather a series of potential affordances because the relationships readers form with magazines, the uses to which readers put them – i.e., the “relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine how the object could possibly be used” (Norman 2013, p. 11) – multiply and compound with time. Magazines provide different affordances to different people but also to the same people at different times. *Time Out* in its original form afforded readers the means to learn about events or restaurants they might enjoy, but that enjoyment was at one remove from the publication. *Time Out Market* affords direct enjoyment of consuming food, but some of those who enjoy it might well be people who have previously enjoyed the indirect affordance.

Another example: the British magazine *Motorcycle Mechanics* (1959–1983) was originally aimed at motorcyclists whose machine was their primary form of transport. They needed information to keep their bikes running, to get to work, or to go on holiday. The affordance provided by the magazine would generally have been one of utility, complementing the need to know with the means of knowing. The same magazine bought *now* as a vintage issue might afford new knowledge of a kind unrelated to the initial intention, as well as enjoyment. Its depictions of relationships between genders and classes, perhaps, might be of value to a sociologist or a cultural historian; a classic motorcycle hobbyist might find nostalgic entertainment in the descriptions of repair techniques. It is possible that a newcomer to the old motorcycle scene who lacked the skill and understanding of an old hand might enjoy the original affordance of utility.

Consider now the Facebook group British Motorcycle Mechanics.¹¹ Set up by Greg Scoffield in February 2015, it is a closed group, and every new member has to be approved by the administrator to ensure that the applicant has a genuine interest in the subject matter and is not just a false agent or a bot intent on luring members to a malicious external site. Such careful scrutiny might argue for a small group but membership is still growing and currently stands at 14 000+, which would be a respectable circulation figure for a specialized magazine. Greg is very clear about the group’s purposes: “To provide a teaching forum for learning mechanics, give experienced mechanics a place to associate and, above all, provide a forum for all members to interact with fellowship” (Scoffield n.d., n.p.). In other words, it is based on relationships and knowledge exchange. The kinds of information sought and offered concern everything from very basic fixes to very advanced engineering, and because there are different opinions about the best way to

tackle any mechanical problem, there are very often lively discussion threads under original posts. The group page has links to a growing number of documents and files from factory and other sources, so part of its function is to act as a library or a permanent set of back issues. There are also collections of video and still images, some of which are of excellent quality.

In other words, British Motorcycle Mechanics is like a living, *permanently-on* magazine that is staffed by 14 000+ content creators, many of whom are globally acknowledged experts in their field. This is way beyond the situation Dan Gillmor (2006) predicted in *We The Media*, when he foresaw “Big Media” having to level with citizen journalists. Big Media have been shoved completely out of the picture. British Motorcycle Mechanics clearly is not a magazine, yet a comparison of its attributes with the General Theory of Magazines shows distinct parallels:

1. it targets a precisely defined group of users (indeed, a hand-picked group);
2. its content is entirely based on the expressed and perceived needs, desires, hopes, and fears of that defined group; it is the group that determines what the content is;
3. the page and its founder has developed a bond of trust with the users;
4. the posts and their threads foster community-like interactions between themselves and their readers, and among readers; without the community, there would be no interaction and, as noted, no content.

This, and the concept of the communicative affordance, is what leads me to characterize British Motorcycle Mechanics as a *Metazine*, which is both a metaphor for a magazine and a meta-representation of the form. Conventional media organizations would love to have the levels of engagement shown within this group, as well as the depth of knowledge in the content,¹² but there is one significant element missing, and that is an appropriate way to monetize it. A subscription model could work but would destroy the founding principles of free access to freely shared knowledge and expertise. The *Metazine* may be, by its very nature, resistant to commercial exploitation. This is not to say that advertising or promotion are prohibited; they are not. Most straightforwardly, the group home page has a “recommendations” tab, under which can be found links to many different individuals or organizations that have something useful to offer, be it parts, a service, or even a good place to ride. More subtly, and woven into the very fabric of the posts, members will recommend businesses they have dealt with; indeed, some of the members leaving comments run their own specialized businesses, and users who have been in the scene for a while are likely to recognize their names from the advertisements they once placed in conventional magazines. In effect, everything that happens in a commercially published magazine is happening in this group, but the organizing principle is a sort of pro-bono idealism rather than a profit motive.

Another Facebook page that shows similar *Metazine* characteristics is the Epiphone Les Paul Owners (ELPO) group; with 32 969 members, it represents a more than respectable circulation. The Epiphone Les Paul is a specific make and model of guitar, but once a person has been admitted (it’s another closed group), the joke is that members are free to discuss *any* make and model of guitar, guitar accessories, playing techniques, or music made on any guitar, although there is an understandable preponderance of the eponymous instrument. ELPO users often contrast this total freedom to post with other specific-make-and-model guitar groups that police their content very tightly and are referred to as “cork sniffers,” the analogy being with wine snobs. Again, the group is like a *permanently-on* version of *Total Guitar* or *Guitar World* but instead of having to wait a month to find out whether a particular brand or model of guitar, amplifier, pickup, or effect pedal is going to be reviewed, users can just create their own content immediately and have it commented on or augmented by others in the community. Furthermore, there is very little chance of commercial considerations tainting the opinion or information because it is so heterodox – for example, when Jock Mirow of Denver, Colorado, posted on 27 March 2019 about his Epiphone Les Paul’s pickups sounding muddy, by the next morning he

had 82 pieces of advice that recommended 23 separate makes or models and the reasons for preferring them. There is no way that an influencer is going to break through that much noise and no way that a single manufacturer or brand can dominate the discourse. The *Metazine* affords an egalitarian marketplace of ideas and opinions.

The final example of a *Metazine* comes from an individual rather than a group, from Twitter rather than Facebook, and represents one strand of magazine-like material rather than a complete magazine. The author goes by the handle @gawanmac, and a good example of the kind of post I am referring to can be found at <https://twitter.com/gawanmac/status/1008254934498926592>. This is a thread of posts that document a walk @gawanmac took, from a busy main road out into the English countryside to a ruined building, a historic site that is the only known example in Britain of a Roman temple that was later used as a Christian church. The thread is an artfully fashioned mixture of images and beautifully crafted captions that takes in details of the route, plants seen along the way and, close up, on site, points of architectural interest, maps, and other information. It is exactly the kind of content one would be delighted to find regularly in *Country Walking* (UK) or *Backpacker* (USA). There is even a monetizable element, as he has an Etsy shop that sells prints of his atmospheric photographs, but this is clearly not a commercial or commercializable site. Check it out and you are more likely to come across posts about LGBTQ+ or Palestinian politics than a country walk, which makes the nature rambles¹³ more integrated into a real life that encompasses diverse interests.

What these three examples, and countless other instances, have in common is that they have progressed so far beyond the idea of participatory journalism propounded by Singer et al. (2011). It is no longer the case that the audience is *permitted* to participate in media discourse under certain constraints in certain conditions; as Bucher and Helmond suggest, new forms of social identity are afforded by modern communications technology and platforms, with new codes of social interactions creating relationships among and between group members. The *Metazine* affords a non-commodified mode of information exchange and entertainment, often based around a commodified field (motorcycles, guitars) but operating beyond the usual mediated boundaries.¹⁴

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show that, as a matter of historical and cultural necessity, the study of magazines needs to move on from its legacy roots to recognize and encompass the evolved categories of *Megazine* and *Metazine*. This applies whether the student is from an academic or an industrial background. The necessity is not comfortable news for journalists, publishers, journalism schools, or academics operating in fields of heritage media.

However, as is evident from news pages of the journalism trade press or a visit to a store that specializes in indie titles, the *Magazine* is far from moribund. An arm of Gutenberg's galaxy (McLuhan 1962) continues to expand, as print on paper exerts its gravitational pull on the imagination of "typographic humans" (to adapt McLuhan's phrase). There will never be nothing to study in this field, but there can be no question that its mass market phase has passed.

The *Megazine* is likely to continue its trajectory of growth as media organizations seek to create 360° brands. From the large titles, such as *Good Housekeeping*, to small ones such as *Delayed Gratification*,¹⁵ the concept of surrounding a magazine with offshoots and events in pursuit of revenue, sometimes to the point where the magazine becomes a subsidiary player in the scheme, is now a well-established business model. This field will remain open to study of commercial development and cultural affect for the foreseeable future.

The *Metazine* is a phenomenon rich with possibilities for further study by media scholars, especially those that bring with them knowledge and understanding of the magazine as a socio-cultural form. It overlaps with the field of social media studies, and can draw on the analytical

tools from that field, but it has distinct characteristics that should encourage new developments in magazine studies. Such studies may also provide valuable insights for the publishing industry.

In conclusion, it does not matter whether the structure of the magazine is a bridge or a cliff – if it provides the features that its users want, it can be either, or both, or something else entirely. The trick is to be able to see the magazine-like features.

Notes

- 1 For an entertaining version of this story, see <http://mentalfloss.com/article/92095/bitter-race-publish-americas-first-magazine>.
- 2 The Hoe web perfecting press was named after an American inventor, Richard Hoe. It sped up printing because it used a continuous roll of paper and could print on both sides of a page.
- 3 There are two interesting observations to make here: (i) The Society for Rational Dress, founded in London in 1881, published a quarterly magazine, the *Gazette*, which ran for six issues; copies are available in the British Library, Shelfmark: 1866.b.9.(10.); (ii) medical studies of female cyclists discovered the interestingly named phenomenon of “bicycle face” in young women who took up the sport. See Marland (2013). For a view on the moral panic around cycling see <https://thevictoriancyclist.wordpress.com/2015/06/21/cycling-accidents-and-1890s-moral-panics>, accessed 19 March 2019.
- 4 A digitized collection of issues can be found at https://archive.org/details/bitsavers_computers And Automation.
- 5 One of the standard paper sizes in Europe and in other parts of the world, 8.27 × 11.69 in. The standard paper size in the USA that is the closest to the A4 is 8.5 by 11 in.
- 6 Giving a keynote at the 2016 Future of Journalism conference in Cardiff, Wales, Dr. Claire Wardle, executive director of First Draft News, made a very strong case for not using the term “fake news.”
- 7 Respectively editorial director and managing director of BBC Worldwide at the time.
- 8 OTT = Over The Top, a standalone video channel that delivers content over the internet. In the case of *Wired* and other Condé Nast media brands, this is not channeled through YouTube – although *Wired* does have a successful YouTube channel, too.
- 9 See also: <https://www.timeout.com/about/market>.
- 10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY96hTb8WgI>.
- 11 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/britishmotorcyclemechanics>.
- 12 Indeed, when I was publishing a magazine in this sector, I did pay some of the group members to write for me.
- 13 Here’s another: <https://twitter.com/gawanmac/status/984865835566141440>.
- 14 The British crafting magazine *Mollie Makes* represents a rare disruption of the new order. A social media coordinator was the first editorial appointment, and it was her task to delve into crafting Metazines, identify key contributors, and persuade them to help Future Publishing to develop a Big Media equivalent. Of course, Future Publishing does not tell the tale exactly that way: www.journalism.co.uk/news/how-future-builds-an-audience-before-launching-a-new-title/s2/a553224.
- 15 In a related development, Delayed Gratification has offered masterclasses in how to launch and develop an independent magazine: <https://www.slow-journalism.com/filter/events-and-classes>.

References

- ABC (2019). *The Economist* collaborates with ABC to provide more transparency into audited circulation figures. www.abc.org.uk/images/The_Economist_case_study_2019.pdf (accessed 3 March 2019).
- Abrahamson, D. (1996). *Magazine-Made America: The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical*. Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

- Barber, K. (2019). How *Wired's* multiplatform strategy is increasing engagement and revenue. *Folio*. <https://www.foliomag.com/wired-multiplatform-strategy-engagement-revenue> (accessed 17 March 2019).
- Beetham, M. (1996). *A Magazine of her Own*, Routledge. London.
- Berger, M.L. (2001). *The Automobile in American History and Culture: A Reference Guide*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Bucher, T. and Helmond, A. (2017). *The affordances of social media platforms*. In: *The Sage Handbook of Social Media* (eds. J. Burgess, T. Poell and A. Marwick), 259–280. London and New York: Sage.
- Clifton, R. and Simmons, J. (2003). *Brands and Branding*. London: Profile.
- Consterdine, G. (2002). *How Magazine Advertising Works IV*. London: PPA.
- Derrida, J. (2001). *Writing and Difference*, 2e. London: Routledge.
- Eisenstein, E.L. (2012). *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, J.J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gillmor, D. (2006). *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media, Inc.
- Goffman, E. (1972). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Pelican.
- Hermes, J. (1995). *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*. Cambridge, UK and Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Hicks, W. and Holmes, T. (2002). *Subediting for Journalists*. London: Routledge.
- Holley, M. (n.d.). *Popular Electronic magazine: history*. http://www.swtpc.com/mholley/PopularElectronics/Popular_Electronics.htm (accessed 20 March 2019).
- Holmes, T. and Nice, L. (2012). *Magazine Journalism*. London: Sage.
- Holt, D. (2004). *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Husni, S. (n.d.). Mr. Magazine [home page]. www.mrmagazine.com (accessed 4 March 2019).
- Johnson, S. and Prijatel, P. (1999). *The Magazine from Cover to Cover: Inside a Dynamic Industry*. Chicago: NTC Publishing Group.
- Korinek, V. (2000). *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lemay, J. (2006). *The Life of Benjamin Franklin Volume 2: Printer and Publisher 1730–1747*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Marland, H. (2013). *Health and Girlhood in Britain, 1874–1920*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mason, A. (2018). Living on the ledge. *BBC Wildlife* (October), p. 32–35.
- McAteer, O. (2019). 'Go big or go home': *Time Out* reinvents revenue model with food markets." *Campaign*. www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/go-big-go-home-time-reinvents-revenue-model-food-markets/1579701 (accessed 20 March 2019).
- McCracken, H. (2015). The most important computer magazine in the history of computer magazines is back. *Fast Company*. <https://www.fastcompany.com/3041672/the-most-important-computer-magazine-in-the-history-of-computer-magazines-is-back> (accessed 1 April 2019).
- McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mr. Magazine (n.d.). www.mrmagazine.com (accessed 3 April 2019).
- Muddiman, J.G. and Roland, A. (1920). *Tercentenary Handlist of English and Welsh Newspapers, Magazines and Reviews*. London: The Times.
- Norcliffe, G. (2001). *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869–1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Norman, D. (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Basic Books.
- O'Neill, A. (2018). *A History of Heavy Metal*. London: Headline.
- Ponsford, D. (2016). Economist deputy editor tom standage on how the weekly business mag reached 35m social media followers. *Press Gazette* (29 March). www.pressgazette.co.uk/economist-deputy-editor-tom-standage-how-weekly-business-mag-reached-35m-social-media-followers (accessed 22 March 2019).
- Schwab, K. (2017). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. New York: Currency.
- Scofield, G. (n.d.). British Motorcycle Mechanics. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/britishmotorcyclemechanics/permalink/911993698863268> (accessed 28 September 2019).

- Singer, J.B., Domingo, D., Heinonen, A. et al. (2011). *Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Steinberg, S.H. (2017). *Five Hundred Years of Printing*. New York: Dover:Publications.
- Tan, E. (2018). Pamco resets audience measurement with 'total brand reach' for publishers. *Campaign*. www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/pamco-resets-audience-measurement-total-brand-reach-publishers/1462453 (accessed 22 March 2019).
- Vick, J. (n.d.). Edward Lloyd Victorian newspaper proprietor, publisher and entrepreneur. <http://www.edwardlloyd.org/resources.htm> (accessed 19 March 2019).
- Walker, J. (2018). Economist Radio Reveals 6m Monthly Streams As It Launches The World in 2018 Series. *Press Gazette* (5 January). www.pressgazette.co.uk/economist-radio-reveals-6m-monthly-streams-as-it-launches-the-world-in-2018-series (accessed 22 March 2019).
- Wicks, F. (1999). The blacksmith's motor. *Mechanical Engineering* 121 (7): 66–69. <https://memagazineselect.asmedigitalcollection.asme.org/article.aspx?articleid=2684051>.