Magazines in the Age of Specialization
Chapter 9
“The story of how a ’60s babe named Helen Gurley Brown (you’ve probably heard of her) transformed an antiquated general-interest mag called Cosmopolitan into the must-read for young, sexy single chicks is pretty damn amazing.”

-Cosmopolitan magazine
Nearly all consumer magazines depend on advertising.

In fact, the U.S. consumer economy, for better or worse, owes part of its great growth to the consumer magazine industry, which has both chronicled and advertised consumable lifestyles and products for more than a century.

By the turn of the 19th century, advertisers increasingly used national magazines to capture consumers’ attention and build a national marketplace.

Throughout that time, magazine pages have generally maintained an even balance of about 50 percent editorial content and 50 percent ad copy.

But now, for fashion magazines in particular, the line between editorial content and advertising is becoming increasingly less important.
The Development of the Early U.S. Magazines

- The idea of specialized magazines devoted to certain categories of readers developed throughout the nineteenth century.

- Literary magazines also emerged. The *North American Review*, for example, established the work of important writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain.
The Rise of General-Interest Magazines

- In 1821, two young Philadelphia printers, Charles Alexander and Samuel Coate Atkinson, launched the *Saturday Evening Post*

- It was the first major magazine to appeal directly to women, starting the “Lady’s Friend,”—a column that addressed women’s issues.

- During the 1800s, the weekly *Post* became the first important general-interest magazine aimed at a national audience.
  - longest-running magazine in U.S. history.
The Rise of General-Interest Magazines

**Saturday Evening Post**

When Cyrus Curtis bought the *Post* in 1897 for $1,000, it had a circulation of approximately ten thousand.

Curtis’s strategy for reinvigorating the magazine included printing popular fiction and romanticizing American virtues through words and pictures (a *Post* tradition best depicted in the three-hundred-plus cover illustrations by Norman Rockwell).
The Rise of General-Interest Magazines

- **Reader’s Digest**

The most widely circulated general-interest magazine during this period was *Reader’s Digest*.

- Started in 1922 by Dewitt Wallace and Lila Acheson Wallace for $5,000 in a Greenwich Village basement,

- *Reader’s Digest* championed one of the earliest functions of magazines: printing condensed versions of selected articles from other magazines.
The Development of Modern American Magazines

- **Postal Act of 1879**
  - Lowered postage rates
  - Increased magazine circulation
    - Advertising revenues soared.

- **Advertisers**
  - Used magazines to capture attention and build a national marketplace
The Development of Modern American Magazines

- One magazine that took advantage of these changes was *Ladies’ Home Journal*, begun in 1883 by Cyrus Curtis.

- Prior to *LHJ*, many women’s magazines had been called cookie-and-pattern publications because they narrowly confined women’s concerns to baking and sewing.

- *Ladies’ Home Journal*
  - First with a circulation of one million in 1903
The Development of Modern American Magazines

- Launched in 1886 as a magazine for “first-class families,” *Cosmopolitan* began as a literary publication, offering both general-interest articles and fiction.

The Development of Modern American Magazines

- Time During the general-interest era, national newsmagazines such as Time were also major commercial successes.

- Begun in 1923 by Henry Luce and Briton Hadden,

- Time developed a magazine brand of interpretive journalism, assigning reporter-researcher teams to cover stories while a rewrite editor would put the article in narrative form with an interpretive point of view.
The Development of Modern American Magazines

- General-interest magazines
  - Prominent after WWI through the 1950s
  - Combined investigative journalism with broad national topics
- Photojournalism
  - Gave magazines a visual advantage over radio
The Fall of General–Interest Magazines


- Dramatically, though, both magazines suspended publication. The demise of these popular periodicals at the peak of their circulations seems inexplicable, but their fall illustrates a key economic shift in media history as well as a crucial moment in the conversion to an electronically oriented culture.
In March 1974, Time Inc. launched *People*, the first successful mass market magazine to appear in decades.

Instead of using a bulky oversized format and relying on subscriptions, *People* downsized and generated most of its circulation revenue from newsstand and supermarket sales.

For content, it capitalized on our culture’s fascination with celebrities. Supported by plenty of photos, its articles were short, with about one-third as many words as those of a typical newsmagazine piece.
The Domination of Specialization

- The general trend away from mass market publications and toward specialty magazines coincided with radio’s move to specialized formats in the 1950s.

- With the rise of television in that decade, magazines ultimately reacted the same way radio did:
  - They adapted, trading the mass audience for smaller, discrete audiences that could be guaranteed to advertisers.
  - Two major marketing innovations also helped ease the industry into a new era: the development of regional and demographic editions.
Table 9.1: Top 10 Magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank/Publication</th>
<th>1972 Circulation</th>
<th>Rank/Publication</th>
<th>2011 Circulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Reader's Digest</td>
<td>17,825,661</td>
<td>1 AARP The Magazine</td>
<td>22,401,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 TV Guide</td>
<td>16,410,858</td>
<td>2 AARP Bulletin</td>
<td>22,204,197</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Woman's Day</td>
<td>8,191,731</td>
<td>3 Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>7,633,372</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>7,996,050</td>
<td>4 Game Informer Magazine</td>
<td>6,734,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Family Circle</td>
<td>7,889,587</td>
<td>5 Reader's Digest</td>
<td>5,606,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 McCall's</td>
<td>7,516,960</td>
<td>6 National Geographic</td>
<td>4,463,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 National Geographic</td>
<td>7,260,179</td>
<td>7 Good Housekeeping</td>
<td>4,339,069</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Ladies' Home Journal</td>
<td>7,014,251</td>
<td>8 Woman's Day</td>
<td>3,876,053</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Playboy</td>
<td>6,400,573</td>
<td>9 Family Circle</td>
<td>3,846,672</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Good Housekeeping</td>
<td>5,801,446</td>
<td>10 People</td>
<td>3,563,410</td>
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Regional Editions

- As television advertising siphoned off national ad revenues, magazines began introducing **regional editions**: national magazines whose content is tailored to the interests of different geographic areas. For example, *Reader’s Digest* for years had been printing different language editions for international markets.

- Other magazines adapted this idea to advertising variations and inserts.

  - Often called **split-run editions**, these national magazines tailor ads to different geographic areas.

  - Most editions of *Time, Newsweek*, and *Sports Illustrated*, for example, contain a number of pages of regional ads.
Another variation of specialization includes **demographic editions**, which target particular groups of consumers. In this strategy, market researchers identify subscribers primarily by occupation, class, and zip code.

In an experiment conducted in 1963, *Time* pioneered demographic editions by carrying advertising from a drug company that was inserted into copies of its magazine. These editions were then sent only to 60,000 doctors chosen from *Time*’s subscription rolls.

By the 1980s, aided by developments in computer technology, *Time* had also developed special editions for top management, high-income zip-code areas, and ultrahigh-income professional/managerial households.

Certain high-income zip-code editions, for instance, would include ads for more expensive consumer products.
Magazines embrace digital content.

- Webzines Online-only magazines such as Salon and Slate pioneered the Webzine format, making the Internet a legitimate source for news as well as discussion of culture and politics.
Although once viewed as the death knell of print magazines, the industry now embraces the Internet.

Magazines move online.
- Magazine companion Web sites ideal for increasing reach of consumer magazines
- Feature original content
The Domination of Specialization

- Magazines grouped by two important characteristics
  - Advertiser type
    - Consumer
    - Business or trade
    - Farm
  - Target demographics
    - Gender, age, or ethnic group
    - Audience interest area (sports, literature, tabloids)
Magazines are also broken down by target audience.

- Men and women
- Sports, entertainment, and leisure
- Age-group specific
- Elite magazines aimed at cultural minorities
- Minorities
- Supermarket tabloids
With increases in Hispanic populations, magazines appealing to Spanish-speaking readers have developed rapidly.
Contemporary commercial magazines provide essential information about politics, society, and culture, thus helping us think about ourselves as participants in a democracy.

Unfortunately, however, these magazines often identify their readers as consumers first and citizens second. With magazines’ growing dependence on advertising, controversial content sometimes has difficulty finding its way into print.

- More and more, magazines define their readers merely as viewers of displayed products and purchasers of material goods.

In the midst of today’s swirl of images, magazines and their advertisements certainly contribute to the commotion.

But good magazines also maintain our connection to words, sustaining their vital role in an increasingly electronic and digital culture.