

AMERICA'S MAGAZINE CONSUMPTION THEN AND NOW BY GENRE

We thought it would be interesting to take a look at how the average American adult's magazine reading habits have changed over the years by editorial genre. To do this, we selected three critical periods: the mid-1960s, the early-1980s, and the current scene. Using the existing audience surveys as a base, we made our own estimates of average issue readership levels for all of the measured publications, as well as many that were not included in the audience studies, such as fraternal, religious, farm, buff and Spanish language. To account for changes in survey methodologies, we took the old Simmons through-the-book findings for the mid-1960s and early-1980s and adjusted them upwards, to make them compatible with the current GfK MRI "recent reading" design. Finally, we had to account for issue cycles, for example, a typical weekly's audience counted roughly four times more than a monthly's readership in our tallies.

It's important to recognize that in the mid-1960s, the magazine publishing industry's emphasis was on *mass audience* with **Life**, **Look**, **The Saturday Evening Post** and **The Reader's Digest**, as well as Sunday magazines like **This Week** and **Parade**, all pumping out a great volume of general editorial content. The three newsweeklies were also going strong, as were mass appeal women's and home service books like **Good Housekeeping**, **Family Circle**, **McCall's** and **Better Homes and Gardens**. **TV Guide** was also a hugely popular entry at the time. Other "selective" categories—business, automotive, health, literary and travel—carved out specialized niches for themselves and were supported mainly by advertisers serving the same market segments.

But things were changing. Although their readership levels were at all-time highs—due in part to costly circulation maintenance—the mass general editorial weeklies and bi-weeklies were having trouble wooing sufficient ad revenue from marketers who increasingly preferred TV as their primary communications platform. **Life**, **Look** and **The Saturday Evening Post** faded from the scene, and were replaced in the 1970s by publications like **People**, which focused on entertainment and celebrity doings, as well as selective titles covering personal finance, food, travel, fitness, health and regional lifestyles.

The advent of cable, with its 24-hour news channels, and the expanded broadcast TV news coverage in primetime and at the local level, began to have an impact on newsweeklies in the late-1980s. A decade later, the Internet, with its huge array of general interest and selective editorial options, dealt another blow to newsweeklies, as well as some business books. Bellwether titles like **Business Week** and **U.S. News & World Report** slid into oblivion, while the money losing **Newsweek** sold for a song, and was changed

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into a clone of Tina Brown's Daily Beast online magazine in 2010. The Internet also had an obvious impact on men's interest titles, particularly the "men's sophisticate" field; if one wanted to see photos of naked women, the Internet had tons of them, free of charge.

Meanwhile, the women's service and shelter books, which had fared well while the weeklies and general interest titles were in upheaval, had to trim their unprofitable circulations. The "seven sisters" became the "six sisters" after the departure of **McCall's**, following a brief and ill-fated stint as **Rosie** (after its new "editorial director," Rosie O'Donnell) in 2002. A host of newer women's interest titles also made inroads, including **Martha Stewart Living**, **Real Simple**, **O**, **The Oprah Magazine**, **Marie Claire** and **More**, as did new fashion titles (**InStyle**, **Lucky**) and celebrity/entertainment publications (**OK!**, **In Touch**).

With this short history lesson as a background, we can look at the statistics with a better perspective. As shown in the first table, in the mid-1960s, the general editorial magazines accounted for 25% of all issue readings by adults and, if one lumped the Sunday magazines, entertainment/celebrity (mainly **TV Guide**) and newsweeklies into a broader general interest category, these four genres represented 58% of the total issues read. Fast forward to 2011, and the same four genres still account for just over 50% of audience attainment, but the general editorial and newsweekly components are mere shadows of their former glory, while the major influx of readership has come from titles in the celebrity/entertainment category. The Sunday books remain a force to be reckoned with (see first table).

The second table provides similar breakdowns for men and women; here, the general shift away from male interest publications, caused in part by competition from cable and the Internet, is more evident. The major exceptions are the sports and automotive genres and, though not shown in the table, some sporting categories, like hiking, backpacking and hunting. On the women's side, the momentum has been clearly in the entertainment/celebrity genre. The reshaping of the women's interest category, with its numerous newcomers, has kept this and the fashion genre's collective readership at stable levels (see second table).

As can be seen in both tables, the "Other" category grew from only 6% to almost 17% over this four-decade interval. The relatively high figure (16%) for the mid-1980s is a bit misleading, since it includes the tabloids (e.g. **National Enquirer**, **Star**), which at the time were peaking in circulation and popularity. Were these omitted, the "Other" category would have dropped to approximately 9%.

The growth and/or continued viability of certain selective genres was evident when we broke out the literary, travel, food, personal finance, gardening, health, regional lifestyles and certain buff publications. Together, these generated a mere 2% of all adult issue readings in the mid-1960s, but by 2011 they accounted for almost 8%.

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While celebrity gossip and entertainment is heavily covered on cable, in TV syndication and on the Internet, so far this does not seem to have impeded the appeal of magazines like **People**, **Entertainment Weekly** and **Us Weekly**, and the websites of said magazines seem heavily visited by people craving more dish. The same can be said for the sports and women's fashion categories. It remains to be seen, however, whether competition from TV and the Internet in other areas—health, cooking, travel, etc.—will eventually come into play. Health and travel channels have been tried on cable and some have failed, so this may not pose as great a competitive threat as might have seemed. More and more cooking shows are appearing on cable, but rather than negatively affecting magazines like **Bon Appétit** and **Cooking Light**, they instead seem to stimulate more interest in what is clearly a popular topic. ■

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DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT CONSUMER MAGAZINE AUDIENCES BY EDITORIAL GENRE

Mid-1960s–Early-2010s

	MID- 1960s	EARLY- 1980s	EARLY- 2010s
General Editorial	25.0%	6.8%	6.9%
Sunday Mags.	13.0	13.3	18.5
Entertainment/Celebs.	9.0	17.7	19.3
Newsweeklies	10.8	11.3	5.6
Business	8.4	8.3	4.8
General Sports	2.8	4.4	4.6
Men's Interest	3.1	2.1	1.5
Participation Sports	1.3	1.5	1.1
Automobiles	1.7	1.7	2.2
Outdoors	2.0	1.1	.8
Nature/Science	1.4	2.7	2.6
Fashion	2.5	1.8	2.7
Home Service	3.9	2.9	3.1
Women's Interest/Service	7.9	7.5	7.8
Bridal/Parenting/Baby Care	1.0	1.0	2.0
Other	6.2	15.9	16.5

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.

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DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN MAGAZINE AUDIENCES BY EDITORIAL GENRE

Mid-1960s–Early-2010s

	MEN			WOMEN		
	MID-1960s	EARLY-1980s	EARLY-2010s	MID-1960s	EARLY-1980s	EARLY-2010s
General Editorial	24.8%	6.6%	8.3%	25.4%	7.1%	5.8%
Sunday Mags.	11.7	12.8	20.3	14.5	13.9	17.3
Entertainment/Celebs.	7.9	15.0	13.3	10.2	20.8	24.2
Newsweeklies	12.6	13.5	7.0	8.8	8.9	4.5
Business	12.0	14.0	7.4	3.6	2.0	2.7
General Sports	4.2	7.0	8.2	1.1	1.5	1.9
Men's Interest	4.4	2.9	2.6	1.4	1.2	.5
Participation Sports	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.2	1.4	.5
Automobiles	2.7	2.8	4.5	.6	.4	.2
Outdoors	2.9	1.3	1.4	.8	.8	.2
Nature/Science	1.8	3.1	3.5	1.1	2.2	1.9
Fashion	.6	.5	.5	4.7	3.1	4.5
Home Service	2.0	1.7	2.0	6.1	4.2	3.9
Women's Interest/Service	2.5	1.8	1.6	14.0	13.7	12.7
Bridal/Parenting/Baby Care	.2	.4	.5	1.8	1.6	2.9
Other	8.1	15.0	17.1	5.4	17.2	16.3

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.