



NOVA

University of Newcastle Research Online

nova.newcastle.edu.au

Webb, Sarah; Fulton, Janet. " 'I want to read it in my hands': the aesthetic attraction of independent women's magazines." Published in *Australian Journalism Review* Vol. 41, Issue 2, p. 273-287 (2019)

© Webb, Sarah; Fulton, Janet, 2019. The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article is published in *Australian Journalism Review* Vol. 41, Issue 2, p. 273-287, 2019, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/ajr\\_00011\\_1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/ajr_00011_1).

Accessed from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1412700>

# **“I want to read it in my hands”: the aesthetic attraction of independent women’s magazines**

## **Abstract**

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests independent magazines are thriving within Australia’s print industry. As ‘maverick’ editors, owners and publishers are focusing more on producing the design and aesthetic aspects of their publications in response to changing reader expectations, there seems to be a demand to read independents among female readers. In particular, young adult female readers are choosing to engage with independent women’s magazines in Australia, placing particular emphasis on the aesthetic reading experience offered by the hard-copy format. To explore this phenomenon, a focus group and survey was conducted among females aged 18 to 24 years, using Blumler and Katz’s Uses and Gratification theory as the theoretical framework. The initial survey garnered findings from 300 respondents, while the focus group consisted of six participants. One key aspect found in the results is that aesthetics is central to understanding the continued appeal and use of such a medium. Other aspects include the quality of content, entertainment, escape, collection and habit, and ease of use. In an age where ‘digital’ is often regarded as the norm, young adult female readers are seeking inspiration and expression from independent women’s magazines.

**Keywords:** aesthetics; independents, women’s; magazines; niche; print.

## **Introduction**

The Australian print industry is seeing growth in its independent publishing sector (Roy Morgan Research, 2017) as editors and readers “find new ways to use and express themselves within the assumed limitations provided by the printed form” (Enriquez, 2009, p. 36). Independent magazines in particular are defying predictions that print is fading amidst digital innovations, as “a growing body of evidence suggests printed independents are thriving” (Hamilton, 2013, p. 43). Independent magazines represent a dynamic sector within Australia (Williamson, 2014) and anecdotal evidence suggests that this sector is prospering in Australia, especially among young adult female readers. Seemingly, this demographic – those presumed to place greater emphasis on online platforms – continue to find worth in print for reasons recently unexplored. Even with a small body of research, what little there is suggests that these titles are quietly thriving even as mainstream magazines falter (Roy Morgan Research, 2017). Independent women’s magazines are considered “beautifully designed, producer-owned and made print publications that have small circulation and high production value” (Enriquez, 2009, p. 29). They are “‘independent’ in spirit due to a maverick editor or publisher who leads the magazine in an exploratory, non-commercial direction” (Thomas, 2007, p. 40). In the growing area of independent publishing, Van Groll asserts that these magazines are currently “defying predictions” that print is “a fading relic of a pre-digital world” (2017, p. 1).

This article is based on research that examined if and how an aesthetic attraction exists between young adult females (aged between 18 and 24 years) and independent women's magazines, one that could potentially surpass the experience of consuming hybrid or online platforms. Often referred to as 'the global niche', independents have embraced both print and online platforms to distribute their content, taking advantage of this hybridity (Le Masurier, 2012; Hamilton, 2013). This results in "less frequent small print runs [which] could mark a greater appreciation of design elements" (Van Groll, 2017, p. 1). By placing greater emphasis on their small-scale print runs and high production values, the visual and aesthetic aspects of independents could be key to understanding the continued appeal of such publications among female readers. There is a paradox that "digital content and cultures have enabled both the democratisation and rejuvenation of one of the oldest media forms" (Le Masurier, 2012, p. 13). Le Masurier speculates on reasons for this and the appeal of independent magazines and predicts that "as mainstream magazines abandon paper for the screen, independents will be the last magazines in print, occupying 10 percent of the Australian market over the next 25 years" (ibid). Therefore, in future, the continuation of print could be partly dependent on a younger generation of readers.

By considering the attraction between young adult female readers and independent women's magazines as a form of experience, this research highlighted the different aspects regarding the place of print in their lives. Such aspects could be key to understanding the continued appeal and use of a traditional medium as part of reader's social reality, in an age where 'digital' is regarded as the norm (Ytre-Arne, 2011; 2011). The continued popularity of independents could be partly due to editors and publishers placing greater emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of their publications as a response to changing reader expectations.

The research took a mixed methods approach by conducting a survey and focus group with young Australian women. Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), which states that readers can draw personalised meanings from print media (Payne, Severn & Dozier, 1988; Sparks, 2012), was used as a guiding framework. This theory assisted in determining young female readers' motivations and purposes for reading hard-copy independent women's magazines, how they feel about these reading experiences, and provided the framework with which to examine the aesthetic attraction initiated by engaging with these magazines.

The purpose of the research was not to focus on a specific publication, but to examine the phenomenon of independent magazine reading itself among young adult female readers. Therefore, the research answered two research questions:

1. Do hard-copy independent women's magazines offer an aesthetic reading experience to their young adult female readers?
2. Is there a demand to connect aesthetically with the independent women's magazines that young adult female readers consume?

Findings from the research determined that the social group of young adult females continue to draw value from and find meaningful experiences and connections with independent women's

magazines by reading them as part of their social reality. This article is reporting on how young women in Australia value, interact and react with magazines and reports on the aesthetic appeal of these magazines as well as other key criteria.

## **Literature review**

The aesthetic experience of women's magazines has received less attention than research on other media. There are also few studies that employ U&G theory to examine this medium. Nor has the aesthetic appeal of independents been examined with a qualitative lens, whereby the researcher immerses themselves within the social group of young adult female readers. The following literature review examines the aesthetic experience and its relationship to reading and response as well as the usefulness of employing U&G as a theoretical framework.

### ***The aesthetic experience***

The term 'aesthetic' is typically associated with media such as art, literature, drama or music (Becker, 1982). However, "any object can be perceived aesthetically" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 39). Aesthetic experience is regarded as the appreciation of aesthetic value and, according to the broad view, can be found almost anywhere (Goldman, 2013). This paper defends the broad view where one can appreciate the aesthetic value of any object where artistic or design elements are emphasised.

Describing the aesthetic experience can be difficult as a reader's 'experience' is subjective and can hold various meanings. However, Shusterman identifies certain features of the aesthetic experience: "First, aesthetic experience is essentially valuable and enjoyable... Second, it is something vividly felt and subjectively savoured... Third, it is meaningful experience" (1997, p. 30). Aligned with Shusterman's first and second distinctions, Iseminger (2003) maintains that the nature of the aesthetic experience is undergone when in a certain state of mind – the state of "finding the experience... to be valuable" (ibid, p. 99). In terms of magazines, the experience is a matter of seeing and touching. To undergo an aesthetic experience in the context of reading a magazine is to recognise that reading itself is valuable and may leave lifelong impressions (Gentikow, 2005).

While aesthetic elements of reading experiences have received less attention, interpretations of emotional reactions to media have been well documented. Research on magazines can be characterised by a shift from emphases on ideology and constructions of femininity (see, for example, Ferguson, 1985; Friedan, 2001; McRobbie, 1982; Winship, 1987), to increased attention to reading as a social practice (see, for example, Currie, 1999; Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1995). However, this earlier research does not shed light on readers' interactions, values or experiences, particularly with independents. Studies such as Winships' analysis of the reader (1987) and Hermes' ethnography of magazine reading (1995) touch upon media experiences, but the field would benefit from more recent thematic and systematic analysis.

### ***Aesthetic reading and response***

According to Krieger, aesthetic elements of a text can have a role in facilitating a reading experience and triggering a cognitive response: “Any text might be subjected to an aesthetic experience, but it depends on the reader and how the reader chooses to read the text” (2000, p. 212). That is, one could read a text such as a magazine as if it were aesthetically pleasing by finding properties within it to be read intransitively. Such properties could encourage the reader to respond aesthetically to texts. Yet, to define what the aesthetic response would be and to define the characteristics in a text that appear designed to invite an aesthetic response, one should seek those features that would lead in that direction in order to make an aesthetic judgement (ibid).

By considering what the ‘aesthetic’ would be, both in reader experience and in magazines, it is important to consider Rosenblatt’s description of the aesthetic transaction, which emphasises the role of the text in “directing the attention of the reader” (1978, p. 86). Transactional Theory suggests a “mutually defining relationship between reader and text” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 122). The theory considers who readers are, what they bring to the text, the expectations they have, and the stance they choose to take as they read. Rosenblatt distinguishes between the *effere*nt stance, where the reader is concerned with what they will take from the text, and the *aesthetic stance*, where the reader focuses on the experience while reading. A reader who seeks no specific information, but the emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual experience adopts the aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1978). Therefore, “the reader remains attentive not only to the content, but also to the feelings evoked” (ibid, p. 122). Such reading would therefore be undertaken as an experience itself (Rosenblatt 1978; 1986). What can be taken from this is the agency with which a reader can approach a text, selecting certain aspects to focus on in the reading.

Iser’s Reader Response Theory makes similar claims when it describes the moments in reading that induce a thought or feeling – a response – from the reader (1978). By defining what happens during the act of reading, that is, how aesthetic experience is initiated, develops and functions, Iser maintains that reading is an active and creative process which produces the aesthetic reading experience, whereby a reader assembles meaning of a text through the senses (O’Hara & Iser, 1979). However, this paper focuses on Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance to determine whether female readers actively seek the emotional and aesthetic experience with independent women’s magazines.

### ***Considering Uses and Gratifications***

U&G theory informed the direction of this study to answer the two research questions due to its ability to discover the origins of needs of media such as magazines (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The theory offers a solid theoretical framework with which to discover motivation among individuals and groups and is instrumental in understanding the ways young adult female readers draw meaning from their reading experiences with independents.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) explain U&G as looking at individual needs that create thoughts and expectations around media, leading to different uses of a medium that inform need gratifications. This aligns with the central focus of this study: to examine key motivations for young adult females to read independent women’s magazines. However, as Payne Severn and Dozier outline, “uses and gratifications research exclusive to magazines is sparse” (1988, p. 909).

Literature examining reader motivations have also been primarily sampled from adult populations, with only a “handful” (Zerba, 2011, p. 597) focused on young adult readers and none concentrating on females alone. Therefore, this research sought to contribute to a greater understanding of the motivations behind prior quantitative conclusions (Le Masurier, 2012; Karan, Park & Xie, 2016). This understanding was achieved in this research by giving voice to female readers’ motivations for continued magazine consumption.

One key component of U&G research is that different media compete for need satisfaction; people use certain media to fulfill specific needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974; Papacharissi, 2009). As readers are free to choose the content they read and how it affects them, “motivations become more important components of reader analysis” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 14). A specific use of U&G lies in its treatment and acknowledgement of the active audience in the selective process of media to engage with (Blumler & Katz, 1974). As young adults are typically conceptualised as ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2011), one of their defining characteristics is the active audience mindset (Serazio, 2013). Therefore, U&G theory aligns with this research that looks at 18-24-year-old female readers and formed a logical fit. This argument is reinforced by several studies on U&G (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982; Bryant & Miron, 2004; Rubin, 2009).

Contemporary literature emphasises the theory’s flexibility and this inherent trait allows it to situate itself within today’s evolving media and “various media contexts” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 139). With print currently utilising both hard-copy and digital platforms, the value of this theoretical framework grows. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) posited five categories within U&G that aided in the discovery of readers’ motivations to continue to engage with print. These include cognitive needs (information seeking), affective needs (for pleasure seeking), personal integrative needs (credibility or status seeking), social integrative needs (social relationship seeking) and tension release (escape seeking). McQuail (2005) extended on this by adding media gratifications pertaining to cultural satisfaction needs (cognitive or information seeking), lifestyle expression needs (identity formation and social), occupying time (entertainment), identity formation and confirmation needs (collection and general interest), and security needs (security through knowledge).

The findings relating to the above categories were useful in drawing on the theoretical framework of U&G. The categories from Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, supported by McQuail, formed the framework of the analysis.

## **Methodology**

An explanatory mixed methods approach, primarily grounded in the qualitative methodology of an ethnography, was employed to determine whether the magazine reading experiences of young adult female readers revealed an aesthetic attraction between themselves and independents. The methods in the design consisted of two sequential phases: a focus group and survey. Combining a focus group and survey compensated for any limitations in the two forms and capitalised on their strengths. The online survey accompanying the focus group provided quantitative context for the primarily qualitative study and offered a quantitative description of attitudes, opinions and

experiences of young adult females. This allowed the research to explore discoveries in more depth, which gave valuable insights into the reading experiences of young adult female readers.

Convenience sampling (Stoneman & Brunton-Smith, 2015) was used to recruit participants from the University of Newcastle in Australia. The survey was completed using Survey Monkey and a shareable link was posted on university social media channels for individuals to anonymously access. Additionally, an email from the University was sent to identifying female students between the ages of 18 to 24 at the time the survey took place. Over a four-week period, there were 300 viable responses out of 377 participants. The survey featured closed-ended questions exploring participants' reading frequencies of independents in Australia, how they experience them and for what reasons. Many questions in the survey also gave participants the chance to make comments, allowing for the collection of additional qualitative data. For the focus group, six female participants – the recommended amount by Hall and Hall (2004) – were recruited via convenience sampling. At the end of the survey, respondents could email an expression of interest to participate in the focus group at a later stage. Since survey respondents were filtered to only allow young adult females aged 18-24-years, potential focus group participants were already within the required demographic. The focus group was 90 minutes long and was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the focus group and descriptive data analysis for the survey<sup>1</sup>.

Results from this analysis included several findings including the one reported on here, which is that the key motivations for reading these magazines - aesthetic appeal, quality of content, collection and habit, ease of use, entertainment, and escape - align closely with categories from U&G theory. The following analysis is structured using these key motivations.

## Findings and discussion<sup>2</sup>

The strength of these independent magazines<sup>3</sup> lies in the active way in which readers choose and utilise their magazines, and thus find titles that connect with the personal self. Specifically, data from the survey and focus group demonstrated that, for these readers, independents are more than just reading a text; they are a chance for a rich reading experience. Hard-copy independents are an active medium, “as they call for the reader’s active participation and attention, with the reader fully in control of decision-making about what and how to read and for how long” (Consterdine, 2014, p. 16). Such publications fulfil different needs which have been adapted to the interests of their readers, and this specialisation allows each magazine to get close to readers

---

<sup>1</sup> Due to the relatively small focus group sample and convenience sampling used in the anonymous survey, generalisations cannot be made to a wider population consisting of 18-24-year-old females in Australia. Therefore, the implications drawn in this article are only specific to the experiences of the sample studied.

<sup>2</sup> There were some major points that resonated within the transcript and key themes that were identified and triangulated with quantitative findings from the survey. Therefore, illustrative quotations have been used in the report to allow participants' voices to emerge and to portray multiple perspectives from the complexity of motivations. These quotations have been selected as the subject matter of each quote was supported by other participants and can be further supported by findings from the survey. All names used in the reporting of the focus group and survey data are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the research was not to focus on a specific publication, but to examine the phenomenon of independent magazine reading itself among young adult female readers. Publications mentioned in the focus group transcript and survey were *APHRA*, *Donna Hay*, *Frankie*, *Orenda*, *Peppermint*, *RUSSH*, *Smith Journal*, *Yen* and *WHITE Magazine*.

with specific attitudes. This preference for niche content is reflected in the range of motivations for reading magazines.

As noted earlier, there were six specific motivation criteria that emerged from this research: content; aesthetics; entertainment; escape; collection and habit; and, ease of use. Most criteria can align with Katz, Gurevitch and Haas' (1973) five categories within U&G including cognitive needs (information seeking), affective needs (for pleasure seeking), personal integrative needs (credibility or status seeking), social integrative needs (social relationship seeking) and tension release (escape seeking) (ibid). The following results have been separated to address each key motivation criteria discovered in the research.

### ***Aesthetics (affective need)***

The first motivation for reading independents among participants in the focus group and survey was the aesthetic elements, particularly with the hard-copy platform. This furthers Bourdieu's claim that "any object can be perceived aesthetically" (2010, p. 39). Responses from this study ranged from general look and feel, to design work such as photographs and layouts.

When survey respondents were asked why they buy or read hard-copy independents, 34.67% (n=104) selected "They are aesthetically engaging" while 36% (n=108) selected "They offer a tactile experience". This particular motivation reflects Zerba's (2011) findings about why the young adult population read magazines, although Zerba's work does not specifically focus on young adult females. Much like participants in this research project, those who participated in Zerba's study emphasised the importance of the magazine format style, colour, art and photography – aesthetic aspects and tangible elements that draw them to read such publications.

In terms of tactility, focus group participants said the overall look and feel of an independent is key in their decision making to buy and/or read one. This choice is based primarily on the design of the magazine cover. Participant 1 described this way of thinking with the following:

I like the smell and touch of an independent magazine, it reminds me of a book... I love looking at the front cover no matter what it is... I just think about how much they redesigned it.

Participant 2 shared this sentiment, emphasising their perceived authentic nature:

I'm very used to the Frankie aesthetic... it's the experience of sitting down with something that does feel like it's been a bit more crafted because it's so unique and authentic... literally just turning the page is nice because it feels nice and all the pictures are really lovely... it's really aesthetically pleasing.

Photography and art also emerged as key aesthetics. Focus group participants reported that publications should be capitalising on these internally-oriented gratifications. Furthermore, because the hard-copy magazine is inherently aesthetically pleasing, participants reported using them as decorative elements within their homes. Some focus group participants display their magazine collections on coffee or bedside tables or store them where they can take on both a decorative and practical function by providing nice-looking, easy-access reading materials:



With independent women's magazines that are quite niche... when you collect them and display them around your home... I think it says a lot about who you are as a person and I like that... it makes your home a home because you've got that little part of yourself displayed and when people walk in they can sort of tell who you are... almost like it's an extension of your personality. (Participant 3)

However, this 'accessory' feature could undermine the magazine's primary purpose – to be read. This use aligns with McQuail's (2005) lifestyle expression media gratification. Essentially, by choosing what magazines to display in one's household, participants are choosing which lifestyle they wish to promote through such displays, thus aligning with identity formation and social gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000; McQuail, 2005; Kilian, Hennigs & Langner, 2012).

Regarding the overall look of the hard-copy magazine, five focus group participants were attracted to strong design elements within the aesthetic motivation for reading independents:

It's not just the aesthetically pleasing parts of them, but it's sort of easier to experience independent women's magazines in a visual sense. (Participant 3)

Others in the focus group expressed an appreciation for such aesthetics, as did respondents from the survey. Of the 48% (n=144) who prefer to read hard-copy independents and the 14.33% (n=43) who prefer to read both platforms, 22.67% (n=68) selected "The design is appealing". Compared to 11.33% (n=34) of respondents who prefer online independents and 14.33% (n=43) who prefer both platforms, only 4% (n=12) selected "The design is appealing". This is an 18.67% difference in preference, as respondents favoured the design elements found in hard-copy independents.

This motivation reflects a gratification factor as described by Jere and Davis (2011): exploration. For example, Participant 3 (20-year-old female) in the focus group said they "like a sleek, minimalist design" and "like that journey of discovery".

### ***Collection and habit (personal integrative need)***

The second motivation that surfaced among both focus group members and survey respondents for reading independents related to collection habits, such as subscribing, which indicates regularity being prized by some of the participants. This motivation reflects McQuail's (2005) identity formation and confirmation media gratification. Focus group participants routinely read out of general interest. However, Participant 4 felt emotionally attached to independents, especially Australian publication *Yen*, when it was in production:

I read *Yen* when it was in publication... I haven't found a magazine that really does what *Yen* did... I just feel like I'm missing something... I might go and explore another independent women's magazine having experienced that loss, because it's just annoying that they're gone... I feel like I've lost like a friend or something... it was just part of a ritual and now it's gone and I'm very disappointed.

Participant 2 said her interest in reading independents extends on the 'ritual' aspect, as she subscribes to *Frankie*:

I got gifted a subscription so now it just turns up in the mail which is really handy because then I don't have to worry about waiting and looking at the calendar to see when it comes out... I just know it's going to come to me, which I quite like.

Interestingly, in the survey, reading habits rarely emerged in terms of subscriptions and personal collections: 91% (N=273) of respondents did not subscribe to hard-copy or online independents and 82.33% (N=247) did not collect them. The survey indicates that there is a certain amount of young adult females still reading hard-copy independents (36%, N=108), but are not interested enough to buy or collect them. This could be partly due to the expense associated with purchasing a hard-copy magazine, or subscribing to either the print or online platform, as reflected in the survey findings. Of the 82.33% (n=247) of participants who did not collect these types of magazines, 36.67% (n=110) identified "expense" as the reason why. Likewise, of the 91% (n=273) who do not subscribe to either platform, 54.67% (n=164) identified "expense" as the reason.

Ultimately, this motivation discovery of 'collection' in the present study reinforces Flavian and Gurrea's (2009) finding that when reading out of habit, readers also feel hard-copy and online platforms are interchangeable.

### **Content (cognitive need)**

Though 'content' could be seen as a simple and obvious motivation, participants in the focus group and survey reported that they read Australian independents because they are drawn to the content elements unique to the medium. Of the 300 survey respondents, 81% (n=243) enjoy the content that independents produce. With these figures, content plays a big role in determining whether a reader will read an independent. This motivation emerged in two distinct ways in the focus group: some read for niche content that appeals to their interests, while others were drawn because of their aesthetic appreciation for a variety of content including photography and designs.

Focus group participants who are after niche content offered reasons for seeking out these titles. For example, Participant 2 reads *Frankie* because she loves photography and art.

What I like about Frankie... I know a few of the issues have photos and illustrations and I quite like that.

This reflects the inspiration motivation that Carter (2013) discovered regarding the uses and gratifications that niche content readers seek. In terms of independents offering a variety of content, Participant 4 read *Yen* because she enjoys content that covers diverse topics and genres that can be explored through design and layout:

That's what I liked about Yen, it just gave me the beauty... they have the Frankie perspective with journalism with your really substance articles.

These motivations align with McQuail's (2005) cultural satisfaction media gratification. As Jere and Davis discovered in their research concerning the motivations of women's magazine readers, "the respondents agreed strongly with statements describing the rich content of magazines" (2011, p. 20), which related to U&G media-use typologies, with "content gratifications... predominant[ing]" (ibid. p. 21). This applies to the motivations that focus group and survey participants reported in this category. Therefore, the dimension of this motivation category, content, seems to align closely with cognitive, or, information-seeking gratifications (McQuail, 2005; Flavian & Gurrea, 2009).

A topic that emerged within this motivation category materialised in a considerable amount of organic conversation in the focus group: advertisements. There was a distaste for both print and online ads. Participants claimed that advertisements within independents diminished their appreciation for the content and distracts them from a fulfilling reading experience. Participant 1 finds ads to be distracting and irrelevant to the reader:

When you're scrolling, it's just like, great... the article is up with pictures of irrelevant ads.

This contention received support from others in the focus group. Participant 2 agreed that the advertisements she sees "are annoying", especially if they are found in hard-copy independents: "I just can't read magazines with ads.... often the designer ads are cool, but it's still just an ad." This distaste could be due to the perceived inauthentic nature of advertising:

Magazines like *Frankie* don't have ads on the front cover and maybe that's because more classy magazines are the ones that don't have all the ads on them... it might be the quality aspect of it and I don't know if that's telling about the nature of independent magazines. (Participant 5)

In the qualitative comment section of the survey, one of the reasons respondents do not read online independents was due to advertisements. One respondent expanded on this with: "I personally hate reading large articles from a screen with advertisements covering most of it!". Several focus group participants also communicated a frustration with advertisements online, especially videos:

You can't get out of watching it, so I just leave the site because I can't be bothered reading the article if I have to go through this... we can't avoid it online whereas in a magazine you can. (Participant 2)

### ***Ease of use (cognitive need)***

Another motivation theme that participants reported was a fundamental one: the ease with which content can be consumed and accessed. As Venkatesh states, "ease of use is an important factor influencing user acceptance and usage behavior of [media]" (2000, p. 342). Focus group Participant 4 stated:

Accessibility is a huge thing because if you can't access them, how can you enjoy the actual experience of holding them and reading them?

Other focus group participants and survey responses echoed this notion. In the survey, 61% (n=183) of respondents identified that they could easily access hard-copy independents, with 32% (n=96) accessing them monthly. This finding suggests that female participants' perceived ease of use is an important factor influencing one's motivation to read independent women's magazines.

### ***Entertainment (affective need)***

Focus group participants mentioned that they read independents also as a means of entertainment or enjoyment, a finding also reported on by others (see, for example, Payne, et al., 1988; Kilian, et al., 2012). Independents were considered by focus group participants to be a viable source of entertainment, especially if they were waiting somewhere. Participant 1 specifically stated:

I flick through *Frankie* when I go to my local library... I'm always drawn to it, it's fun.

This response aligns with the commonly referenced U&G media-use motivation of occupying time (Payne, et al., 1988; Ruggiero, 2000; McQuail, 2005), which is commonly associated with entertainment objectives. Furthermore, these statements align with McQuail's (2005) "filling time" media gratification. The presence of this motivation signals that these magazines provide content that young adult females consider entertaining and the medium is, therefore, fulfilling their role as initiators in the U&G relationship between magazines and consumers.

### ***Escape (tension release)***

Participants reported that they often turn to independents to escape their daily life and routines. This motivation is established in reading magazines for relaxation, a frequently cited media-use typology associated with such publications (Ruggiero, 2000). Consterdine posits that "a range of emotional and behavioural consequences flow outwards from the fact that readers strike up personal relationships with their favourite magazines and these consequences form some of the proof of that engagement and involvement" (2014, p. 22). Participant 3 said the following:

My experience with magazines is that when I want to treat myself, I go and buy a hard-copy magazine and that signals to me that I'm taking time out and just relaxing.

Other focus group participants agreed and discussed the key role that independents have when it comes to various leisure activities they engage in, as did the survey respondents. Respondent 19 wrote: "I prefer a hard copy (sic) it feels more luxurious and as if I am committing to time for myself e.g. in the bath, laying on the beach etcetera". Respondent 25 stated something similar: "I prefer to take time out, sit down with something I can turn pages, earmark articles/pics etc". According to Consterdine, readers can form intimate connections with their preferred hard-copy magazines because they both engage and inform and describes this experience as the "magazine moment" (2014, p. 22).

The magazine moment was described warmly by both focus group and survey participants and was treasured as a break from everyday life. Therefore, the magazine moment often took place in a relaxed environment where participants combined the act of reading a magazine with other

relaxing activities. While Flavian and Gurra (2009) found that readers consider both print and digital platforms to be useable options when reading as a leisure activity, the present study found that participants preferred to read hard-copy independents for the purpose of leisure.

## Conclusion

This mixed methods research examined whether an aesthetic attraction exists between young adult female readers and independent women's magazines in Australia. The data revealed that young women's reading experience of these magazines, at least for the participants in this research, can be aesthetic in nature, particularly with hard-copy magazines. The dimensions of such publications were considered important for the overall reading experience as well as the visual elements: high quality designs, layouts and photography and art on high quality paper offered an aesthetic experience, which online content can find difficult to compete with. Both the focus group discussion and survey responses support this contention. The data also revealed that there is a demand to connect aesthetically with independent women's magazines, but other motivations were also revealed including content, entertainment, escape, collection and habit, and ease of use, each of which fall into four of five categories posited by Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973). Aesthetics were found to be a primary 'need', but not necessarily a 'demand' when reading. Essentially, aesthetics makes a magazine more appealing to young adult female readers; however, when aesthetics is not integrated into a magazine, like in an online environment, other key motivation criteria (as outlined above) may fulfil one's reading experience with an independent women's magazine.

One lesson emerging from this study is that young adult female readers enjoy a close relationship with the independents they choose to consume. The reading experiences of this age group and gender therefore offers ever-expanding, data rich opportunities for scholars and practitioners alike to discern their reading habits and motivations for when consuming independent women's magazines in the Australian print industry.

## References

- Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- Blumler, J., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communications*. Beverly Hills, Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London, Routledge.
- Bryant, J., & Miron, D. (2004). Theory and research in mass communication. *Journal of Communication*, 1(1), 662-704.
- Carter, C. (2013). *Come away with me: the uses and gratifications of leisure travel magazine readership*. Columbia, University of Missouri Press.
- Consterdine, G. (2014). *Proof of performance: making the case for magazine media*. Fipp Limited.

Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., & Woollacott, J. (1982). The study of the media: theoretical approaches. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran., & J. Woollacott, *Culture, society and the media* (pp. 6-25). London: Methuen.

Currie, D. (1999). *Girl talk: adolescent magazines and their readers*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Enriquez, J. (2009). Picking up the pages: an analysis of the materiality of magazines. *Arna: the journal of the University of Sydney Arts Students Society*, 1(1), 28-38.

Ferguson, M. (1985). *Forever feminine: women's magazines and the cult of femininity*. Aldershot, Gower.

Flavian, C., & Gurree, R. (2009). Users' motivations and attitude towards the online press. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 26(3), 164-174.

Frazer, E. (1987). Teenage girls reading Jackie. *Media, culture and society*, 9(4), 407-425.

Friedan, B. (2001). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York, W. W Norton & Company.

Gentikow, B. (2005). Exploring media experiences: a new approach to reception theory and empirical studies. Paper presented to 1st European Communication Conference, Amsterdam, Netherlands, November 24-26. Retrieved May 22, 2017, from <http://www.ecc2005.nl>

Goldman, A. (2013). The broad view of aesthetic experience. *The journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 71(4), 323-333.

Hall, I., & Hall, D. (2004). *Evaluation and social research: introducing small-scale practice*. Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hamilton, C. (2013). Don't look back. In E. Stinson, *By the book? Contemporary publishing in Australia* (pp. 43-58). Clayton, Monash University Publishing.

Hermes, J. (1995). *Reading women's magazines: an analysis of everyday media use*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Iseminger, G. (2003). Aesthetic experience. In J. Levinson, *The Oxford handbook of aesthetics* (pp. 99-116). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. John Hopkins University Press.

Jere, M., & Davis, S. (2011). An Application of uses and gratifications theory to compare consumer motivations for magazine and Internet usage among South African women magazine readers. *Southern African business review*, 15(1), 1-27.

Karan, K., Park, C., & Xie, W. (2016). Online women's magazines: differences in perceptions between print and online magazines among female readers. *Advances in journalism and communication*, 4(1), 31-42.

Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J. Blumler., & E. Katz, *The uses of mass communication: current perspectives on gratifications research* (pp. 19-34). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American sociological review*, 38(2), 164-181.

Kilian, T., Hennigs, N., & Langner, S. (2012). Do millennials read books or blogs? Introducing media usage typology of the internet generation. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 29(2), 114-124.

Krieger, M. (2000). My travels with the aesthetic. In M. Clark, *Revenge of the aesthetic: the place of literature in theory today* (pp. 208-236). California: University of California Press.

Le Masurier, M. (2012). Independent magazines and the rejuvenation of print. *International journal of cultural studies*, 15(4), 383-398.

McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory*. London, Sage.

McRobbie, A. (1982). An ideology of adolescent femininity. In B. Waites, *Popular culture: past and present* (pp. 263-283). London: Croom Helm.

O'Hara, D., & Iser, W. (1979). The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Culture*. 38(1), 88.

Papacharissi, Z. (2009). Uses and gratifications. In D. Stacks., & M. Salwen, *An integrated approach to communication theory and research* (pp. 137-152). New York: Routledge.

Payne, G., Severn, J., & Dozier, D. (1988). Uses and gratifications motives as indicators of magazine readership. *Journalism & mass communication quarterly*, 65(4), 909-913.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: the transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1986). The aesthetic transaction. *Journal of aesthetic education*, 20(4), 122-127.

Roy Morgan Research. (2017). Magazines: Roy Morgan readership results. Retrieved May 21, 2017, from <http://www.roymorgan.com/~media/files/readership/2017/q1%202017/201703-australian-readership-results-march-2017.pdf?la=en>.

Rubin, A. (2009). Uses-and-gratifications perspective on media effects. In J. Bryant., & M. Oliver, *Media effects: advances in theory and research* (pp. 165-184). New York: Routledge.

Ruggiero, T. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass communication and society*, 3(1), 3-37.

Serazio, M. (2013). Selling (digital) millennials: the social construction and technological bias of a consumer generation. *Television & new media*, 16(7), 599-615.

Shusterman, R. (1997). The end of aesthetic experience. *Journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 55, 29-41.

Sparks, G. (2012). Uses and gratifications of Elihu Katz. In E. Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory* (pp. 357-365). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Stoneman, P., & Brunton-Smith, L. (2015). Quantitative research. In N. Gilbert., & P. Stoneman, *Researching social life* (pp. 80-95). London: Sage.

Thomas, S. (2007). Zeroing in on contemporary, independent visual arts magazines. *Art documentation: journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 26(1), 40-50.

Van Groll, N. (2017). A look at independent magazine publishing. Retrieved May 21, 2017, from <https://writersedit.com/look-independent-magazine-publishing/>.

Venkatesh, V. (2000). Determinants of perceived ease of use: integrating control, intrinsic motivation, and emotion into the technology acceptance model. *Information systems research*, 11(4), 342-365.

Williamson, R. (2014). Australian special-interest magazines: a case study in community formation and survival. *Media international Australia*, 150(1), 122-129.

Winship, J. (1987). *Inside women's magazines*. London, Pandora Press.

Ytre-Arne, B. (2011). "I want to hold it in my hands": readers' experiences of the phenomenological differences between women's magazines online and in print. *Media, culture & society*, 33(3), 467-477.

Ytre-Arne, B. (2011). Women's magazines and their readers: the relationship between textual features and practices of reading. *European journal of cultural studies*, 14(2), 213-228.

Zerba, A. (2011). Young adults' reasons behind avoidances of daily print newspapers and their ideas for change. *Journalism & mass communication quarterly*, 88(3), 597-614.