

Analyzing the Websites of American Magazines



THE **b**IVINGS GROUP
strategy.technology.impact

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I. Introduction

As a corollary to the most recent installment of The Bivings Group's media studies, "America's Newspapers and the Internet: Threat or Opportunity?", The Bivings Group conducted the following research on the 50 most circulated commercial magazines in the United States. By analyzing the websites of these publications and comparing the results with last year's examination of magazine websites, we can evaluate the degree to which America's magazines are improving their use of the Internet and Web 2.0 tools.

In this study, our researchers evaluated magazine websites based on the presence or lack of 15 unique Web features. These results indicate that across nearly all the categories, America's magazines are making better use of the Internet than they were last year. However, magazines still lag significantly in their use of the Web when compared to America's newspapers.

II. Summary of Findings

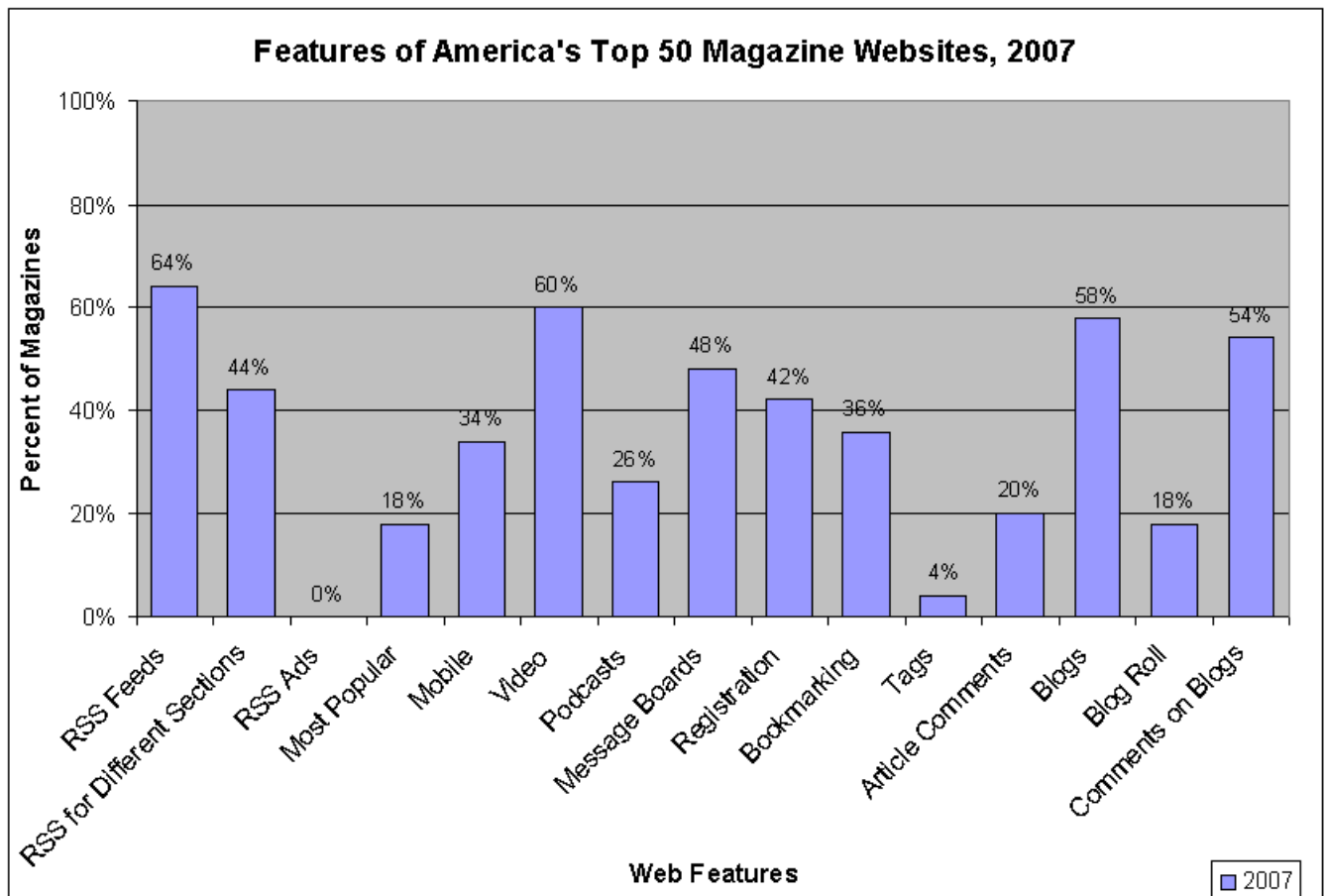
- Sixty-four percent of the magazine websites researched offer RSS feeds. Forty-four percent of the websites have unique feeds for different sections, while no websites embed advertisements in their RSS feeds. Thirty-one of these feeds (97 percent) are partial feeds, while *Time* magazine offers full text RSS feeds.
- Eighteen percent of the websites¹ offer a "most popular" feature, which shows the most read, most emailed or most commented stories each day.
- Thirty-four percent of the websites have content for mobile devices, showing a 20 percent improvement since 2006.
- Video usage nearly doubled in 2007, with 60 percent of the magazine websites we researched now offering video content. In 2006, just 34 percent of the websites offered this feature.
- The use of message boards remained nearly constant compared to 2006 results. Nearly half (48 percent) of magazine websites are now using forums or message boards on their sites.
- The usage of required registration increased since last year from 38 percent to 42 percent.
- Bookmarking increased substantially in 2007. Thirty-six percent of magazine websites now offer bookmarking features, compared to just 14 percent in 2006. Fifteen websites (30 percent) use external bookmarking, such as del.icio.us, three websites (six percent) use internal bookmarking, and just one website, *Sports Illustrated*, uses both internal and external bookmarking features.
- Tagging was the only category to decrease in 2007. While three magazines used tag clouds in 2006, just two publications, *Parenting* and *US Weekly* are currently offering tag clouds on their websites.

¹ Throughout the study, reference to "magazines" in general refers only to the 50 magazines analyzed in our research, not the entire grouping of American magazines as a whole.

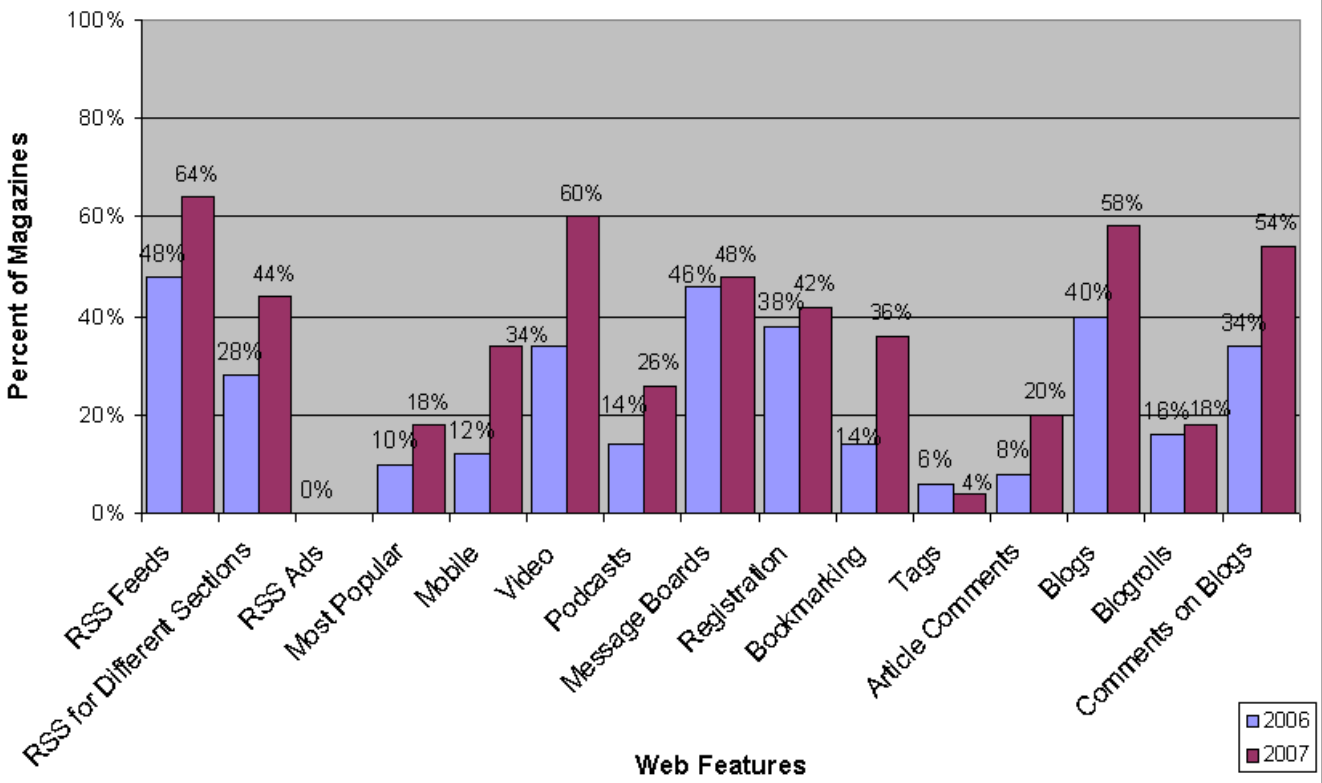
- More magazines are using reporter blogs in 2007 than in 2006. Fifty-eight percent of the magazines researched now offer reporter blogs on their sites, compared to just 40 percent in 2006. Ninety three percent of these blogs allow reader comments, while just 31 percent use blogrolls, or links to external blogs.
- Newspapers fared better than magazines in nearly every category in 2007. The only exception is the use of tags; four percent of magazines use tags compared to just one percent of newspapers.

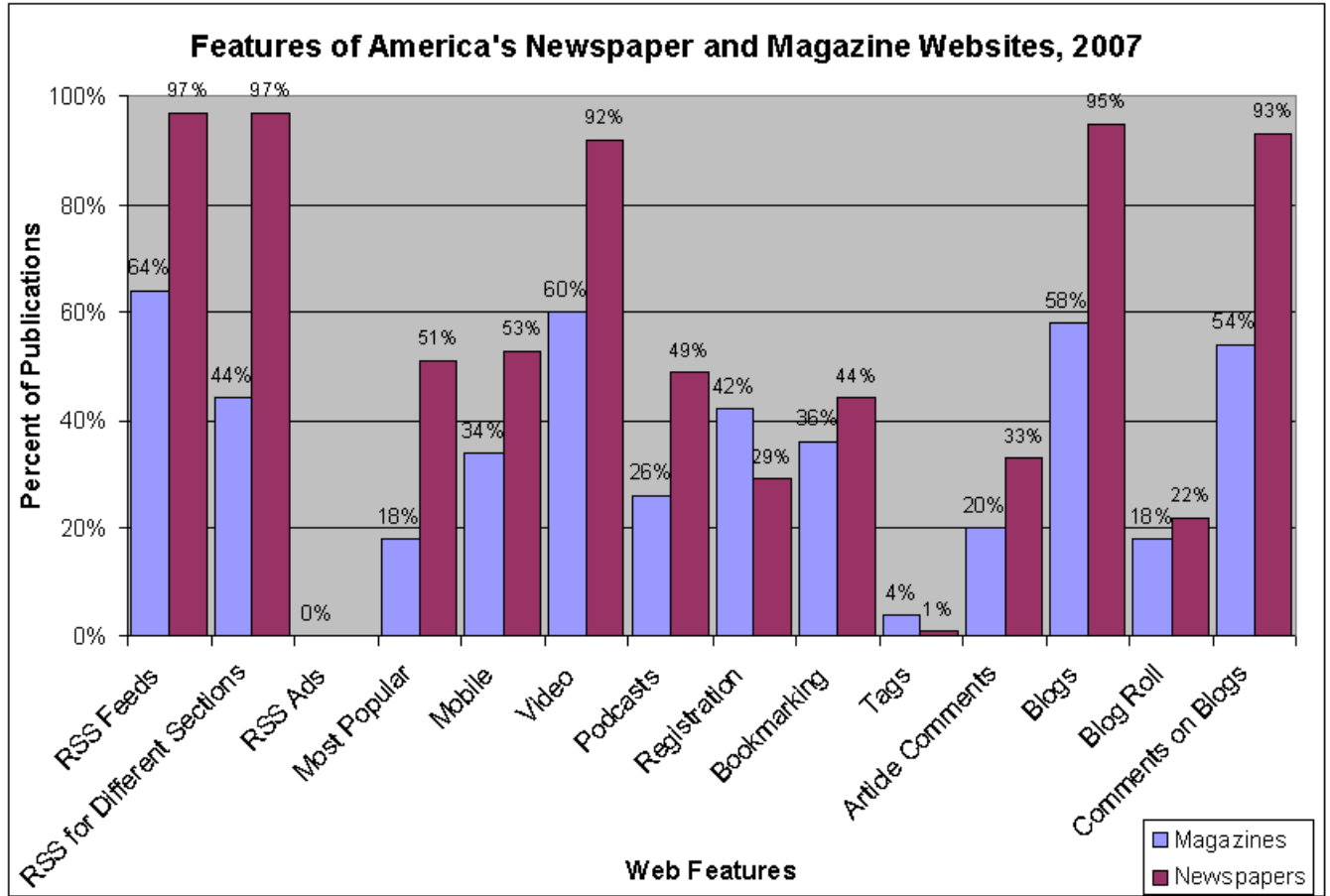
Aggregated Graphs

The following graphs demonstrate these findings. More detailed graphs follow.



Features of America's Magazine Websites, 2006 vs. 2007





III. Methodology

The Bivings Group researched and analyzed the websites of the top 50 commercial magazines in America, based on circulation figures from the Magazine Publishers of America (MPA)² for 2006. To determine the degree to which these magazines are using the Internet, we evaluated their sites based on the presence or absence of the following elements:

- **RSS Feed:** Does the website offer an RSS feed? If yes, is it a full or partial feed? *Note that this does not consider RSS feeds for reporter blogs, only for the newspaper's content.*
- **RSS Feed for Different Sections:** If the website offers RSS, does it divide the feeds into different sections?
- **RSS Feed Includes Ads:** If the website offers RSS, do the feeds include ads?
- **Most Popular:** Does the website offer a "Most Popular" function? This can be any feature that keeps track of and displays the "most popular", "most read", or "most emailed" articles, blog posts, or media pieces of the day.
- **Video:** Does the website offer video content?
- **Podcast:** Does the website offer podcasts?
- **Tags:** Does the website use tags to search and organize articles?
- **Reporter Blogs:** Does the website offer reporter blogs?
- **Reporter Blog Comments:** If the website has reporter blogs, can readers comment on the blogs?
- **Blogroll:** If the website has reporter blogs, do the blogs contain links to external blogs?
- **Mobile Version:** Does the site offer an alternative version or content designed to be viewed on mobile devices?
- **Comments on Articles:** Can users post comments on articles?
- **Registration Required:** Is registration required to view articles? If so, is registration free or paid?
- **Bookmarking:** Does the website offer a bookmarking function? Is it internal (i.e. save the article on the website) or external (i.e. send the article to a *del.icio.us* account).
- **Message Boards:** Does the website offer message boards or forums?

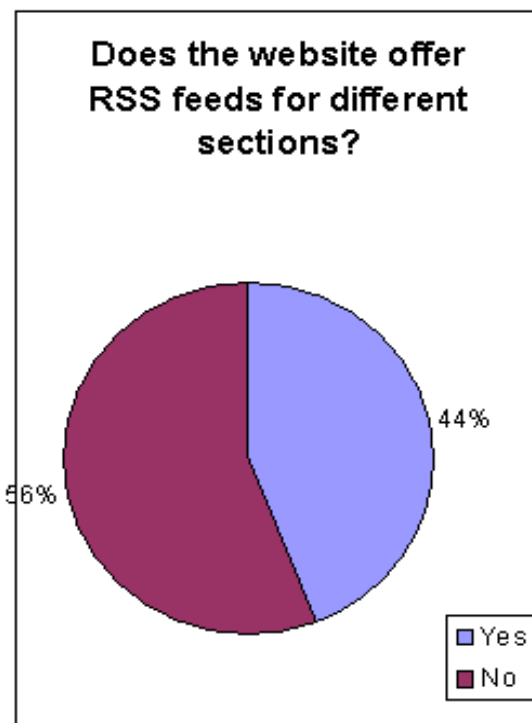
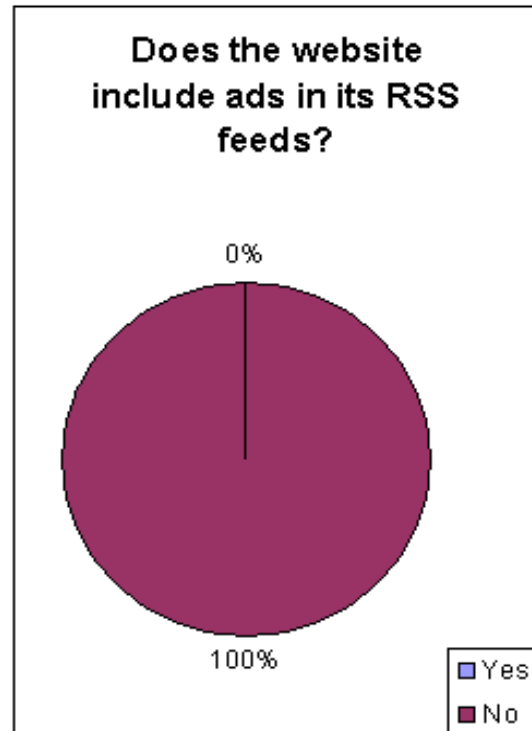
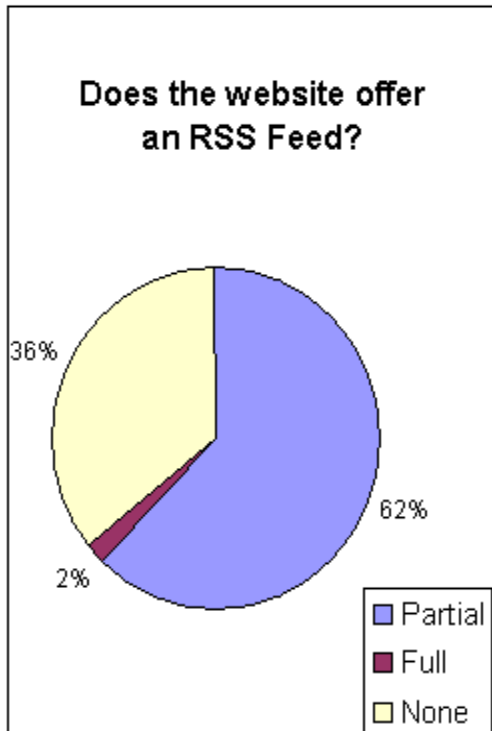
² Circulation data can be found at this URL:
http://www.magazine.org/circulation/circulation_trends_and_magazine_handbook/22175.cfm

The list of magazines we researched can be viewed in Appendix 1. We omitted several of the publications in the MPA's top 50 from our research. These magazines included *Playboy*, whose content we considered inappropriate for professional research; various *AARP* and *AAA* publications, which we did not consider commercial publications; *Woman's World*, which did not have a website, and *First for Women*, which only offers subscription services rather than content online. To make up for omitting these publications, we extended our research to the top 57 magazines, although we only researched 50 publications in total.

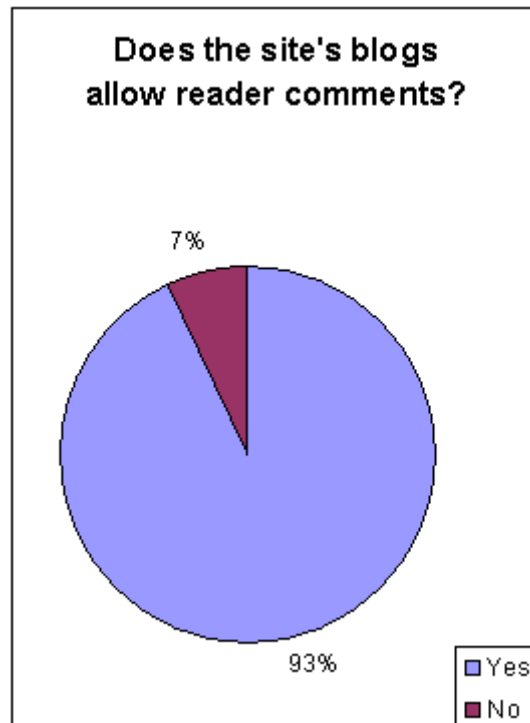
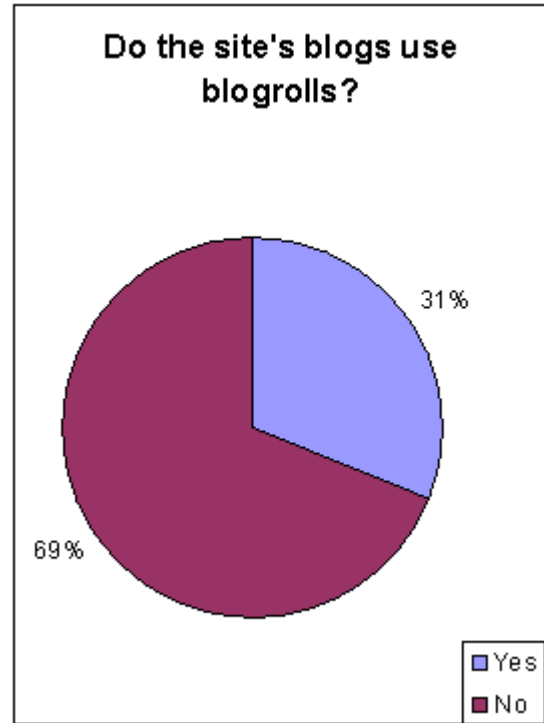
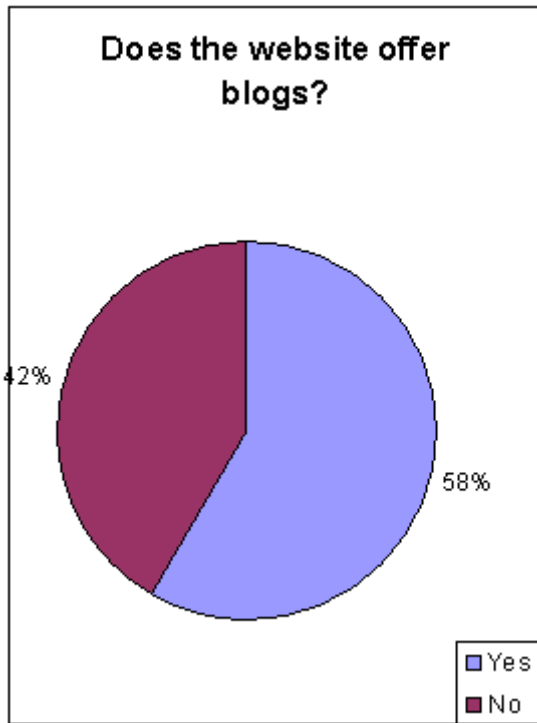
Data collected from the magazine websites was obtained during the period August 1 through August 15, 2007, and thus represents a snapshot in time rather than evolving trends.

IV. Individual Graphs

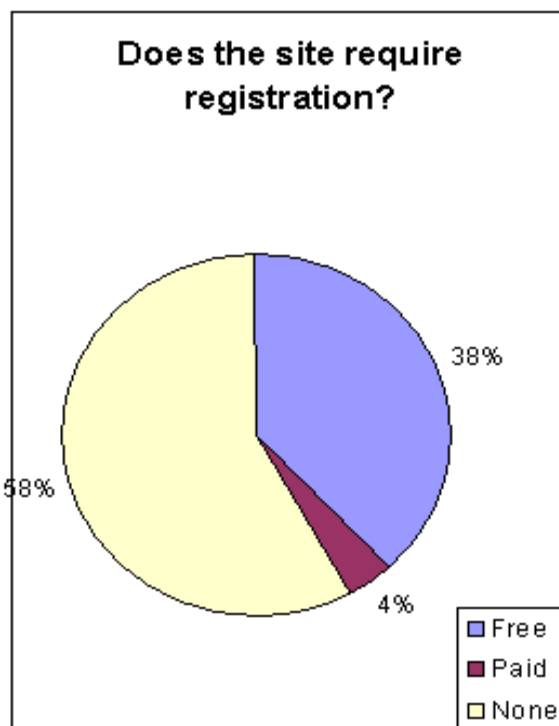
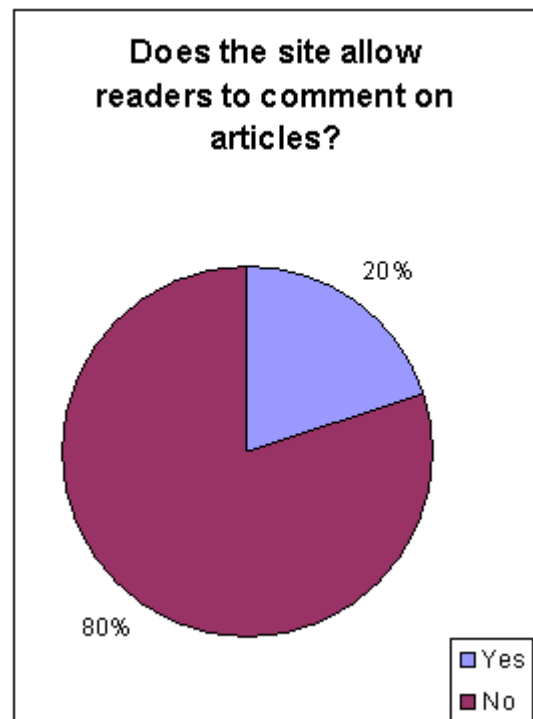
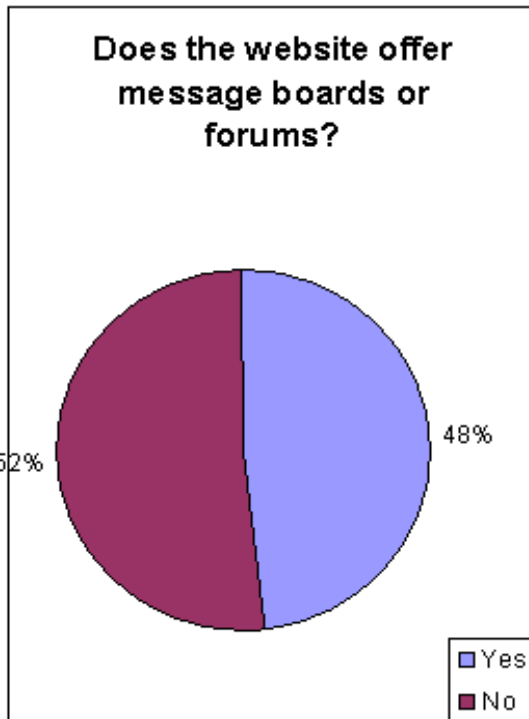
1. RSS



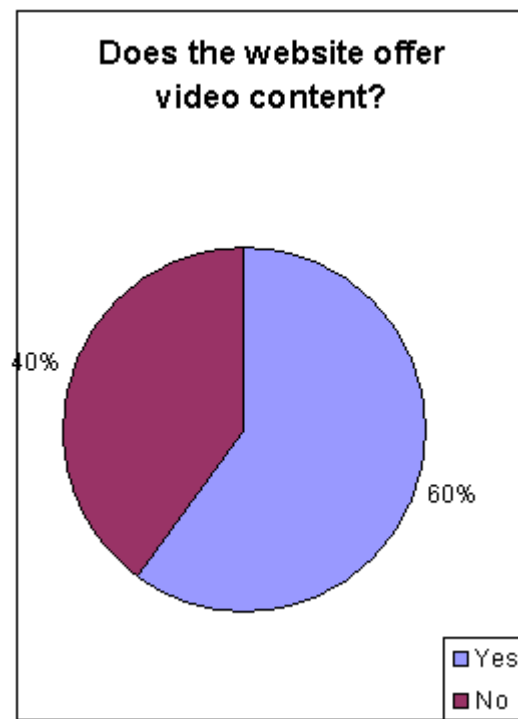
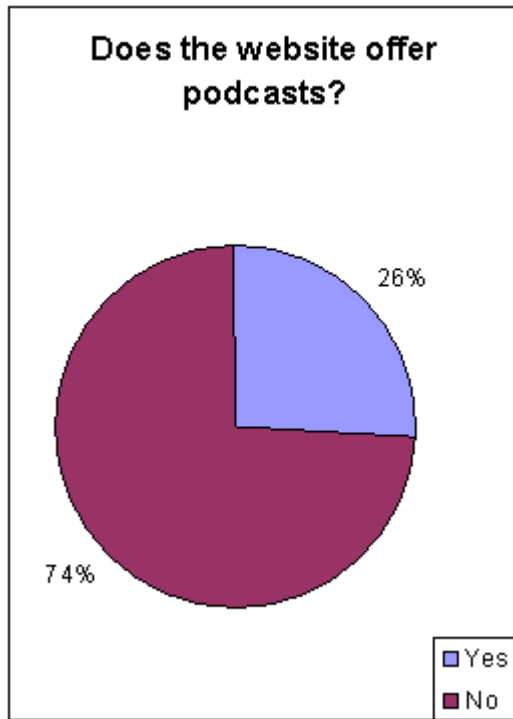
2. Blogs



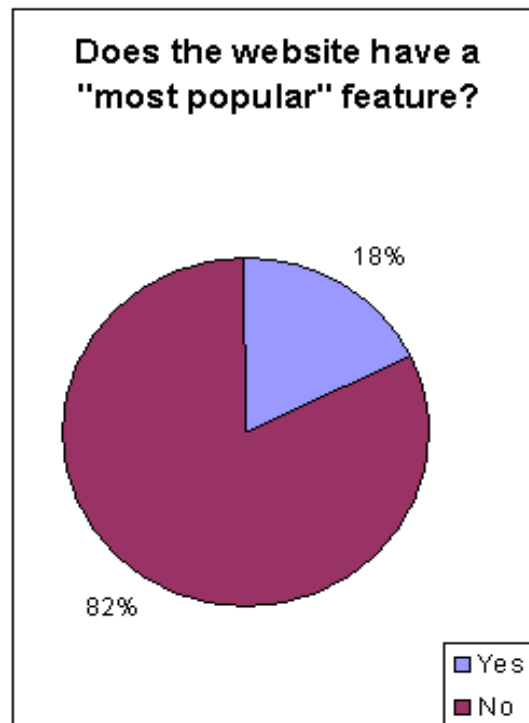
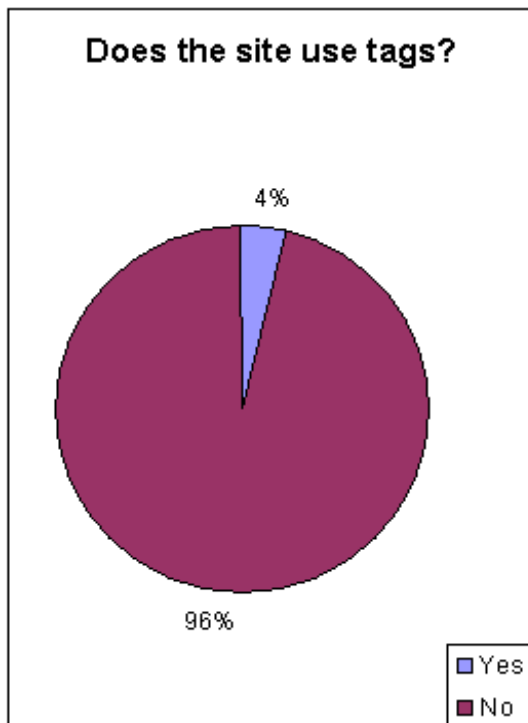
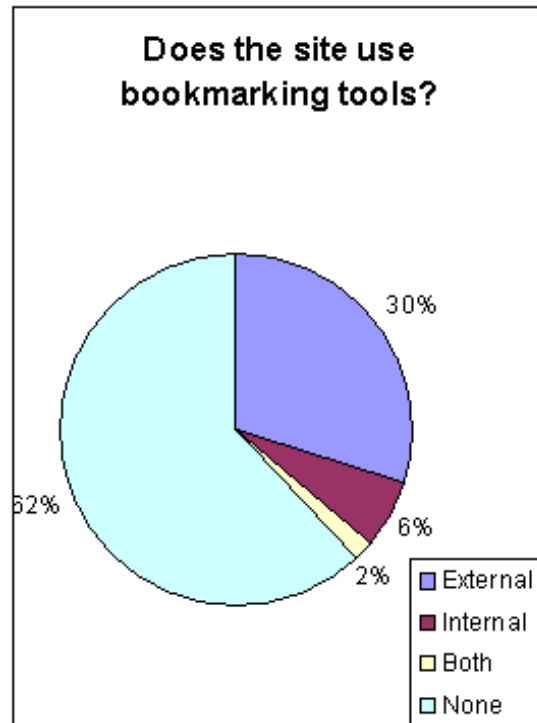
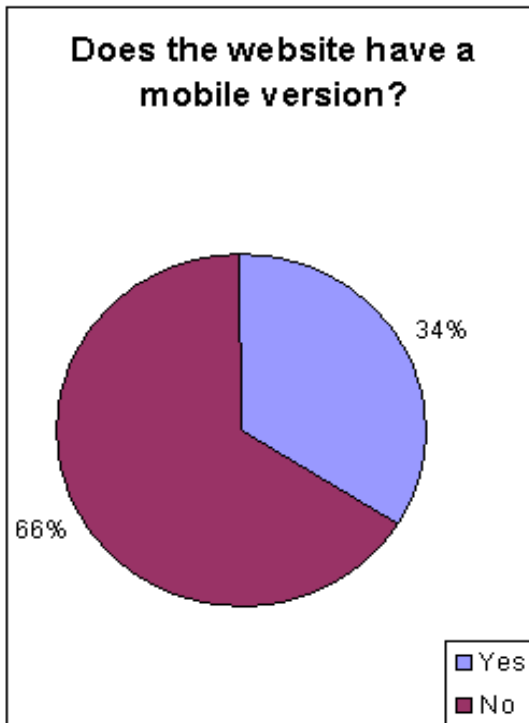
3. Interaction with Readers



4. Media



5. Alternative Content Viewing



6. Conclusions

It is evident from the results expressed in this study that magazines are slower to adopt Web 2.0 than newspapers. It can be hypothesized that this is due to two specific factors. The first factor to consider is the purpose of both magazines and newspapers. Both are print publications with long histories in American media, however, they mostly serve distinct purposes. Whereas newspapers are an essential source of news and daily information for many Americans, magazines tend to be sources of entertainment. Therefore, one can surmise that it is essential for newspapers to provide functional applications on their websites in order to enable Americans to get news in their desired format. In contrast, magazine websites can afford to be geared toward the casual “surfer” and people browsing for interesting content. The differing cultures of newspapers and magazines have definitely affected the way in which these publications use the Internet.

A second factor that must be considered is the audience of these two types of publications. Newspapers, while their demographics are becoming increasingly dominated by older Americans, have appeal to all age groups. Newspaper websites expand on this general appeal by reaching out to Internet-savvy portions of the American population. Audience demographics cannot be generalized in this manner for magazines: for these publications, audiences differ greatly from publication to publication. For example, the portion of American reading *Teen People* is probably quite different than the segment reading a publication such as *Newsweek*. Therefore, we can expect that the adoption of certain Web features by magazine websites will vary between publications (depending on the audience), while the adoption of Web 2.0 by newspaper websites is occurring at a more universal and general pace.

In addition, we can expect that the pressure on magazines to “change their ways” is less forceful than the pressure facing newspapers. Many experts in the newspaper industry fear the evolution of the Internet and theorize that newspapers must either “change or die”³—either leverage the Internet or face being replaced by it. In contrast, it is unlikely that magazines, complete with their glossy photos, eye-catching headlines and tangible qualities could actually be replaced by the Internet. Thus, their positioning in the entertainment industry and inherent differences from newspapers give magazines a bit of a buffer from pressures to shift their focus to the Web, something that newspapers are beginning to struggle with more and more.

³ Cliff Peale, “Newspapers Pin Survival Hopes on User Content”, *The Cincinnati Enquirer Online*, June 27, 2007, <http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070627/BIZ01/706270332/1076.BIZ>

APPENDIX

The following is a list of the magazines researched in this year's survey. Circulation data for these publications can be found on the Magazine Publishers of America website.⁴

Average Total Paid & Verified Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines 2006	
2006 Rank	Publication Name
1	AARP THE MAGAZINE
2	AARP BULLETIN
3	READER'S DIGEST
4	BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS
5	NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
6	GOOD HOUSEKEEPING
7	LADIES' HOME JOURNAL
8	TIME-THE WEEKLY NEWS MAGAZINE
9	WOMAN'S DAY
10	FAMILY CIRCLE
11	PEOPLE
12	AAA WESTWAYS
13	TV GUIDE
14	PREVENTION
15	SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
16	NEWSWEEK
17	PLAYBOY
18	COSMOPOLITAN
19	SOUTHERN LIVING
20	VIA MAGAZINE
21	MAXIM
22	AAA GOING PLACES
23	AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE
24	AAA LIVING
25	REDBOOK
26	GUIDEPOSTS
27	O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE
28	GLAMOUR
29	GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE
30	AAA WORLD
31	PARENTS
32	SMITHSONIAN
33	U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
34	SEVENTEEN

⁴ http://www.magazine.org/circulation/circulation_trends_and_magazine_handbook/22175.cfm

35	ESPN THE MAGAZINE
36	MARTHA STEWART LIVING
37	REAL SIMPLE
38	MONEY
39	PARENTING
40	FAMILYFUN
41	MEN'S HEALTH
42	ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY
43	US WEEKLY
44	IN STYLE
45	COOKING LIGHT
46	ENDLESS VACATION
47	SHAPE
48	COUNTRY LIVING
49	GOLF DIGEST
50	VFW MAGAZINE
51	FITNESS
52	WOMAN'S WORLD
53	STAR MAGAZINE
54	HOME & AWAY
55	SELF
56	SUNSET
57	TEEN PEOPLE
58	FIRST FOR WOMEN
59	FIELD & STREAM
60	ROLLING STONE

Titles shaded in gray indicate publications that are in the top 50 circulated magazines in the US but were not included in our study. For an explanation of this, please see the *Methodology* section of this report.