

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA: SELF-IMAGE AND PERCEPTION IN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

Participatory media is a developing concept in today's media landscape. A form of media that combines the typically disparate fields of content creation and content consumption, participatory media is very nearly eponymous. Audience members submit content for publication and consumption by other audience members, making audiences both content creators and content consumers.

This research investigates participatory media and how it influences self-image and perception in women and girls. The research also discusses audience receptivity to furthered media messaging as a result of image and perception influences.

A content analysis examined content from three participatory media platforms: Rookie Magazine, Interrupt Magazine and BuzzFeed.

Rookie Magazine, founded in September 2011, has a large following among its audience of teenage girls and is continuing to grow. Interrupt Magazine, has an audience of women in their twenties, but also caters to the LGBTQ community. BuzzFeed, as a more mainstream media platform, rounds out the research, providing an opportunity to examine participatory media on a larger scale.

Content from these publications was examined through five different themes: body, personality, perception, image, beauty, and size. Content was labelled according to eleven negatively and positively perceived emotions in conjunction with these themes. This information formed the basis for a discussion on the positivity or negativity of participatory media platforms as they relate to image and perception, and resulting audience receptivity.

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The research consequently determines that participatory media platforms are a positive source of self-image and perception-based thought processes through the emotions that they induce.

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INTRODUCTION:

Participatory media, or media that enables a crossover between traditional audience and editorial relationships, has become more significant over the past decade.

The existence of participatory platforms such as Rookie Magazine, Interrupt Magazine, and BuzzFeed Community speaks to a larger participatory trend fueled by the expansion of and increased accessibility to the Internet. This expansion is evidenced by the growth of other participatory media outlets that themselves go beyond the scope of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Rookie, Interrupt, BuzzFeed, Thought Catalog, CNN iReport and others all encourage audience members to not only consume information but to also create or contribute content.

The concept of participatory media implies that more points of view will be used based on the concept's very nature, therefore more people contribute in facilitated discussion, more views are expressed. The social context of this participatory movement, for instance, particularly that espoused by Rookie and Interrupt is focused on the empowerment of young women. Ideas spread through enterprises such as TED (the founder of both publications have given talks on the TED stage) and the newly created Lean In franchise advocate heightened participation by young women in spheres they might have traditionally avoided. That being said, such participation requires a significant amount of effort; audiences consume content and they see the need to create it as well. Therefore, it is conceivable that audiences could reach a point of oversaturation, at which they would have received excess stimulation from

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participatory media outlets given that these outlets require significant amounts of consumption and creation in order to constitute participation.

The networks that *Rookie* and *Interrupt* helm are based on shared facets of life — in this case, primarily age group and gender. Both magazines also make use of new hybrid (public and private) means of communicating (McQuail, 2010). BuzzFeed, although not necessarily strictly focused on gender issues, also makes use of these new means of communication. The publications take into account the proclivity of readers/contributors to use social media, and channel both accordingly. In doing so, they create a realm in which readers/contributors can communicate through more than the formal article or post structure. In essence, they create communities by taking into account the importance of media and the emphasized creation of social interaction, which accordingly work to make the publications increasingly popular and successful. This is accomplished through online web presence, but also through the employment of targeted social media platforms (C. Russell, personal communication, March 2014).

According to Ganaele Langlois, participatory media can be divided into two paradigms: cultural, or user-centric, and network-based. In creating these two paradigms, one can view participatory media as a cultural phenomenon intended to empower users and foster communication or as a means to control and collect information.

Langlois, though, takes an approach of centrality in regards to these two paradigms. Rather than advocating for one over the other, Langlois supports examining participatory media from an integrated perspective. In doing so, the article suggests that participatory media is indeed couched in the idea that it can

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facilitate communication and accessibility for users of specific media platforms. That empowerment goes hand-in-hand with information maintenance because all media platforms are run by some group of people. Consequently, one must analyze participatory media by thinking of these platforms as “assemblages” (Langlois, 2012).

As assemblages, participatory media platforms “enable the production, distribution and experience of meaning via cultural signs” (Langlois, 2012, p. 97). Therefore, “one should focus on the...conditions within which meaning can be expressed, and on the participatory media platform specifically as a site of articulation between information processing, software dynamics, linguistic processes, and cultural practices” (Langlois, 2012, p. 97).

Essentially, there is more to the idea of participatory media than first meets the eye. Although it might initially appear to be a platform from which to empower and facilitate, it is actually an assemblage of many factors that all work together to create the platform as it really is — as it is represented to the public.

Critical Media Studies 2.0, an article written by Mark Andrejevic, presents the idea that participatory media has not yet fully evolved; rather, much is in flux and the concept is still being defined by those who work in and contribute to the field. Used in their current state, participatory media platforms leave much to be desired, as, in the political sphere at least, access to too many platforms creates a flow of too much information (Andrejevic, 2009).

Rather than only a few, carefully curated articles or stories, media consumers are presented with many takes on every issue, which creates a fatigue and information overload of sorts. The intention of participatory media is

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present at the moment, Andrejevic argues, but there is yet much to be done. This point is further expanded upon in the following quotation from Andrejevic:

Real interactivity means participation in shaping the structure that regulate our social lives -- not just in increasing the range of our choices available within the horizon of those structures and the social relations they help reproduce. (p. 49)

Social constructionism is a theory that refers to the “processes by which events, persons, values and ideas are first defined or interpreted in a certain way and given value and priority,” thereby leading to individual construction of pictures of reality (McQuail, 2010, p. 101).

This theory could apply to studies of Rookie Magazine, Interrupt Magazine and BuzzFeed Community because it emphasizes the way in which the structures, forces and ideas of any given society are created by humans. As a result, ideas are continuously open to change. As both Rookie and Interrupt are focused on presenting ideas alternative to those discussed in mainstream media outlets, it can be said that they hope to change the ideas society is presented with. BuzzFeed community, in allowing a broad user base the opportunity to contribute content, is also facilitating the publication of ideas alternative to the mainstream.

The most interesting facet of this theory is that it is, in fact, referencing processes. Creation and publication of a magazine fits the definition of a process. However, by working to also create communities centered around the core process of magazine making, Rookie and Interrupt bring other processes to the table as well.

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As pointed out by McQuail, there are five main categories of new media which all possess certain similarities. One such category is the category of collective participatory media. This category emphasizes the “uses of the Internet for sharing and exchanging information, ideas and experience and developing active (computer-mediated) personal relationships” (McQuail, 2010, p. 144)

Both Rookie and Interrupt seek the creation of active personal relationships. Rookie and BuzzFeed particularly, have created large online followings that have active discussions in comment sections on websites and that share and discuss content on social media. Both Rookie and Interrupt seek the creation of active personal relationships as well; the magazines have brought the creation of personal relationships outside the “computer-mediated” space.

Following the creation of a new yearbook (yearly book-like magazines published by Rookie), the magazine does a book tour of sorts that allows readers to meet in the physical sphere (Schulman, 2012). After the publication of its first print issue, Interrupt created an art lab in New York City, where readers and the public were welcome to come and create artwork of their own, thereby translating Interrupt’s efforts into a physical space as well. As of yet, BuzzFeed has not made any steps to translate a participatory community into the public sphere, but the site’s overall popularity, and the fact that Community posts comprise some of BuzzFeed’s most popular content, suggests that BuzzFeed too is leaving an imprint on the public sphere. The virality and ensuing discussion of any given article can only serve as a testament to this statement.

The concept of social constructionism is taken a step further in the article “What is Social Constructionism?” by Tom Andrews. As Andrews goes on to

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explain in his article, social constructionism is concerned with the nature of knowledge, and the ways in which that knowledge is created. Meaning is “created, negotiated, sustained, and modified” in certain ways, and social constructionist theory is concerned with determining these methods (Andrews, 2012, p. 40).

Individuals create knowledge through interactions with others in society. These interactions, having taken place through language-based contact, render meaningful realities for those involved in the interactions. As such, “language predates concepts and provides a means of structuring the way the world is experienced” (Andrews, 2012, p. 41).

According to McQuail, media is structured around five basic values: freedom, equality, diversity, truth and information quality, and social order and solidarity. Depending on how these values are emphasized and implemented in any given media source, the publication’s ability to create knowledge process for audiences varies (McQuail, 2010).

For instance, equality at a structural level would lead to the ability of different or opposed interests in society to have the same mass media access opportunities to send and receive. Increased exposure to varied points of view would, in turn, affect the processes through which audiences interpret information. The more views they are presented with, the more their social realities will change. This idea goes hand-in-hand with the value of diversity. The presupposition underlying diversity of media details that the more carriers and more varied content you have, the better (McQuail, 2010).

Take the development of personal attitudes a step further and an article titled “The Role of Attitudes in Building Social Reality” comes into play.

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According to this article, “all the mechanisms that contribute to forming and changing attitudes are finally reflected in the way the social reality is conceived and perceived, as well as in the dynamics of the relation between attitudes and the receptor’s behavior” (Bratu and Voloacă, 2010, p. 781).

The processes of attitude development, being the ways in which individuals obtain knowledge (values, social representations, beliefs, opinions and ideologies), play a central role in an individual’s construction of society. As both media workers and audience members develop attitudes in unique ways, the participatory nature of Rookie becomes more complex (Bratu and Voloacă, 2010).

McQuail highlights how the furtherance of convergence culture blurs the lines between producers and consumers. Convergence culture, which refers to “the range of related phenomena that follow on from and seem to be caused by purely technological convergence,” has led to the coinage of terms such as “prosumer” and “produser” (as opposed to traditional words like ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’). Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed, by virtue of having consumers who are also producers, exemplify convergence culture.

However, one could also call into question the representative nature of this content. Since submitted content goes through a body of editors — the rigidity of this system being largely dependent on the publication being discussed — and since only some people are willing to speak up in the first place, it might not be representative of the entire audience these publications claim to have (Alani, 2014). One could also argue that these magazines could eventually encounter a certain amount of oversaturation. By filling the Internet spaces they occupy with so many voices, audiences (who are, incidentally, also content

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creators) could reach a point where their attention spans or curiosity for such discourses begin to tune out. This could have interesting effects, as suggested by the 2013 study, “Do newspapers matter?”

In the case of Cincinnati citizens following the closure of the Cincinnati Post, politics became demonstrably less competitive. Voter turnout decreased, as did the number of candidates running in elections. Those who did run ran with smaller campaign budgets. Furthermore, the odds of incumbent retention increased (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2013). As suggested by these results, it is possible that if an audience is no longer keyed in to certain subjects, their participation levels dwindle. Should consumers of participatory media reach a point of oversaturation at which their interest diminishes or becomes cursory, as opposed to participatory, would their affiliation with the causes and social movements these magazines champion diminish as well?

Possible resolutions to this question are suggested by a 2013 article discussing online participation in website forums in the context of the spiral of silence theory. The spiral of silence essentially suggests that individuals can “spiral” into silence based on how they believe their participation will be perceived. As defined in the Nekmat and Gonzenbach (2013) article, this theory has three main facets:

- (a) people covet social acceptance and fear being isolated for their beliefs
- (b) people observe the environment around them constantly to avoid conflict and enhance acceptance, and
- (c) the perception of increased support for one’s position on an issue leads to increased outspokenness, while perception of nonsupport leads to silence (p. 737)

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Nekmat and Gonzenbach conducted their study by analyzing how frequently participants “spoke out” or “spoke up” in online forums (both ideological and in mainstream media). For the purposes of this study, “speaking out” referred to people willing to take a firm stand and support their beliefs. A parallel can be drawn between speaking out in the context of this study and creating content for participatory media platforms such as Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed. Content creators are essentially going out on a limb in this situation, displaying their beliefs and work in a very public manner.

On the other hand, “speaking up” is a more passive form of participation. In the study, those who spoke up gave opinions in moderation and use less combative phrasing or messaging. The parallel drawn between this type of participation and participatory media could possibly involve the consumer who comments on created content or shares particular pieces of content on social media networks.

Nekmat and Gonzenbach’s (2013) study determined that individuals are more likely to participate when they feel like they are in a majority group, not a minority group. Assume for an instant that such a phenomenon could similarly occur when an individual becomes overwhelmed by the media options available to them. In that case, two events are possible. The individual in question could feel secure in their majority and, as a reaction to feeling overwhelmed, cut down on participation. The individual could also feel isolated as a result of their overwhelmedness. In this situation, their participation could also decrease (Nekmat & Gonzenbach, 2013).

In the short term, the feeling of membership in a specific majority could also have some interesting implications. Both Rookie and Interrupt are at least

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partially focused on women's issues from the perspectives of the varied age groups they represent.

Therefore, audiences newly acquainted with either magazine could feel encouraged by the communities they have found. Having found communities with more established stances on women's, LGBTQ, and equality issues, these audience members would feel as if they are no longer alone. In this situation, prior to the exposure that could facilitate overwhelmedness, audience members would be encouraged to participate further and to invest more deeply in the equality movements espoused by the magazines at hand.

BuzzFeed, on the other hand, follows a broader, more mainstream pattern. Although BuzzFeed Community certainly has articles devoted to race, gender and equality issues, these are not the site's sole purpose. Its niche, if such a term can be applied to BuzzFeed, is decidedly not as specific as teenage women, or minorities interested in fashion. As such, BuzzFeed presents a contrast to Rookie and Interrupt, suggesting that the publication's success is a concept that only another broadly participatory publication could replicate. BuzzFeed's success could also be a potential indicator of the futures that Rookie and Interrupt have in store.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Individual users of social media and online networks typically approach those networks with one major aim: communicating with others to whom they feel some sense of kinship. When users approach social networking with the aim of maintaining or strengthening ties with people they already view as friends, they tend to leave the networking experience with a heightened self-esteem.

This self-esteem in turn has a number of effects. It leads to a loss of self-control in the users who have been networking for a while, making them more susceptible to impulsive behaviors. It also fuels an individual's sense of self identity, and influences their behaviors and attitudes as a result. This in turn influences an individual's emotional state of being. As such, an individual who has been exposed to social networking or online media with the aim of strengthening ties to close friends is emotionally vulnerable, provided their aims from the social networking process were tied to strengthen ties with other individuals (Coleman & Williams, 2013).

The actuality of the social networking process also plays a role in this distribution of identity, action and emotion. Individuals using social media who consume emotionally positive content further their social networking process, and their subsequent actions accordingly. Individuals who consume emotionally negative content tailor their actions accordingly as well, but their social networking process, and emotional output as a result, influences their self-esteem and resulting actions and behavioral processes in a less fruitful way (Coleman & Williams, 2013; Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014). (Fruitful in this sense being a greater likelihood to consume content further or leave a social networking interaction with a heightened sense of self-esteem.)

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Social identities accomplish a number of functions according to Coleman and Williams (2013). They invoke beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that guide actions; they also associate with specific emotional states of being. As a result, they describe how “consumers with social identity seek out, experience and regulate emotional experiences” (Coleman & Williams, 2013, p. 203). In other words, the emotionally charged experiences and situations are guided by any given consumer’s social identity. Given that social identities are defined as “aspects of the self-concept deriving from social categories, roles, or groups to which an individual perceives himself or herself as belonging,” an aspect of identity that is relevant to the consumer, becomes an essential point on which the consumer is then focused (Coleman & Williams, 2013, p. 203). This focus allows individuals to perceive their world in an “identity consistent” frame of mind.

The action-based element of social identity intersects with what can be called an “emotion profile” that directs what individuals should feel in a given situation. Based on the emotions that encompass an individual’s social identity framework, not only will their actions and behaviors change, but the feelings they associate with these actions and behaviors will change as well. In turn, these feelings influence the feedback that individuals receive based on their identity. This feedback, viewed in terms of success or failure, is indicative of the dual roles that actions and behaviors, in addition to emotions, play as facets of social identity (Coleman & Williams, 2013).

Social networks fulfill “a variety of social needs, including affiliation, self-expression, and self-presentation” (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012, p. S75) As such, they can positively affect those individuals who require more social support or wish

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“to repair well-being after negative emotional experiences” (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012, p. S64). Since social networks influence emotional experiences in this manner, it can be seen that they also tie into aspects of social identity.

According to Wilcox and Stephen (2012), although social network use heightens the self-esteem of users who are focused on close ties with specific friends, they end up with reduced self-control as a result. The greater the social networking of any given person, the greater the likelihood that person will give in to outside forces. Individuals who participated in online social networking for greater amounts of time were more likely to have a higher body mass index, engage in binge eating, have a lower credit score, or have higher levels of credit card debt. Each of these states underscores the consequences of lower self control; users of social media become more susceptible to impulsive action. This research consequently suggests that social network use affects the choices consumers make in their daily lives, indicating the presence of a relationship between social networking and specific behavioral patterns (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

Social networking, targeted as it is, would therefore positively affect well-being. As a result of this increase in positivity and self-worth, specifically among those people using social networks to maintain connections with close friends or others with whom they have strong ties, they have less self-control after interacting with the social network.

Because social networking and online publication are impersonal experiences, they can also contribute to the self-expression present on the Internet. It is posited that because posting information online is a largely impersonal act, and rejection and criticism are not immediately known,

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individuals are more likely to post more personal information online in the name of self-expression. In other words, “the same social norm that dictates modesty in offline social interactions may either not be present or be suppressed in online social networks” (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012, p. S65) This facet of online interaction plays an important role in the resulting observations of Wilcox and Stephen: that using social networks will only positively affect those individuals who are focused on strong ties or relationships with individuals to whom they are close. When focusing on individuals with weaker ties, those posting content online are not as concerned about the information being presented, because the opinion of those viewing the content is valued less than it would have been otherwise.

Combined with the relationship between self-esteem and self-control presented by Wilcox and Stephen, the relationship between body image and self-esteem suggests that the relationship overall between self-esteem, control, body image, and subsequent social identity and action is a cyclic one; the images being created can be emphasized in a number of places (Gatti, Iono, Trafficante & Confalonieri, 2014).

Factors that affect body perception include age, gender and body mass index. Together, these factors, when they deviate from perceived norms, could “influence one’s perception and representation of one’s body and one’s self esteem” (Gatti et al., 2014). Research determines that girls suffer from greater bouts of insecurity relating to body image and self-esteem than boys. This is largely due to the fact that girls base their self-esteem of factors such as BMI, that can deviate from what is desired more easily than factors such as body shape in general, which is of more importance to adolescent boys. Therefore, girls face a more stringent set of image and perception requirements; in order for them to

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have a high self-esteem, they must fit a higher set of standards. Deviation from these standards leads to greater insecurity and lower self-esteem (Gatti et al., 2014).

Combined with practices of social media and the effects of social identity on actions and emotions discussed above, this suggests that girls in such a position would be less likely to engage in the actions of a person interacting on social media in pursuit of high self-esteem (they would not lose self-control as easily, for one). Moreover, they would be more susceptible to those emotionally charged experiences that follow negative trains of thought (Gatti et al., 2014).

The importance of positive or negative trains of thought is underscored by the results of a recent study on the effects of positive and negative social networking. Conducted by Facebook in January 2012 (results published in 2014), this study examined the social networking practices, and subsequent reactions, of Facebook users. By either exposing users to entirely positive or negative content, Facebook was able to ascertain the effects of positive and negative content on mood and behavior in the 700,000 users put under the study (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014).

The study observed that emotions spread easily: “When positive expressions were reduced, people produced fewer positive posts and more and more negative posts; when negative expressions were reduced, the opposite pattern occurred” (Kramer et al., 2014). This highlights the potentiality of social networking and online platforms to affect subsequent actions by users in the manner discussed by Coleman and Williams.

The study therefore indicates that behavior can be heavily influenced by the positivity or the negativity of the content that is consumed; the more positive

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the content, the more likely users are to interact with a given website. In the case of the Facebook study, it was found that users exposed to positive content as opposed to emotionally neutral content or negative content were more likely to update their statuses and actively participate on the site in a positive manner. The opposite is true for users exposed to more negative content; they were more likely to produce more negative posts instead, thereby spreading the negativity to even more users. In effect, the study highlights the efficacy of social networking and online media at influencing user behavior based on exposure to positive and negative content while suggesting that the more positive content viewed, the more participatory in an active, eager manner any given user is likely to be (Kramer et al., 2014).

ROOKIE BACKGROUND:

At the age of sixteen, Tavi Gevinson had taken the fashion industry by storm. At eleven, she had started a blog called *The Style Rookie*, on which she posted her thoughts on fashion and style, and pictures of herself in self-styled outfits.

In no time, Gevinson was the darling of the fashion industry, invited to fashion week by famous designers and given opportunities to speak at venues most adults could only dream of. However, as time passed, Gevinson's ideas of fashion began to change. "Eventually, I started reading about feminism and became inspired by the Riot grrrl movement and *Sassy Magazine*" (Essmaker, 2014).

The ideas gleaned from Gevinson's new interests led to a new idea altogether: an online magazine for teenage girls. Targeted solely at teenage girls, and founded when Gevinson was sixteen, *Rookie Magazine* is meant to be "a place where young people feel comfortable working out ideas and opinions that they're not yet confident with" (Essmaker, 2014). To that effect, the content of the magazine is varied and multifaceted. *Rookie* publishes content about style and makeup to be sure, but also short stories and videos, tutorials and questionnaires.

Most uniquely, *Rookie* is open to submissions from anyone in their audience. Although the magazine currently has a staff of around 90 members (Essmaker, 2014), the website is open for submissions from all audience members and actively encourages their participation.

Today, *Rookie* posts content online thrice daily on weekdays, and once a day on weekends. In addition, the magazine publishes a yearbook. Three have

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been published already, and another one is forthcoming, on the grounds that a yearbook should be made for each year of high school.

INTERRUPT BACKGROUND:

Interrupt Magazine, like Rookie, was founded by an individual with a large personal platform. In October 2012, model Cameron Russell gave a TEDx talk at TEDxMidAtlantic titled “Looks Aren’t Everything, Believe Me, I’m a Model.” The talk quickly went viral, and soon surpassed Colin Powell’s talk from the same conference in number of views (Russell, 2013).

Russell used her participatory art start-up, Space-Made (formerly called The Big Bad Lab), to create Interrupt Magazine. Immediately after the TEDx Talk, Russell realized that the talk’s audience was expanding quickly, and decided to capitalize on its popularity through a “My Media” experiment asking women to answer a question: What would you say if you had access to mass media?

Interrupt Magazine, which launched in the summer of 2013, was founded on the grounds of the submissions from the My Media experiment. Interrupt has since covered issues such as body image, race, and LGBTQ equality. The magazine took the concept of participatory media a step further by establishing a rotating editor-in-chief. These editors-in-chief come from different walks of life, and all are contributors to the magazine. As editors-in-chief, they provide a distinct vision and audience base, all the while overseeing the creation of new content for the issue of the month (C. Russell, personal communication, March 2014).

ACTIVITY:

Approximately 80 percent of Interrupt contributors are women, two thirds are people of color, one third identifies as LGBT, and one third of all contributors are under the age of eighteen (Space-Made, 2013).

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The majority of Rookie readers are young women, which is not surprising considering the target audience of all content posted by the site. Further information about Rookie's audience is not available as easily as information about Interrupt audience and contributors, which is posted on the Space-Made site for anyone to access.

RECEPTION:

Both Gevinson and Russell have been able to call a great amount of attention to their respective magazines, probably due to their firm establishment in the fashion industry and as recognized speakers, which has bolstered the popularity of Rookie and Interrupt.

However, despite the facts that Gevinson and Russell helm their own media platforms and are largely recognizable figures, anything written on the subject of their magazines from a critical standpoint has yet to be found.

Research into the two women turns up numerous interviews, photo slideshows and articles penned by both women, but nothing analyzing the content of the magazines at length is available.

Rookie's yearbooks have received overwhelmingly positive reviews, though, with The Slate's review of Rookie Yearbook 2 going so far as to say "Read it because it is singular."

That same Slate review, however, brings up a point worthy of discussion: For now, the literary establishment still promotes a narrow view of what qualifies as "serious writing." By and large, it is a culture that pigeonholes women writers, undervalues young adult literature, and harbors deep suspicion toward anything on the Internet. Accordingly, Rookie's

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treatment in the press, while glowing, is haunted by the air of indulgence with which you might praise a child's school project.

That "air of indulgence" is discernible in a 2012 article written by the New York Times on the subject of Rookie, Tavi, and some of the magazine's other staff members: "But all little girls grow up, and Ms. Gevinson wasn't content to remain a novelty."

Compared to coverage of Russell, which has taken on a largely awe-inspired tone (the introduction of a CNN interview with Russell begins with 'Cameron Russell aims to open up the media landscape to divergent voices a little bit at a time. '), introductions and stories written about Gevinson and Rookie remain rather amazed that Rookie exists, or that it is quite so popular.

In an interview with *The Great Discontent*, for instance, Gevinson recognizes this distinction: "Having adults reading and commenting on Rookie is nice, but it becomes a problem when it gets into preachy territory.... [Rookie is not] meant to be a place where adults say, "Well you'll understand when you're older!"

BUZZFEED BACKGROUND:

Founded in 2006 by The Huffington Post co-founder Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed was intended as an “experimental lab that focused on tracking viral content and making things people wanted to share.” Today, BuzzFeed has over 500 employees worldwide and reaches 150 million users.

BuzzFeed, although a participatory platform through its “community” feature, presents a striking contrast to Rookie and Interrupt. While both Rookie and Interrupt are online magazines that bring their work into the physical platform as well, BuzzFeed is an online-only participatory platform. Like Rookie and Interrupt, BuzzFeed boasts a staff devoted to the upkeep of the publication. These staff members write articles, edit content, source advertising, and work to expand BuzzFeed’s platform internationally. However, BuzzFeed has a scale much larger than that of Rookie and Interrupt. The platform consequently has an ever-widening scope. In addition to the pop culture listicles and videos that make up a majority of its content, BuzzFeed also publishes news stories and in-depth interviews.

BuzzFeed Community is “the home for awesome posts created by BuzzFeeders who have successfully applied to be in BuzzFeed’s community” (BuzzFeed, 2014). The application process is simple. It entails the creation of a BuzzFeed account and the submission of a post idea. Assuming an applicant is accepted, they are given the opportunity to submit one article idea a day for approval by a BuzzFeed Community editor. The more popular the articles are, the more “Cat Power” an individual receives. Given that Cat Power is BuzzFeed’s official measure of a community member’s rank, the more popular the articles a

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community member submits, the higher their status in the community, and the greater the reach of their message (BuzzFeed, 2014).

Founded in 2008, BuzzFeed Community started out as a “well-kept secret” (Beaujon, 2013). Those who worked in conjunction with BuzzFeed editors to put content on BuzzFeed’s front page, or those who wrote about very shareable content were more likely to have popular posts. BuzzFeed Community — until 2013 — remained a semi-anonymous place where those in the know could contribute, but only if they knew how. On May 8, 2013, BuzzFeed effectively rebranded BuzzFeed Community, hoping to capitalize on the popularity of the feature so far by giving Community a more dedicated place on the site. This dedicated section, given the title of “Community vertical” in BuzzFeed’s announcement of the change, features all BuzzFeed community articles in a scroll-down blog fashion. To the right of this scrolling blog are links to other pieces of BuzzFeed content; the main attention-draw is the vertical blog with all community articles. BuzzFeed also made Community more accessible by featuring it more prominently in the site’s menu bar. BuzzFeed’s site at present devote dedicated menu slots to “News,” “Buzz,” “Life,” “Entertainment,” “Quizzes” and “Video.” Following the “Video” header is one more titled “More.” By scrolling over “More,” a dropdown menu pops up and BuzzFeed Community is the first option.

All that said, the mechanics of BuzzFeed Community are also worth an examination. Prior to the 2013 reshuffling, BuzzFeed Community did not receive nearly as much attention as it does now. Although several community pieces had gone viral, Community’s existence was not as acknowledged. Today, BuzzFeed Community functions in a more directed way: “They can post content that looks

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like standard BuzzFeed fare and flag it for the site's community moderators to consider; they in turn may choose to feature such content on the main community page or on BuzzFeed's homepage" (Beaujon, 2013). This statement indicates that BuzzFeed's community section, although under the purview of BuzzFeed editors, is not as supervised as BuzzFeed original content.

Moreover, it is possible for content to slip through BuzzFeed's cracks. In 2013, for instance, shortly after the Community reshuffle was announced, the site was forced to take down content that made use of an image created for CNN. The site also took down, then reposted, content that poked fun at BuzzFeed (Beaujon, 2013). Both of these instances suggest that Community management, particularly in the time period immediately following the reshuffle, was uncertain in some regards.

Today, BuzzFeed Community is run based on the following guidelines:

1. Don't be that guy.
2. No Haters.
3. No trolling
4. No feeding the goddamn trolls
5. No personal attacks
6. Don't post porn
7. Don't duplicate other people's work and try to pass it off as your own.
8. Remember not to be that guy!

In a Poynter Institute interview with BuzzFeed Editorial Director Jack Shepherd, it is mentioned that BuzzFeed Community, following the reshuffle and the tensions immediately afterwards, does have a more established framework in place for community management.

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For instance, there is a team of moderators that oversees the submission of all content, and people do get banned from the site for breaking the Community rules mentioned above. Editors will work with more reputed content creators — those with more cat power, for instance — to make content as good as it can possibly be.

BuzzFeed's Editorial team consists of individuals responsible for going over content, creating content, and monitoring those posts on the Community site. Shepherd also acknowledges that BuzzFeed Community is a transient concept of sorts: "the definition of community is itself in flux...as the power of communities on places like Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest overshadows the older website communities. BuzzFeed's place in that ecosystem — in being the place you go to make content that can spread in those other communities — is a big project for us [in 2013]" (Beaujon, 2013).

Shepherd also mentions in the Poynter interview that the most popular BuzzFeed Community content to date related to identity. Particularly noteworthy were articles titled "67 signs that you went to boarding school" and "Things Millennial Girls Love."

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THEORY:

Social constructionism refers to “the processes by which events, persons, values and ideas are first defined or interpreted in a certain way and given value and priority, largely by mass media, leading to the (personal) construction of larger pictures of reality” (McQuail, 2010, p. 101).

Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed are all examples of participatory media. However, a participatory media theory is being eschewed in favor of social constructionism as an overall theory for a few reasons. According to McQuail, collective participatory media includes “the uses of the Internet for sharing and exchanging information, ideas and experience and developing active [computer-mediated] personal relationships. Social networking sites belong under this heading. Uses range from the purely instrumental to affective and emotional” (McQuail, 2010, p. 144).

These participatory media platforms are all interactive, meaning that they meet the following five criterion in some way or from, according to McQuail:

- the direction of communication;
- flexibility about time and roles in the exchange
- having a sense of place in the communication environment
- level of control (of the communication environment)
- perceived purpose (oriented to exchange or persuasion) (p. 146)

Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed all meet these requirements. All participatory sections are directed by an editor-in-chief or editorial group. Flexibility is attained because there are no strict deadlines for content submissions and audience members can fluidly transition between positions as audiences and participators. Although the sense of place varies depending on the

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publication in question, it can be argued that all publications, particularly Rookie and Interrupt, provide a sense of place to readers and those submitting content for consideration. The level of control exerted by each publication on the content submitted varies as well; however, each publication, given its participatory nature, allows for participator control. Moreover, there is a purpose to each publication that is oriented around distribution of content or ideas.

Social constructionism begins with a discussion of the community structure approach, which recognizes that the factors influencing media and communication are, in fact, based upon social contexts, and the social structures influencing that communication (Pollack, 2007). As such, news text is conceptualized as “as discourse constructed, transmitted, and acted upon jointly in a circular framing process by the media, audiences and other relevant social players” (Yuan, 2013, p. 78).

In viewing news text in such a fashion, it becomes apparent that social constructionism would view media differently than other socially-based approaches such as a community structure approach; such a perspective would view news media as a controlling entity that serves as a form of social control (Yuan, 2013).

Participatory media, on the other hand, falls in line with a social constructionist approach as it reflects multiple levels of coordination: the collaboration present between journalists and editors working for a given media outlet, the involvement of online users who consume content, and the involvement of users who consume and create content. This coordination between editors and audiences, when considered in conjunction with the social contexts each group brings into a given form of media, suggests that the ideas

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presented by a given publication are open to more interpretation and discussion. Editorial boards have less control over the ideas presented because the publication is open to content creating audiences as well. Therefore, the content and situations presented to audiences are more varied. Community members who participate in their communities also create social capital by sharing information and ideas and providing support to one another (Yuan, 2013).

Consequently, it appears that participatory media invites a socially constructed view of reality; as Walter Lippman writes, we begin perceiving the world with “pictures in our heads” that in turn serve as a “key catalyst to establishing an important social paradigm in the social sciences -- the social construction of reality...” (as cited in Elmasry, 2013, p. 235). This construction is reflected in the manners in which information is consumed. Taking a given discourse or text as a starting place, the social context of the content’s creator is facilitating that text’s role in creating a certain perception of reality. This perception is further developed based on the social context of the individual consuming the content. Taken together, multiple pictures go into the creation of any given perception, as each person participating in the content creation and consumption process brings in their respective point of view (Elmasry, 2013, p. 235).

Knoblauch suggests further narrowing the focus of social constructionism through an emphasis on communicative constructionism, or a subset of social constructionism. Where social constructionism focuses on the construction of reality through various platforms, communicative constructionism is a narrower school of thought interested in examining the role of communication bodies on mediatization, or changes in the media (Knoblauch, 2013). Although this is a

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narrow focus, the theory brings up a number of points relevant to social constructionism as a whole, given that realities constructed by various forms of media in conjunction with social contexts are the focus of this research (Knoblauch, 2013).

Communicative constructivism focuses on the “contemporary societal transformation of ‘communication cultures’” (Knoblauch, 2013, p. 298). In positioning itself as a subset of social constructionism, the theory discusses the notion of objectivation, or the meaning that symbols and shapes are given through social contexts and the subsequent “pictures” or meanings they give to consumers. Objectivation is therefore the process through which meaning is determined (Knoblauch, 2013). Given that communicative forms are objects symbol-based objects, they facilitate the construction of reality as they allow for the coordination of actions and motives; are a way to produce order and orientate action on different scales toward varied goals; and can be single sequences or interactive episodes. In other words, a media institution coordinates actions, and in doing so provides an order which can then be followed (Knoblauch, 2013). This in turn creates certain expectations and invokes knowledge in consumers based on the social contexts they already carry. This process eventually culminates in newer sanctions and norms, which then leads to the institution of power. Such a train of thought suggests that communicative constructivism could be seen as a facet of the community structure approach. As a result, social constructionism, as a broader framework that accounts for heightened participation, is a more relevant theory for this research (Knoblauch, 2013).

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That being said, two ideas proposed by Knoblauch are worth consideration when discussing participatory media in relation to social constructionism: (1) that mediatization is a feature of communicative action, and (2) mediatization in social spheres facilitated by digital technology results in the “transgression of what used to be the ‘primacy of the face-to-face situation’” (Knoblauch, 2013, p. 310). These ideas suggest perspectives to be considered when examining participatory media through a social constructionist perspective. The actions taken by editors and contributing audience members will shape not only the media platforms in which they participate, but will also pervade their own social contexts as a result. Coordinating communications have changed, largely because the distinction between local and global has changed. Furthermore, social structures and norms regarding interaction are no longer as pervasive. As such, the contexts that are facilitating perceptions are changing as well.

This paper, by focusing on the ways in which information about self-image and perception are distributed, highlights that purposeful orientation. As a result of an examination of self-image and perception, it is hoped that a better understanding of audience receptiveness to content and advertising can be achieved. That being said, the cornerstone of this paper will be the messaging of self-image and perception, and how positively or negatively that messaging is viewed. Such an examination then facilitates the determination of advertising efficacy through perceived audience receptiveness.

Since an examination of the construction of self-image and perception is in order, social constructionism is the preferred theory from which to view this paper. Social constructionism, by referring to specific processes, falls in line with the intent to conduct a textual analysis of the image and perception-related

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content presented in Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed. Given that the interpretation of this content forms the basis of further analysis, it will be necessary to examine the “construction” of the positive and negative images presented. Moreover, because Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed are all facilitated by digital technology (primarily websites and social media), the traditional face-to-face model of communication is being eschewed by all publications. They are constructing realities in a manner that has not been the norm up until this point. As such, the realities being constructed are largely based at audiences with social contexts differing from those of previous generations; the social realities being constructed through the participatory media process are fluid, and constantly being developed.

Consequently, a theory that references the development of larger pictures of personal realities is to be desired. Social constructionism, in acknowledging that “the structures, forces and ideas of society are created by human beings, continually recreated or reproduced and also open to challenges and change” establishes a perspective that aligns with the aims of the paper (McQuail, 2010, p. 100). The theory recognizes that those curating, creating and consuming participatory media all bring “structures, forces and ideas” into any given situation, and that these ideas, when viewed in conjunction with the content being presented, can develop certain points of view. Given that these points of view, and the conclusions that can be drawn as a result of these points of view, are the focus of this research, social constructionism is the theory from which the research shall be examined.

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METHODOLOGY:

Research shall be conducted using a textual analysis of Rookie Magazine, Interrupt Magazine and BuzzFeed articles. This textual analysis will be conducted by searching for phrases and words that show up most frequently in both publications according to the following:

- Does the content shown present self-image and perception in a negative or positive light?
- What words or phrases are being used to present the content in this light?
- What type of content is being used to present these ideas? (Is the content visual, written, or an alternative format?)
- Who is writing the content in question? Is it being created by staff members or audience participators?

In order to accomplish these goals, articles that pertain to self-image and perception will have to be selected. Common turns of phrase and language used will be pinpointed in an effort to group rhetoric relating to self-image and perception. These samples will then be categorized into negative and positive frameworks based on definitions established through investigation of relevant literature on the subject. The type of content used to present these ideas will also be tracked; however, given that visual content samples may not have captions or word-based phrasing from which to derive an analysis, it is likely that most content analyzed will take the form of articles.

RATIONALE:

This stipulation on the themes of self-image and perception has been created to ensure that enough content in both publications on a similar theme is

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available for analysis. The theme of self-image and perception was selected as a constraint on the sheer amount of content available.

Rookie Yearbook One extends to nearly 350 pages. Each section of the publication is based on one of twelve different themes that were discussed throughout the 2012 year. These themes were not tangible, which provided writers and content creators the luxury of taking a monthly theme and then discussing it as they saw fit. Therefore, the themes and topics discussed in Rookie Yearbook One veer off course from the themes of Interrupt's first issue by wide margins in several places.

The monthly themes explored in Rookie Yearbook One are as follows:

- September 2011 — Beginnings
- October 2011 — Secrets
- November 2011 — Girl Gang
- December 2011 — Home
- January 2012 — Up All Night
- February 2012 — Obsession
- March 2012 — Exploration
- April 2012 — Transformation
- May 2012 — Power

Unlike Rookie, each of Interrupt's magazine issues is themed around a more tangible issue. Interrupt's first print publication was titled Body Image and focuses more specifically on the way in which others perceive themselves and how outside factors influence these perceptions.

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Rookie Yearbook One contains a myriad of discussions on this topic as well, and when these pieces of content are compiled, they are proportionate to the amount of content presented in Interrupt's first publication.

An analysis of online content was eschewed in favor of published content for a number of reasons. It is true that both Rookie and Interrupt are largely online publications. The vast majority of their audience and their content resides online. However, both websites have undergone changes in the past year (two for Rookie). Finding all the content from a specific time period relative to the time period at another magazine would be difficult to say the least. Furthermore, Interrupt is at least a year younger than Rookie. The magazine, even in its online form, did not become a reality until the spring of 2013. Rookie, having been founded in September 2011, consequently predates Interrupt by a little over two years, at least in the online medium.

Because Rookie and Interrupt both used content published online in their print publications, it can be inferred that content in the print first issues is somewhat representative of the content as it was available on the sites of both magazines at the time of publication. Although the content on the sites is not exclusively the content published online in a reprinted version, it provides a tangible way to access such content from similar periods in the magazines' respective timelines.

PROCESS:

Having taken all of this information into account, the research shall proceed by analyzing the results and comparing and contrasting the rhetoric presented in both publications. At this point, it will be necessary to acknowledge

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the difference in target audiences between Rookie and Interrupt in particular. Rookie's audience is easily categorized; their website states explicitly that they "are a website for teenage girls." Interrupt's audience is a bit more varied; they cater to minorities, including women and LGBTQA groups. The one restriction on this audience is that they are under 30 in most cases.

Following a discussion of audiences, it would seem pertinent to discuss the implications of the rhetoric presented by Rookie and Interrupt. This rhetoric could be analyzed in light of research found through the literature review, leading to further discussion on the subject of the efficacy of participatory media platform publications at spreading a message.

The efficacy of participatory media platforms is an intriguing avenue of investigation due to the fact that the platforms engage with their audiences in a manner entirely different to that of a traditional publication. Because participatory publications involve the audience in content creation, the audience is likely to be more invested in the publication (at least initially), and will potentially be more likely to take the messages in said content to heart (it was, after all, created by individuals to whom they share a closer affinity). This, in turn, would affect a given audience member's receptiveness to advertising presented on through the platform as well.

According to Paul Saffo, a director at the Institute for the Future, "people no longer passively 'consume' media [and thus advertising, its main revenue source] but actively participate in them, which usually means creating content in whatever form and on whatever scale" (Kluth, 2006). This in turn suggests that audiences will become more specific; they will flock toward the content that

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most interests them, implying that they will bear a specificity unheard of until this point except in rather niche areas.

As a result, advertising practices and communication of specific messages will need to shift in response to the targeted grouping of audiences. The impressionability and distinctiveness of these audiences suggests that targeted advertising has the power to make a more significant impression on audiences than advertising in a more general sense. Gevinson was wary of this power when Rookie was founded, and following the advice of radio host Ira Glass, decided to be “very careful about her revenue sources — no advertising she didn’t believe in” (Larocca, 2014).

ROOKIE & INTERRUPT VS. BUZZFEED:

A textual analysis of BuzzFeed will differ from that of Interrupt and Rookie to a certain extent. Neither Interrupt nor Rookie has a ranking system. Furthermore, the scope of both magazines is smaller than BuzzFeed’s. However, BuzzFeed presents a contrast to Interrupt and Rookie that is worth studying. By investigating the differences in audience and self-image and perception expressed in BuzzFeed Community posts, an understanding of the relationship between positivity/negativity of rhetoric and the size/targeting of a readership can be determined.

Rookie Yearbook One was published in September 2012. Interrupt’s first print issue was published in August 2013. Although both publications have since published second (and Rookie a third) editions, first editions were chosen to remove any extra variables in the research process. By choosing to research only first edition publications, it is possible to examine both publications in their

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original state, without the influence of other sources and formats. In Interrupt's case, for instance, the magazine instituted a rotating editor-in-chief model following the publication of the first print issue. Therefore, an examination of the first issues of both publications provides a way for one to examine the publications as they were created under the leadership of their founding editor.

Given the assumption that print publications are representative of online content on Rookie and Interrupt to a certain extent, the contrast between BuzzFeed's online content and the print content of Rookie and Interrupt is an interesting one. In order to narrow the field of content examined in BuzzFeed, the words and phrases pinpointed through analysis of Rookie and Interrupt were used to search BuzzFeed's community section. When possible, only articles published in 2012 and 2013 were examined, since those are the two years in which first issues of Rookie and Interrupt were published, respectively.

The contrast BuzzFeed presents to Interrupt and Rookie is a significant one. The site recently received 50 million dollars in funding to expand its content into new areas including film and advertising. Moreover, the majority of BuzzFeed's revenue is "derived from BuzzFeed Creative, the company's 75-person unit dedicated to creating for brands custom video and list-style advertising content that looks similar to its own editorial content" (Isaac, 2014). Given that social media accounts for 75 percent of Buzzfeed's website traffic at a time when over half of American teenagers create content for the web, and that BuzzFeed is not deriving significant amounts of revenue from participants in its Community section, the site's current status could portend realities that Rookie and Interrupt might have to face in coming years (Isaac, 2014). Audience participation in BuzzFeed, Rookie and Interrupt (which can be derived by

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comparing the number of participants who are not staff members with the number of participants who are), when considered in conjunction with messages received by those audiences, could also serve as a place from which to compare the level of engagement necessary to form a successful participatory media platform.

ANALYSIS/RESULTS:

A qualitative analysis of the body image and perception-related content in Rookie, Interrupt and Buzzfeed was conducted through an examination of content based on five image-related keywords: body, personality, perception, image, beauty and size. These themes, selected based on literature reviewed, served as the focus points for content examination (Coleman & Williams, 2013; Gatti et al., 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

Content in Rookie and Interrupt was read with the aim of identifying the five themes. Once articles mentioning the thematic keywords were identified, they were labeled with positive and negative emotional indicators from the following words: hope, worry, relaxation, happiness, fear, guilt, contentment, pride, anger, disgust, and sadness. These keywords were also selected on the basis of literature reviewed (Coleman & Williams, 2013; Gatti et al., 2014; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012).

As could have been expected, there was some overlap between articles; the themes were not mutually exclusive, so an article that used the word “body,” for instance, might also have mentioned the word “beauty.” Therefore, articles — along with emotional indicators — were categorized under multiple thematic sections when this situation arose.

Content in Buzzfeed was not read to identify themes. Since Buzzfeed is a solely online publication, the themes were run through the BuzzFeed website’s search field. There was no first-edition print publication to analyze. Each theme brought up a separate grouping of articles, that were then examined. As much of BuzzFeed’s content centers on the “listicle” or a list-view article of images, some of the results found through these searches were not put through the content

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analysis as there were no words to analyze, although the listicles were tagged with the requisite themes.

Analysis of BuzzFeed content was also made difficult due to the structure of BuzzFeed's website. Having entered a search term, BuzzFeed only displays a specific number of posts for each theme. Depending on the popularity of the theme being searched, BuzzFeed presents a searcher with content from the past week, or the past couple years. Therefore, maintaining consistency with *Rookie* and *Interrupt* by solely examining BuzzFeed posts from a specific time period was no longer possible. When possible, articles from the 2012-2013 time period were selected. However, certain themes — “body” for instance — are more popular on BuzzFeed, and therefore used more frequently. So, only articles from a few weeks prior to a search appear. In that situation, it was not possible to maintain time period consistency.

It is important to keep in mind that the content analyzed in *Rookie* and *Interrupt* is not entirely representative of image and perception-related themes either. Several articles in these magazines (*Rookie* especially) discuss issues that are thematically in line with the five core themes of this content analysis. If these articles did not explicitly use the words body, personality, perception, image, beauty or size, they were not included in the analysis, since including them would have added another layer of arbitrariness to the analysis process (the other layer being the selection of emotions to apply to various pieces of content). Therefore, articles that discussed growing up as a biracial individual, sexuality and subsequent familial interactions, and street harassment, for instance, were not included in the analysis because the keywords for the themes with which they would have aligned were not used in the actual text of the article.

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All that being said, eight articles from Rookie, 15 from Interrupt, and 14 from BuzzFeed were analyzed.

Table 1: *Thematically organized content in Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed*

Theme	Rookie	Interrupt	BuzzFeed
Body	5 articles	11 articles	4 articles
Personality	1 article	0 articles	2 articles
Perception	0 articles	0 articles	3 articles
Image	1 article	0 articles	0 articles
Beauty	2 articles	8 articles	2 articles
Size	0 articles	1 article	4 articles

The above chart demonstrates that BuzzFeed presented the most diverse content in terms of theme selection. That being said, BuzzFeed's entire site was searched for tags, not necessarily mentions of a theme word in every article. Second in diversity of themes is Rookie, a result potentially attributable to the fact that Rookie Yearbook One featured 12 different themes, to mark off each month in a year. Interrupt's first issue focused specifically on the issue of body image, thereby resulting in the concentration of Interrupt's articles in the two themes of body and size.

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Rookie:

Table 2: *Emotions represented in Rookie articles, categorized by theme.*

Emotion	Body	Personality	Perception	Image	Beauty	Size
Hope		1/1				
Worry	5/5	1/1		1/1	2/2	
Relaxation	1/5					
Happiness	1/5			1/1	1/2	
Fear	2/5					
Guilt						
Contentment	1/5			1/1	1/2	
Pride	2/5	1/1		1/1	2/2	
Anger	1/5					
Disgust	3/5					
Sadness	1/5					

The above chart indicates that the widest range of emotions presented in a Rookie article came from the body theme. Of all 11 themes, only 2 were not referenced on the emotional scale in body-related articles. The same cannot be said of the other themes, with the next largest representation of relation emotions amounting to four emotions paired with the image and beauty themes.

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Interrupt:

Table 3: *Emotions represented in Interrupt articles, categorized by theme.*

Emotion	Body	Personality	Perception	Image	Beauty	Size
Hope						
Worry	3/11				2/8	1/1
Relaxation					1/8	
Happiness	1/11				1/8	
Fear					1/8	
Guilt						
Contentment	8/11				4/8	1/1
Pride	9/11				6/8	
Anger	2/11					
Disgust	1/11				1/8	1/1
Sadness	1/11					

This chart also features a wide variety of emotions associated with the body theme. Interrupt articles have seven emotions associated with the beauty theme, and six with body, suggesting that the two are more closely related in Interrupt than in Rookie.

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BuzzFeed:

Table 4: *Emotions represented in BuzzFeed articles, categorized by theme.*

Emotion	Body	Personality	Perception	Image	Beauty	Size
Hope	1/4					
Worry	1/4	1/2	1/3		1/2	
Relaxation						
Happiness	1/4				1/2	
Fear	2/4	1/2			1/2	
Guilt			1/3			
Contentment			1/3		1/2	
Pride	4/4	1/2	2/3		1/2	1/4
Anger	1/4	2/2	1/3			3/4
Disgust	1/4	1/2				1/4
Sadness						

Like Rookie and Interrupt, the body theme is associated with more emotions. The emotion/theme count for the body theme is closely followed by that of the beauty theme, suggesting that the body and beauty themes are closely related in BuzzFeed too.

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Overall:

An overall examination of the emotions associated with themes across all three magazines suggests that certain emotional indicators are more common than others. These common emotions are illustrated in the chart below:

Table 5: *Occurrence of emotions across Rookie, Interrupt, and BuzzFeed*

Emotion	Occurrence in all three publications
Hope	2
Worry	19
Relaxation	2
Happiness	7
Fear	7
Guilt	1
Contentment	18
Pride	30
Anger	10
Disgust	9
Sadness	2

The emotional indicators of pride, contentment and worry are therefore the most popular, in that order. Least popular are the emotions guilt, sadness, relaxation and hope.

DISCUSSION:

As previously mentioned, McQuail established the following five criteria as a means of determining what is (or is not) participatory media:

- The direction of communication
- Flexibility about time and roles in the exchange
- Having a sense of place in the communication environment
- Level of control (of the communication environment)
- Perceived purpose (oriented to exchange or persuasion)

Given the results found in this study, one can establish that Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed meet these criteria. Consequently, the platforms construct a positive view of self-image and perception for their readers and participating members.

All three publications are directed in their communication efforts. Rather than simply serving as mass submission and publication forums, content for the three sites goes through an editing process. There is a staff on the editorial end that oversees the content and its publication.

The publications do offer a certain amount of flexibility as well. Rookie and BuzzFeed have continuously open submission options, offering readers the opportunity at any time to contribute, and turn in their role of passive consumption for a different role as a more active content creator. Interrupt in its early stages followed a similar model; today, the magazine plays host to rotating editors-in-chief, each of whom determines the content and structure for the upcoming publication.

All three publications provide a sense of place in the communication environment as well. Although the publications have differing purposes and

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target audiences, they all have dedicated missions or objectives. Rookie is established as a magazine for teenage girls, Interrupt as a more fashion-oriented magazine, and BuzzFeed as a publication devoted to popular online content. The publications all have a perceived purpose as a result. They are devoted to the information or discussion of a specific audience and its interests.

The platforms do maintain rigidity when it comes to the control they exert over their communication environments. All eschew total participation without guidance in favor of more controlled publication processes referenced in the directed manner in which communication is facilitated. So, although the publications do not necessarily control what can and cannot be submitted, there is a certain structure to their control over the editorial process.

Taking the theory of social constructionism into account at this point suggests that the structure of these participatory platforms fuels their ability to construct messages for audiences (Yuan. 2013). Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed are using their ability to determine what content is presented, and how, to cater to the demographic to which the content is being submitted.

In essence, the participatory nature of these media platforms allows them to be more inclusive of varying points of view, while selecting for publication the content that promotes more positive engagement around the subjects of image and perception.

Based on the analysis, the content shown presents self-image and perception in specific ways that tend to focus in different areas depending on the publication in question. Throughout the analysis, it became apparent that the most popular emotions are pride, contentment and worry. Since two of these top

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three emotions are positive, it can be determined that these participatory media platforms focus on self-image and perception through a more positive lens.

The presence of worry in the top three emotional indicators is indicative of the worries that writers seem to be acknowledging in their works. Rather than simply establish a positive message, these platforms couch that message in the context of their own experiences. Since these experiences have included worry and self-consciousness problems in the past, the reason for the presence of a negative theme among the positive emotional indicators is easily understood.

That the least popular negative emotions are sadness and guilt suggests that the overall message of these platforms is a positive one. When the presence of positive emotions is accounted for across all platforms, it far outstrips the presence of negative emotional indicators.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

For the purposes of this research, content in Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed was examined for very specific theme words; these words were then identified in relation to emotional indicators. The themes selected and indicators used were determined on the basis of previous research on the subject of body image and self-perception. Therefore, the words and phrases used for this research were selected on the grounds of previous research into their determining power as it relates to indicating the actuality of a certain person's image.

The words or phrases used for this study cannot be seen as entirely representative. Rookie Magazine, for instance, had several articles that discussed subjects one would likely see as a part of any body image themed study — eating

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disorders, growing up a multicultural child in a less diverse neighborhood, dealing with a family that might not be accepting of your sexuality — but these articles did not explicitly state the theme words selected for this research.

Rookie's article on eating disorders, for instance, was told from the perspective of a young girl who was working to overcome her own struggle with anorexia. She spent a great portion of her article discussing her perception of her body image, but she never once actually used the word "body." Words such as "fat," "skinny," and "thin" were used more often.

Consequently, this study cannot be taken as entirely representative of the content examined. A future study should consider the presence of articles that cover pertinent subjects, but that do not necessarily cover those subjects along very specific, thematic lines.

The content used to present ideas relating to positive image and perception in Rookie, Interrupt and BuzzFeed is largely written. Each piece of content analyzed for this research was selected on the basis of the presence of the theme words delineated in the analysis. Therefore, the presence of written content was necessary for the research; theme words could not be selected from pictures and images.

However, many pieces of content were written and published in conjunction with images. Rookie took a more diaristic approach to content overall. There were photo series interspersed throughout Yearbook One, and written content — typically presented in the first person — stood on its own, occasionally accompanied by pictures or charts. Interrupt took a more combined approach, pairing photos with written content in a more traditional magazine format. BuzzFeed took a more alternative approach, likely because its status as

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an online publication provided more room for experimentation, or at least different presentation methods. Content studied for BuzzFeed tended toward a more hybrid format. Multiple images or gifs were typically paired with written content, and main points were numbered throughout the article in “listicle” form.

The content written for these publications was created by audience participators to some extent. The entirety of Interrupt content, for instance, was created by audience participators and contributor submissions, not the editorial staff members. Rookie took a more balanced approach; a lot of content was created by staff members (staff members being defined as those people mentioned on the Rookie “about us” section on the Rookie website), but there were submissions and content from others outside that staff list as well. Content examined for BuzzFeed was not as varied. Despite the presence of BuzzFeed Community, the search feature of BuzzFeed’s site made it difficult to search for Community articles specifically. The article search had to be very theme-specific, and, given the nature of the search field, could not select for Community content alone. In the future it is suggested that a study of BuzzFeed’s participatory content be done after having determined a way to work with the search feature, identifying content from specific time periods, or by specifying a BuzzFeed category (such as the Community category) and ensuring that a particular category can, in fact, be accessed.

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