

## SEGMENTS OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN POLAND

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### **Abstract:**

Women's magazine are an important part of the press market in Poland. The traditional perception of women's magazines is changing gradually. There is a very strong trend to change the role of women in society in Poland, and women's magazines try to be more attractive to independent woman. Ladies want to dominate and from typical housewife they are becoming successful women. The aims of the paper are to characterize segments of the women's magazines on the Polish market. This paper try to describe the characteristic behaviour of the readers of women's magazines. The aim of study is also to reveal if there are the needs of readers which are unmet in connection with changing roles of women in family, professional and social life. Despite the changes in the roles of women, studies show that women continue to read magazines mostly for relaxation. Even women who have very high expectations towards themselves and the world surrounding them.

*Keywords: women's periodicals, segments of women's magazines, women's lifestyle*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's magazines are an important part of the press market in Poland. The most popular one is sold in 350 thousand items of a single issue, which means readership reaching over 10% of the population (Polish Reading Research 2013). This is similar to the daily selling of the largest Polish newspapers. In their case, as in the case of the whole press market, there can be seen a decrease in selling, but the selling decrease of women's magazines is much smaller. This is due to the fact that women tend to purchase or borrow female magazines (Gought-Yeats 2007, p. 28). The tendency to read these titles on the web is less as in the case of daily newspapers.

Women's periodicals are clearly targeted at defined customer segments with different needs. They meet the expectations of women of all ages. Magazines often give pieces of advice, present products, create a style. Many of them describe the life of celebrities, gossip or common problems in the family life of an average family. Reading the magazine often happens at defined time, reserved only for the woman, and is desired and expected (Stevens & Maclaran & Catterall 2007, p 246). Magazines for women create, especially for women performing the roles of mothers and wives in households, the space for the realization of their own needs separated from family life. Reading magazines helps women recharge batteries and often associated with some ritual behaviour. Some researchers compare reading magazines with the shopping (Stevens & Maclaran 2005, p.289). Looking through the periodicals gives women the same pleasure as shopping, in which the aim was often just looking and browsing. Women's magazines are blurring the border between dreams and reality.

The traditional perception of women's magazines is changing gradually. More and more studies show an important role of women's magazines, apart from providing readers with pleasure. The authors emphasize the importance of the content for the sphere of public life. Recent studies show that the impact on public life may be significant, even through the presentation of the changing role of women in society (Ytre-Arne 2011, p 247).

There is a very strong trend to change the role of women in society in Poland. Ladies want to dominate and from a typical housewife they are becoming successful career women, who are independent and often maintain the single status. Not only women, but people in general pay attention to the quality of life led by them. The need of its continuous improvement encourages those ambitious women to surround themselves with better items (starting with the quality of the food, ending with the content provided by the books and press).

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

The aims of the paper are to characterize segments of the women's magazines on the basis of observation of the market. The authors try to describe the characteristic behaviour of readers of women's magazines. The aim of the study is also to reveal if there are any needs of readers which are unmet in connection with changing roles of women in family, professional and social life.

The paper will give answers to the following research questions:

1. What does the woman expect from the magazine?
2. Which behaviours characterise the magazine reader?
3. Which segments of the women's magazines can be distinguished?
4. What trends can be seen in Polish periodicals?
5. Is the content of periodicals keep up with the changing lifestyles of women?

The research was made on a group of 30 women using the IDI method. The group of respondents was diverse mainly in terms of age and wealth. However, most of the respondents were women having higher expectations towards their lives. These women are the most aware of themselves and the world which surrounds them. Consequently, they are the most susceptible to worldwide popular trends, which affect their lifestyle.

## 3. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research shows that women of all ages expect from the magazines above all one thing relax. After or during a stressful day they do not want to spend time doing things which require a lot of intellectual commitment. On the other hand, women want to have a sense of well-spent free time so they expect

to read periodicals with varied topics. These are for example interesting, intellectually challenging features concerning many different issues. The most popular topics are fashion and beauty. Respondents want to read some good advice about their appearance and staying in a good condition. It is highly appreciated when some samples of cosmetics are added to the periodical. Nowadays, the choice between brands and products is so wide that it is difficult to decide on something specific. The possibility to test the product without purchasing it allows women to avoid buying inadequate cosmetics. An interesting finding was the fact that the women (apart from cosmetics samples) want to be able to touch the fabric of clothes presented in the periodicals, as it would be a big incentive for them to do the purchase. It often happens that women who are enchanted with a particular item of clothing presented in the photography in the magazine grow very big expectations which are not always satisfied upon seeing the product in reality. Every woman said that seeing beautiful sets of clothing on models helps them come up with interesting combinations for casual situations or important occasions.






Another important issue that should appear in a perfect magazine is a healthy lifestyle column including articles about diets and sports. The majority of respondents agreed that reliably written articles about this subject are great read. Being active and conscious of what we eat is more and more trend, just as the trend to be a perfect housewife. Women are looking for these new trends in periodicals. Some questioned women said that the magazine without advice on running the house (including cleaning, cooking etc.) is not complete for them.

Issues connected with culture cannot be missed. Apart from fashion and beauty women are looking for reliable reviews of cultural events. They are interested not only in cinema and theater premieres but also in good books and music. A significant factor while making decision whether to buy or not a magazine is the question of money. Especially during crisis women pay attention how much money they spend. They would rather spend money on magazines that meet their expectations presented above. Each respondent said that the most disturbing thing in women's magazines is too large amount of advertisements. Unfortunately this is impossible to change as it is a substantial source of income for publishers. An interesting observation is that women want magazines to be more engaging. The idea is to add a whole section with interesting mind puzzles diversified in terms of difficulty and type. Additionally it may further meet needs of target group if editors organized competitions with prizes.

Most of the questioned women are loyal readers of specific titles. The most popular ones are definitely luxury magazines. Women find them attractive in terms of both content and overall aesthetics. The majority buy every issue of the magazine, sometimes without looking at the content. Buying these periodicals became a kind of habit for them. But not every woman does so. Some of the respondents stated that the cover and the content which are presented in the particular issue encourage them to buy the magazine. Habitual readers are sure that the magazine will meet their expectations every time they buy it. After all, publishing houses have to fight even for these kinds of readers. New titles come out every now and then and no woman will spend her money on a magazine that does not meet her expectations. Women's periodicals have to attract, even be additive and innovative. Some interviewees subscribe favourite titles but they do not represent the majority of the titles readers. It might be because women don't want to be permanently attached to one specific title. As previously mentioned, even faithful readers sometimes want to look for something new and Polish women's magazines market is very competitive. From time to time women buy a new magazine if the cover attracts their attention and the content is tempting, however this does not prevent them from reading favourite titles. Readers, who do not read magazines regularly, buy it only when articles are interesting enough. They do not want to spend money on useless items, which is why even such a purchase is well-considered. A significant part of the researched group reads the magazines on the occasion of a visit to a beauty salon. Then they often familiarize themselves with new titles and sometimes they find them interesting enough to buy them later. As it is commonly known, women are very busy with their professional life and doing household chores. Because of that women often read magazines while travelling (by underground, bus, train or plane) to avoid boredom and the feeling of wasted time. Despite being constantly busy and overworked women try to find a few moments of relax per month when, with a cup of coffee, they can read their favourite titles and relax. Women tend to buy magazines instead of borrowing them. For the majority of them these periodicals have inspirations that they would like to keep for themselves so sharing with other women may cause some unnecessary problems.

On the basis of observation of the women's magazines market it is possible to identify segments which are presented in the table below.

**Table 1:** Segments of the women's magazines

| Segment                                     | Description of the segment  | Example of the title | Cover   |
|---|---|----------------------|---|
| Luxury magazines                            | Magazines for ambitious, independent, aspiring women who appreciate both the knowledge and personal development as well as the world of pleasure and fun. | Twój Styl            |    |
| Monthly magazines for younger reader        | Magazines for active teenagers as well as older women interested in fashion and beauty.   | Glamour              |    |
| Bi-weekly gossip magazines/People magazines | Magazines devoted to celebrities and fashion, addressed to a less demanding reader.   | Show                 |    |
| Self-help magazines                         | Magazines for women around 20-45 years, citizens of smaller cities with average earnings, pending for advices useful in everyday life.                    | Claudia              |   |
| Lifestyle magazines                         | Magazines for ambitious women and men having higher expectations towards life, looking for unusual solutions in everyday life.                            | Monitor              |  |

Source: Authors' elaborations

Luxury magazines are the most popular ones in the researched group. They for sure meet expectations of modern women towards periodicals. As it is presented in the table above, this segment is suitable for ambitious, aspiring and independent women. These three words describe properly today's women's personalities. Magazines placed in this segment have the most varied topics so that they are popular among different generations. The majority of researched group answered that the most interesting periodicals are from luxury magazines segment. Reading them gives women the greatest pleasure and these are the most popular source of inspirations and useful information.

Another segment, less popular among the researched group, is "monthly magazines for younger reader". This type of press includes mainly the following topics: sex, fashion and beauty. Women read such magazines only in order to be up to date with the trends. This is not a segment that gives reliable knowledge about personal development so it is good only to meet the needs of a typical woman taking care of herself. It is colorful and aesthetic so that it can give woman a pleasure of reading. The segment of gossip magazines is intended for women having an interest in the world of celebrities. Information contained in this type of press is devoted only to national and international events for famous people of showbusiness. Gossip magazines are for a less demanding reader, the price is always low so that many potential readers could buy each issue. People are interested in gossip from the world of celebrities and this kind of press fully meets their expectations.

Self-help magazines are popular especially among older women, but often younger women (mainly their daughters) look for some good advice to be used in everyday life. Women to whom self-help

magazines are addressed are usually citizens of smaller cities who do not have those extraordinary needs as residents of major cities. Such magazines have also affordable price which reflect earnings of target reader.

The last segment – lifestyle magazines – is a novelty on the market. These magazines are targeted at people who have higher expectations towards life. Lifestyle magazines are full of novelties from around the world. It is possible to get inspired in various fields – from the sphere of kitchen to business or art. The price may seem to be high, but these magazines are often released less than once a month and the graphic design is always so elaborated that reader does not have a feeling of ill-spend money. It seem that the segment can be a big threat for the luxury magazines despite the fact that these are not released by big publishing houses, like periodicals from other segments.

Does the content of periodicals keep up with changing lifestyles of women? The research did not give a definite answer to that question. On the one hand, it is a popular trend now to model women on militant feminists who are more masculine than men. Women want to show that they are strong enough to handle with the whole world by themselves. However, periodicals present a super-feminine world so now the question arises – how it is possible that such magazines are still bought by women? It seems that there is only one possible answer to such a question – women will always be women. By nature women are interested in cosmetics and fashion and would like to take good care of their home, which means for them the family and the house. Although some strong dominant women do not want to admit this, they also long for such things and sooner or later they realize this. This tendency was summed up by one of the respondents; “A change in the lifestyle is visible by women in general. Especially young women from the generation of 30/35+, and even younger generations, go back to the roots, tradition and to the kitchen. It has become a visible trend now. However, women over 30 do not want to follow in their mothers’ footsteps and intend to cut off completely from the role models of their mothers. Thus, they are determined to be emancipated/independent, they want to disregard kitchen duties and just relax”.

On the other hand, contemporary women want to develop their intellect and personalities just like they want to control their health. They put strong emphasis on their diet and healthy eating habits. Many women are committed to eco lifestyle, which can be manifested, for example by baking bread on their own. The researched group admitted that an important part of their daily schedule is physical activity. Therefore, many of them go to the gym to keep their body (and mind) in good shape. For some of them following a balanced diet and doing a good workout programme is a priority. In this sense periodicals keep up with the changes in lifestyle. In each new issue it is possible to find a growing number of reliable articles which provide women with valuable knowledge. Still, there are women for whom this knowledge is not enough. When such excluding trends appear, it is impossible to meet every woman’s expectations, but publishers try to do their best to find the “golden mean”, which will enable them to keep their loyal readers, and gain new ones.

Yet another thing worth highlighting is the fact that more and more people want to have everything in an electronic version, preferably stored in their portable mobile devices. Therefore, the press market is also changing in that direction. Most of the magazines have a website which is complementary to the paper issue. On such websites women (at whom these are targeted) can find some articles from archival releases which are not available for sale, texts or fragments from the current issue and lots of additional information similar to the one in the magazine. Apart from the popular websites, more and more titles have an electronic issue. It is possible to download it on a mobile device (sometimes even for free) and read it regardless of place and time without having to carry extra weight. There is no need to do the research to see that today’s world is ruled by the Internet. A significant part of researched women admitted that more often they read lots of websites to obtain needed information. It is not just about the specific periodical’s website, but the whole, countless sites for women. Getting information on the Internet can be much easier, faster and above all cheaper. Very popular sites are blogs run by women of all ages. Almost every woman has her favourite blogger with whom she can identify. These bloggers show how to live everyday life with a smile on the face. These blogs are often better sources of information than periodicals. A common complaint is that the featured/presented cosmetics or clothes are not within the range of people who buy these magazines, whereas products presented by blogs and bloggers are, which is why the Internet takes some readers away from the paper issues.

Given the information presented above and by observing the market it is possible to come to some conclusions concerning trends in Polish women’s magazines. Generally, at least three of them

concentrate on the theme of health. Among others it touches upon the issue of obesity. It is a worldwide problem among all generations. There are many programmes designed to raise awareness of the need for lifestyle changes. Not only overweight is a big problem but it is also women's disease that sometimes is impossible to be deal with. Also in Poland there are many initiatives related to this topic. Women's magazines are increasingly involved in social programmes by promoting them and by encouraging women to do periodic testing. Given all of the above mentioned arguments conected with lifestyle changes, women's magazines market is also trying to create or at least keep up with new trends. Periodicals include large sections about physical activity and its beneficial impact on our lives. Coaches show how to exercise at home and motivate oneself to regular training. Very often they give information about new training programmes which can be used anytime and anywhere. Magazines should follow this trend because this particular one does not have defects and could be implemented in each woman's life.

It may be noted that publishers give more attention to the style of magazines. Photos used for a specific article are of better quality and of texts is not boring. Graphic design encourages readers to come back to the magazine a couple of times. Women are sensitive to aesthetics and therefore they pay attention even to such things as the quality of paper. Fortunately Polish women's magazines (especially these targeted at women having higher expectations towards life) have nothing to be ashamed of. The aesthetic is satisfying even for the most demanding women.

Magazines are full of photos of information about clothes and cosmetics that should be an inspiration to the reader. It is a common practice to show the items which are not attainable for the majority of readers. This might be irritating, but on the other hand women like to look at these expensive products, dream of them and try to get them. Therefore, it has been concluded that in fact, probably subconsciously, women seek in periodicals items which could help them increase their social status.

It is worth mentioning that lately a couple of new titles have come out on the Polish press market. They were above all lifestyle magazines. In those periodicals readers will not come across beauty and fashion tips or celebrities' gossip. Topics addressed in this type of magazines are mainly design, cuisine, culture, business, style and travels. This is a piece of good press for people who need a little more out of life than an average person. They are beautifully made, with a lot of interesting articles, which encourages reader to buy them regardless of the high price.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Summing up, women read periodicals mainly for relaxation. They expect to find reliable pieces of information about trends in fashion, beauty, healthy recipies and sports. As a result of the pursuit of success they have less and less free time. If in spite of all they find some time to relax women want to do something that will not make them feel intellectually encumbered. Even women who have very high expectations towards themselves and the world surrounding them have similar opinions about the women's magazines. Nowadays there is a trend of masculine, self-sufficient woman. This phenomenon is not unknown for the researched group but after all they do not expect creating such image of women in magazines. They willingly seek to satisfy their sometimes maybe hidden femininity. The majority of women are habitual readers, faithful to one or two titles. Sometimes the desire to read the magazine is a result of a habit, though usually substantive content and attractive cover have an impact on the decision of buying specific periodical. On the other hand, another trend slowly appears, namely return to the roots, especially among younger generation entering adulthood. This may be connected with a novelty that came out lately on the described market and it is a segment of lifestyle magazines. These kinds of magazines are sources of more diversed content which gives big potential for future development of the segment. In general, readership of paper magazines decreases due to the development of Internet and mobile devices. Reading articles and finding inspirations for everyday life via Internet is easier and cheaper for the user. These two expressions are essential for today's overworked women for whom Internet sometimes becomes a best friend.

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