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STRATEGIES OF ELICITING YOUNG PEOPLE'S AFFECTIVE AND QUICK PARTICIPATION IN A YOUTH MAGAZINE'S INSTAGRAM COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Traditional media have merged with social media and pursue to produce engaging content and form relationships with online audiences. At the same time, social media has allowed young people a venue to practice their basic needs of interaction, identity, and self-expression, and provides communities of shared issues and social/political aspirations. By analysing the Instagram post caption data of the largest Finnish (girls') youth magazine, this case study investigated what posting strategies used by the magazine elicited youth participation, and how do the strategies and participation align with young people's media and online communication preferences. The study found the magazine to use various strategies; mostly affective topics and emoji/tag suggestion appeals. From those perceived as general posting strategies, affective topics and contests and ballots, and from more specific framing choices, a positive approach and topics providing information, peer-support and close topic angles for young women, elicited the most participation. Additionally, suggestion to comment with a quick emoji/tag was the most engaging appeal suggestion. Young people preferred the image-dominated expressive participation towards both everyday/personal and civic/political topics. The study produces valuable, detailed information regarding young

people's online participation preferences and the potential of traditional media in engaging with online youth audiences.

KEYWORDS

affective participation; Instagram; online audience community; online political expression; social media; youth magazine

Introduction

Teen magazines are viewed as a “cultural resource for young people which they can, at different moments, ‘talk with’ and ‘think with’” (Kehily 1999, 68). Teen girls’ magazines offer information and entertainment but also ideological roles and common topics, which function as agents of youth socialization, because they can offer a model of being a girl or young woman (Loke and Harp 2010). Magazines, characterized by reciprocity and community building (Holmes 2007) form a beneficial media context also for young people’s participation. Magazines have been referred to as the precursors to today’s “virtual communities”, because they create stronger relationships between writers and readers compared to news media, including reader-identification and participation (Loke and Harp 2010).

Due to digital competition in the media space and young people’s tendency to be drawn towards interactive online content, traditional media outlets have increasingly adopted social media platforms for their publication and audience interaction purposes (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021; Williams-Turkowski and Sternadori 2019). A social media community, managed and monitored by a magazine, can create a safe participation space for young people and especially for girls, who often face harassment on social media and whose voices are not heard enough in the society (Reed, Wong, and Raj 2019; Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015).

Young people use social media for self-expression, peer-communication, and information (Lwin et al. 2012), and for engaging with various topics with varying modes, such as likes, comments, shares, and tags, which connect them to other users, and also to the media brands (Williams-Turkowski and Sternadori 2019; Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). *Online audience communities* (i.e., online ‘networked publics’ of peers connected, for example, through brands or consumer habits) have been found to be strategically beneficial intangible assets of magazines in media work and brand building because they can deepen knowledge about the audience and strengthen commitment and engagement of the audience with the media brand (Malmelin and Villi 2016).

Magazines have experimented with various digital platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and video services, by sharing links to online content, inviting reader contributions, and conducting brand and content promotions (Williams-Turkowski and Sternadori 2019). Media corporations can use various strategies, from encouraging activity and affective

participation to brand promotion and political mobilization, to achieve their social media audience objectives (van Es 2016; Malmelin and Villi 2016; Sivek 2014; Trusting News 2017).

Young people are especially drawn to entertainment online, including topics of fashion and human stories, but also serious and societal topics are discussed and followed (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021). Consequently, digital and social media have become spaces for youth civic and political expressive participation (Keating and Melis 2017). Magazines have also been found to legitimize issues of societal importance and even mobilize entire political movements through framing and narratives (Sivek 2014). Social media-enabled communities used by traditional media can lead to a shared identity and even political engagement, when the issues raised by the media are discussed and shared on social media platforms (Selva 2016).

This study focuses on a youth magazine, whose target group mainly consists of 13–19-year-old girls and young women. The magazine has been the largest, the most popular, and the only exceptionally active and interactive traditional Finnish youth magazine on social media. The magazine's main product has been a print paper, but they have also maintained an online discussion forum and several social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube. This study specifically focuses on the Instagram account of the magazine. The magazine and data were chosen due to their capacity to showcase young people's activity towards posted content in a unique, corporate media managed social media setting.

The objectives of the study were to investigate what kind of posting strategies does a corporate media aimed at youth (girls') use on its social media account to elicit participation, which strategies elicit the most participation, and how do the strategies and participation align with young people's traditional and online media communication preferences. Thematic coding and content analysis were used to detect general and more specific strategies and (private vs. public) topics of eliciting audience participation, and their elicited participation forms (likes, comment variants) were counted. Further, the participation forms and most liked and commented topics were evaluated in more detail to detect the most eliciting activity appeal suggestions and topic framing patterns.

Instagram usage of traditional girls' teen magazines lacks research. Compared to earlier studies, this study also takes a broader and closer look into the corporate media strategies of eliciting participation of young social media audiences. It is important to understand what aspects of online and traditional media in the current convergent social media landscape interest and engage young audiences who are the media consumers of the future. It is also important to understand the array of interactive strategies that magazines have with online audience communities to choose from.

Magazines' roles and strategies of activating social media audiences

According to Holmes (2007), magazines target a precisely defined group, form content based on their desires and create a bond with readers, hence encouraging community-like

interactions. Magazines can serve as advisors through life's rites of passages and how one defines ideal selfhood both in private (relationships, health) and public (school, work) spheres. Further, magazines targeted at specific age and gender groups, such as girls' teen magazines, have been found to offer age-relevant topics (e.g., puberty, relationships) but also suggest roles which girls and young women ideally should conform to (i.e., traditional femininity), with lesser focus on societal topics, such as women's rights or environmentalism. (Jenkins 2020). Studies have found magazines to have a powerful influence on the attitudes and behaviors of teenage girls (Loke and Harp 2010).

As traditional media (magazines, TV etc.) have been forced to merge with social media, they have started to produce content and form relationships with online audiences (Malmelin and Villi 2016; Selva 2016). Similar consuming habits, preferences and connecting with a media brand can function as a social glue forming the audience into a community (Malmelin and Villi 2016). Magazines, for example, can construct their community culture through language choices of addressing readers (Valpas 2010; Luukka 2003).

Popular and political magazines have their diverse issue agendas and framing through topics and narratives (Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015; Sivek 2014). From popular magazine's online content young people are found to significantly prefer entertaining topics over news and political information (Williams-Turkowski and Sternadori 2019). Nevertheless, many types of magazines can advance civic participation and discourse through topic selection and also by setting up online spaces for discussion (Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015). Special interest and group targeted magazines' online forum discussions have been found to hold more "potential for representing the Habermasian public sphere — publically accessible venues that are diverse, robust, inclusive, and ripe for rational-critical discourse", compared to large-circulation, general-interest publications (Habermas 1962 as quoted in Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015 1).

Most companies today aspire to create content on social media that generates online user and customer activity. In the like economy, "users are allowing the use of their data and affects to enable social interaction with other users and to perform their online identity" (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013, 1353). According to Gerlitz and Helmond (2013, 1358), the Like button "provides a one-click shortcut" to express a variety of (only) positive engagement (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). Comments, on the other hand, offer a potential for more diverse engagement (e.g., critique or political participation, see Theocharis 2015).

Media corporations have their individual agendas and strategies for social media use and building user engagement. van Es (2016) identifies four strategic "applications of social media in reality TV": 1) *Promotional*, where social media is mainly used to increase brand awareness. 2) *Affective*, where it is used to deepen the emotional investment of viewers through affective participation. 3) *Functional*, where the platform is used as a practical channel of communication (e.g., feedback). 4) *Phatic*, where the main focus is on gathering reactions. Further, Malmelin and Villi (2016) found roles to manage magazines' online audience communities: 1) *Observing* the interest and needs of the target group, 2) *Developing*

the platform according to brand and audience needs, 3) *Facilitating communication*, and 4) *Curating content* with discussion angles and brand content.

Consequently, this study investigates the case magazine's online audience strategies through the following first specific research question:

RQ1: What types of posting strategies does the magazine use on its Instagram post feed to elicit participation?

Moreover, from a political agenda perspective, based on the social movement "frame alignment" by Snow et al. (1986, as quoted in Sivek, 2014), Sivek (2014) located four sub-processes, which they connected to political magazines' potential of mobilizing audiences online: 1) *Frame Bridging*, where magazines tweet frequently from the magazine's perspective/paradigm, 2) *Frame Amplification*, where tweets aim to invigorate audiences through information, "calls to action" ("retweet," etc.), and interaction/dialogue, 3) *Frame Extension*, such as using hashtags to invite outside users to join the magazine's community/paradigm, and 4) *Frame Transformation*, when frequent tweets lead to audiences interpreting the world through the magazine's perspective/paradigm.

The Trusting News research project found that social media audiences were motivated to share news story related posts and tag friends in comments when directly encouraged to do so, and the most successful of these strategies framed the posts in a motivational approach, such as appealing followers to help others (Trusting News 2017). Wagner, Baccarella, and Voigt (2017) also refer to the concept of *post appeal* in which social media brand messages are created in a certain persuasive manner or design (e.g., informational, or emotional) to achieve favourable attitudinal outcomes, such as likes and comments. For example, sentiment analysis (i.e., negative, neutral, positive relations users have to topics) is used to forecast people's consumption patterns, and *values* and *affect* assigned to content (Arvidsson 2011).

Young people's needs, interests, and participation on social media

For children and young people, online environments are communication and leisure tools, but also an important arena for peer-support, self-expression and discussing difficult issues (Lwin et al. 2012). Young people are strongly drawn to visual stimuli on social media, and most platforms are "framed around the visual" (Highfield and Leaver 2016). Among the most popular social media platforms for young people are Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat (How Young People Consume News 2018), which are all based on sharing images and videos. Young people use social media mainly for browsing and quick "surveilling", while publicly commenting or posting are more sporadic (Len-Ríos et al. 2016).

Tuukkanen, Kankaanranta, and Wilska (2013) found that children want to discuss or influence issues on the school environment, children's national and global wellbeing, and treatment of others, nature and animals. All these interests present the (overlapping, evolving) *private* (family, school, etc.) and *public spheres* (arena for public issues and political debate) in young people's lives (see Habermas 1989). Traditionally, children and young people have

not had room in the democratic public sphere of discussion but instead have voiced opinions mostly through societal “mediating institutions”, such as schools or organizations (Flanagan and Wray-Lake 2011). Nevertheless, digital and social media have increased the possibility of children and young people to express oneself and form a public voice (Rheingold 2008).

From online media, young people overall seek enjoyment (positivity) and quick access to information and relevant news (How Young People Consume News 2018). Entertainment and fashion are the most followed overall topics, but serious societal topics, such as mental health, climate change, and human rights, are also among the discussed topics of young people on SNS (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021).

Consequently, online environments also create a venue for youth civic/political participation, especially expressive participation. Keating and Melis (2017) identified that far higher proportions of young adults reported engaging in *online political expression*, such as posting or liking political content, than traditional forms, such as voting or joining a political party. Youth usage of online forums to express and discuss political opinions has been connected to *political efficacy*, the belief in one’s ability to achieve political objectives, and positive experiences using social media for political purposes is connected to pursuing social media activism (Velasquez and LaRose 2015).

Based on the aforementioned strategies of eliciting online audience participation and youth preferences of topics and styles of traditional and online media communication and participation, the second specific research question of this case study is:

RQ2: Which of the magazine’s posting strategies elicit the most participation among young people?

As a final note, Theocharis (2015) does not evaluate “liking” other’s political content as political participation, but instead as an “expression of preference”, however evaluating online commenting as political participation. Sceptics describe all the aforementioned participation forms of online activism as *clicktivism* or *slacktivism*, referring to the click-based, “feel-good”, low-impact culture of SNS (see Morozov 2009). Nevertheless, other scholars recognize clicktivism as a new type of online political participation: for example, increasing issue awareness (see Halupka 2014).

Case description, data, and methods

The case magazine of this study published its first print number in 1998. Earlier studies of the magazine have categorized its print content to focus on fashion, beauty and health, relationships, celebrity stories, Q&A sections, reader-produced-content, and advertisements. Societal topics have been marginal but increased somewhat from 2006 onwards. (see Valpas 2010). In recent years the magazine has had over 79,000 print paper readers (circulation over 48,000) and an overall (digital and print) reach of around 190,000 (Media Audit Finland 2018), indicating that roughly half of all Finnish girls have been associated with the brand. The Instagram account had 30,151 followers at the beginning of 2020.

The focus Instagram data was gathered for this study in co-operation with the magazine. The research was not commissioned by the magazine nor did the magazine set any research objectives. The magazine was chosen because it was the most popular youth magazine in Finland, and the only one utilizing interactive social media platforms. The magazine's Instagram page has been targeted for the readers to gain more varied online, interactive and participatory content in addition to the print material. The Instagram account was created during the early 2010's, around the time the application started to gain popularity in Finland.

The data was gathered from the magazine's Instagram account through the analytics feature of the social media publishing tool Buffer. The researchers retrieved the data in January 2020, covering a period from January 1st, 2019 to January 20th, 2020. The data included 281 posts. The data was in Finnish and translated into English by the researchers.

The study's focus was on post data, which is the most comprehensive data available from Buffer, including the following descriptive information: date, post ID, link to original post, post type and post text. In addition, the following numeric post details were available: comments, likes, reach, impressions, engagement, and engagement rate. The study's more specific focus was on post captions (i.e., texts) and their comment and like activity. Reach was also used to evaluate "surveilling" in comparison to the total amount of comments and likes, but there was inadequate information of the other post details for them to be used.

The study used a mixed method approach. First, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic coding analysis process was used to locate and name themes for the 281 posts according to their textual content. The aim of the thematic coding was to detect general posting strategies of corporate media, with regard to previous study findings (eliciting affective participation, brand promotion, sparring engagement etc.; see van Es 2016; Malmelin and Villi 2016), and topics covering different spheres of interest in young people's lives (Habermas 1989; Tuukkanen, Kankaanranta, and Wilska 2013). Further, the Interview and Instagram data were overall evaluated based on potential strategies of the magazine in building online audience communities and mobilizing audiences for political action (Malmelin and Villi 2016; Sivek 2014).

Activity was generally evaluated as the number of comments or likes on average per post regarding some strategy. Descriptive statistics (percentages, means) were used to present the results. The study evaluated likes as a form of *affective evaluation* of the messages (i.e., potential indications of meaningfulness; see Alhabash and McAlister 2014) and one-click shortcuts of *affective responses* towards content (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). Comments were evaluated as *message deliberation* (i.e., potential indication of deeper deliberation on the issue; see Alhabash and McAlister 2014), with potential for more thorough expression of opinion, including political participation (Theocharis 2015).

Further, a semi-structured editorial background interview was conducted with the Editor-in-chief of the magazine on 12 March 2020. The interview lasted 70 minutes and was recorded and transcribed in Finnish. The objective of the interview was to understand the magazine's overall mission, social media agenda and Instagram posting strategies. The interviewee was

selected based on being the person best in charge and aware of the strategies at the time of the interview study.

To go deeper into more detailed posting strategies and framing of the posts, the data was also content analysed based on its preliminary examination (*emergent coding*, Stemler 2001). The 281 posts were coded according to the observed post appeal strategies (see Trusting News 2017; Wagner, Baccarella, and Voigt 2017) of 1) suggestion to like a post and 2) suggestion to comment on a post, including variations: 1) in post, 2) in other content, 3) no suggestion, 4) with an emoji, 5) with a tag, and 6) textually. Further, the amounts of comments elicited by the suggestion types were reviewed.

The content of the users' comments was not the main focus of analysis, but comments were overall reviewed to evaluate if they corresponded with the suggested engagement strategies. Still, comment content of especially prominent social/political topics were more thoroughly analysed to see if and how specifically textual comments had potential for deliberate (cognitively challenging/deep) participation and/or inclusive rational-critical discourse (Habermas 1962, as quoted in Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015, 1).

To grasp an even deeper understanding if there were some effective post framing patterns, the most liked themes were analysed by assessing their specific post topic angles and wordings (Sivek 2014; Luukka 2003), and the emotional appeal strategy *tone* (Wagner, Baccarella, and Voigt 2017; Arvidsson 2011), including variations: 1) positive/happy, 2) negative or 3) neutral/informative. In addition, the most commented themes were investigated more closely regarding post appeal strategies and wordings attached to the suggestion to comment. Post and comment quotations are used to exemplify the findings.

The study followed ethical research guidelines and prevailing laws (national, copyright, etc.), and protected the privacy of individuals (GDPR). The data reports Buffer provided are anonymous: Instagram users' personal information cannot be connected to the posts or activity data. The researchers did not save any personal data during the study and the results are presented anonymously. The magazine gave its permission to study and publish citations from the editorial post data.

Account Follower Demographics

According to the analytical statistics, the magazine's Instagram account had 26,150 followers at the beginning of the data-gathering period (1.1.2019) and 30,151 followers at the end (20.1.2020). Most of the followers (83.9%) were female. The percentages of followers in different age groups were 28.2% (13–17 years); 41.9% (18–24 years); 14.8% (25–34 years); 8.4% (35–44 years); and 6.7% (over 45 years).

Editorial interview results

The interview with the Editor-in-chief (12 March, 2020) revealed that the magazine's Instagram communication goals include experimenting with new kinds of journalistic storytelling and topics, understanding its target group's interests and committing readers to

the magazine's brand and Instagram account. Thus, the main posting objective is not to promote the print magazine or its stories, but to provide content that activates and interests young followers. The editorial team conducts continuous journalistic target group queries to gain this insight. Further, the magazine's values are courage, clemency, merriment and equality and their mission is to encourage young people to change the world. Also, civic and political issues important to the target group are raised, and experimented with, especially in the Instagram content.

Our mission is that we want to encourage our youth to change the world, which relates to everything, but especially to equality and courage. Further, according to our findings, for instance, climate change and environmental issues are topics that worry young people, and that is why we raise them in the social media content. (Editor-in-chief)

The Instagram posting is not based on any specific strategy, but on stated values and "quietly shared and acquired knowledge" on what the most important issues are for girls and young women. There are topics that the editorial team considers of high interest, such as climate change, mental health, and bullying. The magazine does not use a list of subjects that it circulates on Instagram, but it does aim to hold a journalistic subject balance by having a list of recently posted items.

Post classification into themes and upper categories

The thematic coding analysis of all the data resulted in 24 themes. The themes were further classified into three upper categories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number (N, %) of data posts (N = 281) classified into themes (N = 24) and upper categories (N = 3).

Category	Theme	Posts (N)	% of posts
Personal/private/ev eryday life issues (private sphere) N = 13 themes	Entertainment: TV, music, social media, etc.	48	17.1
	Leisure time and activities	29	10.3
	Friendships, relationships, and love	13	4.6
	Bullying and loneliness	11	3.9
	Mental health and self-esteem	9	3.2
	School and exchange studying	9	3.2
	Body issues and appearance pressures	8	2.9
	Work and internships	5	1.8
	Family	4	1.4
	Hobbies	3	1.1
	Exercise and sports	3	1.1
	Sexuality and sex education	2	0.7
	Health and diseases	2	0.7
Total		146	52.0
	Climate change and ecological choices	17	6.1

Social/global issues with potential for civic/political activity (public sphere)	Young people's say in the future of the country	5	1.8
	Gender equality	4	1.4
	Sexual and gender minorities' rights	3	1.1
	Animal protection and activism	2	0.7
	Politics, law, and petitions	2	0.7
	Sexual harassment	2	0.7
N = 8 themes	Ethnic and language minorities' rights	1	0.4
Total		36	12.8
Editorial social media strategies	Brand, product or content promotion	83	29.5
	Battle or vote	8	2.9
	Contest, ballot, etc.	8	2.9
N = 3 themes			
Total		99	35.2

The results show that 64.8% of the posts concentrated on general subjects presenting topics perceived by the magazine to be meaningful for girls and young women (cf. *affective* application of social media, van Es 2016). Most of the posts (52%), 13 themes, covered issues personal to young people, happening in their immediate surroundings or viewed as everyday issues (referred to hereafter as the Personal category). The smallest portion of the posts (12.8%), 8 themes, covered social or global issues, and those where young people can potentially participate in civic and political matters (hereafter the Social category).

Further, 35% of the posts were categorized as specific Editorial social media strategies. The largest portion of these (29.5%) concentrated on promoting the print magazine and other brand-related social media content (e.g., YouTube, Instagram Stories, etc.) (cf. *promotional/functional* applications, van Es 2016). Further, 5.7% of the posts consisted of Battles (voting/ballots between issues, e.g., which ice cream flavour is the best) or Contests (with prizes) to increase audience activity (cf. *phatic*, van Es 2016).

Like focus on post themes

The average number of likes per post (mean) were utilized to evaluate the themes' overall meaningfulness (affective evaluation) to followers (see Figure 1). The total number of likes during the data period was 610,256, amounting to an average of 2,172 likes per post. Total number of post reach was 4,099,367, indicating that 14.89% of the users that saw the Instagram posts also liked them.

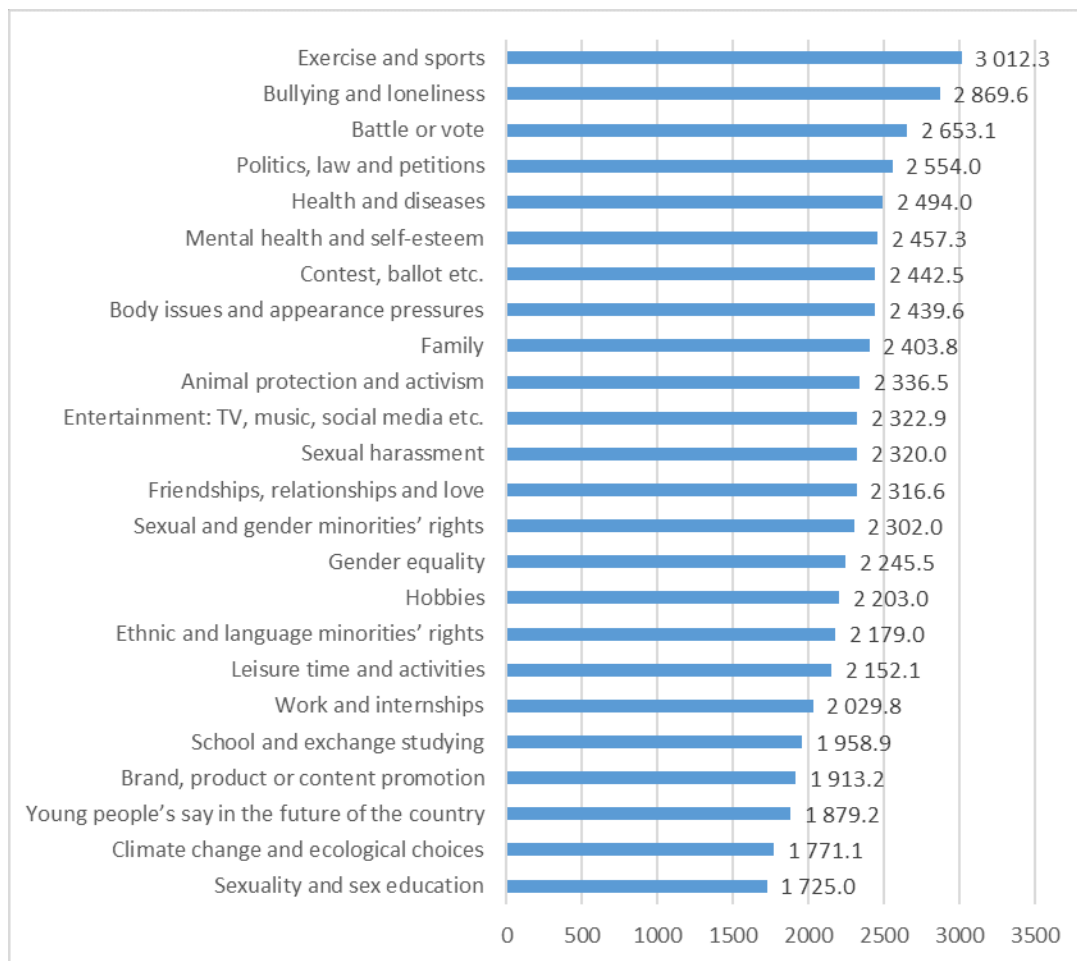


Figure 1. Average likes (mean) per post among the themes ($N = 24$).

According to the activity results, the magazine's most often posted Brand promotion posts did not gather a high number of likes per post (1,913.2, cf. total average 2,172). On the other hand, the scarcely posted themes of Battles (2,653.1) and Contests (2,442.5) were very popular among the followers. As Contests and Battles are specific activation strategies, they are discussed separately from the "affective" theme categories (Personal and Social). The Battle posts' main agenda was to elicit comments on questions, but their objectives and positive topics also gathered large amounts of likes. The most liked (4,093) post stated: "BATTLE! Are you an autumn person? Comment (emoji) if you are or (emoji) if you're not..." The Contest posts' activity was similarly focused on eliciting comments, for example revealing one's favourite emojis with a promise of a prize, but still gathered a high amount of likes towards the posts' positive, rewarding objectives.

Next, the Personal and Social posting categories will be more closely evaluated. The top 10 most liked themes included those from both the Personal ($P = 7$) and Social ($S = 3$) category: 1. Exercise and sports (P), 2. Bullying and loneliness (P), 3. Politics, law, and petitions (S), 4. Health and diseases (P), 5. Mental health and self-esteem (P), 6. Body issues and appearance pressures (P), 7. Family (P), 8. Animal protection and activism (S), 9) Entertainment (P), and

10. Sexual harassment (S). For the most liked themes, the magazine somewhat posted about bullying (11), mental health (9), and body issues (8), but very scarcely about others. The Entertainment theme was the only frequently posted (48), most liked theme, but generated just an average amount of likes (2,322.9).

The strategy suggesting followers like a post was used in only 10 posts but generated somewhat more likes (2,840.9) compared to those without this suggestion (2,238.2). Nevertheless, this strategy's effects were so random and low that they are discussed no further.

In the Personal category, Exercise and sports was the most liked theme of all. Two of the posts having the most likes (3,122 and 3,724) covered Finnish national sport teams' world championship victories, the most popular celebrating (young women's) cheerleading victory, while the least liked post (2,191) suggested followers identify their favourite sports activity. Thus, the popular sports angle had a gender and national celebratory (affective) focus.

Second, the Bullying and loneliness theme's posts ranged from condemning bullying to offering information on how to handle bullying situations. The most liked (4,515; 3,454; 3,177) posts emphasized comforting and giving peer-support for those bullied. Most posts included references to serious stories about bullied people, but their tone was quite positive and optimistic about the future: "Comment (emoji), if you think bullying is never a joke...together we can make the world a better place..."

One of the Health and diseases theme posts, addressing stomach issues, generated a high number of likes (3,286), and the other one, addressing genital issues, generated quite a low number of likes (1,702). Both posts had a positive tone with an informative/helpful approach.

The Mental health and self-esteem theme's posts consisted of discussions on mental health and accepting oneself, such as the most liked post (4,384): "Don't worry about other people's opinions (emoji) Tag a friend who needs reminding that s/he is a great person...". All the posts had a positive, reassuring tone, with many offering advice and further information on the subject.

In the Social category, first, the Politics theme's high average post amount was due to one much liked (3,118) post addressing abortion laws and their development in the USA. The post had a rather dramatic (emotional) topic and tone, building a narrative on women's rights:

Like and comment if you too think that people have the right to make decisions regarding their own bodies !! For instance, the USA is changing abortion laws against the constitution in some states. As a consequence, not even rape victims could have the right to an abortion.

The other (neutral) post about national general election results gained a lower number of likes (1,990).

The Animal protection theme's 2 posts both gained a high number of likes (2,438 and 2,235). Both posts started with a positive, fun approach before addressing more serious aspects of the issue, such as animal testing. Both posts suggested further reading about stories of young activists and social media influencers.

Both posts in the Sexual harassment theme had a serious tone condemning all types of harassment. The one offering peer-stories gained somewhat less likes (2,104) compared to the other, slightly less serious approach to the topic, through a song released on YouTube (2,536). Finally, all three of the Sexual and gender minority theme's posts also took a positive and empowering approach to both condemn discrimination and support equality.

The magazine's most posted theme from the Social category, Climate change, gained the second to lowest likes per post (1,771.1) of all the themes, despite its potentially affective topic. The posts presented information/stories related to fighting climate change and giving followers tips on doing so. The posts overall had a serious tone, and many contained words such as "worry" and "threat", which especially gained low numbers of likes. The most popular post (2,582) started with a more positive tone: "Happy world environment day, our beloved planet! (emoji)..."

Five Climate change posts were part of a campaign where followers were asked to send a WhatsApp voice message addressing their climate change worries, to be forwarded to decision-makers. These posts gathered only 1,520.4 likes on average. Nevertheless, even without the campaign post values, the theme did not rank any higher in the like scale. According to the Editor-in-chief's interview (12 March, 2020), the editorial team saw one reason for low participation activity being that followers needed to go to another application to participate.

Comment focus on post themes

The number of comments per post for each theme are presented in Figure 2. The total amount of comments during the data period was 26,369, amounting to an average of 94 comments per post. Compared to the total number of post reach (4,099,367), 0.64% of users that saw the posts also commented them.

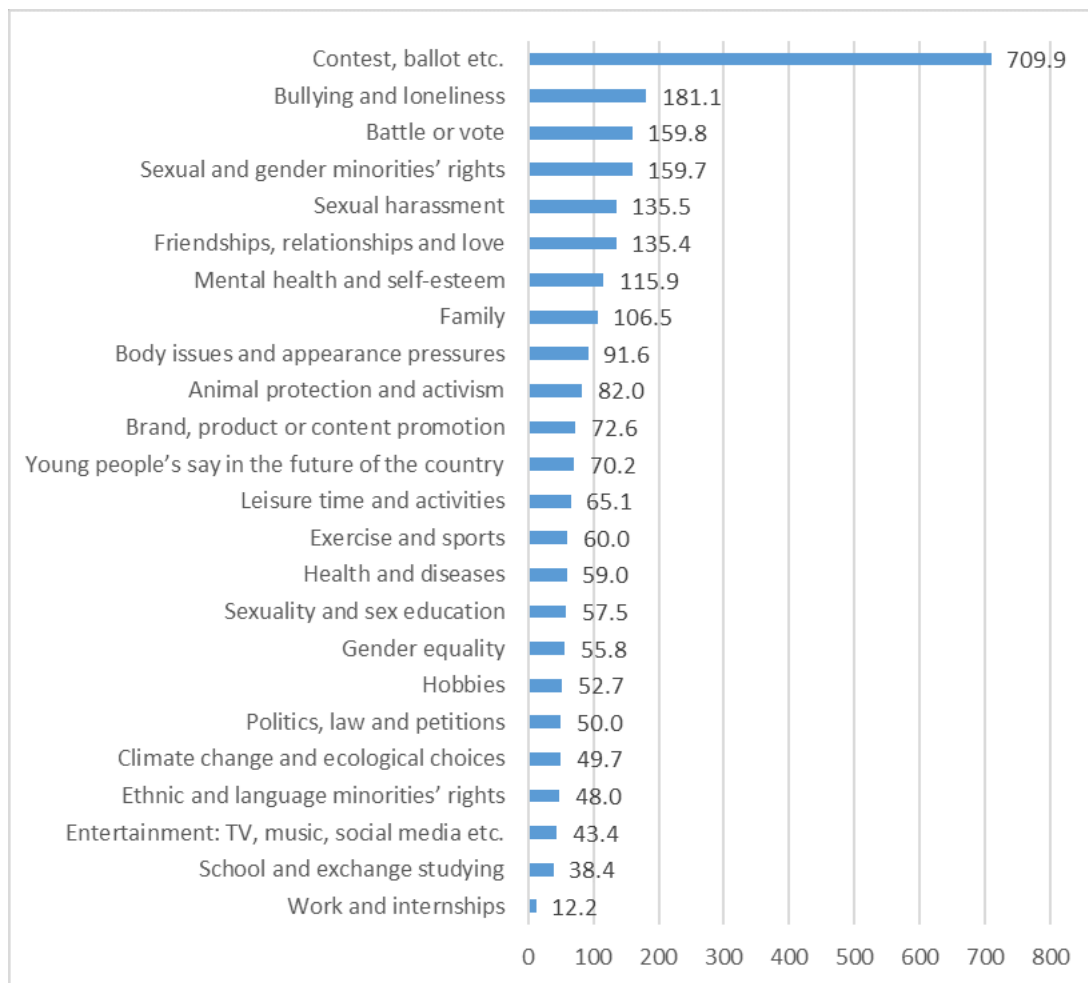


Figure 2. Average comments (mean) per post among the themes ($N = 24$).

The Contest theme gathered the most comments per post (709.9). From the eight posts, 3 suggested commenting emojis, 3 suggested to tag a friend and 2 suggested textual comments. There were no significant differences of activity levels between the suggestion types, but the prize made the difference. The highest number of comments (2,356) were generated by a contest to win tickets to Ariana Grande's concert and another to win a smartphone (1,611). The other posts gathered good but lower average (285.3) amounts of comments with the magazine's print issues and calendars as prizes.

The Battle posts gathered a good amount of comments (159.8). Four of them suggested emoji comments and four textual responses, but there were no significant differences between the average activity results between the suggestion types (159.5; 160). The only difference between the posts were the topics discussed, from favourite songs to arguing if August is a summer month or an autumn month.

From the "affective" themes' perspective, within the most commented top 10 themes, the Personal ($N = 6$) and Social ($N = 4$) categories were again quite evenly represented. The top 10 themes from the Personal category included Bullying, Friendship, Mental health, Family,

Body issues and Leisure time. From the Social category they were Sexual/gender minorities' rights, Sexual harassment, Animal protection and the Future of the country.

Among the Personal and Social categories, the most systematic strategy of the magazine was to suggest that the followers comment on a specific post, which was executed in 167 posts (91.8%). The posts suggesting a comment generated a larger number of comments on average (54.2) than posts without this suggestion (26).

Among the suggestions, the most used strategy suggested commenting a specific emoji or tagging a friend, featured in 99 (59.3%) of the suggestion posts, generating the highest average of comments of all posts (91.1). In addition, 62 posts (37.1%) suggested followers to comment in a textual form, resulting in a smaller average comment count (50.3). The remaining posts suggested commenting in any desired form, resulting in a low comment average (21.1).

The top 4 most commented themes from both the Personal and Social categories were further analysed to find out if there were specific patterns with the suggestion types gathering comments. Table 2 shows the number of posts and comments per post made in the most commented themes that suggested either an emoji, tagging a friend or replying with text. The comments contents overall were found to correspond with the suggestion types.

Table 2. Number (N) of posts and comments per post (mean) according to comment suggestion types.

Top 4 most commented Personal and Social themes	Emoji	Tag	Text
	Number of posts (N)/Average comments per post (M)		
1. Bullying and loneliness	8/194.8	1/376.0	1/38.0
2. Friendships, relationships and love	1/42.0	7/192.3	3/59.7
3. Mental health and self-esteem	4/92.8	4/165.3	1/11.0
4. Family	1/52.0	1/87.0	2/143.5
1. Sexual/gender minorities' rights	3/159.7		
2. Sexual harassment	2/135.5		
3. Animal protection and activism	1/91.0		1/73.0
4. Young people's say in the future of the country	1/72.0		4/88.7

The Bullying theme had the most effective emoji suggestions in the Personal category, mostly appealing peer-support. Further, one post suggesting to tag a friend, who should know s/he is not alone with her/his troubles, gathered a significant amount of tag comments (376). The only textual suggestion urged to praise a friend, celebrity or an unknown person, resulting in average number of text comments (38), such as: “@friend you are a winner and lovely just as you are (heart emoji)”.

The Friendship and Mental health themes were characterized with more suggestions to tag a friend, resulting in a high number of tags. The Friendship posts mostly suggested tagging a

friend in a playful manner, such as: “(emoji) Tag a friend who is more important to you than your phone” (509), and the Mental health posts emphasized tagging as peer-support.

The Family theme had more textual suggestions than others, resulting in very high comment numbers. This was due to a word search puzzle that had followers find a word describing their fathers; a very effective strategy to increase activity (216). Similarly, the only Bullying theme textual comment appeal suggested praising a friend, resulting in short textual compliments that tagged a friend, and the Friendship theme’s textual comments resulted in one post regarding the length of their Snapchat streaks (142).

Tagging overall appeared to increase the number of comments, yet there were no tag suggestions within the top Social category themes. Nonetheless, the Sexual/gender minorities’ rights posts resulted in high emoji comment numbers, with all posts beginning with a value appeal, such as, “Comment (emoji) if you oppose discrimination!...” The 2 posts from the Sexual harassment theme also suggested commenting a certain emoji if one agrees that sexual harassment is wrong, resulting in high numbers of emoji comments (150 and 121). One of the 2 Animal protection theme’s posts had an emoji suggestion appeal to eat vegetarian food. The other posts suggested followers write down their favourite animal, generating both textual and emoji animal descriptions (73).

The Young people’s say in the future of the country posts were especially designed to encourage followers to voice their opinions (to decision-makers via the magazine). One post suggested commenting with an emoji if young people’s opinions should be listened to more in society, resulting in a good amount of emoji comments supporting the issue. Other posts had popular textual suggestions, but this was again due to a word search puzzle (243) to find a word representing the future of the country. In contrast, one textual suggestion concerning future hopes for the country, resulted in only 7 comments, but they were quite deep textual reflections of especially environmental and human values, such as: “I wish each individual would be treated as a human being. Not a machine, not as a resource. As a human who sometimes gets tired and cannot go on (heart emoji)”.

The results indicate that textual suggestions without a strategy such as the word search puzzle or the possibility to react with a quick emoji, generate fewer comments compared to (visual) emojis and tag suggestions. This is also evident in the Climate change theme, where 7 posts suggested commenting with an emoji resulting in a high number of comments (102.7), but 7 textual suggestions resulted in a rather low average comment count (17).

Conclusions

The girls’ and young women’s magazine in this case study builds an Instagram community around the brand and specific issues that followers are interested in and want to engage with. Hence, the community can be classified as an *online audience community* (see Malmelin and Villi 2016). The Instagram communication of the magazine also follows general roles detected by Malmelin and Villi (2016) to manage an online audience community: The Editor-in-chief’s interview (12 March, 2020) revealed that the editorial team pursues to *observe* and

gain information from their audience and has *developed* the platform as a venue to post about issues found important especially for their target group. Promotion of the magazines' print paper and other brand content is *curated* also in the communication, but their promotion is not the main objective. The main goals are to *facilitate activity*, form an interactive relationship with the audience, and commit the followers to the magazine's brand and Instagram community.

The study's first objective was to investigate what types of specific posting strategies did the magazine use on its Instagram post feed to elicit participation. The results show that the most used general strategy of the magazine was to post information, statements or questions about topics perceived by the magazine to be meaningful for their audience and could deepen the emotional connection with the community. The posting strategy closely resembles van Es's (2016) *affective* social media application. The study named the discovered post theme types "*affective topics*". Most of them covered issues from the private sphere of young people's lives, such as entertainment, leisure activities and relationships, but also more social and global topics, such as climate change and human/animal rights, were quite often covered (cf. print content, Valpas 2010).

Further, about one third of the posts could be categorized as *promotional* and *functional* (van Es 2016) material for brand awareness and content notifications, and very few posts (less than 6%), labelled as Contests and Battles, were comparable to a *phatic* strategy (van Es 2016) to merely generate activity and reactions. Consequently, the affective topics and especially Contests and Battles can also be viewed as "native content", in which the objective is not to direct the followers to other (online) content, but instead to build the online community and its interaction.

The abovementioned can be considered as *general posting strategies*, where a fundamental decision is made regarding the magazine's main overall objective of the post (generate reactions, promote print content, direct users to other content, or increase emotional connection). Detailed wordings and angles of the posts (i.e., post tone preferences, topic angles and suggestion appeals to comment in a specific manner) are more *specific framing choices*, chosen especially according to the needs and preferences of the target audience. Consequently, compared to traditional (print/news) media topic selection and framing, the online interactive context has different and quite varied strategic choices of posting content and eliciting participation.

The second objective of the study was to investigate which of the magazine's posting strategies elicited the most participation among young people. From the general posting strategies, Contests with prizes and funny, engaging Battles were very effective strategies to elicit participation (both likes and comments). Hence, their *phatic* objective was achieved. The Brand and content promotion material did not elicit much participation. Thus, promoting and directing users to other content is not what young people are looking for from magazines online (How Young People Consume News 2018), and it is not a good strategy to build participation particularly on the Instagram page.

The *affective topics* were popular among the followers. Within the top 10 themes gathering most likes, from the personal and private sphere were Sports, Bullying, Health, Mental health, Body issues, Family, and Entertainment. From the public sphere, they were Politics, Animal protection and Sexual harassment. Consequently, the online venue has room for various topics from young people's private lives (relationships, health, bullying) to the public sphere and societal happenings (treatment of animals and others), which are close to and engage young followers, and especially girls (Jenkins 2020; Reed, Wong, and Raj 2019; Tuukkanen, Kankaanranta, and Wilska 2013).

The magazine has quite a good grasp on what its followers consider important, but its favourite posting topics, Entertainment and Leisure time, were not particularly popular. This may indicate that since most online media is entertainment-driven, the magazine as a community is more important to followers for other reasons. Further analysis of the most popular *affective topics*' angles revealed patterns of framing choices, which could be evaluated as eliciting participation. These included 1) specifically affective topic angles for young women, such as women's sports victories and abortion rights in politics, 2) peer-support and -stories regarding difficult issues, and 3) informative content on issues, such as general and mental health and dealing with sexual harassment. Hence, the narratives and angles are chosen according to the target group's perceived needs and the magazine's objective of empowering girls.

Moreover, the magazine takes a positive tone and a rather fun approach to both light and serious subjects. This framing choice is in line with both the magazine's stated value of being positive and supportive (Editor-in-chief's interview), and with the type of enjoyable content young people are looking for from magazines and social media (How Young People Consume News 2018). As the Like button is designed to generate only positive engagement (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013), positive framing of the posts is a good strategy to elicit (positive) participation. For example, the serious tone and negative word choices in the Climate change topic can make it difficult to elicit affective responses.

The magazine's most used and efficient post framing choice is a suggestion to comment the posts, and to comment with a specific emoji(s) or by tagging a friend. The followers especially participated with the suggested emojis and tags when the posts appealed for giving peer-support in difficult subjects, like bullying, and expressing support for civic/political issues, like human and animal rights. The results further show that comments with an emoji were comparable to likes as an element displaying overall support for an issue.

Additionally, the magazine made fewer suggestions to comment with text, mostly connected to the civic/political topics, resulting in lower numbers of comments which can be considered quite deliberative civic/political participation (Theocharis 2015; Alhabash and McAlister 2014). Consequently, the results suggest that young people mainly choose to participate in both every day and civic/political issues with the same quick, less cognitively challenging, image dominated reactions, which they are drawn and accustomed to in the visually dominated social media context (How Young People Consume News 2018; Highfield and Leaver 2016).

Although the magazine is not political per se, the civic/political topics and their elicited high (emoji support) user engagement entail the magazine's potential of mobilizing audiences. The magazine uses political mobilization processes and framing in Instagram by quite frequently posting political topics, and by encouraging activity through campaigns and suggesting participation, and thus overall has potential for the audience to interpret the world or events through the magazine's perspective/paradigm (Sivek 2014). The special community, supervised by the magazine, also has more potential for representing the Habermasian public sphere and a safe accessible venue for girls' participation compared to many other online spaces (Wolfgang and Jenkins 2015).

The magazine also tested a few specific civic/political audience mobilization/participation strategies in its Instagram: the Climate change Whatsapp voice message campaign and the posts integrated in the Young people's say in the future of the country theme. Overall, the campaigns were not effective, as participation in the campaigns' textual and voice messages appeals would require more time and thought compared to quick image-responses. Further, young people preferring quick responses "on the spot" might not want to migrate to another platform to participate, like in the Whatsapp campaign. Nonetheless, these campaigns are good examples of how youth magazines online can act as "mediating institutions" (Flanagan and Wray-Lake 2011) for groups with lesser voices in society, such as children, young people, and girls.

For civic and political matters, the results showcase the types of *online political expression* preferred by young people (Keating and Melis 2017). For many, the likes and image-dominated participation may not count as "real" political participation but instead are closer to politically insignificant *clicktivism* or *slacktivism* (Morozov 2009). From a more optimistic perspective, in the *like economy's* traffic, where users inside and outside the community are affected by other users' likes and tags (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013), the civic and political post topics can still increase issue awareness and are expressions of preferences (Halupka 2014; Theocharis 2015). As early exposure to political (online) information is viewed important for adult political activity (Rheingold 2008), even surveilling content for information and engaging in political activity with comfortable quick reactions, can be viewed as important for adolescents' political efficacy (Velasquez and LaRose 2015). Consequently, the magazine has an important role in providing information on civic/political issues, such as awareness of women's rights and violations around the world, while taking into account young people's online communication preferences.

The anonymity of the data restricts the study from finding out if there are only some specific super active users who contribute to the community. Still, the available data showed that 15% of users who have seen the posts have liked them and close to 1% have commented them. Consequently, although browsing and surveilling are common social media habits for young people (Len-Ríos et al., 2016), the posts activate a rather good amount of the followers.

In conclusion, the magazine accomplishes to provide girls and young women varied *affective topics* from many spheres of life to contemplate, receive information, discuss, and participate with, conforming to the basic youth online needs (Lwin et al. 2012). Consequently, the

magazine online brings together young people with similar interests and can offer girls roles (not only traditional female roles) or civic identities to adopt (Jenkins 2020; Loke and Harp 2010), while also allowing them to reflect their peers' roles and participation through surveilling. Further, the communication of the page emphasizes a positive, enjoyable atmosphere and builds on mostly visual emoji and tag suggestions preferred by young people, also in political/civic expression (Keating and Melis 2017), which has potential in increasing belief in one's political agency (Velasquez and LaRose 2015). Finally, the successful strategies show that the shared (affective) topics, community-like interactions, and encouragement for participation are means to form an active youth magazine's online audience community (Malmelin and Villi 2016; Holmes 2007).

The findings offer insights for other teen magazines of eliciting activity of online audiences. First of all, magazines should consider their target group's online needs and preferences. The study, for instance, indicates that young people want to participate and engage with easy access content on social media and complex, time consuming participatory projects might be better for other contexts. Further, instead of promoting print content online, magazines can offer a variety of (affective, native) topics close to their target groups lives to discuss and encourage interaction and engagement with. Different strategies of eliciting participation can be tested and should be reviewed from time to time, for example, with engagement analysis.

Limitations and Future Research

This study does have shortcomings. First, photos are an essential part of an Instagram post, but they were not analysed in this study. The post captions still provided a beneficial angle for analysing the themes and strategies of the posts. Second, the data did not allow us to compare users' demographic and other background information with their activity, but instead evaluations were made according to general age and gender. Further, various other aspects can affect the activity generated by an Instagram post, such as post timing, algorithms, and followers' individual qualities and preferences, which this study's data cannot evaluate. Finally, part of the results relied on the researchers' evaluations, and thus may have been affected by subjective notions.

Despite the limitations, this study raises many possibilities for future research. Interviews with the account followers would provide more insight into why some topics and strategies generate more activity than others. Further, it would be beneficial to investigate the comment content and editor interaction with the users in more detail, which was out of reach of this study. In addition, other media online platforms could be investigated regarding their strategies of activating young people and be compared to the findings of this study.

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