



Product

Set 2 product: Contemporary mainstream magazines -
Cosmopolitan

Unit 3

Creating Media

Focus areas

- Media Language
- Representation
- Media industries
- Audiences
- Media contexts



Historical & social context

- Beginning its life as a family magazine in 1886, then transforming to a literary publication before eventually becoming a monthly women's magazine in 1965, Cosmopolitan has come a long way.
- In the 1950 and 60s women's magazines moved away from articles on home making and moved towards articles on beauty. Fashion also moved up the agenda, with less about how to make it and more about how to wear it. So, with consumption, at the top of the agenda, readers were being reminded that they should look and feel the best they could and the best way to achieve this was by purchasing the latest cosmetics and hair care advertised within the magazine's pages. This is still very much the case today.
- Under the direction of Helen Gurley Brown, Cosmopolitan was reinvented as a magazine for modern single career women. It set itself apart by discussing sexuality in a frank and open manner, taking the point of view that women should enjoy sex without guilt. This change in ideology was possible due to the huge societal shift at the time.
- Socially, the 1960s saw a mainstream change in the perception of sexuality. There were profound shifts in the attitudes towards women's sexuality, homosexuality, pre-marital sexuality and the freedom of sexual expression. Much of this was on the back of the counterculture of the 1960s, the women's movement, the gay rights movement and the advent of the pill in 1960. Suddenly women had power and control which they had never had before. This social context is what Helen Gurley Brown wanted the magazine to reflect. Through the publication, the message conveyed by Brown to women was that men should complement their lives, not take them over.



Background context

- Cosmopolitan is considered an international fashion magazine for women although its cover stories have become increasingly sexually explicit in tone. Typical content revolves around: sex, relationships, women's issues, beauty, fashion, health, careers, self-improvement and celebrities.
- Cosmopolitan is one of the most powerful and recognized brands in the world.
- Published by Hearst Corporation, it has 64 international editions, is printed in more than 35 languages, exists across 110 countries and has a global reach of more than 100 million people.
- Today, the monthly magazine has a combined print and digital circulation of 405,308. Readership is around 5 times that figure.
- It is estimated that the Cosmopolitan brand reaches 1 in 4 millennials, globally.
- It is because of this large readership that the magazine can charge so much for advertising space. In 2017, they published their rates as \$373,405 for a full colour back cover ad.

Audience

- The largest demographic for Cosmopolitan is women aged 18-34 years.
- The median age of a Cosmopolitan reader is 31 years of age with a median household income of around £50,000.
- 45% of their readers are single.
- Over 65% of Cosmo readers are employed.
- Cosmopolitan readers spend, on average, 75 minutes reading the magazine.

According to the editor, Farrah Storr, Cosmopolitan is a "magazine that entertains, enriches and empathises with what young women are going through on their journey to be the best."

Part of the magazine's appeal is also its narrative. The magazine is set out to reflect the reader's typical day. According to the editor, Farrah Storr, "It's easy to navigate with section openers, from things you need to know at the start of your day, tips to keep healthy throughout the day, your latest career advice, to showing you the latest fashion and beauty trends for maybe a lunch shopping break, and ending with inspirational lifestyle and relationship stories that you can end up the day with."

Industry

- Like many magazines, to keep up with audience demand, Cosmopolitan has its own website www.cosmopolitan.com which engages with more than 4.6 million unique users per month.
- The brand also has over two million Twitter and Facebook followers and now also engages millennials on their favourite social platform, Snapchat, attracting up to 300,000 unique users every day and sees its contents being shared over 60,000 times per day in the UK alone.
- Cosmopolitan teamed up with Snapchat Discover to produce 'Daily Editions'. Each edition is



like a small digital magazine. Content can include video, articles, full screen photos, pictures, and other editorial content and every edition is refreshed every 24 hours so it remains current.

- Snapchat is very clear that they do not consider this to be social media (as social media companies tell audience what to read based on what's most recent or most popular). Instead they see this as a storytelling format that puts the narrative first as editors and artists are determining what's important, not clicks and shares.

Part 1: Starting points - Media language

- Title of the magazine, 'Cosmopolitan', has **connotations** of diversity and multiculturalism. It suggests a subtext of difference being a strength and, given that it is a global brand, the title is very fitting in this sense. However, when you look through a range of previous front covers from the UK and the US it is glaringly obvious that there is actually little difference in what is expected of a cover star and therefore females who read this magazine are getting a very narrow representation of femininity fed to them which seems in conflict with the title.
- Some of the **Masthead** is lost behind the cover star's head, suggesting her dominance and showing how confident the magazine is that their readers will still recognise their brand, despite not being able to see all of the title.
- The **strapline** tells us that the magazine is "The No. 1 Women's Glossy Magazine." The phrasing of this encourages the reader to feel a part of something great. The assumption is that they are reading one of the best magazines of its kind and encourages people who don't read it to wonder what they are missing.
- The blue and white **colour palette** used for the cover lines help to support the image of coolness. Blue is commonly seen as a masculine colour and so using it for this particular cover star could be to highlight how she subverts traditional ideas of gender and links to her semi-androgynous look.
- Rose is looking directly at the audience, seemingly making eye contact. This is a common convention of magazines and helps to add to the more personal approach of this format.
- The pose used by the cover star, Rose, where she is pulling her collar up is her way of telling the audience she is stylish and doesn't care what others think. This is a common pose for celebrities such as Kanye West so she may be trying to emulate his toughness. This is furthered by her proliferation of tattoos on display.
- Rose subverts the typical **representation** of beauty in this image, appealing to the target audience in a different way, showing how it's OK to be different. She is still very attractive and her apparent disinterest in fitting a **stereotype** means she will still appeal to much of the target audience.
- This could be one example to support **Gauntlett's** idea that today's media offers us a more diverse range of stars, icons and characters from whom we may pick and mix different ideas. Rose is, at the very least, dressed differently to many other cover stars from women's magazines and her ink is seen as quite refreshing.
- Many of the cover lines focus on body image reminding readers that they could and should look better and also that they will be judged on their appearance.
- There is an example of one cover line from *Cosmopolitan* that refers to manicures but uses provocative language to hook the reader. Given the usual subject matter of this magazine,



it could be an article about sex but it is more likely that the producers are simply using this ambiguity as a way to lure readers in.

- “Free rent for a pretty girl” is supposed to shock the audience. There are several layers to this cover line that the reader has to unpick. Modern women are socially conditioned to have a knee-jerk reaction to this overtly sexist statement. The assumption is that it was said by a man and therefore it is an example of patriarchal oppression - assuming females need financial support and they can ‘earn’ this through their good looks. This would be a good example to support **Bell Hooks’** idea that feminism is a struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression and the **ideology** of domination.

Possible areas for further investigation are:

- Code and conventions of magazine covers: layout, use of cover star, house style, mastheads.
- Genre conventions of lifestyle magazines, the ever changing nature of genre and hybridity.
- The function of magazines – “to provide readers with a sense of community, comfort, and pride in this mythic feminine identity” (‘Media Semiotics’, Bignell, 1997, p61). Magazines promote a “feminine culture” and therefore defines and shapes the woman’s world” (‘Feminism and Youth Culture’, McRobbie, 2000, p69), so they become a familiar friend for the female filled with advice, entertainment and provide a form of escapism for the reader.
- Roland Barthes semiotics & enigma codes - cover lines on the front cover tease people to want to read certain stories within the magazine.

Part 2: Starting points - Representation

- A female cover star allows us to consider the **representation** of femininity in ‘Cosmopolitan’, a lifestyle magazine.
- The magazine’s tag line is “fun fearless female” so someone who may be considered an atypical representation of femininity as the cover star, ‘Cosmopolitan’ is going some way to present an alternative role model for its readers.
- Rose is openly gay and identifies herself as “gender fluid” and so using her as a cover star offers an alternative representation to what is usually on display in such magazines.
- However, the fact she is still very attractive and slim is no coincidence. Her chiselled cheekbones, piercing eyes and pouting lips highlight how, regardless of her gender and sexuality, there is still an underlying stereotypical representation of femininity.
- For women, it is a constant struggle to be successful by holding down a job, whilst also looking good and dressing fashionably. The very essence of all women’s lifestyle magazines is consumerism and so the images and cover lines will always seek to support this.
- Cover lines like “Booty Haul! New jeans that ace your ass.” suggest that the reader needs help improving their derrière and cannot already be naturally beautiful, there is always room for improvement.



Possible areas for further investigation are:

- Stuart Hall – Representation, stereotype, selection and perhaps how this magazine reinforces representations of gender.
- We might want to consider the image as a commodity. Most of the images used on a women's magazines cover are produced to sell and advertise the magazine. The idea being that an attractive looking figure on the front will help the magazine to stand out on the newsstands and sell more copies.