

Fashion Magazines

Abstract

Fashion magazines are both cultural products and commodities. As cultural products, they circulate in a cultural economy of collective meanings. They provide how-to recipes, illustrated stories, narratives, and experiential and behavioral models—particularly in the realms of fashion and beauty—in which the reader’s ideal self is reflected and on which she can herself reflect and act. As commodities, fashion magazines are products of the publishing and print industries and important sites for the advertising and sale of commodities (especially those related to fashion, cosmetics, fragrances, and personal care). As scholar [Margaret Beetham](#) has pointed out, they are thus deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption at national, regional, and global levels.

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Fashion magazines are simultaneously specialist (in that they are for men or women) and generalist (in that their contents extend across a wide spectrum of masculine or feminine concerns). They tell men and women all over the world what to think and do about themselves and their lovers, partners, parents, children, colleagues, neighbors, or bosses and so provide a potent formula for steering attitudes, behavior, and buying along culturally defined paths of masculinity or femininity. In short, they fashion a particular gendered worldview of the desirable, the possible, and the purchasable.

Women’s fashion magazines form a genre within the broader category of women’s magazines, which in the twenty-first century—depending on the country in which they are published—extend across such categories as junior, (hi-)teen, young, young adult, adult, bridal, domestic housewife, interior, career woman, and so on. Some women’s magazines that call themselves “fashion” magazines, like the German *Burda*, for example, take as their primary subject matter dressmaking, patterns, sewing tips, and other womanly skills relating to normal and plus-size women’s everyday clothing. In this respect, they support accepted signs of female accomplishment, including the home production of dress, although they also include features on the latest trends on the runways of Düsseldorf, Paris, and Milan. Other, “high-fashion” magazines like *Vogue*, in contrast, do not carry instructive features related to the making of clothes but focus on a woman’s decision-making processes in the purchase and consumption of fashionable attire, as featured in designer collections and filtered down through celebrity wear to street fashion. Thus, while women’s magazines aim to help readers make their own everyday wear fashionable within the context of the private home, fashion magazines suggest that high fashion is wearable and to be purchased as an assertion of the woman’s public persona. Both provide fashion and styling tips to their readers.

Growth and Development

Although it has been claimed that the first fashion magazine originated in Frankfurt, Germany, in about 1586, as a genre fashion magazines came into existence in France and England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their emergence thus coincided with the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, along with the development of an urban bourgeoisie. Magazines actively led a cultural discourse that vested “femininity” in appearance and located gender difference in “natural” physical differences between men and women.

From their very beginning, magazines—or periodicals, as they were first called—defined their reading public by gender. While men read the news in daily newspapers, women read fiction, gossip, and instructive articles in their magazines. Men's fashion magazines, therefore, did not come into being until the late twentieth century. It was the *Lady's Magazine* and the *Lady's Museum* that, toward the end of the eighteenth century, established a basic pattern for women's magazines: a total disregard for news and politics, a mixture of genres, and a wide variety of authorial voices (a variety that came to be reflected in the use of the word *magazine*, which originally meant "storehouse"). At the same time, magazines early on combined entertainment with instruction for the woman reader who would be a "lady"—witness the subtitle of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* launched in 1798: *Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction*. This combination of information, help, and fun characterizes women's magazines across the world in the twenty-first century as they engage in what an anonymous editor once characterized as 60 percent selling a dream and 40 percent offering practical advice.

The year 1785 saw the launch of the *Cabinet des Modes*, which quickly became the prototype for a new genre of fashion magazines, in which written information about fashions and cultural dress was combined with illustrations showing actual fashions on sale in Paris boutiques, the names and addresses of which were supplied in the text (something that is still found in twenty-first-century Japanese fashion magazines). Although the French Revolution quickly put an end to this publication, in the 1790s a number of titles devoted to fashion along the lines of *Cabinet des Modes* also began to appear in England. These included the *Gallery of Fashion* (1794) and the *Magazine of Female Fashions of London and Paris* in 1798. Their arrival obliged other women's magazines to be more systematic in their coverage of fashion, taking up dress and appearance as an integral part of the discourse on "femininity."

Each magazine's fashion plate (an essential part of the genre by the 1790s) represented the clothed female body and encouraged women, who were also being represented as domestic providers, to think of themselves as shoppers as well as readers. This created an alternative discourse of femininity and the female body, challenging that of the domestic woman. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, fashion magazines were already enacting the tension between fashion and leisure, on the one hand, and a woman's duties of moral management, on the other, that still characterizes the genre in the second millennium. These magazines' publication and distribution were greatly aided by the appearance of entrepreneurial publishers like Samuel Beeton (husband of the doyenne of English cookery, Isabella Beeton), improvements in printing technology, and the rapid growth of the railway system (leading to the establishment of bookstall networks). The development of high-quality paper, binding, and illustration technology (engraving, followed by black-and-white and later color photography) enabled the establishment of a publishing tradition that represented the clothed female figure as a "Beauty."

Growth in the circulation of women's magazines in the latter half of the nineteenth century was accompanied by an increase in the costs of printing, paper, and distribution. As a result, a magazine's sale price could not cover production costs, and publishers had no alternative but to turn to advertising to subsidize production. By the end of the century, magazines contained as many advertising as editorial pages and relied on advertising revenue as much as on direct sales. In this way, they contributed actively to the formation of a commodity culture.

To attract advertisers, magazine publishers like Condé Montrose Nast realized that they had to tailor their publications to a specific "class," or lifestyle, readership with common interests in particular themes and related goods and services. This realization led to the proliferation of magazine types—hobby, sports, health, domestic, career, and so on—at the beginning of the twentieth century and fixed the current form of the fashion magazine with its focus on the fashion world and products relating to fashion and beauty (in the broadest sense). The focus on advertising has thus led to a particular structure affecting the contents of fashion magazines all over the world.

Advertisers, as well as potential readers, have been behind the internationalization of a number of U.S. and French fashion magazines. In 1916, the U.S. publisher Condé Nast launched a British edition of *Vogue* (first published in the United States in 1892), followed five years later by a French edition (1921). The main expansion of fashion magazines, however, occurred in the post-World War II period and was led by the French weekly *Elle* (1945), which first launched a Japanese edition (in 1969) and later moved into the United Kingdom and the United States

simultaneously (in 1985), before launching further monthly editions in western Europe (e.g., in Spain in 1986, Italy in 1987, and Germany in 1988). *Elle* then focused its attention on the Asian region (for example, establishing editions in Hong Kong in 1987, China in 1988, and Taiwan in 1991), followed by South America (e.g., in Brazil in 1987 and in Chile and Argentina in 1994) and Eastern Europe (e.g., in Poland in 1994, the Russian Federation in 1996, and Romania in 1997)—with further forays into Australia (1990) and South Africa (1996). This pattern of expansion from western to eastern Europe by way of Asia and South America has been followed by other international titles such as *Vogue*, *Marie Claire*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, some of which—including *L'Officiel*—have finally moved into the Middle East (from 2005 on). In the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, *Elle* was publishing forty-one editions around the world, *Marie Claire* twenty-nine, *Harper's Bazaar* twenty-eight, and *Vogue* sixteen. At the same time, editions of some Japanese young women's street fashion magazines, such as *Nonno*, *Ray*, *Vivi*, and *Oggi*, had been successfully launched in other parts of Asia, notably South Korea, China, and Taiwan.

Successful internationalization of titles has been accompanied by another trend in magazine publishing. All publishers try to create a “stable” of titles whose readers are differentiated both horizontally (by interest) and vertically (by age). Hachette Fujin Gahōsha, for example, publishes—in addition to *Elle Japon*—other fashion titles such as *Vingtaine* and *25 Ans*, which are designed to catch the same readers at different stages of their lives, as they grow out of younger magazines. Its parent company, Hachette Filipacchi, has itself taken advantage of the successful development of *Elle* to launch other titles from its “*Elle* stable” abroad: *Elle Girl*, *Elle Deco*, and *Elle à Table*.

A print from the *Lady's Magazine*, early nineteenth century, showing two women wearing evening or full dresses. At this time magazines combined entertainment with instruction for the woman reader. Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

As part of this production of a stable of magazines, beginning in the late 1980s, large publishers like Condé Nast began to launch a number of men's fashion and lifestyle titles, some of which—like *Vogue Men* and *Numéro Homme*—clearly owe their origin to women's fashion magazines and have international editions (for example, *Vogue Uomo* and *Vogue Hommes International*). This development reflects the fact that it has become more acceptable for men to be consumers of fashion, dress, and lifestyle products, as well as to look at themselves and other men as “objects of desire.” In this respect, the reconstruction of masculinity through consumption echoes the earlier construction of femininity in the nineteenth century.

The internationalization of fashion magazines takes place in one of three ways. Either a magazine publisher approaches, or is approached by, a local publisher and signs a licensing agreement for a particular title. Or the publishers concerned enter into a joint venture. Or the international publisher can acquire a local publishing house or group. Occasionally—as when *Marie Claire* launched its Turkish edition (1988)—a publisher will be encouraged and supported by one of its advertisers (in this case, L'Oréal) to explore a new market.

Depending on the nature of each country's magazine market at the time of entry, an international fashion magazine may well differ in title, circulation, content, and readership from its original form. When it first entered China, *Marie Claire* was obliged to change its name. *Vogue Nippon* addresses a much younger audience than its U.S. or British cousins because of the way in which the magazine market in Japan is divided into narrowly defined age groups. Some titles (like *Marie Claire*) encourage local production of editorial and fashion content; others (like *Elle*) prefer a standardized format led by the head office. In many cases, international fashion magazines enable the growth and development of local expertise in photography, makeup, hairstyling, and modeling, as well as fashion consciousness. This has itself instigated the growth of indigenous fashion magazines in many parts of the world. For example, South Africa has seen the launch of numerous titles during the past decade, many of them featuring black models: *Destiny* (2007), *Mimi* (2005), *Pursuit* (1998), and *Uzuri* (2005).

Fashion Magazines and Fashion

The driving force behind the publication of fashion magazines is fashion itself. Like the magazines that derive from its existence, fashion is both cultural product and commodity and thus addresses multiple audiences, some of whom are there to show off clothes, others to buy them, and yet others to create a buzz around them. These audiences include the “fashion leadership,” consisting most notably of celebrities from the film, music, and entertainment worlds; fashion buyers, chiefly from large department store chains; and the international press, including fashion magazines, which reviews and comments on each season’s collections and brings new trends to general public attention. To understand fashion, people need to understand the interconnections between its production and consumption, between the ideals of fashion and how clothes are actually worn. Each country’s fashion magazines help readers in this quest.

Because fashion magazines are inseparable from the fashion industry, monthly editions closely follow the latter’s seasonal calendar. It is normal for an editor-in-chief to make use of the seasonal discourses of fashion to prepare a general outline of the magazine six months in advance. The March and September issues of most magazines (there may be some seasonal adjustment because of a title’s monthly publication date) are devoted to the latest spring/summer and autumn/winter collections shown in London, New York, Paris, and Milan (in Asia, the Tokyo collections are also important). Each season’s shows tend to be followed by one special issue devoted to beauty (as seen in runway models’ makeup and hairstyling) and another focusing on fashion accessories (in particular, handbags and shoes).

The remaining four issues usually follow preestablished patterns, some of them related to other aspects of fashion: for example, love, romance, and Valentine’s Day in February tend to be linked to lingerie specials; what to wear on holidays in July and August to swimwear specials; and December to gift giving (accessories, jewelry, and perfumes). These make use of seasonal trends to convey the chosen theme and have given rise to the presentation of related commodities as themselves constituting “collections”: from lingerie and swimsuits to watches and jewelry, by way of mobile phones and chocolates. Thus, the commodities featured on a magazine’s pages—either as text or as advertising—themselves become “fashion” items, subject to constant and regular cycles of change.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the traditional two-season fashion system appeared to be giving way to more fluid, continuous production schedules attuned to consumer demands and the technological ability to fill them. However, the spring/summer and autumn/winter seasonal distribution of clothing remains very important for fashion magazines for three reasons. First, it imposes order on a potentially chaotic mass of clothing that needs to be shown and described to magazine readers, who are reassured by the fixed seasonal boundaries within which trend changes take place. Second, that order is an essential part of magazines’ production processes since, without it, they would be obliged to forgo their current fixed annual structure of issues and devote far more time and energy to the planning of more content-varied monthly editions. This would make it difficult for a magazine title to maintain a regular monthly publication schedule on the basis of its existing personnel and financial resources. Third, it conveniently structures the solicitation of advertising material that itself forms the financial base influencing a publisher’s decision to launch, maintain, or cease publication of a particular title. Since magazines are very important to the fashion world, it is unlikely that the traditional seasonal structure of the fashion industry will be completely put aside in the immediate future.

Textually, fashion magazines’ *raison d’être* lies in what magazine staff refer to as the *fashion well*. The fashion well is found in every fashion magazine and is usually located in the second half of each issue. It consists of between forty and fifty-two full-page color photographs of the latest designer clothes, uninterrupted by advertisements, and featuring well-known designers, photographers, and models (as well as makeup artists, hairstylists, and so on, whose renown is more or less circumscribed by the fashion world). Ideally, a fashion well’s photographs should be edited in such a way that the clothes shown fill between 60 and 70 percent of the page, with background amounting to 30, or at most 40, percent. The fabric, too, should generally be clearly shown, although this is by no means always the case.

The clothes themselves are lent by fashion houses, which are more or less cooperative and/or fussy, that is, hard to please, depending on the status of the magazine asking to use them in a photo shoot. Magazines use preferred fashion-house names, based on advertising placed in

their pages, and editors ring the changes as best they can to ensure that all are represented over a season or year. But what is, and is not, included in a story also depends to some extent on what is popular among readers and sells well in the country in question. Magazines propose ways in which fashion may be transformed into the kinds of clothes worn in readers' everyday lives. Without the clothes, without the images with which fashion is portrayed, and thus without the magazines themselves, there would be no "fashion system" as such. It is the fashion magazines that bring together producer and consumer, supply and demand, by means of a host of intermediary figures.

The fashion well is usually made up of around half a dozen "stories," each ranging from four to as many as eighteen pages in length and using visual images to illustrate some new fashion trend (for example, "Paint the town" to illustrate "the power of color"). In international editions of the same magazine title, however, a "story" can be cut in length, have the sequence of its pictures reordered, and change quite radically in translation. For example, "A Fashion without Frontiers" ("Une mode sans frontiers") in the French edition of *Marie Claire* was given the title "In Search of Real Value" ("Honmono no kachi o motomete") in the Japanese and "From the Village" (in English) in the Hong Kong editions of the same magazine.

Women in various styles of dresses from Vogue magazine, 1916. This was the year that Condé Nast launched a British edition of Vogue after its first publication in America in 1892. Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Ideally, each issue's fashion well should mix color and black-and-white photos to create its own rhythmical beat. Each story should link with the others to fit into an overarching theme and create a "flow" that runs through that issue of the magazine. Accompanying text (or "bylines") includes anything from a bare description of the clothing shown to details of price and retail outlets at which items are available for purchase. Ideally, bylines reinforce the fashion "story" told by the visual images. The stories published in each month's issue of fashion magazines around the world stem from the biannual collections in New York, London, Milan, and Paris. Fashion editors and stylists attend as many as one hundred collections each season. There they pick up on certain "moods" and proceed to imagine the clothes they have seen as "themes," which are then expressed as fashion "stories."

This matching of designer clothes seen on the runways to fashion stories looked at by a magazine's readers usually takes place immediately after each season's collections have been shown. Magazine staff engage in intensive discussions over the course of two or three days, before settling on certain keywords (*romantic*, *sexy*, *power*, and so on) to act as overarching themes based on the different kinds of materials, colors, and clothing styles presented at the shows. These may figure as appetizers in the opening fashion pages of one issue, before being incorporated as the guiding principle of the next. Here magazine editors inform their readers of the "latest fashion trends," praising their qualities and what makes them "different" from preceding trends, showing how they are actually worn by celebrities, and hinting at how readers might best incorporate them into their own everyday lives.

Although particular keywords are repeated globally in different fashion stories, different emphases are brought to bear, so that there is no necessary thematic consistency in fashion wells, either between different editions of the same title or between different magazines published in the same country. There are two main reasons for this. First, every magazine title competes for readers and advertisers among other titles in a magazine market. It needs to differentiate itself as a product from its nearest competitors to achieve this aim. A worst-case scenario would be for it to publish an issue whose thematic contents and/or images are in places identical to those of a competing title. Second, individual magazine's personnel are also competing among themselves as producers to come up with the most successful image formulae, since such success enables them both to maintain their current positions and to seek better positions in other (generally higher-status) magazines.

The net result of this double process of differentiation (which is reinforced by the differentiation inherent in the products of the fashion system itself as presented in the magazines) is that fashion comes to be defined as that which is now consumed as fashion. It is the fashion magazines that in large part contribute to this definition.

Multiple Readerships

Fashion magazine publishing is a business that delivers editorial matter to a targeted readership, as well as delivering those readers to potential advertisers, many of whom are members of the fashion world described in the magazines. As a result, fashion magazine publishing is marked by a continuous tension between the demands of at least three not necessarily compatible constituencies.

This property of having multiple audiences leads to a structural distinction between two different kinds of staff, each concerned with satisfying one audience's needs: on the one hand, the editor-in-chief and related feature, fashion, beauty, and artistic personnel, whose job is to put together a magazine's pages in an attractive-enough manner to appeal to targeted readers; and on the other, the publisher and related personnel in advertising, public relations, sales, and marketing, who deal with advertisers. In other words, editorial staff are concerned with the appreciation of fashion and publishing staff with the business of fashion.

Not surprisingly, given their different primary tasks, editorial and publishing staff may find themselves in conflict over how the products of their work—editorial and advertising pages—are put together in each issue of a magazine title. An editor's particular concern is with how the magazine's advertisements will be distributed throughout each issue, as well as with which particular ads are likely to be found opposite particular editorial pages. There is also a general point of publication policy about whether single-page ads will be placed on the left or right pages of a magazine, since, depending on how it is opened, the reader's eye is more likely to alight on one page than the other.

The omnipresence of advertising of one sort or another in fashion magazines has led to considerable criticism concerning the relationship between advertising and editorial matter. Certainly, fashion magazines uncritically publicize numerous fashion-and beauty-related products. They also are not averse, where at all possible, to creating links between advertising and editorial matter on facing pages by means of color matches, model poses, and overall design. However, the degree to which advertisements dominate editorial matter in their placement in the first half of a magazine, as well as on the pages on which the reader's eye naturally alights, depends mainly on how fashion magazines are sold. In countries like the United States and United Kingdom where readers take out subscriptions that cut the cost per issue in return for an annual commitment, advertisers clearly take precedence over readers. In countries like Japan, in contrast, where magazines are sold primarily at kiosks and newsstands, rather than by subscription, editorial matter clearly is more important than advertising. The structure of Japanese fashion magazines, with uninterrupted blocks of text and visuals throughout the magazine, interspersed with blocks of advertising matter, reveals the importance of readers.

It is here that the magazine cover takes on importance. The front cover serves three interlocking functions: differentiation, advertising appeal, and cultural style. First, the cover image defines the genre of the fashion magazine as a whole by focusing on a close-up photograph of a fashion model or female celebrity, while also positioning a particular title *vis-à-vis* its competitors by means of the title itself, print type, size and texture of paper, and design and layout. Second, the cover captions—or sell lines—advertise the editorial content of each issue, while also anchoring the meanings conveyed by the cover image and magazine “brand name.” Third, both image and captions reveal a wealth of cultural expectations about what a woman should know and do and how she should look. Even in countries not populated by Caucasian women, the cover model's face is often white, almost invariably young, attractive, immaculately made-up, and smiling or seductive. (Indeed, a number of fashion magazines that have featured only black models have gone bankrupt because of insufficient advertising support from global fashion and cosmetics companies.) Different titles convey their particular styles—domestic or girl-about-town, cheeky or sophisticated, upmarket or downmarket—by means of subtle changes of hairstyle, neckline, and facial pose, but their defining characteristic is the cover model's gaze that, as in the advertisements that fill the pages of fashion magazines, intimately holds the attention of “you” as its viewer and reader. This gaze has been likened to that of the male voyeur and is said to mark complicity with women, who are made to see themselves in an image defined by a masculine culture.

Photographers work during Christopher Kane's show at London Fashion Week, London, September 2007. Editors make selections to feature in magazines depending on which styles they want to highlight for the season. Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images.

While serving as a “relay” device to guide potential readers through an issue's contents, the fashion magazine cover also highlights the fashion world: in the selection of model or celebrity as “cover girl” and in the naming of personnel involved in making the image (the photographer, fashion stylist, makeup artist, and hairstylist), as well as of products used (blouse, skirt, pumps, bracelet, blush, mascara, lipstick, nails). The attention paid by editors to members of the fashion world may also be seen in the numerous pages devoted to the activities and public appearances of fashion designers (either as individuals or as a group of professionals), fashion houses, models, celebrities, photographers, hairstylists, makeup artists, and magazine staff themselves. In this way, magazines present not just the clothing that they designate as fashion but also the people and institutions that constitute the fashion world, at both local and global levels.

There are important underlying objectives in this structuring of contents. First, since the fashion industry is marked by continuous change, those involved necessarily seek to impose stability on the instability wrought by the incessant quest for new trends. Magazines assist in this task by commenting on, highlighting, and publicizing fashion designers and their collections to create an overall image of “fashion” itself, as well as its history and development. In particular, they serve to link new trends to previous seasons in order to create a reasonably harmonious continuity and logic of progression.

Second, as part of this process of stabilization, magazines seek to establish connections among the various constituents of the fashion industry by linking designers, fashion houses, models, celebrities, and so on in a series of regular features. In this respect, not only do magazines make known the organization of the fashion world, they also situate that world within neighboring social worlds making up the film, music, publishing, art, and entertainment industries. By featuring their own role as intermediary in the fashion industry's value chain, magazines provide an “inside” view of the fashion world in order to build intimacy with their readers. In other words, they make the suppliers of fashion socially relevant to readers who are the industry's consumers.

Third, as part of this production of social relevance, precisely because the fashion system has become a system of names, magazines function to make those names familiar (and the work of those names known) to readers—usually by means of blatant name-dropping.

Fourth, through strategies of structural stabilization, naming, and the creation of social relevance, magazines also provide readers with an entry into the consumption of the products supplied by the fashion industry. They do this in two main ways. One is by juxtaposing products in such a way that consumers learn how to move from low- to high-ticket items (from perfume to dresses, by way of shoes and accessories), as their economic well-being permits. Another is by endowing fashion items—a Chanel dress, a Prada bag, Jimmy Choo shoes, Cartier jewelry—with a symbolic value (or capital) that a consumer may then exchange in an economic transaction.

As part of this process of linking (and creating) supply and demand, fashion magazines make full use of both models and celebrities who perform a triple function. First, they sell the clothes, accessories, and makeup that they are shown wearing in fashion photographs. Second, they sell fashion magazines themselves, by appearing on the cover of every issue of each title. Third, by locating themselves, or being located in, a fashion context, they sell the fashion and entertainment world itself.

Functions of Fashion Magazines

Broadly speaking, fashion magazines are designed to fit in with the rhythms and routines of men's and women's everyday lives, in which private time and space are highly valued, work merges with leisure as activities overlap, and dreams are fueled by a limited range of

possibilities. Readers almost uniformly agree that fashion magazines show them how to coordinate clothes and how to make a limited wardrobe go a long way. They also use magazines as a shopping guide in some way or another, although most readers are careful to stress that their purchases are not dictated by what they see in the fashion pages. Moreover, some readers use their magazines not to see what is *currently* fashionable but to try to guess what will *become* trendy in the short-term future.

Women's fashion magazines have always made appearance central to the definition of themselves as well as of their readers. Dress thus becomes a complex language in which femininity, looks, age, wealth, class, status, marital position, sexuality, work, leisure, season, and even time of day are all significant. The very notion of fashion as something changing ensures that a woman never *is*, but is always in a process of *becoming*, what she appears to be (although this feminine appearance has always been almost exclusively metropolitan). In other words, woman is not born but made. The very instability of the meaning of *fashion*, however, tends to generate an anxiety that surfaces not only in women's understandings of themselves as women, but also in magazines' attention to perceived body blemishes (cellulite, fat, split ends, dry skin, and the dreaded "body odor," often referred to as BO). Because clothes are represented simultaneously as fashion item, society news, and consumer guide, magazines reproduce "fashion" both as a discourse and as a global business. Novelty becomes the ultimate value for producers and consumers alike. In the early twenty-first century, a similar range of issues faces men, whose masculinity and understanding of themselves as men are being redefined by men's fashion photography and magazines.

As intermediaries between the producer and the consuming public, fashion magazines exist to teach the lay public why fashion should be important in their lives, what the latest trends may be, who the names are that drive them, and where the clothes themselves may be purchased. In other words, they legitimate fashion and the fashion world in cultural terms. They make meaningful connections between things that seem to be essentially independent; they give them social lives by creating an imaginary world about them; they create awareness in participants of the field of fashion in which they work; and they provide historical and aesthetic order in a world whose products, by their very seasonality and potentially chaotic quantity, are likely to go unnoticed. In this way, fashion magazines help form a collective concept of what fashion is, although aesthetically irrelevant forces such as snobbery, elitism, trendiness, and a fear of lagging behind the arbiters of prevailing taste tend to dominate.

Fashion-model Ginny Cavanaugh reading Vogue magazine, New York, 1950. Fashion magazine publishing delivers editorial matter to a targeted readership, many of whom are members of the fashion world described in the magazines. Al Barry/Three Lions/Getty Images.

The production and reception of fashion are thus interdependent, in terms of both communication and the organization of production and consumption. The "creative act" of designing fashion is in a state of constant flux because it is influenced by the attitudes of the buying public and intermediary fashion world. These more or less determine what innovations can and cannot be made. Designers need mediators and interpreters of one sort or another, therefore, to ensure that their work is properly understood and that this appreciation then translates into sales. In other words, like politics, art, or academia, fashion is marked by a struggle to enlist followers, and one task of fashion magazines is to convert the agnostic.

The apostles who spread the word, who portray and interpret designers' collections each season—giving them a meaning to which readers can cling, removing all the strangeness that accompanies novelty, reconciling what at first glance may be confusing with the already familiar, and thereby creating continuity between previous, present, and future trends—are those working for the fashion magazines. Their job is not simply to appreciate new stylistic trends (often by setting up a series of oppositions between these and the previous season's styles) but to recognize new discoveries, reevaluations, and reinterpretations of styles that have been misunderstood and/or belong to the past. If designers create the form of fashion items, fashion magazines create their legend. In this process, they fabricate mythical personages out of designers and the fashion houses for which they work, as well as of other members of the fashion world. This leads to a situation where collections may be judged not by their intrinsic worth but by the names with which they are labeled.

At the same time, the public needs fashion magazines since they help their readers distinguish what is “good” from what is “inferior” in the apparent chaos of each season’s collections in New York, London, Milan, and Paris. In this way, magazines help transform fashion as an abstract idea and aesthetic discourse into everyday dress.

Snapshot: Vogue Nippon

In 1998, Condé Nast signed a joint venture agreement with the Japanese financial newspaper, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (or *Nikkei* as it is abbreviated in everyday communication), and established the Nikkei Condé Nast Company in order to publish the eleventh international edition of the U.S. publisher’s flagship title, *Vogue*, under its common concept of “elegance and substance.” The first issue of *Vogue Nippon* was duly put on sale in July 1999, with a comparatively expensive cover price of ¥760 (approximately US\$7) and an initial print run of ninety thousand.

Compared with other titles like *Marie Claire* and *Elle*, the launch of *Vogue* in Japan was rather late. This, together with the structure of the Japanese magazine market at the time of the magazine’s launch and *Vogue Nippon*’s targeted readership, has led to a rather different kind of magazine from that found in European or U.S. editions.

Because it addresses predominantly young, unmarried, well-off Japanese women in their twenties and early thirties, and not older women married to comparatively wealthy husbands as in the United States, *Vogue Nippon*’s overall style is more “youthful” (this may also explain the comparative lack of skin-care and other anti-aging commodities in its pages). Because these women are au fait with Western culture, trends, and styles and because they tend to travel abroad quite frequently, *Vogue Nippon* can present itself as a Western fashion magazine that is more leading-edge, classy, tasteful, stylish, sophisticated, global, intelligent, individualistic, trustworthy, and elegant than its competitors.

Although almost all of its advertisers are European and U.S. companies and although the models featured in both fashion stories and beauty pages are Caucasian, often stereotypically blonde and blue-eyed, *Vogue Nippon* is not simply Western in appearance. It follows Japanese publishing standards in the way that it structures and mixes advertising and text pages in blocks, rather than running them alongside each other, as in the United States. It also tailors regular and special features to Japanese, not just U.S. or European, interests. The monthly “Editor’s Letter” invariably addresses its readers as *Japanese* women, relating the world fashion scene to some aspect of Japanese society and culture. Pictures of Japanese celebrities are included with those of foreign stars, while Tokyo street styles are often brought into features on the Paris or Milan collections. Even the captions to the magazine’s fashion pages (with their Western models, Western locations, and Western designer clothing) pay lip service to Japanese tastes.

Vogue Nippon thus veers toward localization in the content of its features but follows standard practice in its attention to fashion, beauty, health, travel, and the celebrity fashion world. Its fashion stories—the crucially important part of any fashion magazine—are for the most part commissioned by the locally employed fashion features editor, who uses a number of trusted freelance fashion editors in Europe and the United States. At the same time, however, it follows a central directive that the magazine use top-quality photography, art, and design—a quality that the Japanese editorial and publishing staff transform into something very special and, perhaps, “Japanese” in their attention to detail and the overall look of the magazine. Such attention leads to thematic flows between monthly issues, as well as within a single issue, of *Vogue Nippon* and helps brand the magazine as different from its local and international competitors.

Branding also extends to the magazine’s fashion stories, which have to be made abroad if the magazine is to get international recognition among members of the so-called fashion village, or fashion world: that is, among photographers, models, makeup artists, hairstylists, and art directors working in Paris, London, New York, and Milan. Although it would be possible for *Vogue Nippon* to buy pages from its sister editions in Europe and the United States, there would then be no *creativity* in the eyes of the fashion village, which measures every fashion magazine by its ability to produce original material. Support for the magazine from members of

the fashion village is important because they can, and do, provide editorial staff with the kind of gossip, tacit knowledge, and backstage information that every magazine needs to fill its pages.

Vogue Nippon's attention to detail and quality images clearly resonate with Japanese readers who unequivocally wish to be "stopped in their tracks" by arresting and stunning photographs. However, they are also very conscious of the gap between the kinds of clothes they can wear in their everyday lives and those that they see in the pages of *Vogue Nippon*. As a result, readers claim that they are very rarely persuaded to *buy* any of the fashions featured in the magazine. At a *practical* level, therefore, Japanese fashion titles, which make use of Japanese—or at least Asian—models, are seen to be more appropriate vehicles for advertising and consumption than foreign titles like *Vogue Nippon*.

Nevertheless, attention to quality images does attract advertisers whose advertising then contributes to *Vogue Nippon's* brand image. One reason for the magazine's preference for foreign advertisers is that they have a cachet unmatched by Japanese advertisers. European and American fashion houses have also produced high-quality photographs that coincide with the magazine's image of itself. However, starting in the early 2000s fashion advertising itself reached a peak, so that *Vogue Nippon* has had to start attracting top-brand advertisers in cosmetics, hair, and skin-care products and may, in the future, need to extend into other product ranges not immediately connected with the fashion industry.

Securing new advertisers is not as simple as it might appear. In order to avoid becoming like competing fashion magazines and thereby losing brand identity, *Vogue Nippon* has to ensure that it maintains visual control of its contents. This it does by proactively selecting its advertisers, rather than by allowing advertisers to select *Vogue Nippon*. In this way, both advertisers and magazine are engaged in a mutually reinforcing status game: Advertisers place their ads in *Vogue Nippon* because of the title's brand equity; *Vogue Nippon* in part achieves that brand equity by attracting high-status advertisers.

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