



Defining Modern Womanhood: Cosmopolitan's Strategic Cover Choices and Their Impact on Young Women's Identity

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Article Information

Submitted August 29, 2023

Revision January 11, 2024

Accepted July 15, 2024

Published October 1, 2024

Abstract

Women's beauty and physical perfection are the main points for presenting their figures in mass media. Women are considered the most effective means of connecting audience interaction in persuading. Cosmopolitan is a media that often presents female public figures on its magazine cover. Cosmopolitan is here to create and transform brands into authentic conversation destinations about important things to the audience. Cosmopolitan predominantly uses foreign model covers. However, in July and August 2022, Cosmopolitan presented covers with photos of female singers, namely Agnez Mo and Isyana. Both are female singers whose abilities are recognized in Indonesia. The digital cover was studied using a descriptive qualitative approach with Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics as an analytical tool. The results show that the representation of modern women presented by Cosmopolitan is a simple appearance without removing other important elements in fashion. Among them are comfort and an elegant and classy impression. The clothes used represent the identity of public figures in the eyes of the public. In addition, it brings innovation and becomes a dialogue regarding changes in how modern women think and behave. Modern women must understand the importance of being wise on social media, being themselves, and being inspired through their work. These three things are realized as a result of a healthy mentality.

Keywords: Cosmopolitan; modern woman; magazine cover; representation.

Introduction

The dignity of women as a 'second sex' figure places them in limitations that include cooking (*masak*), giving birth (*manak*), and dressing up (*macak*) (Zuhry, 2019). This traditional or conservative idea is starting to be eroded by women who demonstrate their abilities in the public sphere, even many who bear a double burden by doing domestic work and working. At the same time, women can also actualize themselves in the public sphere, which aligns with what Veranita (2023) said:

digital literacy impacts women's role in the nation's welfare, public space, and family.

In the broader context of life, the image or icon of women is always present in various media, including print, electronic, and digital media (Cenderamata & Darmayanti, 2019; Ernawati & Triyono, 2023) Women's beauty and physical perfection are often the main focus in various forms of mass media (Diyanti & Zelviona, 2024; Sahan & Witarti, 2021). The interdependent relationship between media and audiences is formed because women

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are considered the most effective tool for connecting messages. It is in line with the view that women's perfect physical beauty can be a very effective tool of persuasion (Fitrianti, 2021).

Ray Williams (2022) notes that attractive individuals often receive more attention, a finding supporting the research of Tanyildizi and Yolcu (2020), highlighting the assessment of women's physical attractiveness. Women's physical beauty is believed to increase the effectiveness of information delivery. Mass media, such as magazines, also often feature women, both in print in the past and digital formats as we see today.

Over time, Indonesian people have become increasingly fond of accessing information in electronic products or digital media. This transformation is also inseparable from the way the audience searches for information. (Aliudin & Arisanty, 2018). The Nielsen Audience Measurement Research Institute's records (in Romadhoni, 2018) Show that public consumption of magazines is only 5%. Tabloids, newspapers, radio, and online media are above magazines by 6%, 12%, 20%, and 33%, respectively. The large number of people accessing online media is one of the reasons for the shift from magazines to digital forms.

Changes and developments in media digitalization have impacted the existence of conventional media (Haqu, 2020; Hasan et al., 2023). Therefore, traditional media also faces significant pressure from the presence of new media. The transformation of magazines from print to digital format has a positive impact, namely facilitating access and increasing audience interest (Wijoyo & Reviyanti, 2024). This situation allows digital magazines to be accessed anywhere and anytime. The main

focus lies in improving and strengthening digital supporting infrastructure in response to the challenges arising from the transition from print to digital media (Rumata, 2018).

Cosmopolitan, accessed for free through the website cosmopolitan.co.id, is a magazine that presents various information about women. Known initially as a monthly print magazine from the United States focusing on fashion and entertainment, Cosmopolitan has transformed its brand into a leading destination for various topics important to its audience. Topics covered include fashion, beauty, pop culture, relationships, physical and mental health, careers, and finances. Cosmopolitan is known to have the world's most significant segment of young women, thus establishing its position as a pioneer and leader in content relevant to women (Cosmopolitan.co.id, n.d.).

Cosmopolitan seems to support the ongoing trend because previously, women were seen as weak, marginalized, and subordinate (EP, 2014). This view is an old construction built by the patriarchal system. It can be seen that Cosmopolitan magazine strongly supports the emancipation movement (Mulyana, 2022), which supports the new construction of women carried out by Cosmopolitan magazine, which seems to destroy the old construction of women's identity (Kahanna & Endrizal, 2023).

From this, Cosmopolitan represents the image of Western women. A magazine that convinces its audience that they can and can determine what they want for themselves. A magazine that illustrates that women can also be free from conventional ties. However, at the same time, the achievements achieved are still based on a male perspective.

Cosmopolitan.co.id displays digital covers in certain months. The results of interviews with the models on these covers are also presented. Ratnaningtyas (2023) explains that the selection of sources cannot be separated from media planning in its journalistic work. However, at the beginning of the emergence of digital covers, Cosmopolitan predominantly used foreign models. At least four out of five covers used foreign models.

In July and August 2022, Cosmopolitan.co.id consistently features covers with photos of Agnez Mo and Isyana, two female singers recognized in Indonesia and abroad. In addition to being a singer, Agnez Mo is also active as an actress, businesswoman, producer, and songwriter, with more than 350 awards in Asia and internationally, including iHeartRadio Music Awards (USA), Social Star Awards, Mnet Asian Music Award (Korea), Shorty Awards (USA), Anugerah Planet Muzik (Singapore-Malaysia), World Music Awards, JPop Asia Music Award (Japan), Asia Song Festival Award (Korea).

Isyana, a singer with a unique vocal character, received a scholarship from the Singapore government in her second year of high school. The scholarship allowed her to study music performance at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in collaboration with The Royal College of Music (RCM) London in the Bachelor of Music with Honours program. In 2015, Isyana received the RCM Excellence Award and a Bachelor of Music (B.Mus) degree, becoming the best graduate from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts after obtaining a Music Performance diploma in 2013 (Hafidha, 2020).

Agnez Mo and Isyana became the magazine's cover, covering different topics. Agnez Mo discussed women's equality,

music, and life goals (Rusnandha, 2023). Meanwhile, Isyana (Lestari & Adrainy, 2023) tended to convey how to anticipate and deal with the issue of oppression or bullying with #HarumkanMedsos. Agnez and Isyana's views broadcast by Cosmopolitan indicate an effort by the magazine to follow trends or segments in Indonesia, Agnez and Isyana have views.

The media selects and highlights an issue with the portion they determine, which is related to the decision whether the information is worthy of publication or not. The portion and intensity of media presentation vary, affecting how the audience perceives an issue (Sokowati, 2023).

Media often do not present facts in their entirety but choose representations that have been chosen to be presented in a certain way. These selected media representations result from a filtering process and are offered in various forms (Mahdi, 2015). This condition gives the media the ability to influence its readers. Focusing on specific themes, opinions, issues, and practices impacts identity patterns, social attitudes, and future actions (Syas & Rusadi, 2021).

Stuart Hall (2013) explains that representation is essential in forming and exchanging meaning in culture. This process involves using signs, language, and images to represent something. The use of language and these signs produces meanings that support the idea that events, objects, and individuals do not have absolute or fixed meanings. Everything created through these signs results from individual activities in culture and society (Alamsyah, 2020; Sudarsono, 2021), including the signs made by Cosmopolitan Magazine to display the reality of women.

Aisyah et al. (2018) noted that urban women today have knowledge and expertise

in their respective fields and can inspire others. On the other hand, Sarwono (2019) found that the image of modern women in *Cosmopolitan Indonesia* magazine still emphasizes Indonesianness with a positive attitude, self-confidence, courage, and an open mind.

Cosmopolitan magazine covers often feature photos of foreign public figures or models. Tanjung (2012) shows that the magazine presents various visual illustrations on each page and edition. However, in several editions, *Cosmopolitan* has only featured portraits of public figures from Indonesia as the cover of the digital magazine. The selection of these public figures was carried out through a strict selection process.

Cosmopolitan.co.id chooses public figures who have achieved nationally and internationally and are far from negative news. This magazine also advises readers on how women should behave, think, and act. Soewardikoen dan Tohir (2021) saw that adult cover models look sexy, while teenagers usually pose generally with 50% open clothes, unsmiling faces, sharp gazes, and slightly tilted faces.

As an academic study, there have been many discussions about the representation of modern women from various perspectives, including representation of girl power (Aprinta, 2011), gender and sexuality (Juditha, 2015), woman offender (Hasfi, 2010), women's language (Sarwono, 2019), issues about migrant women (Bali & Malhotra, 2024; Wahyudi, 2024) and issues of empowerment (Pakasi et al., 2024).

Therefore, based on the available facts and research results, this study aims to explain the representation of modern women,

especially those framed by the mass media, namely the digital magazine *Cosmopolitan.co.id*. The researcher will fill in the gaps in this point of view.

Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative type. Qualitative research is contextual based on specific places and times (Dodgson, 2019). Qualitative research methods are social science research methods that collect and examine human activities and speech (Afrizal, 2016).

Qualitative data can be in the form of written text or conversation, as well as human behavior. This study applies Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory (Manggola, 2019; Surahman, 2014) as an analysis tool, which tends to focus on visual aspects and the constructivism paradigm. The use of this method is considered appropriate for this research.

Peirce is known as an American philosopher (1839-1914). In Peirce's thinking, there is a combination of signs that emerge from activities that are represented in human life. This condition indicates that humans create signs and define each individual's culture. Therefore, each region has different signs (Sobur, 2013). According to Pierce (dalam Vera, 2015), signs can be seen from three trichotomy concepts: signs as a form or something that can be felt by the five senses and leads to something, objects, and interpretants.

According to the stages by Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2019), data collection was carried out through documentation and observation. The next stage is data reduction, which covers the 2022 edition of

Cosmopolitan Digital magazine with models of internationally recognized Indonesian singers and public figures, namely Agnez Mo and Isyana Sarasvati. The data that has been studied is then presented in the form of narrative text and tables. In the end, this study produces conclusions based on the findings obtained.

Gambar 1. Cosmopolitan Magazine Cover Model who is a singer and public figure.



Source : (Cosmopolitan.co.id, 2022)

Result

According to dochipo.com (2024), Magazine covers are essential for communicating brand impressions and should grab attention at first glance. An influential cover has elements such as a masthead, issue, publication date, main photo, main theme, other topics, hierarchical typography, attractive colors and fonts, and pictures with prominent backgrounds. Kristiyono (2020) added that the basic principles of graphic communication include simplicity, visual balance, unity, emphasis, and repetition to make it easier for readers to understand the content and attract attention.

The study of the front cover maps how Cosmopolitan constructs modern women in its magazine cover version. The model symbol on the Cosmopolitan magazine cover is reviewed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis, as follows:

Table 1.1 Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis

Figure 2. Cosmopolitan Magazine Cover, July 2022



Source : (Cosmopolitan.co.id, 2022)

<i>SIGN</i>	<p>Qualisign: Half-body photo of a woman with short hair above her shoulders, wearing a white dress and necklace. Plants and purple orchids surrounded her. The model's name is written, and the sentence 'Positive Energy on Social Media' is accompanied by 'Positive Energy on Social Media.'</p> <p>Sinsign: The body is facing sideways with the hands placed behind the body, and the face looks forward with a smile that is not very visible.</p> <p>Legisign: Eyes looking forward with an upright face. A white choker necklace adorns the model's neck.</p>
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OBJECT Icon: Public figure with purple orchid
Index: Public figures wear white clothes and foreground purple orchids. The position looks contrasting because of white in the form of dresses worn by public figures. There is a placement or repetition of orchids and leaves, trying to control the reader's eyes (to attract the eye). Public figures are placed with an asymmetrical balance that gives the impression of being relaxed, casual, and not too much.
Symbol: Green leaves are a calm or relaxed color group. It shows something alive and growing. Purple orchids are one of Indonesia's national flowers.

INTERPRETANT Theme: The white color of the clothes worn by public figures signifies pure, clean, pure, spotless, plain, silent, light, airy, bright, smooth, clear, simple, sterile, cold, and clinical (Eiseman, 2006). According to Setiawan (2022), purple orchids are closely related to power or nobility and show a sense of awe, respect, and appreciation.
Decent sign: A public figure who is also a brand ambassador for Lux Botanicals speaks about being wise on social media and expressing yourself as yourself.
Argument: Public figures who show a simple but elegant give an impression as an image of nobility and achievements.

Figure 3. Cosmopolitan Magazine Cover, August 2022



Source : (Cosmopolitan.co.id, 2022)

SIGN Icon: Public figures wear strap sleeve dresses with Japanese motif outer. The outer is worn not completely or made on one shoulder—the combination of an inner with a plain color and an outer full of motifs.
Index: Public figures wear dresses that emphasize the curves and shape of the body, giving a sexy impression. Meanwhile, the oversized outer gives a casual appearance.
Symbol: oversized can be comfortable, easy, fashionable, stylish, and chic. Oversize emphasizes simplicity, so it is essential to choose the right combination. Simple clothes with basic designs are not always boring (Assoune, n.d.). A pencil dress is a type of dress that has a tight model. Usually, a dress with a pencil shape has a simple style, and the bottom edge is narrowed so that it produces a pencil-like appearance. Dresses with this model show off the shape of the hips (Hai Gadis, n.d.).

OBJECT Icon: Public figure with purple orchid
Index: Public figures wear white clothes and foreground purple orchids. The position looks contrasting because of white in the form of dresses worn by public figures. There is a placement or repetition of orchids and leaves, trying to control the

reader's eyes (to attract the eye). Public figures are placed with an asymmetrical balance that gives the impression of being relaxed, casual, and not too much.
Symbol: Green leaves are a calm or relaxed color group. It shows something alive and growing. Purple orchids are one of Indonesia's national flowers.

INTERPRETANT Theme: black dress, straight cut with a shape that fits the body shape. Black is related to integrity and leadership. The meaning of black can be self-discipline and self-control. Black fashion gives an impression of elegance, prestige, formality, and class (Saputro, 2021). Oversized styles often look more relaxed and comfortable and are a popular trend in men's and women's fashion. Effortless comfort is one of the most attractive things about the oversized fashion trend (Partnered Content, 2022).

Decent sign: A stylish public figure always tries to be herself and inspires with her work.

Argument: A public figure always appears fashionable, graceful, and dignified without leaving herself behind and having integrity and leadership over her life goals and dreams, without abandoning comfort

Discussion

Through the study of the front cover, it can be mapped how *Cosmopolitan.co.id* constructs the modern woman version of its magazine cover. *Cosmopolitan.co.id* is a magazine obsessed with presenting extraordinary things. As the world's most prominent young women's media brand, *Cosmopolitan.co.id* aims to be a reference in real discussions about everything necessary to its readers, from fashion and beauty, pop culture, sex and relationships, physical and mental health, to career and finance. For *Cosmopolitan.co.id*, anything is possible. (*Cosmopolitan.co.id*, n.d.).

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mental health, to career and finance. For *Cosmopolitan.co.id*, anything is possible.

The first criterion is fashion and beauty. *Cosmopolitan.co.id* magazine wants to show its readers that modern young women do not leave behind their beautiful and fashionable side. Rukmawati dan Dzulkarnain (2015) saw that each individual's understanding of beauty is formed and depends on the benefits and goals felt when someone conveys their construction. For example, beauty can increase self-confidence, gain fame, be in the spotlight, and help support careers and other needs (Christiani, 2023; Eko, 2018). However, women are not bothered by beauty standards, given that they are more focused on recognizing their strengths and being beautiful in their own way (Rachma, 2018), as with Isyana, who shows a simple impression.

The elegant side, as an image of nobility and achievement, is presented in white clothing. Eiseman (2006) stated that the color white means simplicity. White contrasts with the purple orchid, symbolizing power and nobility showing awe, respect, and appreciation (Setiawan, 2022). Agnez Mo also prioritizes simplicity, comfort, ease, and

style in dressing. Saputro (2021) explains that black fashion gives the impression of elegance, prestige, formality, and class. She brings out an image of integrity and leadership over life goals and dreams without abandoning comfort. Agnez Mo is committed to the dreams and ideals she wants to achieve (Afifi, 2019; Noegroho, 2023).

The second criterion, popular culture, is inseparable from the element of music, which brings the work of both public figures into the spotlight for fans and the public. Popular culture emphasizes that culture helps build structures and history (Rahmawati et al., 2012). As part of popular culture, consuming certain music is a sign that someone judges and is judged by others (Storey, 2010).

The clothes worn by public figures reflect the identity of the wearer. Therefore, Isyana and Agnez Mo also focus on image, style, and fashion to highlight their identity. Ibrahim (2011) explains that the appearance of the human body through the choice and use of clothing, makeup, and behavior becomes a strong statement about status, gender, and class. Therefore, fashion has become an essential characteristic of modernity, which is marked by continuous innovation (Habsari, 2015; Shinta, 2018) and is interpreted as part of history.

The third criterion is sex and relationships. KBBI notes that relationships are connected or linked (one with another) by cause and effect (Saputri, 2021). This criterion is related to how public figures can transmit relationships or relationships to their readers. As in the *Cosmopolitan* cover in July, which used the sentence 'Positive Energy on Social Media.' Through this digital cover, *Cosmopolitan* also voices about being wise on social media and expressing yourself as

yourself. It is not much different from Agnez Mo's cover, which has the sentence 'Always To be real, always to inspire.' *Cosmopolitan*'s digital cover tries to voice always to be yourself and inspire with work. These two things are what *Cosmopolitan* wants to convey to its audience.

Kahanna dan Endrizal (2023) states that *Cosmopolitan* follows women's trends, such as the emancipation movement, and supports this trend because women were previously considered weak and marginalized by the patriarchal system. The two magazine covers show that *Cosmopolitan* supports the new construction of women's identity and breaks down old views.

In the fourth criterion, *Cosmopolitan.co.id* conveys the importance of physical and mental health for modern women. The last criterion about career and money emphasizes that the success of a public figure's career comes from effort, prayer, and a spirit of never giving up. Career advancement goes hand in hand with financial advancement. These criteria construct *Cosmopolitan.co.id*'s view of modern women.

Family Health Service Department of Health (2019) explains that physical, mental, and social health are essential. Women often face pressures from social, family, and work roles, so maintaining a healthy life balance is not easy. Good mental and physical health is essential for a happy and healthy life.

Sardjito Hospital Public Relations (2022) added that quality of life and physical condition are influenced by mental health, which includes emotional, social, and psychological well-being, and is the basis for self-development.

Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that the representation of modern women presented by Cosmopolitan through selecting Isyana and Agnez Mo as cover models is a simple appearance chosen without removing other essential elements in fashion. Among them are comfort, fashionable, elegant, and classy impressions. The clothes used represent the identity of the two public figures in the eyes of the public. The fashion that appears is an essential characteristic of the modernity of young women today. Clothes or fashion bring innovation and become a dialogue towards changes in modern women's thinking and behavior.

Cosmopolitan believes that modern women need to be wise in social media, be themselves, and be inspired through their work, which results in good mental health. Both public figures continue to grow and gain public recognition through their ways and achievements.

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