



Media Representation of Ideal Woman: Sociological Research

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Abstract

In modern society, the media play a significant role in promoting beauty trends and the perfect woman. Women's magazines are one of the many structures involved in the production of representations of women. The goal of this research was to examine the ways in which women are portrayed in the media, i.e. on the covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The method used in this research is content analysis, which was carried out in 2022. Analysis included period from 2010 to 2020. The covers were photographed and afterwards analyzed. Odd numbers of magazines (i.e. their covers) were chosen for the sample. Also, among such covers only those showing one woman were chosen. The total number of analyzed covers is 64. The analysis process included the analysis of visual and textual elements. The analysis shows that the most represented topic on the covers is sex, followed by fashion and love. The covers of the magazine mostly show young white women with make-up, brown hair of medium length and wavy loose hair. More than half of the women on the covers have a smiling face. Also, most women bodies are presented from the knees/thighs up and most of them are women with slim bodies. By profession, the most common are actresses and singers, then models, mostly of foreign origin. As for the analyzed text by the image, in most cases it is advice, expression of personal experiences or recommendations of the people who are shown on the covers, written in the first or third person singular, which tries to influence the reader's behavior. Finally, the women on the covers are flawless, perfect women, therefore almost unreal. Although the aim of the magazine is to advise and inform women about various everyday topics, it certainly has a hidden message, which is to promote the perfect ideal of beauty that influences young women all over the world.

Keywords: content analysis, magazine *Cosmopolitan*, media, representation, women

1. Introduction

Media presentations influence the way how women and their roles in society are perceived. In the 21st century, the representation of women in the news and other media presents a complex and mixed picture of women as subjects and actors in society (Byerly & Ross, 2006). In the sphere of capitalism, which makes the most money by media promoting of visual information, the emphasis is placed on physical appearance in content dedicated to women. Nowadays, advertisements, films and fashion impose beauty on women, that is, they determine and manipulate how they should look. The constant imposition of a perfect appearance stems mostly from fashion changes that dictate the ideals and standards of clothing, appearance, and body size and weight. However, all this imposition of beauty causes various psychological problems that can potentially affect health. This includes, for example, excessive exercise, improper diet and various plastic surgeries in order to achieve the idealized body promoted by the media (Lubina & Brkić - Klimpak, 2014). Beauty in general is compared to a woman, which is why they are considered an object of worship, but at the same time belittled. Namely, it is often thought that the lack of intelligence and ability is supplemented by beauty. A woman is often presented on the cover precisely because she is beautiful, and rarely because of personal success (Lubina & Brkić - Klimpak, 2014).

Magazines are specifically associated with femininity and women's culture. It is imperative for them to attract consumers. This is achieved by using the most striking images and headlines. The purpose of the magazine is a venture involved in two distinct but closely related sales processes: one to women, the other to advertisers. Advertisements used in women's magazines are structured in a way that allows the reader to dream. Cover images and sales lines also reveal a lot about the nature of women's magazines. The face of a woman, which is their trademark, is usually white, young, smoothly attractive, while the woman is impeccably groomed and usually smiling or looking seductive. The image presented in such magazines sells the qualities of white skin, youth, beauty, charm and sexuality as valuable features of femininity (Ndzabela, 2002). The women's magazine industry is understood as a producer of meaning. Magazines contain messages and signs about the nature of femininity that serve to promote and legitimize dominant interests. Early feminist accounts of women's magazines addressed the ways in which magazines offered unreal, untrue, and distorted images of women. Women's magazines were considered a powerful force for the construction and legitimation of gender inequalities. They did not simply offer their readers pleasure, but were a key site for the development of a self-identity that undermined women. Representations of femininity in women's magazines, therefore, were considered as the naturalization of an ideologically charged image of women and their place in society. Consequently, these texts were seen as instruments of domination that contributed to the overall subordination of women's identities (Gough-Yates, 2003).

Women's magazines developed into a cultural phenomenon that attracted considerable attention from feminists and other media theorists. The reason for this is mainly the way in which women are represented and presented in magazines. The woman created by the media is a wife, mother, housewife for men, a sexual object used to sell products to men, a person who tries to be beautiful for men. This means that the media, especially women's magazines, provide images that advise and guide women on how to be the perfect mother, lover and glamorous woman. It has more to do with their sexuality than their intellectual capacity. Women are presented as subordinate, passive and sexually available (Ndzabela, 2002). Despite differences in status, wealth, class, and race, magazines assume a shared experience among women. It's not just publishers and editors who use this inclusive voice. A key feature of women's magazines is a reader's input in the form of letters and real-life stories. In a way, within the limits of their own codifications, magazines expanded the possibilities of what it means to be a woman. Magazine discourse creates new female subjects through their

construction or representation of women as certain kinds of subjects. The changes seen in these magazines in the 1990s articulate a commitment to the production of norms of female beauty through the invocation of an assumed, universalist female culture dedicated to fashion and the body. They also carry the transition of what it means to be a young woman today. Magazines are thus deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption as well as the circulation in the cultural economy of collective meanings and constructions of identity for the individual reader. They exist as goods and as a means of advertising other goods. Advertisers envision women as primary consumers. First of all, they address the women as consumers through text and goods advertised in the magazine (Ndzamela, 2002).

What is specific in that context is the social construction and cultural representation of women, in terms of whether they are presented as glamorous sex objects or independent women in control of their sexuality. For many years, efforts have been made to find out whether these magazines are in line with the wishes and aspirations of their readers. Women's magazines are one of the many structures involved in the production of representations of women. Since these magazines are commercially driven, advertising plays an important role in the type of content they deliver (Ndzamela, 2002). As for magazines and newspapers, it is already known in advance that important events related to politics and business, which are considered to be of interest to men, go on the cover, while entertainment and culture are placed at the end. It can also be noticed in the pictures in the magazines that the men are much more serious because they are associated with more serious topics, while the women are mostly anonymous and are tied to the sale of some products, clothes, food, household and the like. It can be seen that regardless of the development of society, the position of women is still degraded (Lubina & Brkić - Klimpak, 2014).

A woman's social position is also often depicted alongside her idealized body. Magazine covers often state that weight loss enables a better life and higher status. Women are constantly bombarded with images of beauties on commercials, television, advertisements that offer false promises by purchasing a promoted item, such as various creams, then slimming pills or exercise equipment. In addition, the media emphasize that such a woman has everything she wants, from power, money, work to the perfect man. It has been proven, Kuhar points out, that women who have looked at pictures of slim models, shortly afterwards become depressed, feel ashamed, but also dissatisfied with their appearance. Such images lead to emotional disturbances in women, from dissatisfaction and changes in mood to pleasure. However, the media does not only attract readers with images of an idealized body, but also with the health that such a body represents. In other words, body care is associated with fun and a positive opinion of oneself, but also with the opinions of others, and it is emphasized that the ideal body depends on one's own choice and effort (Kuhar, 2005). In that sense, magazines for girls and women are complex cultural products. They are part of periodic industry and designed in mutual relation. Their content is varied in format and includes different contributors. They are the product of negotiations, usually between publishers, editors, advertisers and readers. Their pages contain diversity, inconsistency, contradiction and tension. Each magazine carries explicit and implied messages to its target audience and promotes messages on its covers (Tinkler, 2016). In contemporary society with intensive use of internet, social media also contribute to fueling similar gender expectations by conveying ideal images of women that are sometimes far away from reality. For example, female influencers often tend, to give a misleading representation of female subjectivity by projecting an image of successful women (Roberti, 2022). Furthermore, Joshi (2023, p. 94) observes the rapidly rising potential of social media which in not only reflecting, but according to the author, is also shaping sexualized notions such as beauty and gender by offering a new ways and contexts for performance and self-representation.

1.1. The specificities of *Cosmopolitan*

Magazine *Cosmopolitan* is one of the most popular magazines among women around the world. It is also one of the best-selling magazines in Croatia, representing the important influences of consumer popular culture on women. It is a representative of the world brand, it is positive and optimistic, intended for women who love men and women who love themselves. Since 1981, *Cosmopolitan* has portrayed women as young, independent individuals with interests in careers, clothing, travel, art and entertainment. In the 2000s, beauty, health, fashion, career, personal growth, and at the same time popular culture and the lives of celebrities became the center of interest. Nowadays, *Cosmopolitan* focuses on information from the world of fashion and cosmetics, about love, health, popular culture, that is, it is based on everything that women are interested in. It is noticeable that the magazine has less and less text and more and more photos (Grdešić, 2013). This magazine "carries cultural content such as sexuality, lifestyle, fashion, cosmetics, and others wrapped in the local language" (Kahanna, 2023, p. 442). It appears in 43 local editions in national languages, therefore this magazine is an example of a globalized magazine that deals with universal problems, difficulties and issues related to women. It is extremely difficult to resist reading *Cosmopolitan*, because it deals with women's lives and desires, shows ideal bodies and represents ideal relationships between women and men. It also reports on individual experiences with which most women can easily identify. However, Erjavec is of the opinion that the problem of *Cosmopolitan*, as well as other women's magazines, is that it addresses female readers as if they were a homogeneous group. The female subject is uniform in terms of age, social class, visual image, mentality and sexuality. The set of images and representations constructs an imaginary world and an ideal female reader who is fundamentally heterosexual, white, and middle-class. Little space is left for diversities that indicate differences within this firmly established collective (Erjavec, 2006).

This magazine shows itself as if it knows what women want. Because it is presented with distinctly female discourse, *Cosmopolitan* depicts the world from a female perspective. By constructing and defining the "women's world", magazine articles achieve socialization, supporting notions of what femininity should be (Conradie, 2011). *Cosmopolitan* is structured mostly by shorter, regular front and back features, with fashion and beauty features and segments in the middle of the magazine. The front pages are rich with information in a small font size, accompanied by numerous photographs and design details to distinguish one news story from the next. The main reason for placing all the visuals and entertaining information in the front part is to induce the individual to read and at the same time to facilitate the more serious task of reading longer articles (Donnelly, 2002). The magazine is known for its wit and quirky texts. It has a special style of writing that makes extensive use of alliteration and puns. The content page is also very visual and well designed in terms of color coordination and the use of font details to indicate different content categories. What is important to note is that the *Cosmopolitan* editor's page has the title "Our COSMO world", thus alluding to the global family to which the magazine belongs and allowing the reader to feel a sense of community and connection with women around the world (Donnelly, 2002). The magazine targets the audience of women aged 20 to 45 living in big cities, with secondary and higher education. *Cosmopolitan* consumer, in other words "Cosmo girl" is an active woman who likes to spend money and sees the magazine as a source of information. She likes comfort and beautiful things, cares about her appearance and wants a job that will give her the opportunity for advancement (Crusmac, 2013). Most countries have their own version of *Cosmopolitan*. In the United States of America, this magazine has long been one of the most successful magazines that has been portraying beautiful women as a social ideal for more than fifty years. The women who graced the covers in the past were mostly thin white women with blonde hair and blue eyes. This rule seems to have been most influenced by American beauty contests, but also by

ideal representations of Hollywood actresses such as Marilyn Monroe. However, over time there is a shift towards different ideals of beauty (Maslow, 2015). On the other hand, *Cosmopolitan* in Indonesia previously presented women as weak, marginalized and subordinated which was in consistency with an patriarchal system. Kahanna (2023, p. 443) points that such presentation in *Cosmopolitan* is changing since magazine currently supports the emancipation movement through the new construction of women which seems to tear down the old construction of women's identity.

Cosmopolitan covers are well coordinated and attention grabbing. When it comes to their color, pastel, light and sorbet colors are most prevalent. The most commonly used colors on the background of the covers are turquoise, orange and pink. Such youthful colors are used because they give the magazine an irresistible "girly" look, reminiscent of the packaging of a Barbie doll. Most of the women who appear on the covers are international celebrities. As for the titles, they are in line with *Cosmopolitan* magazine's intimate, confident and open attitudes that encourage and advise women. As with other well-known magazine brands, the title of *Cosmopolitan* is immediately identifiable. The main page of the magazine, or the cover, can be seen as a signature of the magazine that can become so famous that it achieves iconic status (Donnelly, 2002). The analysis of *Cosmopolitan* covers conducted by Maslow shows that the white race prevailed in all the years investigated (from 1959 to 2014). But, most of the women on the cover did not have a smiling face. As for the woman's age, none of the women were over thirty. In the 50s of the 20th century, all the women on the cover were with blue eyes, in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s the eye color varied, and in 2010, most models were again with blue eyes. As for the body type, for most of the years the women on the cover had a slim and enviable figure, and it was only in the 80s that women with curves appeared. Regarding hair length, the results showed that medium length was the most prevalent. What still needs to be highlighted is the amount of makeup on women. In the 1950s and 1960s, half of the models had heavy make-up, while half had natural make-up. In the 1980s, most models wore heavy makeup, and in the 1980s and 1990s, most models wore natural makeup. In the 2000s, the division between strong and natural make-up again occurs, and in the 2010s, most models were with heavy make-up (Maslow, 2015).

Crusmac also conducted an analysis of the covers of *Cosmopolitan*, in which she starts from two assumptions. The first assumption is that mass media promote two main values: beauty and economic independence. The second assumption is that the post-feminist media also promote the independent woman and thus put the traditional roles of women (wife and mother) in second place. The analysis included nine main topics appearing in the magazine: sex life, beauty tips, fashion and trends, body and nutrition, relationships, marriage, career, motherhood, celebrities and pop culture. Namely, the analysis confirms that *Cosmopolitan* has a large number of terms related to the cult of body and beauty. Also, celebrities promoted in all analyzed units are attributes of postmodern society, replacing models promoted in the past. The analysis also confirms the second hypothesis, since the concepts related to career are less related to the personal life of a woman. However, the low association between career and motherhood suggests that the two terms are often disconnected, showing that some magazine cover content likes to treat the two issues separately. Also, if women's independence hinders or causes the disappearance of traditional roles such as motherhood, the same can be said for beauty and sex. What is obvious is that the messages are mostly focused on activities and interests specific to young women, whose spheres of interest are beauty, romance and pleasure, rather than marriage and motherhood (Crusmac, 2013).

It is also necessary to point on slightly different analysis of *Cosmopolitan*, a linguistic analysis of the texts, authored by Figueiredo. It is an analysis of texts collected from British and Brazilian *Cosmopolitan* magazines. This critical approach aims to reveal the hidden

connection between language, power and ideology. Three categories of language elements were analyzed: vocabulary, modality and discourse. In terms of vocabulary, the ways in which romantic relationships and sex are portrayed in *Cosmopolitan* are studied. The most frequently used expressions in the magazine are "sex as strength for women", "sex power", "women as seductress", "sex as a game", "sex and control". From this it is evident that the representations of women are extremely sexual and in this sense they are presented as powerful. As for the second studied category, modality, it is about the author's attitude towards himself, against the world and the readers. The author studied the verbs and adverbs used in *Cosmopolitan* texts. What she notices is that *Cosmopolitan* uses the modality to construct a friendly and intimate discourse and thus tries to hide the power relations between the writer/institution and the reader. It is a discourse that influences the reader's behavior, that is, to start doing something they are not currently doing, and to stop doing something they are doing, to change their behavior. This discourse is characterized by the use of the imperative. The author noticed that the language used in *Cosmopolitan* texts refers to the discourse, i.e. it affects the behavior of the readers, by establishing ways of correct and incorrect behavior of women, especially when it comes to relationships, inviting readers to adhere to them. In sum, *Cosmopolitan* contributes not only to maintaining gender relations unchanged, but also to maintaining a power imbalance between readers and the press in general (Figueiredo, 1997). On the other hand, Ling's analysis of *Cosmopolitan* in China, almost thirty years after Figueiredo analysis points that discourse of sexuality in *Cosmopolitan* in China is "redefining sexiness as empowering, turning women into sexual subjects in heterosexual relationships, and policing women's sexual bodies". Meaning that these discourses demonstrate characteristics being quite divergent from the discourse of sexuality documented in socialist period, offering "a new female sexual subjectivity to adopt, while also subjecting them to new modes of gender governing" (Ling, 2023, p. 285).

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Objectives

Many feminist approaches are based on criticizing the available representations of women and femininity in the media, popular culture and art. However, the way in which the media reports on topics that affect them through sensationalism is problematic (Hollows, 2000). Therefore, the general goal of this paper is to investigate the ways in which women are portrayed in the media, that is, on the covers of *Cosmopolitan*. Specific goals are to:

- analyze the elements of the visual representation of a woman (woman's body, body position, facial appearance, way of dressing);
- determine the ways of constructing "femininity" on the covers;
- analyze the content of the text messages by the image of the woman.

2.2. Method and Sample

In this research, the covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine (Croatian edition) were analyzed. With prior consent and permission, the sample was collected in the University Library in Split. Each year has 12 editions and the analysis included period from 2010 to 2020. The covers were photographed and afterwards analyzed. Odd numbers of magazines (i.e. their covers) were chosen for the sample. Also, among such covers only those showing one woman were chosen. Accordingly, two numbers were excluded from the analysis (number 11 from 2015 and number 7 from 2019). Therefore, the total number of analyzed covers is 64.

The method used in this research is content analysis, which was carried out in 2022. For the purposes of the analysis, and based on the relevant literature and piloting of the sampled

material on which the analysis was carried out, a categorical apparatus was constructed and an appropriate protocol was created.

The analysis process included the analysis of visual and textual elements. The analysis of visual elements included an analysis of the cover's background and image of the woman. The textual analysis involved the analysis of the text that was next to the picture of the woman and which referred to the image. In other words, the content analysis of the covers of *Cosmopolitan* included 3 categories: background, image of a woman and accompanied text. For the categories representation of women and background, a categorical apparatus was constructed in advance. Thus, the analysis of the background included the analysis of the color of the title and the type and color of the background. The category image of women included analytical subcategories of race, age, facial description, body and hair description, body position, clothing, and person's occupation and origin. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the textual elements.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of the visual elements of *Cosmopolitan* magazine covers

Regarding the backgrounds of the covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the type and color were analyzed. On most (95.3%) covers, the background is unspecified, while it is visible on only two covers representing an interior (3.1%), and the other representing an exterior (1.6%). The analysis showed that the most common background color on the covers is white (32.8%). Pink is found on 14.1% of covers, blue on 7.8%, orange is present on 4.7% of covers, yellow, red and 6.3% backgrounds on the covers are pink. Purple, green and blue-violet are present in 3.1% of cases.

Along with the analysis of the visual elements of the covers, we also analyzed the themes of the texts on the covers and the colors of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine titles. Regarding the text on the covers, the aim of the analysis was to investigate which topics are represented on them and the color of the magazine's title. The most represented topic on the cover is sex (31.3%), fashion (14.1%) and love (12.5%). Tips such as *Wedding Survival Guide*, are present in 10.9% of cases. The theme of beauty is presented in 7.8% of the analyzed titles, fun and seduction in 6.3%, while career and horoscope are represented in 3.1% of cases. The topic of health is found in 4.7% of the analyzed content. The next analyzed category is the color of the *Cosmopolitan* cover titles, and the analysis shows that the most represented color is red, 21.9%, followed by pink 18.8% and white 17.2%. Black, blue, yellow and pink colors are used in 6.3%, and purple, orange and gold in 3.1% of cases.

3.2. Features and characteristics of women on the covers

The second part of the analysis refers to the analysis of woman's presentation, i.e. her portrayal on the cover of the magazine. The analysis included categories - age, race, face, hair, body, profession and origin. Based on the analysis, it is evident that in 59.4% of the cases on the covers there are young women (from 15 to 29 years old), 40.6% of middle-aged women (from 30 to 59 years old), while older women (from 60 to 90 years) were not on the analyzed covers. Regarding the race, the majority (79.7%) of women are white. Black women are on two front pages (3.1%), and there is only one Asian woman. During the analysis, it was observed that other races (Latino) were present in 15.6% of cases. The analysis of the woman's facial expression included the analysis of the presence of make-up, facial expressions, and gaze. The results show that all (100%) women have make-up, and more than half (64.1%) of them are smiling, while 35.9% have a serious facial expression. The next category is the type of view of a woman, which has an important meaning, especially for magazines. In the past, women on

magazine covers and various advertisements mostly had a downcast, dreamy look, which signified their subordination in society, more precisely to men, while today this is a rare case (Maslow, 2015). Analyzing the type of gaze in the presentation of women, it was noticed that the majority (87.5%) had a direct gaze. In 9.4% of cases, women on the covers look "aside". On just one cover, a brooding, dreamy look was observed. Also, it was noticed on one cover that the woman had her eyes closed.

The next analyzed category is woman's hair. In addition to length, hair color and hairstyle were analyzed. Regarding hair length, about a third (31.3%) of women have short hair (shoulder length). Medium hair length (below the shoulders) was observed in 65.6% of cases, while long hair is present in only 3.1% of cases. The analysis shows that more than half of the women, (59.4%) have brown hair, while slightly less than a third (31.3%) are blonde. 6.3% of women have black hair, and only two women (3.1%) have unnatural hair color, such as pink or green. Furthermore, most of the women on the covers (87.5%) have wavy loose hair. Straight loose hair is present in 6.3% of cases and solemnly raised hair in 4.7% of cases. On only one cover, the woman has casual raised-up hair.

Further analysis has included the body of the woman shown on the cover. Regarding the body, the analysis of the content was aimed at investigating several aspects: the part of the body shown on the covers of *Cosmopolitan*, characteristics and body position. Also, the clothing of the women on the covers was analyzed. The analysis shows that the majority of the body is shown (from the knees, thighs upwards) in 82.8% of cases. The whole body is shown in 10.9%, while the upper part of the body is shown in only 6.3% of cases. Furthermore, the women on magazine covers mostly have a slim body (92.2%), while 7.8% of women have a curvy body (with hips and breasts being well-defined). By analyzing the position of the body, it was observed that almost all women, 96.7% of them were standing, while only 3.1% of women were sitting. As for clothing, the majority (87.5%) of women are dressed casually, while 10.9% of women are formally dressed. Only 1.6% are half-dressed, that is, one woman on the cover of the magazine.

The final analyzed categories are the occupation and origin of the person on the cover. The analysis shows that almost half (45.3%) of women are actresses by profession, while 29.7% are singers. In addition, 7.8% of women on the covers are models, and 6.2% of women have two professions – singer and actress. Only 3.1% of women are presenters or influencers by profession, while one woman is known as an Internet celebrity, a reality star, an influencer, a model and as an actress. At the same time, most of the women on the covers are of foreign origin (93.8%), while only four (6.3%) women are from Croatia.

3.3. Content analysis of text messages

The next part is related to the analysis of text messages on the covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. As for the cover text itself, it is known for its wit and whimsy. It refers to a special style of writing that makes extensive use of alliteration and puns, whether it is quotes or sentences (Donnelly, 2002, 63). In this part of the research, the text with image category was analyzed, more precisely the type of text and content. According to the results, more than half (64.1%) of the analyzed text that accompany the image is descriptive (not whole sentences but often adjectives describing woman), while 26.6% of the text is in the form of quotes. Only 9.4% of the total analyzed text has the form of a sentence.

In addition to the type of text, it is important to understand its content. *Cosmopolitan* uses the modality to construct a friendly and intimate discourse, which is already visible on the cover itself, where there are various tips or some personal experiences and recommendations of the person depicted on it. It is about a discourse that affects the behavior of the reader, that is, a

change in behavior. This discourse is characterized by the use of imperatives and influences the reader's behavior by establishing the correct and incorrect behavior of women (Figueiredo, 1997, 15). Precisely for this reason, the analysis was aimed at determination of the content of the text placed by the image of the woman. The categories included content describing the depicted woman and her personal experience from her perspective, i.e. in the first person or from the perspective of someone else, i.e. in the third person, and at the same time advice for the reader. As for the advice addressed to the reader, the analyzed sentence - "In a relationship, you have to say what you really think" can be cited as an example. The next type of sentence is - "I am a girl who longs for love and believes in fairy tales". This is a description of a person, that is, one's own opinion in the first person. The next category is the description of a person through someone else's opinion, where the sentence - "From a wacky girl to a serious entrepreneur" can be singled out as an example. Regarding personal experience through one's own opinion, one example is the sentence - "I got the best advice in my life from my mother". The last category referred to personal experience through someone else's opinion, and an example is the sentence - "She discovered how she amassed wealth". The results show that in 37.5% of cases it is a statement of personal experience through one's own opinion, while in 32.8% of cases the content of the text is a description of a person through someone else's opinion, i.e. in the third person. The personal experience of a person through someone else's opinion appears in 15.6% of the analyzed texts, and the description of a person through their own opinion is found in 7.8%. Finally, advice to readers is present in 6.3% of cases.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The obtained results show that the color of the title is most often red, pink or white, which are dominantly stereotypical "female colors". Also, red is a strong color that evokes the strongest emotions in us (passion, dominance, excitement, energy, etc.). As for the background, in almost all covers, it was undefined (it does not show either the interior or the exterior), which certainly points to the conclusion that the editor's goal was to highlight the woman and the textual elements put on the background. This is indicated by the color of the cover because around a third of the covers are white and slightly less are pink. Since the focus on the covers is on the depiction of women and that the covers contain numerous short texts, it is not surprising that the background on most covers is somewhat more neutral. The analysis of the content of the textual elements on the covers show that the most represented topic is sex, and fashion and love can also be highlighted along with it. It should be noted here that there are lots of different topics on the covers of the magazine intended for different types of women, where everyone can find something for themselves. These topics were not the subject of our analysis since we were interested only in the analysis of the image of women on covers and the text that accompanied it.

White women of a younger age, with brown hair of medium length, loose and wavy, are most often shown on the covers. Although we can witness today in the media an increase in the trend that celebrates natural beauty (without make-up, filters, etc.), it seems that this is not the case in this analysis since all the women shown had make up. Most of them are women with slim bodies, so we can conclude that the ideal of slimness is still very much present in the media, specifically on the covers of magazines.

Analysis of the content of the text messages show that more than half of them have the function of describing the depicted woman. Most often, it is a description of the personal experience of the depicted woman through her own opinion, and then through the opinion of others. This indicates a friendly and intimate discourse that is used in the magazine precisely

through advice or some personal experience. In other words, this is a part of discourse that affects the change of the reader's behavior and is emphasized by the imperative.

Comparing the results of our research with similar ones, such as Maslow (2015), we find a lot of similarities, especially when it comes to the age and race of women on magazine covers, as well as the presence of make-up on women's faces, hair length and the presence of a slim body. However, in the category of facial expressions, a difference was observed compared to the mentioned research, in which it was shown that on more than half of the analyzed covers the woman was not smiling, while our results showed that the majority of the women on the cover were smiling. This is certainly one of the indicators of changes in presenting women over the years.

Background and text on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* are also elements that can be compared to Maslow's data in analysis. As for the background of the covers, the results of the author Maslow coincide with our results for the most part, whereby an unspecified background prevails, and white and pink are also the most common colors. However, a difference was noticed in the color of the main title. In contrast to our results, where red, pink and white colors predominate, in Maslow's analysis, black and white are the most common colors, which indicates a kind of simplicity. Furthermore, Maslow's results show that the most prominent topics are love and sex, as in our research. This is an indication that *Cosmopolitan* magazine, since its first edition, has been going in the same direction regarding the advice, help, various experiences and entertainment for women around the world. Therefore, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, regardless of the year of publication, remained faithful to its principles and rules. Primarily, what is important is the woman on the cover and the message she sends, and it can be noticed that every woman on the analyzed cover is self-confident and successful, which sends a message to readers to fight for their desires and not give up on them. However, on each cover there is a text next to a picture of a person, which refers to some personal experience, opinion or advice addressed to female readers, and this is what is crucial for this magazine. It is about self-confident, intimate and open attitudes. What is important, along with the text, is of course the appearance of the cover itself, which must attract the customer's attention. As can be seen in the results, youthful colors are most often used, which give the magazine an irresistible look.

Finally, the image of woman on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine shows a perfect woman without flaws. Analyzing the covers of this magazine, it was observed that every woman is flawless or even unreal. Although the aim of the magazine is to advise and inform women about various everyday topics, it certainly has a hidden message, which is to promote the perfect ideal of beauty that influences young women all over the world. Unfortunately, the pressure of that perfect look will always be there since the media has quite an influence on society, although sometimes we are not aware of it. Finally, by the analysis of various scientific publications/papers dealing with this topic shows its complexity and dependence of social developments and changes. Thus, we agree with Roberti (2022) when she points out that new analytical tools and techniques should be developed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of production of female subjectivity in different social and cultural contexts which are especially influenced by new media and technology developments.

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