

Advertising Products Through Stories

In 1937, Cosmopolitan magazine provided readers with a series of realistic short stories and articles profiling individuals. These stories served as models for the reader to emulate, in order to be successful and polite. Advertisements in the magazine strived to use this same format, using narrative to describe the potential utility of products to consumers to persuade consumers to purchase them.

Cosmopolitan magazine seems to be aimed primarily at female, middle to upper class consumers, despite being a literary magazine. The interesting stories that were a model for a proper way to act, as well as a pleasure to read. The cover of this issue of Cosmopolitan contained a painting of a beautiful woman in a formal gown. She looks happy, and seems as though she is inviting the reader into the magazine with her hospitality. The color scheme is orange on grey, indicating that both cosmopolitan and this woman stands out against a dull background. Given that this issue was released in the middle of the depression, and New Deal Era, this background may represent the dreary environment throughout the country (Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History). Many of the elements of the era's technological development were viewed as mundane, or dehumanizing, as seen through Charlie Chaplin's commentary in Modern Times (Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History). The text on the cover is much more limited, advertising only one story. The story indicated is the beginning of the next book by the famous author Hervey Allen, who had previously written a novel likely to attract a similar type of reader. In this era, it would have been very likely for middle and possibly upperclass women to want to read about luxurious experiences that stand out from

everyday life in order to forget some of the issues they face. The image of a successful woman would be enticing to an average consumer and indicate that the reader too could be successful. However, it was also necessary to be practical and find the best products for their value to justify reading the magazine. As such, *Cosmopolitan* needed to convey practical lessons to readers through more extravagant stories.

Given this demographic of readers, the table of contents of *Cosmopolitan* is unsurprising. The table of contents is organized by section, including “three serials, book-length novel, novelette, nonfiction feature, seven short stories, and ten articles.” There is a much heavier emphasis on fiction works and stories than on nonfiction works or reporting. Each of these features seems to contain some type of lesson, either through a moral in a story, or through the message of the article. The cover story is not emphasized more than any of the other stories within the table of contents, as each story aims to serve as a model to the women reading the magazine. This layout was a precursor to the shift in the early 1940s in which *Cosmopolitan* became “The Four-Book magazine (Spatacus).”

Both the narrative stories and the articles within the magazine serve as positive examples to the women reading the magazine. For instance, the cover article describes in detail the personal life of the author Hervey Allen. In addition to focusing on Hervey Allen, *Cosmopolitan* gives details about how his wife behaved and was supported. “Ann Andrews, a slender, lovely thing whose eyes did not retain the classroom gaze of polite inattention when beautiful pieces of writing were read or spoke of” demonstrates a value on attentiveness and studious behavior (*Cosmopolitan*, 8). Furthermore, the detailed of the honeymoon explained their closeness and Ann’s support, “returned in a bitter winter

with thirty dollars, two small daughters, and a mammoth novel two-thirds completed (Cosmopolitan, 8).” The image associated with the story is also of the entire family, with Ann very clearly attentive to her small daughters. By highlighting the characteristics of being studious, supportive, and a good mother, Cosmopolitan indirectly shows how a woman reading the magazine could help further her husband in his career. Additionally, in the short story “Foreign Affair,” the writing demonstrates how the supporting character Alice helped out Bill with his flaws by introducing him to being caring and putting himself in others’ shoes. She encouraged him to adopt a more caring stance, which was an attribute tied to females in the time period. Additionally, she was also willing to concede when she was incorrect and be supportive enough to break Bill out of jail. Her caring attitude and supportive nature are both idealized in this story. Both Ann in the nonfiction work and Alice in the story provide role models for how women should act during the time period. The magazine articles are targeted towards teaching women proper values and lessons through stories.

Given all of this information about both the era and the stories in Cosmopolitan magazine, it’s possible to analyze the advertisements in the magazine to see if they play into the same framework. The majority of the advertisements in the magazine are targeted at women, either for something that will help themselves, or something they can do to help their husband. For instance, over half of the advertisements are for cosmetic matters, like products for soap, deodorant, or make-up. All of these items would help a woman to appear proper in public, or to assist her in choosing the proper products for her husband. Additionally, there are many advertisements relating to alcohol. This may have partially been the case due to the end of prohibition four years

earlier. It is also probable that since *Cosmopolitan* was a literary magazine, men may have also flipped through the stories, and advertisers would have wanted to also appeal to them. Finally, there were advertisements regarding health matters such as toothpaste, gauze, and laxatives. All of the advertisements seemed to somehow relate to the woman's role in the private sphere around the house, and how she supports the home and her husband.

One particular ad that clearly displayed a product shown within a story was immediately following the Hervey Allen article. The ad was entitled "The General Cried at Dawn" and consisted of a black and white series of drawings, each with its own caption. The storyline is about a soldier, sitting on a park bench with a young lady, and he recounting his time in the military for her. He'd been assigned to a particularly tough general for orderly duty. He found the general distraught because he could not. The soldier suggested Sanka Coffee, a caffeine-free alternative. As a result, the general had greater respect for him, and offered to promote him. The ad concludes with a description suggesting that Sanka is a good choice because it allows both coffee consumption and sleep. Additionally, the description offers instructions for making coffee "Make Sanka Coffee strong, the way all good coffee should be. Use a heaping tablespoonful for each cup (*Cosmopolitan*, 85)." The advertisement is clearly meant to appeal to men because it discusses how the coffee is real, and strong. However, since a woman is likely to be the one reading the advertisement, and the one purchasing the coffee, the story appeals to her desire to support her husband.

Apart from the obvious message of the ad, the graphic design appeals to the reader in several specific ways. First of all, the ad is in black and white. While the

majority of the magazine is in black and white, some ads are in color. This sparsity of color seems to show the lack of frills associated with the coffee. It is a very serious, even “manly”, product compared to some of the others presented in the magazine. Additionally, the comic style formatting for the advertisement makes it seem as though it would be a fun story to read. The sketches may attract readers as it’s an interesting story, and not just a product description. The sketches themselves are very realistic. This realism allows for the same type of modeling as in the articles. At the top, the first image is of the soldier and the woman sitting on the park bench. The soldier is dynamically telling the story, and the woman is smartly dressed and raptly listening to learn from the soldier. Again, the advertisement provides a positive role model for how a woman reading the magazine should act, and also encourages her that to be supportive it may be wise to purchase Sanka coffee. Additionally, the military was viewed positively during this era. By having a military background for the advertisement with the coffee, it shows that the decaffeinated Sanka coffee was not viewed as weak, but instead just as real as standard coffee. This could be to demonstrate that drinking decaffeinated coffee was nothing to be ashamed of, and was just as strong as drinking standard coffee. The General at Dawn provides another role model for women to follow, just like in the stories in the majority of the magazine. All of these factors subtly help to support the message discussed in the text of the advertisement.

Overall, advertisements in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in 1937 attempted to follow the format of the remainder of the magazine. Since the women who read this magazine desired to read about how to be successful in a very difficult era, the advertisements

also provided positive role models and provided stories of how their products should be used by upstanding women.

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