

# On entering the world of women's magazines a cross-cultural comparison of Elle and Marie Claire

Moeran, Brian

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**On Entering the World of Women's Magazines:  
A Cross-Cultural Comparison of *Elle* and *Marie Claire***

By

Brian Moeran  
Senior Research Fellow  
Danish Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

**Introduction**

The study of women's magazines is interesting and various. On the one hand, there is the pioneering work of Roland Barthes who, in *The Fashion System*, did a structural analysis of women's clothing as described by French fashion magazines from the late 1950s into the early 60s (Barthes 1983). On the other, there is Marjorie Ferguson's *Forever Feminine*, in which the author made full use of her decade's experience as writer and associate editor for a weekly women's magazine in Britain, to produce an account that combined in-depth interviews with editorial staff with content analysis of selected English women's magazines between 1949 and 1980 (Ferguson 1983).

Other approaches include the historical research by Marjorie Beetham who has traced the emergence and history of women's magazines in Britain from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day (Beetham 199\*), and – at the other extreme, perhaps – Joan Barrell and Brian Braithwaite who look at the history of magazines and the contemporary magazine industry in the United Kingdom from a purely business angle. Ellen McCracken has looked at 'glossy' women's magazines in the United States primarily as 'cultural texts', although she also brought in the business side of magazine publishing by focussing in detail on the relation between advertising and editorial matter in the women's glossies that she studied (McCracken 1993).

Much of the more recent academic writing about women's magazines has tended to present textual critiques of what is published there. This is epitomised, perhaps, by McCracken's work. One comparatively early commentator on women's magazines, Janice Winship, successfully combined a feminist, Marxist and reader's approach in an analysis of *Woman's Own*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Spare Rib*. Her *Inside Women's Magazines* provided some general ways of understanding the place of women's magazines in contemporary British women's lives, as well as the cultural codes that

shape those magazines as a combination of ‘survival skills and daydreams’ (Winship 1987). More recently, a Dutch feminist, Joke Hermes, has conducted in-depth interviews with readers of women’s magazines, to determine what it is precisely that does (or does not) interest them, makes their contents memorable, helps women with their everyday lives, and so on. There has thus been a gradual move away from Ferguson’s pioneering work on the production of magazines to current interest in their reception – an interest that has characterised cultural studies in general during the final decade of the millennium. In my own research, therefore, I wish to link the production and consumption of women’s magazines by looking at how editorial staff go about their work and at how women regard the publications that they regularly subscribe to or buy.

Almost all the work cited here has been concerned with women’s magazines in England and the United States, and it is in Europe and across ‘the pond’ that they have been most apparently successful. However, there is an important ‘non-western’ market for women’s magazines in Japan and these have been studied by, among others, John Clammer, Sharon Kinsella, Brian Moeran, Nancy Rosenberger and Lise Skov (Skov and Moeran 1995; Moeran 1996). Teruko Inoue and her research group have also written a pioneering comparative study of women’s magazines in Japan, the USA and Mexico (Inoue et al 1989). It is on a comparison of two international women’s magazines published in France, Hong Kong, Japan, UK and the USA that this paper focuses.

### **Questions and Methodology**

The main questions underpinning my research stem from the fact that women’s magazines are both cultural products and commodities.

- As *cultural products*, they circulate in a cultural economy of collective meanings, providing recipes, patterns, narratives and models of and/or for the self.
- As *commodities*, on the other hand, they are products of the print industry and crucial sites for the advertising and sale of other commodities. They are thus deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption at both global and national or regional levels.

At the same time, throughout their long history, women’s magazines have taken their readers’ gender as axiomatic and defined them ‘as women’. Yet magazines have tended to represent femininity as fractured in the sense that they assume that it is given and yet somehow has to be achieved.

By offering not only to shape their readers’ gendered identities, but also to address their desires, women’s magazines lie at the intersection of at least three different layers of the cultural economy. It is on the interrelationship of money, public discourse and individual desire that my research focuses and from this interrelationship that a number of questions arise. Simply put, these are:

1. How do magazines like *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* distinguish and define their targeted groups of readers and advertising clients?
2. In what ways do their messages denote a selective filtering and interpretation of aspects of ‘the world’ in the regions in which they are published?

3. What beliefs and values are incorporated in magazines' messages and in what forms are these messages transmitted?
4. Who decides the content of messages, and how?
5. What individual behaviour patterns and attitudes do magazines foster among their different readers?
6. What social behaviour and collective attributes do they foster among their different readers?
7. How might the answers to the above questions change over time (Ferguson 1983:4-11) and across cultures?
8. How do international women's magazines, which are published world-wide in more than a dozen countries each, adapt to the differing needs and expectations of local readerships?
9. What are those needs and expectations, and how do they differ – if at all – among readers living in Japan, Hong Kong, France, England and the USA? In other words, in an international magazine, what is changed and why? Which messages – and thus which beliefs and values incorporated in those messages – remain the same among different editions and why?
10. How 'international' are international women's magazines? For example, if certain modifications are made to the presentation of a magazine's *contents* (especially with regard to fashion and beauty), as hinted above, are they also made to the overall *structure* of the magazine in question? Do different reading habits and expectations lead to magazines taking on different *styles* in different editions, so that an international women's magazine like *Vogue*, for example, ultimately bears a greater resemblance to other magazines in its genre published in the same country (for example, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Cosmopolitan* in the USA or *Spur*, *Oggi*, *25 Ans*, *Frau* and *Domani* in Japan) than to other editions of the same title published in France, the UK, Italy, Korea and Japan?
11. As newcomers, international magazines often find themselves obliged to adapt to local magazine practices and markets. What are those practices? And how do they differ, if at all, in different markets?
12. Given that editorial practices are often said to be contingent upon the advertisers whom magazines attract, what is the relationship between advertising and editorial matter? In other words, how much attention do editorial staff pay to *readers* and how much to their *sponsors*?
13. How much does the relationship between magazines and their advertisers hinge upon corporate advertisers' and magazine publishers' globalising strategies? Is there any connection between such strategies?

All these questions together pose three methodological issues, in the sense that I need to find out:

1. How *editors* envision the way their magazines ought to be (according to their own professional criteria) and how those magazines actually turn out in practice (because of advertiser and other business demands). This means that I need to do research on *cultural production*.

2. How *readers* themselves read and think about magazines and their contents, what they expect to get out of women's magazines and for what purposes. This means that I need to do research on *audience reception*.
3. What the *magazines* themselves say. This means that I need to carry out *content analysis* of the two magazines in the five different editions that I have available to me from 1996 through 1998.

It is only this combination of cultural production, audience reception and content analysis that, in my opinion, will lead to a proper understanding of the role of international women's magazines in societies as varied as those under analysis. Somehow I have to combine analyses of the market (Bird 1977, 1979; Barrell and Braithwaite 1988) with discussions of 'images of women' (Winship 1987, McCracken 1993) and reader reception (Hermes 1995).

### **Magazine Selection**

At the time I started my research in the mid- to late-90s, I had a limited range of international women's magazines to choose from. The most obvious choice would have been *Cosmopolitan*, published in both Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese editions, as well as in British and American editions. But *Cosmo* was, and to some extent still is, every academic's favourite magazine to study (rather like McDonald's and Disney) and, as an academic well acquainted with marketing strategies, I wanted to be *different*. And anyway, *Cosmo* did not seem to carry *that* many ads, and advertising – as explained earlier – has been the force driving my interest in the magazines.

Other obvious choices included *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Although *Bazaar* was published in Hong Kong, there was no Japanese edition, and *Vogue* – a little late among the international magazines' push into Asia – had not yet gone out of Europe. So I was left with *Elle* and *Marie Claire*.<sup>1</sup> Although partially forced upon me, this choice was 'inspired' in the sense that the head offices of the two magazines have adopted two rather different globalising strategies. While the publication of *Elle* worldwide is master-minded by its French publisher, Hachette Filipacchi, in Paris, so that there is considerable co-ordination of textual material in the different editions of the magazine (now published in 32 different countries), *Marie Claire* has been franchised to different publishers with different local tastes and strategies in different parts of the worlds. This gave me the seeds for two kinds of comparison:

1. Between similar, though differently titled, French women's magazines, on the one hand, and
2. Between different local productions of each of these magazine titles, on the other.

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<sup>1</sup> There was also a Japanese fashion magazine, *Ryūkō Tsūshin*, that was published in a Chinese edition in Hong Kong during the 1990s, and that seemed promising in the sense that it was *not* published by an American or European firm, but by another globalising force: Japan. But it was not published in any other language so that, although I have a year's supply of both editions which I can now use as supporting evidence for my research findings, this magazine was clearly unsuitable to the project.

The two magazines selected are of comparatively recent origin and both were created in France.

- *Elle* was founded in 1945, embarked upon its first international edition – again in Japan – in 1969, and now publishes 32 editions, selling almost 5 million copies a month. Of these 916,817 are sold in the USA.
- *Marie Claire* was created in 1937, embarked upon its first international venture in Japan in 1982 and now publishes 2 editions, selling more than 3 million copies a month. Of these, 640,319 are sold in the USA (as compared with *Cosmopolitan*'s circulation of just over 2.5 million in that country).

By comparison,

- *Cosmopolitan*, the world's leading international women's magazine, was founded in 1886, but only embarked upon an international strategy in 1972 (when it made a spectacular entry into the UK market). It now has 24 international editions and sells more than six and a quarter million copies a month worldwide. Of these more than 2.5 million are sold in the USA.
- Another long-staying magazine, *Vogue*, was founded in 1892, and was quickly exported: to the UK in 1916, and to France five years later. Even so, it only has 11 international editions at present, selling a combined total of 1.85 million copies a month. Of these more than 1.1 million are sold in the USA. (See *Table 1*)

From this it can be seen that of the two magazines selected, *Elle* is the newest and has the largest circulation worldwide, outside of the USA. For its part, *Marie Claire* is the second newest international women's magazine and ranks third in international distribution and number of copies sold worldwide. (See *Table 2*)

### **Magazine Publishers**

Major publishers of the two magazines selected are Hachette-Filipacchi Medias (*Elle*) and Marie Claire Album SA. In the USA, the Hearst Corporation publishes *Marie Claire*.

- Hachette-Filipacchi Medias is one of the world's largest magazine publishers, with more than 200 titles sold in 32 countries. Starting out by publishing a *Jazz Magazine* in the 1950s in Paris, the company has grown through innovation and international expansion, including acquisitions of French publisher Hachette (1980) and US-based Diamandis (1988). It took its present name in 1997 and in the following year acquired the Japanese publisher Fujin Gahō.

Apart from its flagship weekly, *Paris Match* (circulation approximately 800,000), HFM publishes such diverse interest titles as *Lui* (the French *Playboy*), *Car and Driver*, *Premiere* and the late John F. Kennedy Jr.'s US political publication *George*. Its stable of women's magazines includes *Woman's Day*, *Fujin Gahō* (Japan) and *Orient Beauty* (Hong Kong), as well as *Elle*. The company also prints French regional newspapers and supplements and has other interests in advertising, gravure printing and electronic and book publishing.

In its international expansion, HFM has preferred not to sell franchises to local corporations (in the way that *Marie Claire* has been franchised to the Hearst Corporation), but to set up its own branch organisations in the countries in which it operates. The Greek edition, therefore, is run by Periodiko Hachette-Rizzoli, and the Japanese by Hachette-Filipacchi Japan. The company runs its Asia-Pacific branch, too.

- The family-owned Hearst Corporation is a New York-based media giant with interests in TV and radio, cable networks programming and online services, as well as its original newspaper, magazine and business publishing. The company owns 12 daily newspapers, 18 weeklies, 16 consumer magazines, stakes in such cable TV networks as ESPN, as well as 47% of women.com Networks, the Internet's largest site for women. Started by William Randolph Hearst, whose father had obtained the *San Francisco Examiner* as payment for a gambling debt, bought the *New York Morning Journal* in 1895 and competed with Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* in what became intense rivalry.

Hearst quickly branched out into magazines (1903), film (1913) and radio (1928), and created his own International News Service (which was later sold in 1958 to form United Press International). By the mid-1930s, he ran a media empire (that included 13 magazines, 8 radio stations and two motion picture companies), which he then had to sell off to avoid bankruptcy. He came owner of one of the first TV stations in the US in 1948 and, although he died three years later, the company has continued to expand by acquiring newspapers, publishers (including William Morrow), TV stations, and magazines (*Redbook*, *Esquire*). Among its current titles are *Cosmopolitan*, *Prima*, *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Marie Claire*.

Although published by Hearst in the United States, *Marie Claire* is published by different companies in different parts of the world. In the UK, for example, Britain leading publisher, IPC Media Limited (with a collection of almost 100 titles), is at the helm. In Japan, *Marie Claire* was published by the prestigious publisher, Chūō Kōronsha, for 17 years before moving to Kadokawa Shoten in 1999. In Hong Kong, it is franchised to Publisher ZYC Holding (which also publishes *Penthouse*). In Greece, the magazine is put out by M.C. Hellas, a joint venture between The Lambraki Corporation and Marie Claire Album SA.

## **Readers**

Information on readers can be had from the website for *Elle*, but not for *Marie Claire*, so that comparison is a little difficult. I do, however, have readers' profiles from the publishers of the Japanese and Hong Kong editions of the latter magazine, with which to compare the two.

As is apparent from the incomplete figures (see *Table 3*), readers' profiles fluctuate country by country. In France, for example, more than half the readers of *Elle* are more than 35 years old, whereas in Japan the figure is only 13%. Such differences are found, too, in income levels and the addressed audience. Whereas most editions of *Elle* are targeted at working women, in Hong Kong professional women make up 78% of the readership.

These differences may be found in the profiles available for *Marie Claire* readers in Hong Kong and Japan. Both countries show a very high rate of education among

readers, but, whereas the Hong Kong edition's audience is made up of 48% senior professionals, Japan's is 48.4% working women (or 71.95%, if part-time and freelance working women are included). Income levels for Hong Kong readers appear to be much higher than those of *Elle* readers, while in Japan they are on average a little lower.

When we compare readers' profiles for the Hong Kong editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, we find that each tends to use the same criteria to define its target audience. Readers are, of course, *loyal* to their magazines. They are also *young, independent, well educated, affluent (or well off) and ready to spend* their money. This is neatly summarised in a single paragraph from the *Elle* profile:

The *Elle* woman enjoys her life and actively participates in various activities like travelling abroad, dining out, visiting hair and beauty salons, gathering with friends, shopping and going to movies. She is affluent and ready to spend on a wide range of lifestyle products.

In this respect, perhaps, the *Marie Claire* woman is a little different, for the magazine's readers:

Enjoy reading about various topics, including social issues, fashion and beauty. Featuring articles with an intelligent and feminine point of view, *Marie Claire* is a sensitive window to the world.

So, while *Elle* appears to aim more at fashion and lifestyle, *Marie Claire* gears itself towards intelligent and informative editorial content with quality. Each positions itself clearly in this respect by means of magazine slogans. *Elle* is simply *The World's Biggest Selling Fashion Magazine*. *Marie Claire*, however, describes itself as 'more than just a fashion magazine'. It is *For Women of the World* (USA), *The Only Glossy with Brains* (UK), and *For Women Who are Changing the World* (Hong Kong). It is not entirely clear, however, to what extent this audience positioning works in reality.<sup>2</sup> After all, most women's magazines publish what is more or less a standard fare of features, fashion, beauty, health and fitness – usually in that order (see *Table 4*).

One of the points made by Joke Hermes (1995) is that readers do not remember anything much about the magazines that they assiduously take. This is partly connected with the fact that they rarely sit down to read, but pick up and put down magazines like *Vogue* or *Cosmo* between doing other (more important) things. The picture painted by Hermes, on the basis of extensive interviews with more than 50 readers in the Netherlands, is that women's magazines have very little practical effect on people's everyday lives.

I intend to find out more about readers during my forthcoming trip to Japan and Hong Kong, but preliminary impressions suggest that readers there take magazines 'for fun' and to get practical tips on how to combine different style of clothing, where to find newly opened restaurants and boutiques, and so on. In other words, as with women's magazines throughout history, they are used as practical guides for everyday living. They are also – like the weather and people's pets – a common point of interest among colleagues at work or university in Japan and Hong Kong.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hong Kong readers' profile for *Marie Claire*, for example, reveals that readers are particularly interested in fashion advertisements (although this may well be just a pitch to attract more advertising from the big-spending fashion houses).



## International Women's Magazine Environment

Some of the questions posed above have been answered *vis-à-vis* British magazines by Marjorie Ferguson (1983:4-11) in the following way:

1. Women's magazines distinguish and define their target/client group by means of titles, covers, subject matter and advertisements – all of which help define women as biologically distinctive. By creating and fostering images and symbols of 'femininity' magazines also create and sustain ready-made readerships, on the one hand, and a marketplace for their advertisers, on the other.
2. Magazines address a separate community of women by filtering their messages through a 'woman's angle'.
3. Magazines appeal to an implied bond of commonality among women readers that they are women. As they create and recreate the classic themes of triumph over personal tragedy, successful slimming, infidelity, ageing and so on, magazines venerate the concept of 'woman'.
4. Readers are encouraged to choose what kind of women they want to be – whether stay-at-home wives and mothers or corporate executives. Magazines help readers achieve their aims by providing 'how to' recipes on how to dress, cook, educate children, have good sex, earn respect from men, and so on. In this respect, they are 'surrogate sisters' who offer support and assistance to their readers in their attempts to achieve their 'womanhood'.
5. The belief in a shared women's bond is so strong among editors and magazine staff (most of whom are women in all five countries studied) that it is never questioned. Instead, it provides a basis for solidarity that transcends individual economic, social and personality differences.
6. It is the magazines' editors who act as cultural intermediaries and gatekeepers of the world of women since it is they (themselves predominantly, but not exclusively women) who choose what and what not to publish.
7. Content analysis of women's magazines in the UK suggests that although particular topics addressed by British magazines may change over time, their purposes remain supportive, understanding and reinforcing. It remains to be discovered how true this is of magazines published in the other countries of the research survey.

In addition, we might also add:

8. International editions of women's magazines probably need to adapt to all sorts of different needs and expectations of different local readers by, for example, including discussions of local celebrities, local fashion reportages and models, and local or regional (in Asia Japanese) products, as well as those originating in Europe or the United States. Portrayals of family, sex and work related matters must also be made relevant to local readers, while travel and food features are likely to be more regionalised.
9. Magazines also seem to take on different styles, precisely because they need to adapt to local markets. This is most readily seen in the way in which each country edition of *Elle* and *Marie Claire* has different dimensions, according

to the standard of the country in which it is being published. Thus, *Elle USA*, *Elle UK*, and *Elle Japan* are of radically different dimensions, although *Elle USA* is the same as *Marie Claire USA*, *Vogue USA* and *Harper's Bazaar* and *Elle Japon* the same as *Marie Claire Japon*, *Vogue Nippon*, *More*, *With* and other monthly women's magazines.

Such country conformity is not limited to a magazine's measurements, but is also to be found in its overall structure. Thus the tendency for *Elle USA* to litter its early pages with advertisements is unacceptable in Japan, whose readers expect their magazines to be structured in blocks of text and advertising matter, rather than in the left-page-text and right-page-ad style found in the United States women's magazine market. In this respect, too, therefore, *Elle*, *Vogue* and *Marie Claire* end up resembling one another in Japan or the United States more than they do their own titles in other countries.<sup>3</sup>

10. The relationship between magazines, their readers and advertisers is a difficult one to follow – as we shall see below – but preliminary findings suggest that very different attitudes are adopted by editors, depending on the country in which they are working and the state of the economy of that country. In general, readers appear to be given short shrift in American, but priority over advertisers in Japanese, magazines. At the same time, however, it would seem that Japanese magazines make greater use of editorial tie-ups so that it is not always easy to distinguish covert from overt advertising. This is, however, a criticism brought to bear by Ellen McCracken (1993) in her study of women's magazines in the USA.

It has been suggested that magazines like *Marie Claire* have been pushed towards a globalising strategy by their main advertisers – in this instance the L'Oréal and Estée Lauder Groups (Sonnenklar 1986). The fact that L'Oréal has a 49% stake in *Marie Claire* makes this seem likely, but it may prove difficult to prove the link between magazines and advertisers' globalising strategies.

### **Hypotheses**

In this paper, I do not intend to go into a content analysis of the messages contained in international women's magazines published in France, Hong Kong, Japan, UK and USA. Rather, on the basis of some of the questions and answers provided above, and as a result of previous study of advertising and magazine publishing practices in Japan, I will here put forward a number of hypotheses. These concern:

1. Editorial, reader and advertiser relations as revealed in the layout and structure of each edition of an international women's magazine;
2. Processes of globalisation and localisation as seen in publisher practices, magazine content and advertising.

Specifically:

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that *Marie Claire USA* is published – together with *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar* – by the same publisher, the Hearst Corporation, does not contribute towards variety among the titles concerned.

**Hypothesis 1: A magazine's stance towards its readers, on the one hand, and advertisers, on the other, can be detected in its overall structure and style – specifically in:**

1. The ratio of text to advertising pages *in toto*;
2. The distribution of ads throughout the magazine (running count);
3. The extent to which ads precede textual matter;
4. The extent to which ads interrupt textual matter (features, articles, and so on);
5. The distribution of text and advertising on left and right pages, with right pages being seen as dominant in magazines that open from left to right (as in European and American editions), and left pages dominant in those that open from right to left (as in the Japanese and, sometimes, Hong Kong editions);
6. The appropriateness of advertising to editorial matter and the frequency of appropriate (for example, fashion, makeup, skincare) and inappropriate (for example, tobacco, alcohol, automobiles) advertisements.
7. Stylistic features linking advertising to editorial, and editorial to advertising, matter both on the front cover and in the pages of a magazine.

**Hypothesis 2: The extent to which a magazine is universal in its form can be said to support a thesis of 'globalisation', in so far as:**

- (a) The publishing company standardises its product in terms of contents, layout and advertising material regardless of different local environments;
- (b) Advertisers provide advertising material that is standardised, with minimal linguistic and/or design adaptations in different local environments; and
- (c) The publishing company adopts a standard corporate structure, as announced in its magazines.

**Hypothesis 3: In that international women's magazines address women in different countries, the 'globalisation' of a particular title can give rise to standardisation in the areas of:**

- (a) Fashion and its appreciation – specifically in the depiction of clothing, discussion of style (including related footwear, handbags, jewellery and other accessories), advice on how to dress, and information on the fashion world;
- (b) Features, their subject matter and content,
- (c) Beauty – specifically in magazines' recommendation of makeup and hair styles, and related products; in discussions of skin care and related products; and in body, health, and fitness matters;
- (d) The prevalence of image over text: standardisation as such is likely to be in the area of product dissemination and marketing, and less likely in the editorial matter accompanying such advertising.

**Hypothesis 4: In so far as standardisation of both textual and advertising material exists in a magazine's various editions in different countries, it can be hypothesised that depictions of women and 'femininity' are becoming standardised and that women themselves may be becoming more uniform in their practices and aspirations.**

**Hypothesis 4:** Given the origins of the magazine publishers and the advertisers in the fashion and beauty industries, such uniformity may be hypothesised as being primarily ‘western’ (although the presence of Japanese corporations like Shiseido cannot be discounted).

**Hypothesis 5:** Given the known factor that Japanese and Chinese women are conscious of being differently ‘Asian’, it may further be hypothesised that such uniformity as can be found in the Fashion, Beauty, Health and Fitness sections of an international women’s magazine will tend to be limited to countries, or at most, regions (like East Asia, North Europe, the Mediterranean, etc.), and will not extend to global proportions.

## **Results**

In order to find out if the above hypotheses were sustainable, a data base analysis of international editions of *Elle* and *Marie Claire* was begun. Magazines examined came primarily from five countries in particular – France (country of origin), Hong Kong, Japan, UK and USA – but also from Greece, India, Italy, Spain and Sweden. So far 115 complete records of individual magazines have been made. Of these 98 come from the five focal countries. (See *Table 5*)

### **Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis above was based on the fact that a woman’s magazine is both cultural product and commodity in itself, carrying both cultural and economic messages to its readers. It suggested that a magazine’s stance towards its readers and advertisers can be detected in the ratio of text to advertising pages, in the distribution of each on left and right pages, as well as throughout the magazine, and the extent to which ads precede and/or interrupt textual matter. Preliminary data base findings reveal the following:

- (a) Each edition of a women’s magazine (including selected examples of *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*) averages 282 pages, of which 158.5 (56.2%) are of textual matter and 123.5 (43.8%) of advertisements. *Elle*’s average edition length is 291, and *Marie Claire*’s 266, pages respectively. Of these text and advertising pages for each magazine come to 159/132 and 157/108 respectively. (See *Table 6*)

Among the different editions of each magazine, it is clear that the American edition of *Elle* and British edition of *Marie Claire* rely very heavily on advertising and that ads account for over half the average number of pages in each magazine. Japanese editions of both magazines have the fewest number of ads. Thus the ‘commercial’ aspect of *Elle* is strongest in its American edition, followed by the British, Hong Kong, French and Japanese editions respectively; while that of *Marie Claire* is strongest in the British edition, followed respectively by its American, French, Hong Kong and Japanese editions. There appears to be no necessary correlation between advertising and circulation and/or launch date in each country in the case of *Marie Claire*, although there may be one between advertising and years of publication in the case of different country editions of *Elle*.

From these data, it is possible to suggest further hypotheses with regard to women's magazines in general.

- i. The standard textual edition of a magazine is likely to come to approximately 160 pages, so that all pages exceeding this average length will be devoted to advertising.
  - ii. A magazine's 'success' may be determined by the additional number of advertising pages it carries over and above a critical minimum to cover production and distribution costs along with sales and subscriptions. This 'critical minimum' may be in the region of two thirds of the total textual average.
- (b) In general about two thirds of all ads in *Elle* and between two thirds and three quarters of all ads in *Marie Claire* are found in the first half of each edition of the magazine. Between one third and one half of these are found in the first 50 pages, with six (*Marie Claire*) to seven (*Elle*) out of every 10 pages being devoted to advertising matter. Given that the cover and the opening pages of a magazine provide it with its 'face', the fact that most of this 'face' is devoted to advertising suggests that, overall, magazine publishers are more concerned with their advertisers than with their readers. In general, it is to the former, rather than the latter, that they cater when structuring their magazines, although *Marie Claire* is clearly more 'reader friendly' than *Elle*. (See *Table 7*)

At the same time, the fact that some editions (in particular, those published in Japan) put most of their advertisements early on in their pages may be interpreted as a move to help, rather than hinder, readers. Magazine publishers are obliged to accept advertising to help cover their costs, whether they like it or not. They can place such advertising early on in the magazine, and please their clients, or hold it back to the very last pages (and probably lose those clients as a result). By placing it early on, they can then keep their pages comparatively free of advertising during the feature, fashion and beauty sections. Alternatively, as in the British editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, publishers can distribute advertising fairly evenly throughout a magazine's pages and so keep readers constantly aware of textual interruptions (to the presumed gratification of their advertising clients).

- (c) A large majority of advertisements carried in each of the magazines in question is to be found on the page on which the reader's eye naturally falls (here termed the 'primary eye' page). In contrast, textual matter tends to be found on the left (or 'secondary eye') pages. On average, half as many more advertisements are found on right, as opposed to left, pages in all magazines throughout the world, and such 'primary eye' ad pages outnumber primary eye text pages (including fashion and beauty features). This is the case regardless of whether a magazine opens from right to left or from left to right. Once the reading order is established in a particular magazine – only the Hong Kong edition of *Marie Claire* and the Japanese editions of both magazines in question open from left to right – the gap between 'immediate eye' and 'secondary eye' advertising and text pages tends to grow. (See *Table 8*)

In general, it can be seen that *Marie Claire* is more 'reader friendly' than *Elle* in the way that its editions balance advertising and textual matter. Although data base analysis confirms the general 'commercial' nature of each title, however, the Japanese editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire* provide the exception to prove the

rule, since each carries between three and four times more textual than advertising matter on the 'primary eye' (left) page. Indeed, the Japanese and American editions of *Elle* are virtually reversed in their emphases. The 'commercial' leanings of *Elle* are strongest in its American edition, followed respectively by its Hong Kong, French, British and Japanese editions. In *Marie Claire* the American edition is again the most reader unfriendly, followed by the British, French, Hong Kong and Japanese editions in that order.

- (d) Although data base analysis has yet to be conducted on the extent to which advertising interrupts textual matter in international women's magazines, it is clear that in general editors give greater precedence to textual materials in *Marie Claire* than they do in *Elle*, since feature stories tend to start earlier in the magazine and to continue with fewer advertising interruptions on both left and right pages (see *Table 9*). This is particularly the case with the Japanese edition of both magazines, which tend to be structured in separate blocks of textual and advertising matter, with minimal interruption of advertisements within each feature.

The only pages that are not interrupted by advertising material in all editions of the magazines under study are those devoted to fashion reportage. This is known as 'the book' and consists of from 42 to 55 uninterrupted pages of photographs, usually beginning more than half way through the magazine (once again, the exception tends to be Japan, where the fashion feature comes somewhat earlier). Prior to these pages, however, each magazine tends to be structured with every left text page placed opposite a right ad page, so that 'reading' consists of going through consecutive left pages of a magazine. This is particularly so early on in each magazine. All left ('primary eye') pages of the Hong Kong edition of *Marie Claire* each month tend to be advertisements until the start of the first feature (on page 33, or thereabouts). In the American editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, there are occasions when the only right ('primary eye') pages with textual matter in the entire magazine, outside the fashion 'book', are those initiating a feature story. The May 1997 edition of *Elle USA*, for example, has just five right pages of textual matter in the whole magazine, apart from one for Beauty and 28 for Fashion.

Once again, *Marie Claire* tends to be more reader friendly than *Elle* in this aspect of its structuring of advertising and textual matter, and Japanese editions seem to be the most carefully structured with the reader in mind. The American editions of both magazines are without doubt the most geared towards advertisers' interests.

- (e) With regard to the appropriateness of advertising to editorial matter, we can see that there is some difference in advertising category content between *Elle* and *Marie Claire*. As is to be expected, perhaps, of a magazine that frequently advertises itself (on its UK and Greek editions at least) as *The World's Biggest Selling Fashion Magazine* (the word 'fashion' being a necessary inclusion to make the statement valid *vis-à-vis Cosmopolitan*), *Elle* has more fashion and fashion-related advertisements than *Marie Claire* whose strengths are in fragrances, skincare, personal care and hygiene. The latter magazine also has a greater percentage of ads devoted to home and interior, and food and drink. (See *Table 10*)

At the same time, we should note that there is considerable country-by-country variation in ad category preferences. While the Japanese editions of both

magazines carry more fashion ads than all others, the British have a preponderance of hair, the French of food and drink, and Hong Kong editions of handbags and watches. The American edition of both magazines carries more footwear and tobacco advertisements, as well as more hard liquor advertising (not made apparent in the table). Personal care and hygiene advertising is particularly strong in the UK and USA titles. (See *Table 11*)

It should be noted that the French edition of *Marie Claire* is particularly strong in the advertising of makeup, skincare and perfumes.

- (f) As intimated from the above, it would seem that the American editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire* are most likely to include advertising that is not specifically related to women's issues (alcohol, automobiles, tobacco). Both magazines have the same average number of advertising categories (17 out of a potential 26), but – for reasons noted earlier in the discussion of readers – *Elle* is clearly more fashion-gearred in its advertising approach. For its part, *Marie Claire* is slightly stronger in beauty-related advertising (skincare, personal care, makeup) as well as in matters to do with the home.
- (g) A number of techniques are used by editors to link editorial and advertising matter, as well as the front cover (an advertisement in itself for each magazine) to the contents. The American editions of both *Elle* and *Marie Claire* have a separate section *On the Cover* in their contents pages to indicate where to find features advertised on the cover. All magazines carry a front cover photograph insert on one of their contents pages, giving information on the model, photographer, makeup artist and products used, hair stylist, fashion editor and fashion displayed, and so on – sometimes even including manicurist and fragrance worn by the cover model. This advertisement for an advertisement is most detailed in the American and British versions of each magazine, and least so in the Japanese – thereby confirming, perhaps, the more commercial nature of the former.

One way to create *flow* in a magazine is by means of repeated use of a particular image, colour, celebrity or facial type. A cover model, for example, can herself act as a relaying device throughout a magazine's pages. When Stella Tennant appears on the cover of both American and Japanese editions of *Elle*, for example, in the middle of 1997, cover credits inform us that both her clothes and her makeup are by Chanel (for whom she was main model at the time), and we soon find a number of Chanel ads placed prominently early on in the magazine (in particular the Japanese edition). Another instance to note, perhaps, is that of Bridget Hall appearing as cover model on the September 2000 edition of *Vogue USA* and in a Ralph Lauren ad placed opposite the Content page in which the cover photograph is given its credits (including fashion by Ralph Lauren). Such linkages can extend right through a magazine. Christy Turlington, for instance, appears on the cover of the September fashion issue of *Elle USA* in 2000, wearing Prada and in makeup by Maybelline. She appears again on page 53 modelling Mondri fashion, is photographed close-up for "Look of the Moment", opening the magazine's Beauty section on page 360 (where she is introduced as "the face of Calvin Klein's new perfume, Contradiction"). She appears a few pages later in an ad placed opposite one of the Beauty section's pages, this time with startlingly blue eyes, advertising Durasoft FreshLook disposable colour and clear contacts. She then takes up four pages in the extended 105 page fashion feature, in a section called "Striking Balance".

So, faces and personalities can be used to create a flow throughout a magazine, to enable a reader to move smoothly and effortlessly from first to final pages. But there are other devices that are occasionally used to link advertising to facing editorial page. These I term *adjacency*, since they are used to create a flow between facing (rather than between consecutive) pages of a magazine. Although adjacency techniques sometimes make use of commercial products, their primary aim is in my opinion aesthetic since it contributes to a cohesiveness of a magazine's overall design.

1. *Colour*: One frequent adjacency technique is colour matching. On pages 420-1 of *Elle USA* (9/97), dedicated to fitness, for example, the text includes an ultramarine violet box whose colour shade exactly matches that of a full page ad for diet Snapple juice on the opposite (right) page. The Hong Kong edition of the same title (12/97, pp.30-31) perfectly matches the 'strong tones' of an Yves Saint Laurent handbag advertisement on the right page with its fashion photos and headings on the left.
2. *Product*: Another common adjacency feature is matching of advertised products to text. As the above example shows, magazines frequently place ads for jewellery or footwear, for example, opposite textual matter related to accessories or shoes. Sometimes, as in *Vogue USA* (1/01, pp.36-7) or *Elle France* (6/4/98, pp.92-3), the product advertised can complement something in the text opposite. Frequently (cf. *Elle Japon* [1/01]), such product adjacency is part of what is known as an 'editorial tie-up'. Just how often this occurs can lead critics to claim that women's magazines are no more than 'advertising magazines' (McCracken 1993).
3. *Object*: A third adjacency technique is use of an identical object in both advertisement and text. For example, a text page may carry a photograph insert of a young woman peering over her dark glasses (again *Elle USA* [9/97]), with a more or less identical image on the advertising page opposite (for Jean Louis David).
4. *Pose*: Both ad and text may carry a photograph of a model or person in a similar pose. For example, *Elle Hong Kong* (12/97) carries an ad for Omega endorsed by Piers Bosnan leaning on his right arm on a motorbike, while on the Contents page opposite is a photograph of Laetitia casta leaning on her right arm on a car. Similarly, *Vogue USA* (1/01, pp.104-5) has adjacent photographs of two blonde women sitting on their haunches and gazing unsmiling at the reader.
5. *Gaze*: A frequently used adjacency technique is that of the gaze, where either two models in similar poses will stare at the reader in a similar manner, or one (or two) models will gaze across at something or someone on the opposite page. As an example of the former, see *Elle Hong Kong* (12/97), where a close-up portrait of the eyes, nose and mouth of Courtney Love in 'Making Faces' is paralleled by a similar drawing in the Gatineau advertisement opposite. As an example of the latter, see *Elle USA* (2/01, pp.136-7), where a black model advertising 'exciting armpits' (!), is laughing across the page at an inset of a second black model laughing.
6. *Language*: Another adjacency technique is parallel use of language. This may be limited to a single word (like Christmas, Valentine, Mother, and so on), but can take the form of phonemic parallelism, as in the Revlon advertisement 'LavenDare' and facing text 'L'ivg en danger' in *Elle France* (6/4/98, pp.72-3).



All of these and other techniques are designed to give magazines a coherence that they might otherwise lack, for – as I have remarked elsewhere (Moeran 1996) – there is a constant tension between editors and advertisers in magazine publishing. Editors want to create a flow that takes readers from one point to another, easily through the magazine from its first to very last pages. Advertisers, on the other hand, are anxious to make a reader stop to look at their announcements. Coincidentally, these techniques are identical to those of *relay* and *anchorage* described by Roland Barthes in his discussion of the signifiers and signifieds used in advertising.