"THE MAGAZINE IS A MOMENT OF CONSCIOUS LOOKING"

An Ethnographic Study on the Practice of Reading Fashion Magazines

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Abstract:

“The magazine is a moment of conscious looking” – An Ethnographic Study on the Practice of Reading Fashion Magazines is an interpretative study in which the author examines, through ethnographic research methods, the reading behaviour of teenagers, young adults and adults from Southern Germany who consume commercial fashion magazines. Claiming that previous research has failed to perceive the reader as a co-creator of meanings, this study aims to understand which social values and functions readers attribute to commercial print fashion magazines today in a digitalized world.

Drawing on Stuart Hall’s Encoding/decoding theory, as well as on Consumer Culture Theory, the author argues that readers actively rework and reinterpret meanings encoded in fashion magazines, which makes reading this magazine genre a meaningful activity. Furthermore, this study shows how the use of digital media in the field of fashion affects the values and functions of the print genre. Finally, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s approach of capitals and gender theory, the author illustrates a relation between the socialization background of the readers and their opinions, and argues that meanings of commercial fashion magazines are also constructed beyond the reading experience.

Keywords: Commercial Fashion Magazine, Print versus Digital, Ethnographic Study, Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Consumer Culture, Cultural Capital, Gender
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Introduction

Background

Without the clothes, without the images with which fashion is portrayed, and thus, without the magazines themselves, there would be no ‘fashion system’ as such.

Brian Moeran, Social Anthropologist

According to the sociologist Yuniya Kawamura, fashion “is not visual clothing but the invisible elements included in clothing.” For her, these elements only exist in people’s imagination, and so fashion is nothing physical but rather culturally constructed imagery. Engrossing this thought, fashion magazines probably have been one of the most important agents in the production as well as the maintenance of fashion and the fashion system, since their raison d’être, as claimed by Brian Moeran, is to portray fashion to the public.

On April 25th, 2017, the German economy newspaper Handelsblatt in its issue “Numbers of magazines continue to grow” reported about the increasing numbers of magazines on the German market, while, however, the numbers of magazine editions are diminishing. Although 53 magazines were discontinued within the past year, another 87 with a mid-low number of editions were launched. Since 2001 the magazine market has increased by 35%. According to the Association of German Magazine Publishers, the magazine market in Germany remains stable and will probably continue to grow in 2017.

Among the new publications one can find an increasing number of fashion magazines, especially in recent years. In 2014, the German edition of Harper’s Bazaar was re-launched, followed by the fashion and lifestyle magazine Barbara in 2015 and, as most recent example, the fashion magazine Die Dame in March 2017.

Thus, against the assumption that print has been dying since the establishment of the World Wide Web, these recent developments show that the consumption of magazines as well as the interest in fashion publications is gaining importance in Germany. There would not be increased production if there was

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1 Moeran, “More than just a fashion magazine,” 730.
2 Kawamura, Fashion-ology, 4.
4 “Zahl der Zeitschriften steigt weiter”
5 Verband Deutscher Zeitschriftenverleger e.V.
not increased demand on the part of the consumers. In turn, an increasing demand means that fashion magazines today fill a certain need and therefore have a specific function and value in society. In this thesis, I want to further examine these values and functions of commercial print fashion magazines through the readers’ perspective.

This research is based on an academic as well as private interest. Having a background in European Ethnology, I have conducted my study in an ethnographic context. While in my bachelor thesis, I focused on the authority of fashion magazines exclusively from a producer’s perspective, I take my master thesis as an opportunity to extend my knowledge of fashion magazines by focusing this time on the reader’s opinion. Admittedly, I am a passionate fashion magazine reader myself. However, the main motivation to focus on the consumer has emerged through past internships in fashion publishing at the German publisher Hubert Burda Media, in which I became part of the production process and started to get first insights into the interface of the fashion industry and its target audience. Thus, with this study, I do not only intend to satisfy my personal curiosity, but also to contribute to a better understanding of fashion magazines in academia.

**Aims and Research Questions**

In this thesis, I aim to understand the social values and functions of commercial fashion magazines according to a readership of different age groups in Southern Germany. I will investigate on what occasions, as well as for what purposes, readers today consume print fashion magazines during their daily routine in relation to their consumption of comparable content in digital media. In a further step, I will analyse if and how the cultural values of print fashion magazines attributed by the readership differ depending on their age and lifestyle.

As argued by the cultural scientist Anna Gough-Yates, women’s magazines have to be understood as a “cultural realm” rather than in an exclusively economic dimension.\(^{10}\) Editors and advertisers indisputably influence the production of print fashion magazines, and consequently the production of their cultural value. However, as Gough-Yates argues, the maintenance of print fashion magazines on the market is highly dependent on social and cultural processes.\(^{11}\) In this thesis, I intend to analyse relevant social and cultural processes, which determine the value of print fashion magazines, by adopting the view of the end consumer – the readership.

In total, the social values and functions of print fashion magazines will be examined through three aspects: First, I will study the reading behaviour of magazine readers by not exclusively focusing on the reading act itself, but by analysing how consumers interact with magazines from the moment they decide to buy them to the moment they store them. Second, I will identify how the use of digital media affects


\(^{11}\) Ibid.
the value of print media in the field of fashion and third, I will investigate how the readers’ socialization backgrounds and attitudes towards commercial fashion magazines influence these values. Although the last two aspects do not mainly focus on print fashion magazines, they do, however, give indirect insights into how consumers legitimate their usage. Thus, the research aim is thematically organized in three different question clusters:

1. What values and functions do readers ascribe to commercial print fashion magazines during purchase as well as during the actual reading and storage situation?

2. How do digital media affect the value of print fashion media?

3. How do the reader’s socialization background and attitude affect the value of print fashion magazines?

**Literature Review**

Studies on fashion magazines have been conducted continuously in academia since the 1970s, and most of them are dominated by discourse analysis and semiotic work. Generally, it can be stated that there have been three contrasting approaches of studying fashion magazines. Some scholars like Roland Barthes (1990 [1967]), Paul Jobling (1999), Angela McRobbie (1978), Ellen McCracken (1993) and Agnès Rocamora (2013) have analysed fashion in written words and images in fashion magazines and newspapers. Arguing that the producer’s intentions take a crucial role in the realization of fashion magazines, Anna Gough-Yates (2003), Brian Moeran (2006) and Kate Nelson Best (2017) study fashion magazines through their context of production, while Ros Ballaster et al. (1991), Diana Crane (1999), Elizabeth Fraser (1987), Ellen McCracken (1993) and Joke Hermes (1997 [1995]) have a focus on readers and consumption.¹²

Inspired by Stuart Hall and his Encoding/decoding theory, the fashion scholar Ane Lynge-Jorlén claims in her PhD thesis *Between Edge and Elite: Niche Fashion Magazines, Producers and Readers* (2009) that the meanings of fashion magazines have to be analysed from the interrelation between producer, the magazine’s content and consumer.¹³ To find the right balance between these interrelations is a complex undertaking. Recognizing that fashion magazines need to be studied from multiple angles in order to be fully decoded, I acknowledge that my study, which focuses primarily on the perspective of the reader, has its limitations. Nevertheless, I intend to demonstrate with this literature review how my study obtains its strength through that limitation.

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¹³ Ibid. 21–22.
One of the earliest studies on fashion magazines was conducted by philosopher Roland Barthes, who is considered as a pioneer in this field, in *Fashion System* (1990 [1967]). Inspired by Saussurean linguistics, Barthes aimed to define fashion by developing a complex linguistic system. In his work\(^\text{14}\), he distinguishes between three types of clothing: *the real clothing*, by which he means the physical garment, the *image-clothing*, which is clothing pictured in a photograph, and *the written clothing*, which is the description of clothing in text. According to Barthes, the idea of fashion is exclusively produced by written text, since written words are the most evident form of communicating the meaning of clothing, while photography requests multiple readings.\(^\text{15}\) However, as Paul Jobling shows in his work *Fashion Spreads – Word and Image in Fashion Photography since 1980* (1999), the production of fashion is not reduced to written text but is also found in images and should not be, as Barthes argues, only reserved for the female sex.\(^\text{16}\)

Barthes makes an assumption of the typical female reader based on his semiotic work. He does not integrate the reader’s perception or opinion on fashion magazines. Although he has been criticized for his divisive work, feminist scholars, as for instance Angela McRobbie (1978), have come to similar conclusions in their studies. In effect, as Lynge-Jorlén (2009) and the scholar of Media Studies Gough-Yates (2003) illustrate in their work, there was a strong feminist research movement in this research field until the mid-1980s. Fashion magazines have been alleged to impose normative femininities and therefore being harmful to female readers.\(^\text{17}\) Hence, without taking the reader’s perception into consideration, feminist scholars have tended to position fashion magazine readers as naïve and superficial.

The comparison of two studies shows the extent to which scholars can misinterpret the nature of readers through basing their assumptions on semiotic analysis: Angela McRobbie, scholar of Cultural Theory, in *Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* (1978) and Elizabeth Frazer, scholar of Political Theory, in *Teenage Girls Reading Jackie* (1987). McRobbie undertook a critical analysis of the teenage magazine *Jackie*, a successful teenage magazine in Britain at that time. Her research aim was to unpack the system of messages in *Jackie*, “a signifying system and a bearer of a certain ideology; an Ideology which deals with the construction of teenage ‘Femininity’.”\(^\text{18}\) She argues that through codes the teenage magazine imposes certain interests, values and products on its readers, which define *Jackie*’s and the reader’s femininity. This includes fashion and beauty, among other aspects.\(^\text{19}\) Although McRobbie re-evaluated her study in 2000 in *Feminism and Youth Culture*, she did not conduct any ethnographic inter-
views and still related to the reader as a theoretical construct. In both of her studies, she acknowledges in her conclusion that her study is limited in terms of ignoring the readers’ perception of Jackie.\textsuperscript{20} Frazer (1987), too, conducted a study on the magazine Jackie, but analysed how girls read the magazine. She concluded, however, that teenage readers can adapt critical views on Jackie, and consequently, are not overwhelmed by it.\textsuperscript{21} Hence, Frazer contributed to a more positive image of magazine research, like Janice Winship in \textit{Inside Women’s Magazines} (1987).

The social anthropologist Janice Winship, conducted a content analysis on \textit{Woman’s Own, Cosmopolitan} and \textit{Spare Rib} in \textit{Inside Women’s Magazines} (1987). Acknowledging that she herself was a dedicated reader of the magazines, she combined the content analysis with her own reading experience. Thus, since she positioned herself as researcher and research subject at the same time, her objectivity in the study is questionable. Nevertheless, Winship was one of the first scholars who significantly changed the understanding of women’s magazines. In her study, she perceives the magazine as a means of pleasure for women and, consequently, distances herself from previous research, which had categorized women’s magazines as harmful.\textsuperscript{22} In effect, Frazer and Winship were two of the first scholars who started to embrace interpretative ethnography\textsuperscript{23} as a new and appropriate method for studying fashion magazines.

In \textit{Decoding women’s magazines – From Mademoiselle to Ms.} (1993), the linguist Ellen McCracken studied text in advertising and editorials. Highlighting that magazines are strongly dependent on advertisement, she argues that magazines reinforce advertising and consequently motivate readers to buy certain products. Furthermore, she concludes that advertisements in fashion magazines make readers feel insecure and at the same time awaken their desire.\textsuperscript{24} McCracken included some comments of her 34 undergraduate students with whom she discussed \textit{Cosmopolitan}. The students stated clearly positive associations with the magazine such as, for instance, the smell of the printed pages or the sensation of pleasure while reading it.\textsuperscript{25} However, in her study, McCracken gave her semiotic analysis more weight than her students’ thoughts. Thus, McCracken’s conclusion is mainly influenced by her content analysis and consequently, even though some positive aspects were provided in the interviews with her students, her understanding towards fashion magazines remains critical.\textsuperscript{26}

The scholars Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron combine, like McCracken, a textual analysis with ethnographic research. In \textit{Women’s Worlds} (1991) the authors aim to

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 50–51.
\textsuperscript{21} Frazer, “Teenage girls reading Jackie,” 414–424.
\textsuperscript{22} Winship, \textit{Inside Women’s Magazines}, 52–66.
\textsuperscript{23} According to Gough-Yates (2003), from the mid-1980s onwards, feminist scholars have been influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist theory, which had a crucial impact on the research on fashion magazines and their readers. Inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, scholars began to recognize that meanings of any form of culture, which also automatically implies fashion magazines, were not naturally pre-existent but constructed through and reflected within discourse. Thus, the meaning of fashion magazines is not anchored within the physical medium itself but rather is formed by how people think, talk and write about them, or rather: through a discursive formation. Consequently, interpretative ethnography has become increasingly popular for studying fashion magazines [Gough-Yates, 2003: 11–12].
\textsuperscript{24} McCracken, \textit{Decoding women’s magazines}, 4.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 5–7.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. 299–301.
understand why women read magazines. Like Frazer in *Teenage Girls Reading Jackie* (1987), Ballaster et al. conclude that women reading magazines are conscious about the variety of discourses of femininity in them. Thus, the reader is pictured as knowledgeable about the hidden codes in the magazines. Unfortunately, Ballaster et al., like McCracken, put greater emphasis on the textual analysis and conclude that magazines maintain their influence on women by being both a guide for living and a means of experiencing pleasure. Hence, although ethnographic research on readers has become a more legitimate method to understand the meaning of fashion magazines, scholars like Ballaster et al. (1991) and McCracken (1993) have failed to acknowledge the possible enrichment through ethnographic data and instead mainly focused on textual analysis.

Drawing on Barthes (1990 [1967]), McRobbie (1978) and Frazer (1987), I argue that content analysis, either through text or image, is not the most adequate method to understand which meanings and values readers attribute to fashion magazines. Neither are the researcher’s personal feelings about women’s magazines fruitful for an objective research process, as seen in Winship (1987). It is mainly using interpretative ethnography, which guidelines need to acknowledge, and including the readers’ personal attitudes that give real insights into their understanding.

Furthermore, relating to the work of Ballaster et al. (1991) and McCracken (1993), I argue that analysing fashion magazines through various angles can have negative effects on the data evaluation and consequently on the results. Although I agree with Ane Lynge-Jorlén (2009) that fashion magazines need to be examined through their multiple interrelations in order to be fully decoded, researchers run the risk of valuing one type of analysis more than another. In the case of Ballaster et al. (1991) and McCracken (1993) it was ethnographic research that was overshadowed by content analysis. Thus, I have chosen to exclusively focus on the readers’ perspective in order to elaborate my study in depth without running the risk of being distracted by other data.

*The Use of Fashion Magazines and Other Media*

The sociologist Diana Crane (1999) examined women’s interpretations of fashion photographs in *Vogue*. She interviewed 45 participants, between college and middle age, and showed them 18 photographs of editorials and advertisement in *Vogue* of the year 1997. Like Ballaster (1991) and Frazer (1987), Crane also pictures a reflecting attitude on the part of the reader. In her study, Crane observed that her participants also used other means in order to inform themselves about fashion trends. She pictured three different sources besides fashion magazines: first, the reader’s social milieu, second, local stores and third, participants explained that their surroundings, whether it is a friend, a family member or an unknown person on the street, functioned as a source of fashion inspiration.

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28. Three of them were male.


30. Participants explained that their surroundings, whether it is a friend, a family member or an unknown person on the street, functioned as a source of fashion inspiration.
television, which also included clothes worn by popular singers.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, besides concluding that readers critically reflect on fashion magazines, she also illustrates that fashion magazines are not the ultimate authority in fashion, and neither the ultimate determiner of fashion according to readers.\textsuperscript{32}

The scholar in Media Communication Jokes Hermes is one of the few scholars who conducted an exclusively interpretative ethnographic study on women’s magazine readers in \textit{Reading Women's Magazines} (1997 [1995]). Her aim was to understand how consumers read women’s magazines and how they make them meaningful.\textsuperscript{33} In her interviews\textsuperscript{34}, Hermes observed that readers mostly read women’s magazines unconsciously and superficially. Her interviewees did not ascribe a specific meaning to women's magazines.\textsuperscript{35} Consequently, she claims that, in general, media use is not always meaningful and she perceives women’s magazines as meaningless and having little cultural value.\textsuperscript{36} However, relating to Stuart Hall (1996 [1980]), Lynge-Jorlén argues in her thesis that even if readers experience the reading as meaningless, the process of engaging with a text and decoding its message is still a meaningful act of consumption.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, Hermes indicates coherence between the use of other media, especially the use of television, and the use of women’s magazines. However, focused on magazines themselves, Hermes fails to discuss this relation in depth. The question whether the use of television affects the value of reading magazines remains open.

In her article “How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs” in \textit{Fashion Media – Past and Present} (2013) the fashion scholar Agnès Rocamora aims to uncover the origin and features of fashion blogs. Rocamora argues that fashion blogs, which operate in a digital sphere, have “refashioned” old media, by which she refers to print media. She concludes that blogs and print media do not damage but rather complement each other. Thus, Rocamora proves that the meaning of one medium is also dependent on other media with similar content.\textsuperscript{38} Unfortunately, Rocamora only focuses on blogs with written text and compares these to print fashion magazines, which, however, represent fashion as text and pictures. In \textit{The History of Fashion Journalism} (2017), the scholar in Cultural Studies Kate Nelson Best illustrates developments of fashion magazines and shows that fashion journalism nowadays is not exclusively limited to print media, but that all kinds of digital and print media are interrelated.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{31} Crane, “Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines,” 547.
\textsuperscript{32} Unfortunately, Crane does not further ask in which context her participants use fashion magazines by contrast with the other three sources she mentioned or the usage of magazines in general. Although her work opens up further questions, which I will partially aim to answer in this study, it can be seen as an additional contribution to a more positive understanding of fashion magazines.
\textsuperscript{33} Hermes, \textit{Reading Women’s Magazines}, 5–6.
\textsuperscript{34} She conducted interviews with 80 readers, among them 16 men, all between the ages of 18 to 60 [Hermes 1997: 144].
\textsuperscript{35} Although they stated they used them as a source of information for everyday issues, they would put the magazines down readily as soon as other things needed to be done. Therefore, Hermes claims that readers attribute very little cultural value to women’s magazines.
\textsuperscript{36} Hermes, \textit{Reading Women’s Magazines}, 143.
\textsuperscript{38} Djurdja, Shaun and Rocamora, \textit{Fashion Media – Past and Present}, 155–163.
\textsuperscript{39} Starting from the 17th century, Nelson Best outlines how fashion journalism has changed until today, drawing on different pieces of research on fashion but also integrating opinions of people from the fashion industry. In her analysis, Nelson Best relates to a broad range of fashion magazines, including magazines from the US and Europe, with a focus on British, French
Thus, inspired by Hermes (1997 [1995]), Crane (1999), Rocamora (2013) and Nelson Best (2017), I argue that the values and functions of commercial fashion magazines cannot be perceived by exclusively analysing the print media themselves, but need to be understood in relation to the use of other (digital) media.

**Theoretical Framework**

In the following, I will draw on different theories within Consumer Culture Theory, Media Theory, Culture Theory and Gender Theory, relating to the approaches of Grant McCracken (1988), Stuart Hall (1996 [1980]), Pierre Bourdieu (2010 [1979]), and Judith Butler (2007 [1990]). These four different theoretical approaches allow to understand the creation of meaning and to determine the reader’s role in this process. They furthermore provide a base to understand how readers influence and control meanings in fashion magazines and how the readers’ socialization background, age and gender impact the interaction. Addressing mostly women, commercial fashion magazines target a specific sex, which is why I will discuss gender as an aspect in the process of meaning making in more depth.

**More than Just a Reader**

In *More than just a fashion magazine* (2006) the sociologist Brian Moeran understands fashion magazines as both cultural products and commodities. While as cultural products they reflect symbols and meanings which circulate within a culture, as commodities they promote the sale of goods especially within fashion, cosmetics and more. Promoting cultural values and advertising at the same time, commercial fashion magazines are strongly connected to consumption, since “the essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense”. Thus, I do not limit my definition of a person, who buys and reads fashion magazines, to “reader”, but I also perceive that person as a consumer of cultural commodities.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) acknowledges that consumption does not only operate in an economic sphere, but that it is also related to socio-cultural, symbolic and ideological aspects. Nevertheless, there has been controversial discussion about the identity of the consumer. Scholars as for instance Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1996 [1944]), Jürgen Habermas (1985), and Jean Baudrillard (1998) argue that consumers are obligated to adapt to a system organized by marketers and consequently position the consumer in a submissive role. Other scholars, however, like David Glen Mick and Claus

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and German publications. She furthermore does not only analyse fashion journalism in commercial fashion magazines but also integrates all kinds of new forms of fashion journalism, as for instance in Niche Magazines or Blogs [Nelson Best: 2017].


Arnould and Thompson, “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research,” 868.

Buhl (1992), Linda Scott (1994), Mark Ritson and Richard Elliot (1999) argue that consumers are indeed able to reflect critically on marketers’ codes and rework their meaning. Hence, with regard to the previous discussion in the literature review, I further base my study on the theory that “consumers [and thus, readers] are conceptualized as interpretive agents rather than as passive dupes.”

Relating to Douglas and Isherwood’s work The world of goods (1978), the cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken acknowledges as well that “[the significance] of consumer goods consists largely in their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning.” Arguing that these meanings in consumer goods are dynamic and constantly changing, McCracken develops a theory of how these meanings move within culture through four different kinds of rituals: Exchange, Possession, Grooming and Divestment rituals.

By exchange rituals, McCracken means celebrations such as Christmas or birthdays, in which the meaning of goods in forms of gifts are transmitted from the gift-giver to the gift-reciever. By the term possession rituals, McCracken understands the actual interaction with and concerning the goods, as among others collecting, cleaning, discussing, comparing and showing off. Here, consumers often claim to not only own the object but also its meaning. Grooming rituals help to maintain the meaning of goods, which are perishable. Divestment rituals are useful to “clean” goods from their previous meaning and enable the individual to inject a new meaning.

Hence, according to McCracken, meaning making is produced by different rituals, in which the individual actively interacts with the goods. Consumers can thus create, wash out or maintain meanings of goods and transfer them from one individual to another. For this reason, in order to understand which social value and function readers accord to commercial fashion magazines, the overall situation, in which those magazines are purchased, read, discussed and preserved, needs to be integrated in the research process. In sum, not only the readers’ own reflections on magazines are relevant but also the time and space in which the readers interact with them.

Decoding Fashion Magazines according to Hall

With her study Reading Women’s Magazines (1997 [1995]), Hermes proves that readers actively rework meanings and symbols pictured in magazines, which are not necessarily understood the same way as the editor’s primary intention. Since in this thesis, I intend to understand the social values and functions of magazines from the readers’ perspectives, I automatically start from the hypothesis that readers attribute a specific meaning to magazines. Thus, despite their position as receivers, readers are perceived here as

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44 Arnould and Thompson, “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research,” 875.
45 Ibid. 875.
46 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 72.
47 Ibid. 84–88.
48 Ibid.
active reproducers of meaning. The scholar in Media Studies Stuart Hall is a defender of this hypothesis. In his chapter *Encoding/decoding* in *Culture, Media, Language* (1996 [1980]), Hall argues that receivers (readers) actively reproduce meanings of messages (the magazine) in mass media, encoded by producers (editors).

Hall criticizes the traditional mass-communication theory – sender/message/receiver – for its linearity and claims that the overall mass-communication is constructed at different moments: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction. Using television as an example of a transmitter of messages, Hall argues that the meaning of messages encoded in media is not limited to the producer’s intentions, but that messages acquire further meaning when decoded by receivers. Since, however, the producer constructs the message in another context, with different knowledge as the receiver decodes it, the meaning of messages on the part of the producer can be different from the one on the part of the receiver.

Hall categorizes three different positions receivers can adopt when they decode messages: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional position. When receivers adopt a dominant-hegemonic position, Hall means that they interpret the message exactly as it was decoded. This is possible when receivers are operating in the dominant code. Decoding through a negotiated position means to acknowledge the dominant beliefs encoded in the message, but not to accept them completely. Evaluating the message through the norms and values people hold in order to maintain their position in society, they permit themselves a more open interpretation of the meaning. Thus, people literally negotiate the encoded meaning with their lifestyle and decode the message according to it. The last position Hall defines is the oppositional position. Receivers taking this position understand the intended meaning of a message, do however, not share the same code and reject it.

According to Hall, meaning is produced by language. Inspired by semiotic approaches, however, Hall’s understanding of language goes beyond verbal communication. Languages consist of signs that are capable of expressing meaning and can occur in different forms as for instance sound, image, objects and words. Meanings formed by producers or readers are, however, not exclusively formed by language, but also through social practices, since meanings can only be effective if they are reflected in our behaviour. Hence, the producer cannot transmit arbitrary messages to the receivers, and receivers cannot rework meanings arbitrarily. Mass-communication must be constructed and interpreted in a meaningful discourse.

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49 Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” 128.
50 Ibid. 130.
51 Hall argues that discourses cannot be understood without the operation of codes, which are provided by language [Hall, 1980: 131–32].
54 Hall “Encoding/decoding,” 128.
55 Ibid. 130.
Drawing on a semiotic approach, Hall argues that discourse is formed by language and practices, which then produce meanings. Thus, meanings encoded in media are created and only circulate in discursive forms.

The ‘object’ of these practices is meanings and messages in the form of sign-vehicles of a specific kind organized, like any form of communication or language, through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of discourse. The apparatuses, relations and practices of production thus issue, at a certain moment (the moment of ‘production/circulation’) in form of symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of ‘language’. It is in the discursive form that the circulation of the ‘product’ takes place.\(^5\)

Hence, drawing on Hall’s approach, I base my analysis on the following assumptions: Magazine readers encode messages through reading written text and looking at pictured images in the medium. Decoding messages in commercial fashion magazines and using them in practice determine their meanings. Meanings, which are formed through how readers talk about magazines and what they do with them, reflect the magazines’ value but also function, for which reason I will focus on the meaning making of magazines in my analysis. Hence, circulating in various discursive forms, readers’ understanding of the encoded message might differ from the producers’ primary intention. Furthermore, readers might as well decode and interpret messages differently from one another. Thus, readers’ practices can differ, since their practices are as well connected to their individual cultural identity, age, gender and lifestyle.

\textit{Bourdieu and the Formation of Social Groups}

I have chosen not to restrict my study to a specific commercial fashion magazine, since it is the aim to analyse the overall phenomenon of reading commercial fashion magazines. Conducting the analysis from the reader’s view, it is necessary to conduct the research with people with similar characteristics, respectively people from similar social groups.

In \textit{Distinction – A social critique of judgement of taste} (2010 [1979]), Pierre Bourdieu’s broadest empirical study, he illustrates detailed observations of middle class consumption behaviour and lifestyle, exploring how social groups are formed. According to Bourdieu, social groups differ with respect to the amount of their social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Social capital is the amount of interaction one individual has with other individuals, economic capital is the financial situation of an individual, and cultural capital is the individually acquired knowledge.\(^5\)

For my research, I have classified the participants in different categories: high school students, university students, and adults working in the cultural sector. Thus, I targeted my interview partners

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Bourdieu, “Social space and symbolic power,” 17.
through the institutions where they acquire or use their knowledge and consequently ensure that they, within the groups, have similar knowledge or rather, a similar cultural capital.

Furthermore, it is not sufficient that the interviewed readers share a similar cultural capital, but they also need to have a similar lifestyle, which is according to Bourdieu additionally composed by the economic capital. Each social group in society has a specific amount of capitals, which are reflected in people’s tastes and customs – the “habitus”.

First, it is presupposed that taste (or habitus) as a system of schemes of classification, objectively referred, via the social conditionings that produced it, to a social condition: agents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their taste, different attributes (clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends) that go well together and that go well with them or, more exactly, suit their position.58

In order to be accepted as a member of a specific social group, the individual adapts to the group’s habitus, which is, among other things, defined by the consumption of clothing or other goods from the fashion sector. The appropriate habitus and, consequently, the legitimation to be a member of a specific social group, is obtained by the “right” consumption. Bourdieu therefore perceives the consumption realm as a field of power, where people get classified mainly by the amount and composition of their economic and cultural capital.59 Hence, people think, talk and act in the way of the social groups they feel affiliated to, in order to be accepted as a group member and thus, differentiate themselves from other groups. Nevertheless, neither social groups nor taste are naturally given but constructed.60

Bourdieu further argues that social spaces are comparable to geographical places, since the closer the groups are, the more common properties they possess and vice versa. He observes that people with a similar habitus find each other in specific places. Thus, Bourdieu sees a relation between geographical spaces and the accumulation of social groups.61 Therefore, I have not only aimed to situate my research in a social sphere but I have also positioned it geographically. Thus, the interviews did not only originate from similar social communities but also communities that share the same national identity.

Looking for interview partners through a snowball effect, which I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, all participants within the groups share a similar lifestyle or belong to the same social group. Thus, the meaning making of commercial fashion magazines is likely to be very similar among the participants within the groups since they share a similar habitus.

However, the classification of the groups does not only differentiate the participants in terms of their cultural capital, but also in terms of their age, which in this case also affects their economic capital. Hence, the meaning making of commercial fashion magazines in the reader groups will likely differ from each other, since each group represents other lifestyles.

58 Ibid. 19.
60 Ibid. 17–19.
61 Bourdieu, “Social space and symbolic power,” 16.
As a mass medium, commercial fashion magazines target readers across a broad age range, which means that they target a mass with greatly varying lifestyles. In order to fully uncover their social values and functions, it is necessary to take all kinds of meaning makings, which are influenced by the habitus, into consideration.

Commercial Fashion Magazines and Gender

In *Fashion: The Key Concept* the scholar in fashion Jennifer Craik states:

> Fashion magazines, fashion advertisements, fashion Web sites [sic!], advice columns, music videos, and fashion writings are primarily directly targeted at girls and women, and there is a complex code of femininity inscribed in the symbolic messages and signifiers carried by clothes.\(^{62}\)

In this study, I use the term commercial fashion magazine as synonym for women’s magazine, because all magazines that were named by my interview partners are magazines directed at women, through the use of for instance typical female names or attributions, like “Joy”, “Jolie”, “Barbara”. However, I do not deny the possibility that they are also read by men. In fact, two of my interviewees were male. Thus, commercial fashion magazines, regardless of the sex they target, are concerned with gender issues, for which reason, gender needs to be taken into account, even though it is not the main discussion of this study.

In *Gender Trouble* (2007 [1990]) the feminist theoretician Judith Butler discussed the difference between sex and gender. While the female and male sex are biologically given, gender, being a “woman” or “man”, is culturally constructed.\(^{63}\) Thus, the adjectives “female” and “male” are understood as terms which describe the biological sex, while “feminine” (woman) and “masculine” (man) are determined via discursive formations.\(^{64}\)

Especially in her article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), Butler illustrates further that gender is an act of performance, which manifests itself through the repetition of these acts.

> In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic!]; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity through a stylized repetition of acts.\(^{65}\)

According to Butler, even though gender identities institute themselves through repetition, she perceives them as rather dynamic. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, who perceives the body as a “historical idea”\(^{66}\), But-

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\(^{62}\) Craik, *Fashion: The Key Concept*, 140.

\(^{63}\) Butler, “Gender Trouble,” 8.

\(^{64}\) Ibid. 9–12.

\(^{65}\) Ibid. 519.

\(^{66}\) Ibid. 520.
ler argues that, through time, established performances of gender will break, be re-established and repeated in different forms. Thus, gender and how gender is performed is constantly changing, but also constrained through social norms and taboos.\textsuperscript{67} Consequently, the body, through which these acts of performances are conducted, is the reflection of gender identity. The human body is not only a factual materiality; “it is a materiality that bears meaning.”\textsuperscript{68}

Since commercial fashion magazines in this study are specifically a representation of femininity and mostly consumed by women, which perform femininity, the act of purchasing, reading and discussing those magazines is influenced by gender identity. Consequently, the social functions and values of commercial fashion magazines, as well as the actual act of reading, are not only determined by lifestyle or age, but also through gender.

**Methodological Consideration and Presentation of Empirical Data**

*Understanding Fashion Magazines through Ethnographic Methods*

The design of this study is qualitative research, using interpretative ethnography as a main method. I relate to the early studies of Ballaster et al. in *Women’s Worlds* (1991) and Hermes in *Reading Women’s Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (1997 [1995]). Both studies acknowledge that the meanings and values of fashion magazines are produced through discursive formations. Thus, interpretative ethnography has been used as a useful tool to understand how the readership produces meanings and values around printed women’s magazines.\textsuperscript{69}

Since the research aim is to understand functions and values of commercial print fashion magazines through their cultural meaning, it is favourable to use phenomenological hermeneutics as an approach. Initially used for textual analysis, hermeneutics furthermore allows for understanding the human practices of an individual, as well as the product of these practices through interpretation. According to the professor of Governance and Leadership Kerry E. Howell, the understanding of human actions through interpretation is only given when there is mutual interaction between the researcher and the researched object. Thus, the researcher needs to experience the context in which their research is positioned in order to understand the cultural phenomenon. Here, as Howell shows, various approaches of hermeneutics impede the possible objectivity of the researcher. For instance, while objectivist hermeneutics claims a clear demarcation between objectivity and subjectivity, phenomenological hermeneutics argues that the researcher and the research object experience the same world and that only through this shared world meanings are perceptible.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. 521.
\textsuperscript{70} Howell, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology*, 159.
In addition, phenomenological hermeneutics rejects the idea that human practices or objects have a natural meaning, but rather claims that they are subject to a process of becoming.

Meaning is temporal and involves process; meaning is in a continual state of becoming and therefore illustrates a non-objectivist perspective of meaning: people, action, the text and so on are not external entities requiring an objective interpretivist stance, but a construct with which the interpreter continually negotiates meaning and understanding.\(^{71}\)

Hence, understanding meanings is not only determined by context, which involves space that the researcher and the research object need to share, but also time, since meanings are dynamic and changeable. Interpretative ethnography aims to understand human behaviour through contextualizing human actions. Thus, individual opinions and feelings give deep insights into cultural meaning and values within a society, which would not be possible to acquire through a quantitative or deductive method.\(^{72}\)

Consequently, in order to employ an inductive methodology, I will use theories which facilitate my interpretation process. I base my research method on critical ethnography. This means that my research process is closely related to theories which enable me to interpret the empirical data. Nevertheless, as Howell emphasizes, the researcher becomes the interpreter of someone else’s interpretation, for which reason critical ethnography requires a critical view from the researcher’s perspective. It furthermore takes discourses into consideration in order to perceive power relations between the researcher, their research subject and the environment in which the research takes place.\(^{73}\)

Since my research aim is closely related to the consumption behaviour of the readership, I focus particularly on the readership itself. I conducted focused group interviews as well as individual interviews. I will outline the advantages and challenges of conducting interviews in a following section.

Selection of the Research Subject and Access into the Research Field

In the early stages of the research project, I intended to understand how print fashion magazines sustain themselves, while digital media in the field of fashion constantly adapt their features. I therefore needed to enter a society in which print media are favoured.

Germany appeared to be a very suitable society to analyse the cultural value of print fashion magazines. In the last four years, new women’s magazines with a focus on fashion lifestyle have been launched or have increased their number of editions. Since spring 2014, the publisher Hubert Burda Media has monthly brought out the German edition of Harper’s Bazaar, one of the oldest fashion and lifestyle magazines on the Western market.\(^{74}\) Only one year later, the German actress and television presenter

\(^{71}\) Ibid. 166–167.

\(^{72}\) Holy and Stuchlik as quoted in Skinner, The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach, 71.

\(^{73}\) Howell, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology, 124–127.

Barbara Schöneberger launched her own fashion and lifestyle magazine *Barbara*.75 In the same year, the publisher *Bauer Media Group* announced to increase the number of editions of the lifestyle magazine *Intouch Style*76 and, as a recent example, in March 2017, the publisher *Axel Springer* re-launched *Die Dame*, a fashion magazine which was published from 1911 to 1943. According to these recent developments, I concluded that the demand of fashion and lifestyle print magazines on the German market is still high. The research is limited geographically to a semi-rural region in the Southern part of Germany. Having grown up in this area, I experienced a remarkable consumption of commercial fashion magazines in my surroundings in daily life. Here I draw on Bourdieu, who claims in *Social Spaces and Symbolic Power* (1989) that geographical spaces are also social spaces, since the “closer agents live together, within space, the more common properties they have and vice versa.”78 Thus, Bourdieu makes an interrelation between a geographical space and the habitus of the people, who live in this space. Regarding my personal relations with this region and the intention to understand how the socialization background of the participants affects the meaning making of commercial fashion magazines, I found it suitable to geographically focus on Southern Germany.

I did not search for people reading a specific commercial print fashion magazine. Diana Crane (1999) conducted an analysis of the interpretation of *Vogue* fashion photographs from a consumer perspective. She based her study exclusively on photographs as a representation of fashion in *Vogue*, although 10% of the interviewees were not even *Vogue* readers, and 57% were also dedicated to other magazines.79 Crane observed that the participants often spoke negatively about the models in the photographs.80 One reason for this might possibly be the readers’ ability of critical thinking. However, participants might also have reacted negatively to the photographs because they were supposed to reflect on a magazine which they do not personally or at least not fully relate to. For this reason, I do not limit my research to a specific magazine, but rather focus on the whole phenomenon of commercial fashion magazines.

It needs to be ensured that the interviewees are from similar social groups in order to understand how meaning is constructed through a specific group. Therefore, I draw on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (2010 [1979]) and aimed to find people with similar capitals, who regularly81 or occasionally82 consume commercial print fashion magazines, regardless of their personal magazine preference. By doing so, I

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78 Bourdieu, *Social space and symbolic power,* 16.
80 Ibid. 555.
81 I understand a regular reader as a person who reads a print fashion magazine at least once a month, since most magazines are published monthly.
82 I understand an occasional reader as someone who reads one to two print fashion magazines within three months.
ensure that the participants are from similar social groups, which consequently have a similar lifestyle and a similar habitus. Thus, I do not analyse a specific readership of a specific magazine, but a specific readership within a specific social group.83

With the exception of one interview group, which I found through contacting people in different Facebook groups,84 no participants were directly chosen by me. The first contacts were made through my circle of acquaintances in Germany who then, in a second step, contacted people from their circle of acquaintances. Hence, I was able to get more participants through a snowball effect. I used my first contacts as informants, who then became participants as well in the later research process. As the professor of Methodology of Social Research and Evaluation Methods Giampietro Gobo states in his book Doing Ethnography, informants have the advantage of accelerating the access to a social group. However, informants might as well impede the research project, since they are – as non-researchers – very close to the research process.85 For this reason, all informants were informed about the research questions and the requirements for participating before they started to contact possible participants within their circle of acquaintances. Once new potential participants were found, I got into contact with them and briefly reviewed if they were in fact suitable for the research or not. Nevertheless, it was important for me that especially the focus groups were able to form themselves in order to achieve a positive group dynamic, which in the end contributes to better empirical data.

The first group I accessed were 15 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 from my previous high school. Five teachers gave me the permission to conduct interviews with their students during school time, but only two had enough students for forming a focus group. Since I was not in direct contact with the students until the actual interview took place, I asked the teachers to forward their students a quick online survey, in which they needed to state whether they read commercial print fashion magazines or not. Conducting the online survey beforehand helped me not only to sort out the students interested in fashion magazines from the ones that are not, but also to get an overview of the number of participants I could possibly get.

The second group were 12 students between the ages of 20 and 25 from my previous university. One focus group and one single interviewee were accessed through entering different student groups on Facebook, while the other focus group and interview partners were formed by contacting a previous fellow student and friends of mine. For this group, I did not conduct any online survey beforehand. All participants were in contact with me via Facebook messenger or WhatsApp, where we discussed their suitability for the research project. Except for one person, all participants who had approved to join the focus group or individual interviews beforehand were present at the day when the interviews were conducted.

83 Bourdieu, “Social space and symbolic power,” 16.
85 Gobo, Doing Ethnography, 127.
The third group, six adults between 41 and 54 years, were also contacted through a common friend. The participants in the focus group interview were all friends with each other.

**Focus Groups and Semi-Structured Individual Interviews**

In this study, I conducted five focus group interviews and six individual ones. I decided to combine both interview forms, since they complement each other.

Focus groups are especially popular within consumer research, since it allows for variation of opinions on a specific topic. Thus, the aim of focus groups is not to seek for a solution for the discussed issue, but rather to illustrate different perspectives. In contrast to individual interviews, participants in focus group interviews are likely to forget about the actual interview situation. Hence, the lively and collective interaction with other participants encourages spontaneous expression, which consequently allows for more authentic data collection.\(^{86}\)

Nevertheless, as stated by Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Cassey in *Focus Groups – A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, “you can’t depend on the results of focus group research.”\(^{87}\) Although I intended to give the groups as much freedom to form themselves as possible, I was particularly concerned about the high school students group which was formed through the fact that they were taught by the same teacher. Teenagers’ behaviour at school is likely to be influenced by group pressure. I therefore also integrated individual interviews into my study in order to counteract a too dominant opinion.

Nevertheless, it can be stated that generally all group interviews were quite balanced and the conversations very dynamic. I avoided interrupting the participants while they were discussing the issue with each other and tried to lead the conversation by asking further questions during the short breaks. In effect, I (luckily) experienced all participants, whether dominant or not, expressing their opinion and disagreement directly with no fear of provoking conflicts.

All individual interviews I conducted were semi-structured, meaning they were framed loosely. According to the psychologist Steinar Kvale, semi-structured interviews favour an active interaction between interviewee and interviewer, which gives the researcher a deeper insight into the interviewee’s life. Consequently, semi-structured interviews have a more positive effect within qualitative research than structured interviews which are more formal and usually conducted in an unnatural setting.\(^{88}\)

Although I asked most of the questions, I aimed to have a mutual conversation with my interview partners following the understanding of Ann Oakley. In *Doing Feminist Research*, Oakley states that

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\(^{86}\) Brinkmann and Kvale, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 175–176.


The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchal and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

The most hierarchal situation I experienced was with the high school students who demonstrated their respect towards me with distance, as they do with their teachers. I tried to fight those boundaries by starting a private conversation with them on the way to the room where the interviews were conducted. I furthermore asked them to not address me with the formal German “Sie”, but rather with the informal “Du”. Some students even found my private Instagram and Facebook account which I let them access.

In fact, in each interview situation I became an interviewee myself at a certain point during the conversation. Even though I had presented my study project and myself beforehand, all participants asked me more precise questions about both my personal and academic life. I answered all questions as naturally as possible until the participants’ curiosity was calmed.

The framework of the interviews was divided in two different parts. In the first part, I asked the participants exclusively about their usage of print fashion magazines, while in the second part I asked them about their usage of digital fashion media. In order to get a smooth transition between both parts, I showed the participants a promotion video published by Net-A-Porter, in which it is shown how the print magazine Porter relies on e-commerce. The video shows how print and digital media such as e-commerce can complement each other. Through the reactions of the interviewees it was possible to understand how receptive readers are towards a change from print to digital content.

Challenges during the Research Process

Translation

All interviews, as well as the data transcription, were conducted in German. However, in order to make my research analysis comprehensible, I have translated the quotes of the participants that I used in my analysis into English. Translating empirical data is not an easy process to undertake, since researchers run the risk of distorting the original meaning in the act of translation. Whether the researcher becomes the translator or has the data translated by a professional translator, the empirical data is taken away from its initial natural language context.

Nevertheless, as discussed by the scholars Bogusia Temple and Alys Young in Qualitative research and translation dilemmas the difficulty does not lie in finding the right equivalent words and syn-

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89 Oakley, “Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms,” 41.
90 The framework of the questions is included in the appendix. However, it needs to be stressed that this was only a loose guideline through the interviews. During the conversations, I adapted my questions to the topics raised by the interviewees, for which reason the framework of the questions is not a complete representation of the discussion.
91 Youtube. “Shop Direct From The Pages of PORTER Magazine.” Accessed March 5, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUvx_gHfxvQ
tax, but rather in transmitting and reconstructing the same meaning. The language and literature scholar Sherry Simons further argues that

[the solutions to many of the translator’s dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literature forms and to changing identities. [...] In fact, the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value.]

Temple and Young argue that it does not matter whether the researcher carries out the translation or a professional translator. As long as the researcher keeps their objectivity, it will not affect the data evaluation. Nevertheless, starting from Simons’ argumentation, it can be asserted that it is more valuable for researchers to translate their data on their own, if they are familiar with the local realities in which they are conducting their research.

Speaking German and French as mother tongue, as well as having been socialized with Southern German dialects, I did not experience incomprehensible speech during the interviews. I asked the participants to clarify or explain more in depth when they were making general assumptions. All quotes were translated by myself and I only changed them for the sake of readability. Nevertheless, in order to keep a certain level of transparency during my research analysis, I have put the original wording into footnotes.

Anonymity

While I was negotiating the conditions of the interviews with possible participants, it happened that people became curious about my interview questions. Furthermore, I was asked several times, if the thesis was going to be published. Potential participants frequently made statements like “Oh, but I’m not a fashion expert. I cannot guarantee anything”. Reading between the lines, this allows for the interpretation that some felt uncomfortable with the idea of their opinion becoming public – a frequent concern in ethnography.

As the anthropologist Mary Carol Hopkins emphasizes in When they read what we write: the politics of ethnography (1993), researchers conducting ethnographic research are always committed to a moral responsibility towards the study subject. In effect, she argues that preserving the anonymity is so constituent that anthropologists do not even discuss whether to anonymise individuals or not.

I did not ask my participants whether they wanted to be anonymised or not, but rather decided already at the beginning of the research process to anonymise the data. I partially base my reasoning on the assumption of the anthropologist Barbara Tedlock, who argues

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92 Temple and Young, “Qualitative research and translations dilemmas,” 163–165.
93 Simon as quoted in Temple and Young, “Qualitative research and translations dilemmas,” 165.
94 Ibid. 167.
95 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: principles in practice, 212.
We have entered into the arena of postcolonial social science, with its focus on morally engaged research. This new ethical framework presumes that the public sphere consists of a mosaic of communities with a pluralism of identities and worldviews. Researchers and participants are united by a set of ethical values in which personal autonomy and communal well-being are interlocked.97

Furthermore, the complexity of preserving anonymity also lies in our understanding of the public and private sphere, which can vary depending on the position an individual has in the research project.98 In effect, as illustrated by Will C. Van Den Hoonadders, scholar in Qualitative Social Research in *Is anonymity an artifact in ethnographic research?*, researchers can never fully anonymise their research subject and make their research process transparent at the same time. Side information such as geographical placement of the study or age, sex and ethnic origin of the participants automatically give indications about the participants’ identities.99

*Presentation of Participants*

In this section, I want to briefly outline how many participants were included in the focus groups, their age and which magazines they read. All interviews were recorded with the approval of the participants.

High school (Gymnasium) students:

Age: 14 -16  
Participants in total: 15  
Sex: One boy, the rest female  
Fashion magazines read: *Vogue, Elle, InStyle, Intouch Style, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Joy, Jolie, Freundin (all German editions)*

I conducted two focus group interviews. One group had four participants, three girls and one boy. The other group included eight participants, all girls. I further had three individual interviews, in each case with girls. All interviews took place during the lessons and lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. The teachers had organized a separate class room, where I was able to conduct the interviews without being disturbed or disturbing the regular school classes.

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99 Van Den Hoonadders, “Is anonymity an artifact in ethnographic research?,” 145-47.
University students:

Age: 20 - 25
Participants in total: 12
Sex: All female
Fashion magazines read: Elle, Glamour, InStyle, Intouch Style, Cosmopolitan, Jolie, Joy (all German editions)

I conducted two focus group interviews. One group included four participants, the other one six. The participants only partially knew each other. Furthermore, I undertook two individual interviews. All participants in this group were women. Except for one participant who was currently studying medicine, all participants were from the same humanities discipline. All interviews were conducted in a café.

Adults:

Age: 41 – 54
Participants in total: 6
Sex: One man, rest female
Fashion magazines read: Vogue (German edition), Elle, Myself (German edition), Marie-Claire (French edition), Donna, Barbara, Couch

I conducted one focus group interview with three participants: two women and one man. All three participants share the same circle of friends. I furthermore conducted three individual interviews with women. The focus group interview, as well as one of the individual interviews, were conducted at one of the participant’s houses, one during tea time and the other one during dinner. Another individual interview was conducted in a café and the third one at the participant’s house.
Outline

In the first part of the analysis, I examine which values and functions readers attribute to commercial fashion magazines before, during and after the reading process. Drawing mainly on Hall (1996 [1980]) and McCracken (1988), I illustrate how values and functions are formed through meaning, which the readers construct during the interaction with the magazine. In the second part, I analyse how the use of digital fashion media affects the functions and values of print fashion magazines. The focus here is to illustrate the interrelation between print and digital media in the field of fashion. In the third part of the analysis, I demonstrate how meanings of this magazine genre are constructed beyond the reading experience. Drawing on Bourdieu’s Distinction (2010 [1979]) and Butler’s Gender theory (2007 [1990], I examine how the reader’s cultural capital and gender influence their perception of fashion magazines. Each analysis chapter contains a short introduction as well as a short conclusion, followed by a final conclusion at the end of the paper.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ For the sake of comprehensibility and transparency, I have chosen to change some of the formatting standards stated in the Handbook Guide for writing an academic thesis in Fashion studies at Stockholm University. First, regarding the high number of quotes and the limitation of pages, I have chosen to present quotes from the ethnographic material in a smaller font size as prescribed. Second, I acknowledge that I have exceeded the limitation of pages, which is not due to the analysis itself but again due to the high number of quotes and their translation. However, the exact wording of the ethnographic material and the interviewees’ answers is the essence of ethnography and therefore also of this research project. For these reasons, I did not want to separate the German quotes from the analysis written in English, thus allowing the reader to directly relate the translation to the original wording. With this paper, I have remarkably exceeded the scope of a Master’s thesis, which is however only due to the high number of quotes and translations that are a vital part of an ethnographic approach.
Analysis Part I: Reading Commercial Fashion Magazines

In *Culture and Consumption* (1988), McCracken asserts that the origin of all meanings in goods lies in a “culturally constituted world”. He perceives culture as both the “lens” through which we perceive all phenomena but simultaneously also as the “blueprint” of human activity. Thus, culture supplies our world with meanings and there are two cultural concepts, which provide meaning to the world: cultural categories and cultural principles.

Cultural categories are, according to McCracken, the “co-ordinates of meaning”, which he mainly divides into time, space, nature and person. Through these cultural categories, a system of distinction is formed, which then determines how phenomena in the world are perceived. Thus, drawing on McCracken’s approach, I intend to start my analysis by illustrating phenomena within space and time, while readers are purchasing, reading and preserving commercial fashion magazines.

The Moment of Purchase

The Planned Spontaneity

We enter a shop and we find food because we need to eat in order to survive. We also find cleaning and washing products because we need to keep our home and ourselves hygienically clean in order to fend off diseases. Thus, the shop provides us with all products for our basic needs. However, right next to the counter, there is an entire shelf with magazines. What basic need do they cover? And if they do not cover any, why are they there?

In his article *Encoding/decoding* (1996 [1980]), Hall argues that messages need to circulate within discourse, constructed by language, in order to be meaningful. Thus, a meaningful message is only then meaningful when the receiver is able to decode it within the discourse and translate it into a social practice. This social practice is then the reflection of an effect, a use of the message, or the satisfaction of one of the receiver’s needs. That means that the meaning of messages must have a purpose in order to be meaningfully decoded.

For this reason, I specifically asked my participants to explain why they read commercial fashion magazines. It appeared that participants are not aware of it until a few moments before the actual act of purchase.

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101 McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 72.
102 Ibid. 72–73.
103 Ibid. 73.
104 Ibid.
105 Hall, “Encoding/decoding”, 128.
106 Ibid. 130.
107 Ibid. 130.
When do you buy fashion magazines?

High school students:

- When you are at the train station or something like that, then you just buy one.\(^{108}\)
- When I quickly pass by a kiosk. I read them [Cosmopolitan] once or twice a month, I don’t know when there is a new issue coming out. I just take a look if it is already there.\(^{109}\)
- Well, if I’m interested in the cover.\(^{110}\)
- I preferably read InStyle. I buy Vogue when we do grocery shopping at Hieber [regional supermarket], they have these magazines and then I look there [magazine shelf] and then I spontaneously decide which appeals the most to me. So actually spontaneously. [...] I look at it, the cover is important, because it’s what’s on the front.\(^{111}\)

According to the publisher of InStyle Germany, the main target audience of the magazine is between 20 and 39 years old.\(^{112}\) While Vogue\(^{113}\) and Cosmopolitan\(^{114}\) target an audience between the ages of 20 and 49. Thus, the high school students regularly decode magazines, which editors have encoded for another audience, namely a more mature one.

The teenagers could not state a precise reason why they would buy magazines, rather they are attracted by them, when they see them at the kiosk or while they do the grocery shopping with their parents. The cover of the magazine arouses a certain curiosity in the teenagers, which in turn leads to the final purchase. Led by curiosity, commercial fashion magazines therefore contain information which teenagers are interested in and they will probably in some way make use of.

In Jackie: An ideology of adolescent femininity (1978), McRobbie criticizes the youth magazine Jackie for its limited and very specified illustration of the “natural” feminine adolescent. She uncovers the magazine as a “teaching-tool” for feminine adolescents, which she, in turn, views extremely critically.\(^{115}\) However, at this point of the analysis, we see that the magazine is bought because the cover appeals to them, but not because they intend to extract specific information which will have an effect on their gender behaviour. As I will review later during the analysis, the high school students are able to reflect critically on the magazines they read. Although they seem to be quite unsure concerning their reasoning, they are not passive readers.

\(^{108}\) Man ist am Bahnhof oder so und kauft sich halt eine.
\(^{109}\) Dann wenn ich schnell am Kiosk vorbeigehe. Ich lese eine bis zwei im Monat, weiß auch nicht wann die neue immer rauskommt. Ich schau dann einfach, ob sie schon da ist.
\(^{110}\) Ja wenn mich das Cover interessiert.
\(^{111}\) Ja wenn mich das Cover interessiert.
When and where do you buy the magazines?

University students:
- At the train station or at the airport. I work at SWR and therefore have to take the train regularly. I mainly read them on the train or at home in front of the TV, but I never sit down and read a magazine, despite when I read Flow.116
- I sometimes read Joy. This is the typical pester power purchase over the counter.117
- In effect, when I have to take a longer train trip, so quickly at the kiosk.
- Very commonly, I’m at the supermarket and buy two, three things and then I stand in front of it [the magazines shelf] and think: “Ah come on! I still have two hours to lie down on the couch”, this is usually a quick decision.118
- At the kiosk or train station… Or quickly over the counter. It’s like the chocolate bar you allow yourself.119

Adults:
- When I think: Today I want to treat myself to some magazines because I have the time for it. And then I drive to the book shop at the train station.120
- Yes, exactly, you also plan it a little bit. You know you can get it at the kiosk at the train station.121
- Or when you have a spare hour after you have finished all your chores and you think: So now I will prepare myself a cup of coffee and read a magazine.122
- I have a subscription for food magazines. Everything else is an impulse purchase. I sit there on the train and wonder: “Ok, what am I going to do for 2 hours? Ok, I buy Vogue, I buy Elle, maybe Brigitte as well, they maybe have a good story.”123
- On weekends during the big grocery shopping on Saturdays and I think: “Oh, today I will make myself comfortable with a cup of coffee.”124

In contrast to high school students, who are mostly driven by their curiosity, university students and adults plan to use the magazine in a specific context, even though the decision is made spontaneously. In these two groups, the commercial magazines are either going to fill spare time, as for example stated during a trip on the train, or they are going to be used as means of relaxation for a short period of time during daily routines.

In Reading Women’s Magazines (1997 [1995]), Hermes describes similar functions of commercial fashion magazines. She also states that magazines are read for relaxation or during a short break of daily obligations. She further argues that women’s magazines are used for their physical properties in day-to-day life rather than appreciated for their content. Consequently, Hermes asserts that this genre of maga-

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117 Ich lese manchmal Joy. Das ist so der typische Quengelkauf an der Kasse.
118 Ganz klassisch, ich bin im Supermarkt, habe zwei bis drei Sachen gekauft und stehe dann davor und denke: „Ach komm ich habe ja noch zwei Stunden mich auf’s Sofa zu setzen.“, meistens diese schnelle Entscheidung.
119 Am Kiosk oder Bahnhof. Oder schnell an der Kasse. Das ist so wie der Schokoriegel, den man sich halt noch gönnt.
121 Ja, genau man plant das jetzt auch ein bisschen! Und du weißt du kriegst das am Kiosk beim Bahnhof.
122 Oder wenn man mal ’ne Stunde nach dem Erledigten hat und denkt: So jetzt mache ich mir einen Kaffee und lese eine Zeit­schrift.
123 Ich habe nur so Essenzeitschriften abonniert. Alles andere sind nur Impulskäufe, da sitz ich dann im Zug und frag mich: „Ok was mach ich jetzt zwei Stunden lang? Ok, Ich kaufe mir die Vogue, ich kaufe mir die Elle und vielleicht auch die Brigitte, da ist dann vielleicht eine gute Geschichte drin.“
zine is rather meaningless since the readers do not actively use the knowledge or information, which they gain from the magazine, in their daily life.\textsuperscript{125}

Hall argues that encoded meanings in mass communication need to be encoded meaningfully, by which he means that they must be encoded within discourse. Nevertheless, meanings can exist beyond discourse but are then meaningless since they do not have an effect on the receiver.\textsuperscript{126} Hence, since Hermes’ interviewees did barely apply the knowledge acquired from reading women’s magazines in their daily life, she concludes that there is no use, which in turn means, no effect.

However, as my interview shows, university students and adults are very aware of the magazine’s function and thus the effect, before they buy it, namely relaxation. Whether it is for a train trip of an hour or because they are free from obligations during an afternoon, the participants clearly plan to use the content of the magazine as means of escape from daily routines, which has its effect at least during the act of reading. Thus, when purchasing commercial fashion magazines, women do not intend to use the acquired knowledge in the form of entertainment after the reading process but during the reading process itself.

The Cover

In her work \textit{Decoding Women’s Magazines} (1993), McCracken argues:

“together, the visual images and headlines on a magazine cover offer a complex semiotic system, communicating primary and secondary meanings through language, photographs, images, color and placement.”\textsuperscript{127}

As I have discussed in detail before, Hall argues that meanings in mass communication are produced in different spheres. Editors working on the magazine encode messages with meanings and transmit them through the magazine to the readers, who then decode the message according to their interpretation. Thus, the encoded meaning might differ from the decoded one. The act of buying is the first situation in which the transmission of meaning happens. Leaving the producer sphere, the magazine’s encoded meanings are re-evaluated from the moment the reader encounters the cover.

Out of the thirty-three participants I interviewed, there were only two people who are committed to one specific magazine. One person, a university student, has a subscription for \textit{InStyle} and an adult person, who always buys \textit{Myself}. All other participants stated to have preferences of two to three different commercial fashion magazines they would read by turns. Nevertheless, even though the rest of the participants are not consciously committed to a specific commercial fashion magazine, they have still chosen a genre.

\textsuperscript{125} Hermes, \textit{Reading Women’s Magazines}, 34.
\textsuperscript{126} Hall, “Encoding/decoding”, 130.
\textsuperscript{127} McCracken, \textit{Decoding Women’s Magazines}, 13.
Most participants stated to buy commercial fashion magazines either at the kiosk around the corner, the magazine kiosk at the train station or at the supermarket while doing the grocery shopping. They mostly described the buying situation and the choice of magazine as spontaneous and quick decision. This does, however, not mean that the decision is made unconsciously. Especially in my discussions with the high school and university students, I observed that the cover of the magazine has a great influence on the choice.

*High school students:*

*When and where do you buy a magazine?*

- Kiosk.
- Supermarket.
- Yeah, when I’m interested in the cover.128
- You look at the headline or at the person, who is on the cover. Although, when you have found one [magazine], which was ok, you usually buy it again, because you know it then.129
- Yes, but you wouldn’t buy a magazine if you don’t like the person on the cover.130
- Yeah, maybe.131
- Actually, it’s not such a big deal. It just shouldn’t be a star you don’t like, respectively, when you like someone then you are more likely to buy it.132

*What does a cover need to have in order to get your attention?*

- Either a cool headline or obviously, a star, then I usually buy it. Like for example Kim Kardashian, she always causes scandal and she has crazy outfits.133
- I used to read InStyle, but now not so often anymore. But there are funny articles in Cosmopolitan. When you are at the supermarket and then there is a headline leaping to the eye: “The best of the man.” That’s funny and then you read it.134

Here we see two different reactions to the cover. Some high school students seem to somehow feel empathetic towards the pictured star on the cover, which then motivates them to buy the magazine. Others do not necessarily relate personally to the star, but connect them with subjects they are interested in. For instance, a magazine with Kim Kardashian appears interesting because her personality is related to gossip. Gossip, in turn, is related to scandals and scandals are happenings which occur outside of the society’s behavioural norms. In *Decoding Women’s Magazines* (1993), McCracken gives a short insight into her university students’ discussion about *Cosmopolitan*. McCracken observes that her students are especially attracted by the magazine’s cover and by its provocative articles. Although the students recognize the magazine’s content as being far from reality, they especially enjoy fantasising about the illustrated life-

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128 Ja, wenn mich das Cover interessiert.
129 Man schaut so auf den Titel oder die Person, die auf dem Cover ist. Obwohl, wenn man eine gefunden hat, die dann ok war, dann kauft man die halt wieder, weil die kennt man dann ja.
130 Ja, aber du würdest ja die Zeitschrift nicht kaufen, wenn du die Person auf dem Cover nicht magst.
131 Ja, schon.
132 Eigentlich [spielt das] keine so große Rolle, darf aber doch kein Star sein, den man nicht mag, bzw. wenn man jemanden kennt, dann kauft man sich die schon eher.
134 Früher mal die InStyle, lese ich jetzt nicht mehr so oft. Aber in der Cosmopolitan gibt es schon lustige Artikel. Vor allem wenn im Supermarkt dann ein lustiger Spruch ins Auge sticht „Das Beste vom Mann“, dann ist es halt schon lustig, dann liest man sich das halt durch.
Thus, according to McCracken’s observations, her readers get excited about Cosmopolitan because of the articles in which “forbidden subjects” are discussed. Launched in 1965, Cosmopolitan has been targeting working and sexually liberated women. Until today, constructing its profile with celebrities, the magazine has a strong emphasis on sexuality, fashion and beauty.

McCracken shows similar findings to mine in terms of the decoding process during the purchase situation. However, while McCracken’s interviewees are university students, mine are younger, namely high school students.

Show me your favourite magazine and tell me what you like about it.

University students:
- That’s quite difficult actually. I don’t really have any favourite fashion magazine, it rather depends on the content. I take a look at the store to see whether the subjects and the design [of the magazine] appeal to me. [approval from other participants]
- Yeah, I just wanted to buy Cosmopolitan because I read it occasionally. But there was a headline like “In shape for the spring”. Ugh! Then I just grasp an edition of Jolie or Glamour instead.
- I often decide depending on the person on the cover. They usually have a story about that person und then related to that person, they show some fashion trends. If I, for example, compare those two covers [Glamour and Jolie], then I would rather buy that one [Jolie picturing an actress covered with tattoos]. She plays in Orange is the new black, she is lesbian and well, I think she already looks like she has such a strong personality. And if they write something about her as a person then I think it’s interesting. [Approval from other group members]
- And that’s why I like Jolie also a little bit more than the other fashion magazines, not always, but those magazines often show products that are not affordable for me and in Jolie there are also things from Zara, H&M, Mango. The stuff where prices start at 150€ is quite cool but I cannot afford it.
- Same here!

During the discussion with the university students, one group was discussing two covers with two different celebrities. On one cover, there was the British singer Rita Ora, smiling and in a glamorous position. The other magazine had Ruby Rose, an Australian actor. Her sitting position shows clearly her completely tattooed arms. The participants told me that they would rather buy the magazine picturing Ruby Rose, since her personality appears “more interesting”. However, none of these young women actually belong to the social group – lesbian and tattooed – that Ruby Rose represents. They then further argued to prefer Jolie anyway since they present commodities which are affordable for them and therefore closer to their

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135 McCracken, Decoding Women’s Magazines, 6–7.
136 McCracken, Decoding Women’s Magazines, 5–7.
140 Ich geh ganz oft nach der Person auf dem Cover. Die haben dann noch eine Story zu der und dann werden ja anhand dieser Person noch irgend welche Modetrends angezeigt. Wenn man jetzt zum Beispiel die beiden hier vergleichen würde, dann würde ich eher zu ihr greifen. Die spielt bei Orange is the new black und ist lesbisch und ich weiß nicht, aber die sieht schon so wie ein starke Persönlichkeit aus. Und wenn da was über sie als Person steht, finde ich das interessant.
141 Und deswegen mag ich eigentlich die Jolie auch ein bisschen lieber als die anderen, nicht immer, aber ist ja auch oft so bei so Modernmagazinen, dass die Produkte, die da drin sind, jetzt nicht so unsere Preisklasse ist aber bei Jolie ist auch mal was von Zara, H&M oder Mango dabei. Die Sachen, die ab 150 Euro anfangen, sehen ja mal ganz cool aus, aber das kann ich mir eh nicht leisten.
142 Ja ist bei mir auch so!
reality. Thus, the young women look after a cover which relates more to their reality and the world they live in, rather than a glamorous world they are not part of.

Nevertheless, the young women did not limit their argumentation to the image on the cover, but also read the headlines, which in this case, even kept one of them from buying a magazine. Since there are some alternatives on the market, the reader actually has the freedom to reject her preferred magazine if she is not interested in the content.

During a discussion about the most relevant parts in commercial fashion magazines, interviewee shows the cover of Donna.

Adult:
- For instance, I just recently bought Donna because it was so appealing to me due to this mature woman but then at the same time she also dared something. This turquoise and gold [colours of the dress the model wears] and big earrings. I think it’s important that fashion is a part of it [commercial fashion magazines].
- The Barbara magazine is ingenious! They only address issues like “the courage of leaving gaps”, “Be yourself” [headlines on cover]. It’s different. This appeals to me and makes me feel like I want to buy it. I don’t want to be like this common woman ideal, I’m just not interested in it.

The adults were not problematizing the cover as much as the other two groups during our interviews. One part of the participants had a particular magazine they regularly read. Thus, the cover is not evaluated critically and compared to other covers since the purchase originates from a habit. The other part stated to have a particular magazine they feel affiliated to but now actually want to try something “new”. When I then asked them to tell me which magazine they now were recently reading and how they had chosen it, most explanations started with: “oh what was its name again?”. Some participants only remembered parts of the magazine’s name, as for instance “cosmopolite” instead of “cosmopolitan”. There might be different reasons for this reaction and one of them is probably that the reader here does not view the entire cover, but only parts of it.

Looking back at the argumentation of the university students, one participant states “Then I just grasp an edition of Jolie or Glamour instead [of Cosmopolitan]”. Here the participant clearly knows why she did not buy Cosmopolitan: because the content of the magazine did not appeal to her. However, she does not mention clearly which magazine she finally took instead, since she only states “Jolie or Glamour”. Here the reader does not make any differentiation between Jolie or Glamour, she only differentiates between what she does not want to read – advice on how to lose weight – and the other unknown, and in this case “better”, content.

In Decoding Women’s Magazines (1993), McCracken describes the cover as very intriguing, since it operates not only as an advertiser of the magazine but also the commodities pictured in the magazine,

143 Zum Beispiel hier die Donna, die habe ich mir letztens gekauft, weil ich das so ansprechend fand mit dieser etwas schon reifere Frau, aber gleichzeitig hat sie sich auch was getraut, dieses Türkis und Gold und große Ohrringe, finde ich also schon wichtig das Mode dabei ist.
144 Die Barbara-Zeitschrift die ist so genial! Da geht’s nur um so Themen wie „Mut zur Lücke“ „Sei so wie du bist“. Es ist anders, das spricht mich an und es macht mir Lust es zu kaufen. Und diesem klassischen Frauenideal habe ich keine Lust zu entsprechen und es interessiert mich nicht.
which in turn will influence the reader’s consumption behaviour.\textsuperscript{145} She further argues that especially the cover invites women to fantasise about their rather “common” life in a more glamorous way, while they view the glossy cover.

While viewing the magazines, the woman herself participates in the construction of the idealized images; she performs a kind of pleasurable work by combining fantasy with elements of her reality. [...] Whether a perfect face, dress, meal, or furniture arrangement, these symbols appear all the more attainable because they urge the viewer to link the fantasy to her everyday life.\textsuperscript{146}

However, as my interviews show, readers look at covers in order to detect the one they do not want to purchase due to its content rather than the one which will make them fantasise. Generally, the participants did not seem to fantasise about or glorify either the cover or a magazine itself. In some situations, readers emphasized how they appreciate “practical” advice stated in the magazines as for instance how to combine a shirt in five different styles or how to make a home-made beauty mask. Thus, in contrast to McCracken’s consideration, my interviewees seek for information they could translate into their reality. Consequently, they rationally categorize the magazine judging by its cover in “interesting” and “not interesting” rather than fantasise about it.

**Reading Commercial Fashion Magazines**

*Time and Place*

So far, I have discussed how magazine readers decode fashion magazines during the act of purchase. Once bought, the readers decide within what time and space the magazine will operate in their daily routines. My interviews have shown that commercial fashion magazines are read in three different spheres. The first sphere refers to places in which the readers are obligated to bridge a time. Two of the most commonly mentioned examples were trips by train or waiting at the doctor’s and hairdresser’s.

*When and where do you read your magazines?*

**High school students:**

- Actually at home, or while on a long trip by car. Or when I take the train to go to my training. Then I have to go to Offenburg, if I have nothing else to do, I take a magazine with me.\textsuperscript{147}
- I take the train in order to get to school, so often on the train, otherwise also in my leisure time at home. When I’m a bit stressed and want to work it off, then I make myself comfortable.\textsuperscript{148}
- At the doctor’s, at the hairdresser’s, on the train or at home on the couch.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{145} McCracken, *Decoding Women’s Magazines*, 14–15.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid. 13.


\textsuperscript{148} Ich fahre ja jetzt viel mit dem Zug zur Schule, also viel im Zug sonst auch in meiner Freizeit, zuhause. Wenn ich ein bisschen Stress habe und abbauen möchte, dann mach ich es mir gemütlich.

\textsuperscript{149} Beim Arzt, beim Friseur, im Zug oder zuhause auf dem Sofa.
University students:

- At the train station or at the airport. I work at SWR [regional radio station] and therefore I have to take the train quite often. I read them mostly on the train or at home while watching TV, but I don’t sit down and read a magazine.\textsuperscript{150}
- Indeed, when I am on a long train trip. Then quickly at the kiosk. Or during vacation. It’s just easier to read than a book.\textsuperscript{151}

Adults:

- During the supervision early in the morning, or when I’m on the road, on the train or in bed as bedtime reading... no difficult read.\textsuperscript{152}
- At the doctor’s! At the hairdresser’s, of course!\textsuperscript{153}

Clearly, when reading fashion magazines in a waiting room or at the hairdresser’s, readers did not actively decide to purchase the magazine, but more or less are forced to engage with it by the situation, since there is time to bridge. I will therefore not discuss further this sphere in which magazines operate. However, I want to give a short insight why my participants mentioned the waiting room at the doctor’s and the hairdresser’s frequently. Having grown up in the German speaking parts of Europe, I can confirm from my own experience that most doctors and hairdressers offer their patients and customers a generally broad range of women’s magazines to read during waiting time or during treatment. Especially hairdressers tend to have various subscriptions for commercial fashion magazines. This is certainly a factor which promotes the reading culture of commercial fashion magazines in Germany, which I will, however, not analyse more in depth since the initial situation differs from the one of my analysis.

In contrast, when traveling for instance by train, participants feel especially motivated to read commercial fashion magazines. Some even stated to “stock up themselves” with them in order to guarantee that they have enough reading material during the trip. I observed this phenomenon in all age groups. Some participants stated further in the discussion that they often also have a book with them during the trips. However, they usually go back to the magazine, since “it is easier to read.” Here, commercial fashion magazines are valued for two things: their ability to entertain their readers for a short period of time when they need to bridge waiting time and secondly, for their simplicity, which facilitates the decoding process.

In fact, when the decoding process appears to be easy, readers feel relaxed, which is their aim when they buy this genre of magazine. The quotes, which I mentioned above, already show that relaxation is one of the main purposes of reading commercial fashion magazines.

\textsuperscript{150} Am Bahnhof oder am Flughafen. Ich arbeite beim SWR und deswegen muss ich schon öfters mal Zug fahren. Ich lese sie auch hauptsächlich im Zug oder daheim vor dem Fernseher aber ich setze mich jetzt nicht hin und lese eine Zeitschrift.
\textsuperscript{151} Tatsächlich wenn ich länger Zug fahren muss. So beim Kiosk, noch schnell. Oder im Urlaub. Es liest sich auch viel einfacher als ein Buch.
\textsuperscript{152} Frühaufsicht oder wenn ich mal unterwegs bin, im Zug oder abends im Bett, so als Bettlektüre... keine schwere Kost.
\textsuperscript{153} Beim Arzt! Beim Friseur natürlich!
When and where do you read your magazines?

High school students:
- Well, in bed. I make myself comfortable. When you have time and forget about the stress at school and just read this [magazine].  
- It is somehow relaxing, when you lie on the couch or when you are on vacation. It’s like an additional means of relaxation.

University students:
- Well, mostly in bed, before I fall asleep or during the afternoon coffee, then I like to read it, or on the couch. Or sometimes I take it to the sauna or to the swimming-pool, on the train. There are a lot of places. Or just lie somewhere with a magazine in summer, that’s also nice, when you don’t have to study.

Adults:
- During the weekend, in the bathroom, at the hairdresser’s [...] and when I really want to make myself comfortable, as for instance during pre-Christmas period, oh candles, tea, bed and I don’t have to have my laptop on my lap, but really lie down and look at it, maybe I put it down for a while and fall asleep and then I have a look again.
- My computer is always on when I’m at home. So, I’m at it a lot between times. When I read a magazine I sit outside [on the terrace] and prepare myself a coffee. The magazine is a moment of conscious looking.

Here we see that the interviewees do not only read commercial fashion magazines in places where people usually rest, as for instance the bed, the couch or sauna, but they construct a whole situation of cosiness. Reading commercial fashion magazines implies for the readers making themselves comfortable, drinking coffee or tea and lighting candles.

Reading commercial fashion magazines is not about the moment of reading itself but about the overall situation of relaxation surrounding it. Thus, on the one hand, this genre of magazine promotes the relaxation factor in the situation, but on the other hand, they become a means of relaxation through the overall situation readers create around them. Reading commercial magazines would probably not be considered as a means of relaxation if the readers would not read them in bed with a cup of coffee.

154 Ja zuhause im Bett. Ich mach es mir dann bequem und dann wenn man grad so Zeit hat und den ganzen Schulstress mal ausschaltet und man wirklich nur das liest.
155 Es ist ja irgendwie entspannend, wenn man so auf dem Sofa liegt oder im Urlaub. Das ist ja wie ein zusätzlicher Punkt für Entspannung.
157 Am Wochenende, im Badezimmer, beim Friseur [...] und wenn ich es mir wirklich mal gemütlich machen will, zum Beispiel in der Vorweihnachtszeit, boah! Kerze, Tee, Bett und nicht mein Laptop auf den Schoß zu halten, sondern wirklich hinzulegen und das anzugucken, das bleibt dann da so liegen, dann geh ich schlafen und dann schau ich wieder rein.
In her book *Reading women’s magazines*, Joke Hermes states that

Women’s magazines constitute a genre that does not make demands: they can easily be picked up and put down again. Since, as readers, we know magazines will not capture us totally or carry us off, they are quite safe to read.\(^{159}\)

Being read easily and thus not in depth, Hermes concludes that commercial fashion magazines have little significance to the reader and therefore little cultural value. In one respect, my data collection provides a very similar impression, as my interviewees asserted that women’s magazines are easy to read. Some of the participants even corrected the wording of my question when I was asking them how they read magazines. The common statement was: “I don’t read them, I look at them.” Except for a few exceptions, which I will discuss later, in all generations I have interviewed, browsing through a magazine was the main way to read commercial fashion magazines.

High school students:
- In bed, lying down, while I listen to music. I look through it and when I’m interested in something, then I read it, if not, I continue to look.\(^{160}\)
- When there are long articles, I usually browse through them, but I look at the pictures.\(^{161}\)
- Yes, I think images are important in such magazines. When you like the picture then you also read it. Yeah, I also preferably look at images.\(^{162}\)

University students:
- First, I look at all the pictures! [Group agrees]\(^{163}\)
- Browsing through, then putting down, then browsing through again.\(^{164}\)
- Sometimes I go directly to the cover story. Sometimes it is so stupid that it’s interesting to read it.\(^{165}\)
- I’ve never read a magazine completely.\(^{166}\)
- Actually, I go from the beginning to the end and read what I’m interested in, I just browse through the rest. I don’t look at specific information. In *Glamour*, there is a 60 seconds knowledge thing, that I think is super good! I always read it, because they explain where words are from, that’s interesting. And then I look at the fashion things and sometimes I read interviews when I’m interested in the person, but usually not.\(^{167}\)

Adults:

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\(^{159}\) Hermes, *Reading Women’s Magazines*, 34.

\(^{160}\) Auf dem Bett, im Liegen, während ich Musik höre. Ich schaue so durch und wenn mich was interessiert, dann les ich das und wenn nicht, dann schaue ich einfach weiter.

\(^{161}\) Bei fetten Artikeln blättere ich meistens weiter, aber die Bilder schaust man sich schon mal an.

\(^{162}\) Ja, ich glaube Bilder spielen da auch eine große Rolle in so Zeitschriften. Wenn das Bild einem gefällt, dass man das auch liest. Ja ich schau dann eher auf das Bild.

\(^{163}\) Ich schaue zu allererst alle Bilder an!

\(^{164}\) Durchblättern, dann weglegen, dann wieder durchblättern.

\(^{165}\) Manchmal gehe ich auch direkt zu den Coverthemen. Manchmal ist es ja so blöd, dass es schon wieder interessant ist zu lesen.

\(^{166}\) Ich habe auch wirklich nie eine Zeitschrift ganz gelesen.

\(^{167}\) Also eigentlich gehe ich von vorne nach hinten durch und das, was mich interessiert, das lese ich und das andere überblättere ich ja. Ich schaue nicht nach besonderen Infos. Also in der *Glamour* gibt’s ja einen 60 Sekunden Wissensteil, das finde ich zum Beispiel super gut! Das lese ich immer durch, weil da gibt’s einfach so Wörter woher die herkommen usw. das finde ich ganz spannend. Und sonst halt die Modesachen schaue ich mir schon immer genau an. Und die Werbung überblättere ich schon mal und so Interviews manchmal lese ich sie, wenn mich die Person interessiert, aber meistens nicht.
From the end to the beginning and stay where I like and continue. I don’t want to anticipate. I want to encounter it as completely new when I look at it the first time. I browse through and read it if I’m immediately interested. I only look at them. I don’t read them. My computer is always on when I’m at home. So, I’m at it a lot between times. When I read a magazine, I sit outside [on the terrace] and prepare myself a coffee. The magazine is a moment of conscious looking.

Since all age groups made very similar statements, namely that they mainly flip through magazines, it can be stated that the act of reading commercial fashion magazines is only partially influenced by age, gender and lifestyle. It appears almost as a “natural” way to read commercial fashion magazines. However, as Hall states, all cultural objects, including commercial fashion magazines, possess meaning and meaning influences all cultural practices, as for instance reading magazines. In turn, meaning is a cultural construct and therefore not “natural”. Here we might not see a strong difference between age, lifestyle and gender, but it is still a reading behaviour, which has developed is not naturally given.

Nevertheless, as we also see from the answers given, readers stop at those pages that attract their attention and read particular articles thoroughly. That means, even though readers are not interested in some pages, they still skim-read them in order to recognize whether they are interested in the content or not. Once an interesting page is found, they pay more attention to it. Then the browsing process continues until the next interesting page is found. As discussed previously, likewise with the cover, readers categorize here into “not interesting” and “interesting” during the decoding process.

Drawing on the approach of Hall, we assume that language defines meaning. In turn, he defines language beyond the verbal communication, but rather as signs expressed through sound, image, objects and words. Reading commercial fashion magazines is then decoding a language which is transmitted two-dimensionally, through the written word and looking at images. During the interview, participants made a clear distinction between looking through/viewing and reading a magazine. In these cases, the act of looking is related to the visual representations, while reading is related to the written word. Thus, stating that they first look through the magazine means that readers first decode the pictures and then the text. The image and what it represents attracts the attention and leads then to a decoding process while reading.

Therefore, according to most of the participants, the commercial fashion magazine is completely looked through, since participants need to sort out the interesting parts, but not completely read it. The only exceptions were found within the group of adult readers. Although their reading habit might be initially intended as described above, two participants specifically stated to actually read the whole magazine:

168 Von hinten nach vorne, bleibt da stehen, wo es ihr gefällt und geht dann weiter. Ich will dem nicht vorgreifen. Ich will es ganz frisch haben, wenn ich es dann zum ersten Mal sehe.
169 Ich blättere durch und lese dann etwas, wenn es mich sofort interessiert.
170 Guck die Hefte alle nur an, ich lese sie nicht.
173 Ibid. 5.
How do you read your magazines?

Adults:
- Quite simple in my case. First round, getting an overview. I don’t read, I look through it. Second round, ah there is an interesting article, which I look for now. Third round, ah you look at the fashion things. And then at the end, when I’ve read everything, I read the uninteresting articles, so I still have something. I use everything of it. I wouldn’t buy it just because of the fashion, but if there wasn’t any fashion, it would be a pity. I need images. So a magazine with only articles is not my thing. The balance between image and text must be right. 174

What are the most relevant parts for you in a magazine?
- I cannot really say what the most relevant pages are in a magazine, because I really read the whole magazine. So, fashion has to be a part of it. If Brigitte wouldn’t have any fashion, then I would maybe take Brigitte and then another fashion magazine. 175

Although both participants state specifically that they view and read the magazine in its whole, they emphasize the necessity of a balance between images and written text. Thus, my interview shows that it’s not exclusively images or exclusively text which readers decode while reading, but the combination of both. Even though most images are decoded, while some written texts are just ignored, it is the balance between both which makes reading commercial fashion magazines enjoyable. Here again, the reader does not expect a useful effect after the reading process, but a visual stimulation during the process.

Nevertheless, as I have already discussed before, compared to the university students and adults, teenagers appeared to be more interested in the actual content of the magazine, especially when it addresses a “forbidden” – usually sexual or scandalous – issue. Here, the function of the magazine is not to create a relaxing situation, but to establish knowledge.

High school students:

How do you read your magazines?
- I directly look at the things which catch my eye, or everyday life stuff. I look for the topics in the list of contents and then I look if there is something I want to turn directly to. Otherwise I go from the beginning to the end. 176
- When I bought one and when I’m at home and if I have time I usually look at it immediately. At the dining table. I don’t have a specific place in the house. Sometimes also in bed in the evening. 177
- Often, I look in the table of contents if there is a topic which appeals to me. Then I go directly there and read it. Some things I just leave out. 178

175 Ich kann eigentlich gar nicht sagen, was die relevantesten Zeitschriften sind, weil ich dann schon wirklich die ganze Zeitschrift lese. Also es muss schon Mode dabei sein. Wenn die Brigitte keine Mode mehr hätte, dann würde ich mir vielleicht die Brigitte holen und dann noch eine andere Modezeitschrift.
176 Also ich schaue mir die Sachen an, die dann so direkt ins Auge stechen oder wo so Alltagssachen sind. Im Inhaltsverzeichnis schaue ich nach den Themen und schaue, ob was dabei ist, wo ich jetzt direkt hinblättern will. Sonst gehe ich von vorne durch.
Here we see clearly that the high school students target a specific content they are interested in, since they look directly in the table of contents to check on which pages they can find the interesting parts. This does however not mean that they do not simply flip through a magazine as discussed before. During the discussion, it became clear that they still do it, but after having read the parts which appeared interesting to them. Thus, the reading process is here more conscious and active in comparison to skim-reading which only follows the purpose of relaxation. Again, the teenagers stated that if the headline does not attract their attention, it is usually the images in the magazine.

McCracken (1993) and Ballaster et al. (1991) argue that commercial fashion magazines motivate the readers to fantasise about their everyday life. Illustrating idealized representations of people, dresses, lifestyle and more, especially McCracken argues that readers are invited to link these extraordinary representations to their “ordinary” life.\(^{179}\) Thus, both Ballaster et al.\(^ {180}\) and McCracken see the magazine as a device for fantasising about one’s own daily life, which both see critically, since the readers aspire to something that will never be their reality. However, as we can see from the quotes stated above, the readers in my interview groups did not seem to fantasise about the illustrations in the magazines. I will explain this more precisely in a following part of the analysis. Nevertheless, it can be stated at this stage that the readers do not use commercial fashion magazines in order to imagine their lives in a more luxurious way and therefore differ from the concept of Ballaster et al. and McCracken.

Whether flipping through a magazine or reading it by targeting specific articles, the overall function of commercial fashion magazines regarding their readers is not to inspire, as they are usually framed, but to entertain and to create a feeling of relaxation. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this does not mean that commercial fashion magazines do not have an inspiring effect at all. They do and, as I will show, they even motivate further consumption. However, the reader does not expect this effect during the reading process. The main purpose is to experience relaxation in the decoding process of a balanced quantity of written text and images. Thus, commercial fashion magazines already accomplish their purpose for the reader when they create a moment of relaxation, in which the reader is not required to undergo any physical or mental efforts.

\(^{178}\) Meistens schaue ich schon im Inhaltsverzeichnis, ob es ein Thema gibt, was mich anspricht. Dann gehe ich da direkt hin und las mir das durch. Manche Sache lass ich dann auch einfach aus.

\(^{179}\) McCracken, *Decoding Women’s Magazines*, 161.

\(^{180}\) Ballaster et al., *Women’s world*, 130.
After Reading Commercial Fashion Magazines

Until now, we have seen how commercial fashion magazines affect the reader before and during the reading process. At this point of the analysis, I want to show how readers give meaning to their magazines after the actual reading process. Inspired by Consumer Culture Theory and drawing on the approach of Grant McCracken (1978), I focus on the question what the readers do with the magazines after the reading process. I do not only explore what meanings readers attribute to magazines after the reading, but also how the reading process has affected them.

How Magazines Are Stored

McCracken argues that the meaning of goods is in general produced by four different rituals, among them exchange and possession rituals. During my interviews, I observed mainly possession rituals in the form of preservation, which I divided into three different types. The first form I identified is to save the magazine in order to keep its content available for future re-reading.

What do you do with the magazine after you have read it?

High school students:
- I mostly keep them. I look at them again.  
- When it [the magazine] is still current then yes, but after half a year... The styles change so quickly.

University students:
- I keep them and they stay in the wardrobe. It’s a waste of space actually, but somehow I cannot throw them away.
- I keep them until I have to move. You always have in mind you could need them again.

Adults:
- Until now, I have always collected them until there was no space for them anymore. Now I start to throw them away. I’ve always had the feeling, I will have a look again and I have kept them all. But I don’t look at them anymore. And now, when I’m done with reading and I like something, then I tear it out and stick it somewhere or put it on the desk. And now I throw the rest away consequently.
- In the past, I used to give them to a friend until she told me she doesn’t need them anymore. Now, I throw them away. I collected them for some time, they piled up. That went on my nerves one day and then I threw them all away.

181 Ich behalte sie meistens. Ich schaue sie mir dann doch nochmal an.
182 Wenn sie noch aktuell ist, dann ja, aber nicht nach einem halben Jahr... Die Styles ändern sich ja so schnell.
183 Ich hebe sie auf und sie stehen bei mir im Schrank. Voll die Platzverschwendung, aber irgendwie kann ich sie halt nicht weggeschmeißen.
I collect them and then after a year I throw them away. You always think “you might have a look again”, but I don’t.\textsuperscript{187}

Ironically, readers claim that commercial fashion magazines are easily read, all the more difficult appears the separation from them afterwards. Some argue they keep them because they think they might “need” them again. After the reading process, it seems as if the readers have the feeling they have found some useful information, they could need in the future. One explanation for this might be the assumed function of this genre. Until today, commercial fashion magazines still position themselves not only as a source of inspiration, but operate as well as an advisor in lifestyle questions.\textsuperscript{188} Thus, we assume that the reader recognizes the magazine as a source of helpful advice, which would picture the reader as taking the dominant-hegemonic position according to the understanding of Hall. However, as my interviews show, most of the participants do not re-read the magazines and finally dispose them. Thus, it can be assumed that readers recognize the function of commercial fashion magazines as a lifestyle advisor, but do not, according to their preservation behaviour, re-use it as one. Therefore, I would rather argue that magazine readers take a negotiating position in the decoding process according to Hall. They recognize how the magazine itself intends to function, but do not accept this function completely.

The second form of preservation is the particular placement of magazines in order to show them off to visitors, keep them clean or to use them as a form of decoration.

*What do you do with the magazine after you have read it?*

High school students:

- I used to pile them up, every month, because it looked so nice. But some day, there were just too many so I threw them away.\textsuperscript{189}
- In my room, I have a wardrobe from IKEA and there is a drawer and that’s where I keep all of them. After a while, I throw them away, because there are too many. When I like something, I try to remember in which issue I saw it, because I think it looks stupid if you tear something out. That would disturb me.\textsuperscript{190}

University students:

- I throw away smaller papers, but I have for instance two American editions of *Vogue*, those ones I keep.\textsuperscript{191}

*What do you appreciate in print, what other fashion media cannot replace?*

- You have it then, on the web it is gone someday. And I also like to keep the magazine, because I like how it looks in the wardrobe and you can always have a look at it again.\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{187} Ich sammle sie und die stapeln sich bei mir und nach einem Jahr werfe ich sie dann weg. Man denkt immer „ach vielleicht schaust du da nochmal rein“ aber mach ich nicht.

\textsuperscript{188} Moeran, “More than just a fashion magazine,” 737–738.

\textsuperscript{189} Ich habe sie mal aufeinander gestapelt so jeden Monat, weil das so schön aussah. Aber irgendwann waren es so viele, dass ich sie weggeworfen habe.


\textsuperscript{191} Also so kleinere Blätter werfe ich weg, aber ich habe zum Beispiel zwei amerikanische *Vogue*, die hebe ich dann schon auf.

\textsuperscript{192} Du hast es dann auch, im Internet ist es dann irgendwann weg. Und ich hebe gerne die Zeitschriften auf, weil ich es schön finde, wie das dann im Schrank aussieht und du kannst immer auch reingucken oder so.
Adults:

- I collect them and then after a year I throw them away. You always think “you might have a look at it again”, but I don’t. It has a decoration effect. When it was *Vogue*, then it was on top [of the pile], so everyone could see it is *Vogue*. It happened occasionally. But I don’t do that anymore, these times are over.\(^\text{193}\)

As opposed to the statements before, here the intention of preservation is not due to a possible re-use in the future, but because “it looks nice”. Here, commercial fashion magazines operate as an object for the personalization of the reader’s home. McCracken argues that through possession rituals, which implies collecting and showing off the objects, owners claim to possess the meaning of the object, which has been given from the outside world through discourse.\(^\text{194}\)

Possession rituals allow the consumer to lay claim and assume a kind of ownership of the meaning of his or her consumer good. They help complete the second stage of the trajectory of the movement of this meaning. As we have seen, advertising agencies and the fashion world move this meaning from the culturally and historically constituted world into the goods. With their possession rituals, individuals move this meaning out of the goods into their lives.\(^\text{195}\)

Assuming that commercial fashion magazines often claim to be knowledgeable about the latest fashion trends and to operate as a style advisor, readers claim through those possession rituals to have the same features. Here, obviously the symbolic meaning of the magazine is relevant. Some university students stated to keep *Vogue*, but they would throw away “smaller” magazines. It seems that *Vogue* has successfully built up its image as the most valuable fashion magazine on the market. Thus, the meaning of the magazine, which has been given from the outside world through discourse, is transmitted to the individual reader, whose lifestyle appears consequently more fashionable. However, as my interviews also show, this effect lasts only as long as there is enough space to preserve them. Hence, magazines lose their up-to-dateness and therefore their function as lifestyle advisor. The transition of the meaning is only successful for a certain period of time and then slowly fades away until the readers decide to completely remove them from their lives. Studying niche magazines, Lynge-Jorlén (2009) makes similar observations. Her readers kept the magazine, which has high fashion status, in order to elevate their own cultural status within the field of fashion. Thus, Lynge-Jorlén concludes that through the symbolic meaning of the magazine and its physical form, readers do not only intend to elevate their own status but also to convey social distinction.\(^\text{196}\)

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\(^{194}\) McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 85.

\(^{195}\) ibid. 85–86.

The third type of preservation I noticed in my material is a mixture between possession and exchange rituals. This type of preservation was only observed during the interviews with university students.

*What do you do with the magazine after you have read it?*

University students:

- It goes into the collage box.197
- I keep them to do arts and crafts: vouchers, collages, gift paper.198
- Yes exactly, in order to stick them on boxes.199

Here, the young women clearly state the purpose of preservation, namely to separate the appealing content from the uninteresting one. Either they use this piece in order to personalize other objects, or to transmit the meanings of the magazine by individualizing vouchers or gift paper. McCracken names offering gifts specifically as an example for transmitting the meanings from objects that the giver feels related to the receiver who shall obtain the symbolic value. However, the students do not give away the whole magazine itself as a gift, but pieces of it. For this reason, this form of preservation cannot be determined completely as a possession ritual, neither as an exchange one, but rather as interface of both.

*The After-Reading Practice*

In *More than Just a Fashion Magazine* (2006), Moeran concludes that fashion magazines function as a promoter of the fashion industry to its readers.

As intermediaries between producer and consuming public, fashion magazines exist to teach the lay public why fashion should be important in their lives, what the latest trends may be, who are the names that drive them and where the clothes themselves may be purchased. In other words, they legitimate fashion and the fashion world in cultural terms.200

Nevertheless, drawing on Hall, fashion magazines can only obtain this function or rather the “meaning” if the reader puts the decoded information into any kind of practice. Otherwise, the initially encoded meaning stays meaningless, which means that fashion magazines cannot be termed a promoter of fashion consumption, if the reader’s consumption behaviour remains unaffected. For this reason, it is not enough to outline how readers purchase, read and preserve their magazines, as discussed in the previous sections, but one has to ask if there is an effect that goes beyond the sphere in which readers interact with magazines.

197 Kommt in die Collagebox.
198 Ich hebe sie auf, um zu basteln: Gutscheine, Collagen, Geschenkpapier.
199 Ja genau, um Kisten zu bekleben.
200 Moeran, “More than just a fashion magazine”, 737–738.
During the interviews, the majority of the participants stated that they do not buy commercial fashion magazines in order to get inspiration for fashion consumption. However, when they find something appealing to them during the reading process especially high school students will try to either find the same article or a more affordable copy of it.

High school student:

**Does reading commercial fashion magazines affect your consumption behaviour?**

- Not really. Sometimes, for instance when I see an expensive dress, then I might look if I find something similar to it. I wouldn’t wear the styles as they are pictured in *InStyle*. That’s too extravagant for me. I think it’s beautiful, but I would not dare to wear it. Then I’d rather wear the boring and common things.\(^{201}\)

**Do you look online if you see something you liked in the magazine?**

- So, for example I look, and then there are these *Louboutins* with this spike. I thought they looked really awesome and then I looked and saw that they were really, really expensive. And then I looked for fakes, on *Amazon*, but they had a bad review and monstrous heels, that’s why I didn’t buy them in the end.\(^{202}\)

**When and where do you read fashion magazines?**

- At home when I’m bored and I have nothing better to do. And sometimes, they put the prices on the outfits [pictured in the magazine], which you can choose from. And sometimes there are nice things and if they don’t cost like 100€, you can treat yourself.\(^{203}\)

**What do you do after you have read the magazine?**

- I go on *Zalando* or *Asos* and see if I can buy something similar.\(^{204}\)

Looking at the questions from which I gathered the material, one can clearly see that I did not necessarily have to ask the high school students directly whether they used the magazine as an inspiration for consumption or not. They mentioned it repeatedly like a natural activity throughout the whole conversation. During the reading process, the teenagers seem to compare the world pictured in the magazine to the world they live in. Seeing a pictured item which appeals to them, they will first evaluate if this item is affordable to them, and second, if it represents their lifestyle. This why high school students link the content of the magazine to their reality.

Since commercial fashion magazines tend to illustrate mainly extraordinary content rather than common objects, the desired objects fail to get into the teenagers’ reality. Instead, they will look for similar items, which then represent the interface between the magazine’s world and the reader’s


\(^{202}\) Also zum Beispiel, ich schau dann halt, da gibt’s ja diese *Louboutins* mit diesem Stachel dran. Also ich fand die sahen richtig geil aus und dann habe ich geschaut und die waren sehr, sehr teuer. Und dann habe ich nach Fakes geschaut, so auch auf *Amazon*, aber die hatten schlechte Bewertungen und so Monsterabsätze, deswegen habe ich sie mir dann nicht geholt.

\(^{203}\) Daheim wenn’s grad langweilig ist, wenn man grad nichts Gutes zu tun hat oder so was. Und manchmal stehen ja bei den Outfits ja auch die Preise da, wo man sich dann aussuchen kann und manchmal sind da ja schon manchmal schöne Sachen dabei und wenn die nicht gleich 100€ kosten oder so dann kann man sich ja auch das schon mal gönnen.

\(^{204}\) Ich schaue auf *Zalando* oder *Asos*, ob man was Besonderes nachkaufen kann.
reality. Operating as an inspiration for consumption, magazines clearly promote the fashion industry and turn into a form of fashion catalogue rather than an incentive to use your imagination.

If we assume, as stated by Moeran, that fashion magazines intend to motivate consumption and teenagers do so after the reading process, then the teenagers have adopted the dominant-hegemonic position during the decoding process. According to Hall, readers take this position when they decode the information as it was initially encoded by the producer.\(^{205}\)

However, I have to mention at this point of the analysis, that this effect is not always the rule. Other high school students stated that although they might feel inspired after the reading, they forget about the content, which means that the inspirational effect can also fade away and does not always lead to an act of shopping. Unfortunately, the interviews cannot give insights on what is happening on a subconscious level. The reading might still affect the consumption behaviour of those students who “forget” about their initial inspiration, but they are not aware of it and therefore did not discuss this behaviour in the interviews.

Having shown them the advertisement video\(^ {206}\) of the Porter magazine, the university students and adults admit to a behaviour like that of the high school students: While the high school students from the beginning stated that the magazines inspire them to consume, the other two groups said so only after the video. This video shows the print magazine Porter and the hands of a reader who scans the magazine’s editorial with an app, which then in turn enables the reader to instantly purchase what they see in the magazine. The reactions were as follows:

University students:

- It happens sometimes that I see something [in the magazine] and would like to have something similar, but then you can’t find it.\(^ {207}\)
- Yes, I think it’s nice. Is it already available? I have to try it out. I would use it for InStyle, then you could combine it with Mybestbrands – where can I get it the cheapest?\(^ {208}\)
- Practical but a bit scary.\(^ {209}\)
- It’s certainly comfortable for a lot of people. It’s a good idea but I would never use it, because I would never know if it actually fits me.\(^ {210}\)
- They combined both advantages, but then you lose the fun, because fashion is about searching and rummaging.\(^ {211}\)
- It’s also seldom that when you see something you like, it’s affordable and it’s in my size and it will suit me.\(^ {212}\)
- I never say “I want that outfit!”; but rather something similar.\(^ {213}\)
- It is always stated in the magazine where you can buy it. But then I think I can just go directly to Zalando.\(^ {214}\)

\(^{205}\) Hall “Encoding/decoding”, 136.

\(^{206}\) Youtube: “Shop direct from the pages of PORTER Magazine.” Accessed May 2, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUvx_gHfxvQ&t=1s.

\(^{207}\) Geht mir ja manchmal schon so, dass ich was sehe und dann so was Ähnliches schon gerne hätte, aber das geht ja dann nicht.

\(^{208}\) Ja find ich gut. Gibt’s das schon? Muss ich mal ausprobieren. Würde das für die InStyle schon nutzen und dann könnte man das kombinieren mit Mybestbrands – wo krieg ich es am günstigsten?

\(^{209}\) Praktisch aber schon gruselig.

\(^{210}\) Für viele Leute ist es bestimmt bequem. Also ist schon eine gute Idee, aber ich würde es nie nutzen, weil ich nie wüsste, ob es mir stehen würde.

\(^{211}\) Da wurden ja irgendwie beide Vorteile kombiniert aber da geht ja irgendwie der Spaß verloren, weil bei Mode geht es ja um das Suchen und das Stöbern.

\(^{212}\) Ist ja selten dass man auch was sieht, das einem gefällt und dann bezahlbar ist und auch in meiner Größe und steht mir.

\(^{213}\) Ich sag auch nie, genau das Outfit will ich haben, sondern man sieht ja dann so was Ähnliches.
Adults:

- That’s awesome! By the way, I think the dress that she is wearing is amazing. I like that. Yes, great. I think it’s great, really great. It would motivate me to buy a magazine. Very ingeniously made. I mean they would need to have fashion, which I wear, if they only show things like these ones, that wouldn’t be anything for me. But the dress on the cover. Awesome! Great! I would buy it immediately. And it would fit me, I know that! 215

- Hmm, so super easy to buy. You can get it easier. It’s like Shazam for fashion. The fashion magazine totally turns into a, I’d say, H&M-catalogue. I would use it. I was often in the situation that I saw something in Brigitte – unfashionable again [refers to the magazine] - and think “Wow, great! I want this absolutely!” Then you search the references for a long time. Then you find a mail-order business which can possibly ship it Then you call and they tell you: “Sorry, it was published in Brigitte and we have sold everything, call again in two years!” Something like that and then you just don’t get that thing. I think I only managed it once, a red parka, otherwise I’ve never managed to get something, which I saw in Brigitte. It would definitely be a reason to buy it [the magazine] more often. Great idea! 216

Here, even though the university students stated throughout the conversation that they do not buy the magazine with the intention to get advice or inspiration in fashion, watching the video, we can see a motivation for shopping. Compared to the teenagers, university students appear to be generally more critical towards the magazine. Although they also link the pictured world to their reality, they however conclude that the illustrations in the magazine are too unreal and can therefore not become real. Which, in turn, does not prevent them from desiring an item, which is similar to the one they saw during the reading process.

In contrast to the university students, the majority of the interviewed adults made very positive statements when watching the video. One reason for this might be that they have a greater amount of economic capital, for which reason the illustrated items in magazines are theoretically affordable for them. Thus, while teenagers and university students with a lower economic capital have to identify the overlap of their financial possibilities and their lifestyle, adults only have to evaluate if the appealing item suits their lifestyle.

However, for both groups, the effect appears to be the same. Coming back to Hall, especially university students and adults do not take the dominant-hegemonic, but rather the negotiating position. They link the magazine’s content to their world and evaluate how both realities can co-exist. Some seem to find an interface, while others finish by rejecting the idea completely.

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Short Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how readers of different age groups give meaning to commercial fashion magazines from the moment of purchase to the possible actions they take after the reading. Assuming that the raison d’être of commercial fashion magazines is to promote the fashion industry and consumption, I have analysed that readers do not take this meaning, or rather said function, into consideration until they have ended the reading process. The main purpose at the beginning, which leads to the purchase of the magazine, is to create spontaneously a cosy and relaxing situation in between every day’s obligations. I have further shown that readers very seldom take the dominant-hegemonic position but rather the negotiating one, in which they reflect to what extent the illustrated world in the magazine can co-exist with their own reality. Finally, it has been illustrated how readers can use fashion magazines as a style inspiration even if they initially did not intend to do so. Thus, commercial fashion magazines have various meanings and functions depending on the situation in which readers decode them, and this consequently confirms Grant McCracken’s assumption that the meanings of cultural goods are dynamic and changeable.217

217 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 71–72.
Analysis Part II: Print versus Digital Media

In the last two chapters of *The History of Fashion Journalism* (2017), the scholar Kate Nelson Best explains how commercial fashion magazines have lost their power since the millennial age. According to her, the technological improvements of smartphones and tablets, as well as the launch of digital platforms such as *Facebook* (2004), *Twitter* (2006) and *Instagram* (2010), have transferred the fashion industry to a public sphere. It allows people from all over the world to participate in a cultural conversation on fashion. Being free of charge, these new technologies have strengthened the consumers’ expectation to be constantly provided with new reports and images of fashion and thus, becoming a more recognized interlocutor in this global interaction.\(^{218}\)

However, Nelson Best also illustrates how traditional print fashion magazines have adopted new digital features in order to hold the competition with new social media channels, which have become the new voice of the fashion industry.\(^{219}\) Print and digital media are consequently interdependent, for which reason one cannot analyse the meaning of print without recognizing the role of digital media in the field of fashion. Thus, the meaning of commercial print fashion magazines is not exclusively determined by their physical dimension anymore, but needs to be redefined in relation to the digital sphere.

Having this interrelation in mind, I asked my participants to discuss their usage of further fashion media during the second part of my interviews. Initially, I did not put a specific emphasis on digital media, since I wanted the interviewees to discuss their personal media use besides commercial magazines. One university student mentioned niche magazines as an alternative to commercial fashion magazines. The other participants, however, instantly started to discuss their digital consumption of magazines. Therefore, I will specifically focus on the usage of digital fashion media in my analysis.

So far, the conducted interviews have shown that there are many similarities in the reading behaviour of the different age groups. However, from the moment I asked the participants to discuss further media types in the field of fashion, the statements began to clearly differ from each other. While the high school and university students stated to inform themselves about events in the fashion industry through different social networks, adults hardly used any of these. The only group that showed a high usage of this digital medium were the high school students. This was, however, not surprising, since this group was difficult to access already at the beginning of the research project. I had to contact a total of five classes of approximately 25 teenagers each. From those around 125 high school students, I only found three who stated to read print magazines more than once a month, and 12 who read them occasionally. Visiting the classes during the lessons, other students told me they did not read commercial fashion magazines simply because they instead use digital media such as *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *Snapchat* in order to inform themselves about events in the industry and the latest fashion trends. Thus, I can agree with Nelson


\(^{219}\) Ibid. 217–221.
Best that digital media have meanwhile successfully adapted features that once belonged to print fashion magazines.

**Fast Pace versus Consistency**

In her article *The Circus of Fashion*, published in 2013 in the *New York Times*, the fashion journalist Suzy Menkes problematizes the effects of digital communication about fashion and claims that “a time gap between when a small segment of fashion-conscious people pick up a trend and when it is all over the sidewalks” does no longer exist. Among other aspects, which I will come back to later in the analysis, the establishment of social platforms such as *Facebook, Instagram* and *Snapchat* has influenced the understanding of fashion within the mass media and the fashion industry. As Suzy Menkes states, the process of communicating new fashion trends has increasingly speeded up, with the consequence that fashion trends can easily spread and quickly be adapted by the mass. Furthermore, the World Wide Web enables not only fashion editors as experts of their field to contribute to the fashion image, but also laypeople, for instance in the form of bloggers or e-tailors, to participate in the creation of the fashion image.

Thus, print fashion magazines that have a time-consuming production and are exclusively made by fashion editors and advertisers have a more static image of fashion. Digital media, in contrast, represent a variety of fashion images that are extremely dynamic and fast-paced.

My interviews have shown that the constant availability of fashion images can be a blessing and curse at once. While it has the capacity to fill the consumers’ “quick need”, it can also overwhelm them during the decoding process due to its endless content.

**High school students:**

*What digital media do you use?*

- On the web or on *Instagram*, I like to look at bloggers. I think it looks cool when they put down a t-shirt together with a bag. This is also a form of inspiration.

*Which medium, print or digital, do you think is best for styling guidelines?*

- I think preferably *Instagram*, because in *InStyle* it’s about the extraordinary and celebrities again. And when I look in the morning, then I don’t want to take out a magazine, look for something and then look [at the pictures]. Then, I just use *Instagram*, because it’s available more quickly.

*What is the difference between digital and print media in the field of fashion for you?*

- The web is faster and always there.

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222 Im Internet oder auf *Instagram* schau ich mir gerne Blogger an. Ich find das sieht immer so cool aus, wenn die da ein T-Shirt hinlegen und dann noch eine Tasche. Das ist auch immer ein bisschen Inspiration.

223 Also ich glaube dann doch eher *Instagram*, weil bei der *InStyle* eher so wieder das Extravagante und Stars und so ist. Und wenn man morgens irgendwie so schaut, dann will ich nicht unbedingt eine Zeitschrift rausholen, suchen und dann schauen. Dann doch lieber *Instagram*, weil das schneller greifbar ist.
There are videos on Instagram with explanations. In a magazine, you may not always understand them. You can view Instagram more quickly. Everything is more quickly there. A fashion magazine, you need to buy first.

Here we see three different reasons for using digital fashion media according to the high school students. First, images in digital media, as for instance on Instagram, are recognized as appealing and have therefore an inspirational effect on the consumer. Second, digital media enable the consumer to obtain the required information faster. For a quick styling idea, students would rather look it up on the web than in a print magazine whose decoding process requires more time and whose content is more fixed. In order to look something up on the Internet, however, the consumer must know what he or she is looking for beforehand. Hence, getting precise information from the Internet only functions when you know what you are looking for. Third, audio-visual representation appears to be more comprehensible for the students than reading a text in a magazine. In fact, the teenagers occasionally mentioned that they read a print fashion magazine with more concentration in comparison to digital platforms. Furthermore, during the interviews with the high school students, it was extremely challenging to understand in which context they use platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. When I asked them when and which websites or applications they usually use, their responses remained quite vague. Often they answered “Always” followed by an uncertain “I don’t know”. Hence, I conclude that the decoding process of digital media does not happen as conscious as reading print magazines. This does not mean that the readers do not make meaning of it. Nevertheless, with a strong focus on the use of print fashion magazines, my material only provides an incomplete picture of the meaning of digital fashion media.

University students:

*Which media influence your consumption the most?*

- Online.
- It’s always there, on the web. It also fades in.
- I don’t have the time to always say: “So now I sit down and read a magazine.” Online is just easier and quicker.

*When, where and why do you use digital media?*

- I use InStyle to come down and to relax, and the other things [Instagram and Blogs] more like here and there, when I don’t feel like studying. It’s a distraction for two minutes. In the morning when I don’t want to get up, then I look there [on Instagram]. When I really sit down, then I read the magazine. Instagram is a pastime.

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224 Internet ist schneller und immer da.
225 Bei Instagram gibt’s ja auch mehr Videos mit Erklärungen, in einer Zeitschrift versteht man die vielleicht nicht immer.
227 Im Internet ist es ja immer da. Es wird immer eingeblendet.
228 Ich habe auch nicht immer die Zeit zu sagen, so jetzt setze ich mich hin und lese Zeitschriften. Online geht es da halt viel leichter und schneller.
- I often look on Instagram and Pinterest, then I quickly scroll down and when I’m annoyed I just log off. In the case of a magazine, I have to think: „ok, do I want to spend 5€ on something which doesn’t only have pictures, but also this whole other stuff, do I really read this? 230

What is the difference between Instagram and InStyle for you?

- You have personalised topics for yourself, which only you like. With Instagram or Flipboard, you can filter stuff out. That’s the difference, you can personalise it.231

Adults:

What’s the difference between digital and print media in the field of fashion for you?

- When it needs to be quick or I need an idea, then I have a look in the New York Times.232
- [On] the web, specific companies. I often go on the Gastra site for example, because I can’t find it in the shops.233
- If I look for something specific. For instance, I want to make a chocolate cake for work. I type it in and I have immediately 200 cakes on one page. To look in a magazine for it would be too annoying. And there I can just pick one. I use Pinterest for specific reasons. Or on Zalando I have a page, on which they show me what my style is. I target something and use it for specific reasons.234

The sociologist Agnès Rocamora, claims in her article Hypertextuality and Remediation in the Fashion Media (2012) that the reading experience of fashion magazines is limited to the pages of the magazine itself, while in the blog sphere, the reading experience is never-ending. With the World Wide Web, readers get offered a variety of texts, while with print magazines the reader can only access what is printed in the magazine.235 Similar to the high school students, university students and adults appreciate the digital media use because within a short time, it provides them with the information they have been looking for. In addition, the participants have the perception that they have more control over their digital media consumption. According to them, digital media enable them to log off anytime they want and, furthermore, to select content, which is impossible while reading a print fashion magazine. However, in my interviews it was difficult to discuss their digital media consumption in as much depth as their consumption of print. Some students occasionally stated they did not remember who they follow on Instagram or what kinds of information they extract from which digital platform. The adults always named a clear reason for using digital media, as for instance e-shopping, but both student groups were vague in their reasoning. Although both groups claimed to use digital

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229 Also Instyle mach ich so zum runterkommen oder chillen und das andere halt mal zwischen durch, wenn ich keine Lust habe zu lernen, so als Ablenkung mal zwei Minuten. Morgens wenn ich aufstehen muss, aber keine Lust habe aufzustehen, dann ja guck ich da. Wenn ich mich richtig hinsetze, dann lese ich die Zeitschrift. Instagram ist ein Zeitvertreib.

230 Ich schaue halt auch ganz viel auf Instagram oder Pinterest, dann scroll ich schnell und wenn’s mich nervt, gehe ich wieder raus. Bei einer Zeitschrift muss ich überlegen „ok, will ich jetzt dafür 5 Euro ausgeben und dann gibt’s ja nicht nur die Bilder, sondern diesen ganzen Schnick-Schnack drum herum und lese ich die dann wirklich?“

231 Du hast für dich personalisierte Themen, Sachen die nur dir gefallen. In der InStyle hast du halt alles und bei Instagram oder Flipboard kannst du das halt filtern. Das ist einfach der Unterschied, es ist personalisierbar.


234 Rocamora, “Hypertextuality and Remediation in the fashion media,” 95.
media only for a very short period of time during the day, this activity is repeated quite often. Thus, the question, whether the participants are as much in control of their digital consumption as they think they are, remains open.

Generally, it can be stated here that the participants did not question the content of print magazines in comparison to digital fashion media, but rather the practicality of print media. Through their digital corpus, social platforms, like Instagram or Facebook, make it easier for consumers to get the information when they want to get it. Hence, in contrast to print magazines, which are used to construct a specific atmosphere, the use of digital media is directed to specific information the consumer wants to acquire. I further noticed during my interviews that no participant mentioned the use of digital media as a means of “fashioning” themselves as discussed by Rocamora in her article *Mediatisation and Digital Media in the Field of Fashion* (2016).¹²³ Hence, it appears that digital media are not necessarily only used because of their more democratic approach to fashion, but also for their practicality and constant availability during everyday situations.

As I have already stated, consumers have to know what they are looking for in advance to use digital platforms efficiently. However, this is not always the case and so the advantages of digital media use reach their limits. As Lynge-Jørlén argues in her study *Between Edge and Elite: Niche Fashion Magazines, Producers and Readers* (2009), print is especially valued for its clear layout:

High school students:

*What is special about print fashion magazines?*

- Well, on the web everything is so much, there is everything. And in a magazine, you have things you are really interested in and nothing else. You cannot read everything on the web.²³⁷
- I think that on Facebook to find things again [is difficult] and with a magazine you have everything in one spot. When you have it in your hand, then you really have it and you can always look for it. On the web, things can be deleted so quickly.²³⁸
- I think, it’s more comfortable. You can always leaf through it again quickly, and the other thing [technology] sometimes doesn’t work.²³⁹
- It’s easier to get an overview.²⁴⁰
- On Instagram, you only see what it looks like and maybe a small text and then nothing else, for more you need to go on the homepage and blablabla and in magazines, everything is more clearly arranged.²⁴¹

*During a discussion whether digital media can replace print:*

- I could go without magazines.²⁴²
- I couldn’t. I always buy one for when there is a new season, to look what is coming. But I don’t need any in the middle of the year.²⁴³

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¹²³ Rocamora, “Mediatisation and Digital Media in the Field of Fashion,” 12–14.
²³⁷ Ja ich finde im Internet ist es halt so viel, da kommt halt wirklich alles. Und bei den Zeitschriften, da sind es wirklich nur die Themen, die einen ansprechen und man hat nicht alles Mögliche. Im Internet kann man dann gar nicht alles lesen.
²³⁸ Ich finde es halt [schwierig], gerade so bei Facebook es wiederzufinden und bei Zeitschriften hat man das alles auf einem Fleck und wenn man es in der Hand hat, dann hat man es auch wirklich und kann später immer noch suchen. Im Internet kann das ja schnell wieder weg sein.
²⁴⁰ Es ist übersichtlicher.
²⁴¹ Also bei Instagram, da sieht man ja nur wie es aussieht und vielleicht noch einen kleinen Text, sonst fast gar nichts, für mehr muss man dann auf die Homepage und blablabla und ich finde in Modezeitschriften ist das alles übersichtlicher.
²⁴² Ich könnte auf Zeitschriften verzichten.
University students:

What is special about print fashion magazines?

- It’s a different overview. Not only with fashion stuff, but generally when something is properly listed. You have it on one page. Of course, someone did a pre-selection, but scrolling and this back and forth... [Print] is just more structured. 244

Adults:

Which digital fashion media do you use?

- Television or a blog, or a company, which I specifically look at. I know a brand usually from print media, or my daughter told me about it. I know the blog as well from the magazine. 245

Here, university students and adults made very similar statements. According to all three groups, print fashion magazines appear to give a more precise idea of new fashion cycles. The participants stated to “find everything and nothing”, which makes it difficult for them to recognize new trends. A print fashion magazine, however, is limited in its pages and therefore also limited in its content. Messages in print are more to the point and well-matched. According to the participants, print media might require a stronger focus to be decoded, but it guides the reader through one topic and does not overload them with information. Once, however, the new trend or image has been recognized, especially high school students stated they would go back to digital media, since, as I have discussed before, they are more practical. Thus, print magazines do not only function as an orientation for new fashion trends, but also guide readers in their digital media use. Reading print magazines, therefore, facilitates to surf the digital fashion landscape.

At this point of the analysis, I want to clarify that the use of digital and print media is not exclusively dependent on their cultural and symbolic value or on their content, but also their corpus which affects the reading process. As Rocamora illustrates and claims in How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs (2013), new (digital) and old (print) media do not always “exclude each other, but feed into each other.” 246 Both types of media have advantages and disadvantages, and thus complement each other.

243 Ich nicht so. Ich kaufe mir immer zum Saisonwechsel eine, um zu sehen, was jetzt kommt. Aber so mitten im Jahr brauch ich das nicht.
244 Es ist halt ein anderer Überblick. Es geht mir jetzt nicht nur bei Modesachen so, sondern überhaupt, wenn irgendwas halt schön aufgelistet ist. Das hat man halt auf einer Seite, natürlich hat da jemand schon eine Auswahl gemacht, aber dieses Scrollen oder hin und her klicken... Das ist einfach für mich übersichtlicher.
246 Rocamora, “How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs,” 162.
The Real versus the Particular

In my interviews with high school and university students, all participants claimed to use more digital fashion media than print fashion media. As I discussed in the last sub-chapter, one reason for this are the advantages of digital media – their constant and cost-free availability – which is not given in print. Nevertheless, the digital practicality is not the only reason. My interviews have shown that participants who are quite active on social media experience the represented world as more “real” than the images illustrated in print magazines.

Which medium has more validity?

High school students:

- What you see on the web is more real in a way. In a magazine, everything is more staged.247
- And bloggers on Snapchat, they do not only film when they are at the Fashion Week, but also everyday things and this just seems to be more real than a magazine, and she [the model] gets her make-up prepared for six hours and 100 of people staying behind the camera and then this perfect light.248

University students:

- For me, Instagram has more validity, because there I can see that people actually wear those things. In a magazine, things are often far-fetched.249

Here we can see that the students can personally relate to the presentations on the Internet, while illustrations in magazines appear unrealistic. By stating “but [the bloggers film] also everyday things” or “I can see that people actually wear those things”, the students show that they link the visual and audio-visual representations, here especially seen on Instagram, to their own experienced world. As a consequence, presentations seen in digital media seem to be more realistic, while meanings of printed illustrations are not as easily transferable to the real world.

In contrast to print media, digital media allow producers and consumers to share a presence in the same sphere. In Mediatization and Digital Media in the Field of Fashion (2016), Rocamora argues that fashion practice is also digital practice. Social media like Instagram have not only enabled producers to connect directly with the consumer and enhance the shopping experience, but they also enable the consumer to expose his or her “fashionable” self.250 As Rocamora states:

“Camera phones have become part of the “texture” of everyday life and point to the normalizing of “certain expectations of positionality and regularity with regards to media practices” (Jansson 2015, 21), and, one can add, to attendant practices of the self, such as beauty rituals.”251

247 Schon das, was man so im Netz sieht, das ist irgendwie realer. Und bei einer Zeitschrift ist ja eher mehr alles inszeniert.
248 Auch Blogger auf Snapchat, die filmen ja nicht nur wenn sie auf der Fashion Week sind, sondern auch so alltägliche Sachen und es ist irgendwie realer, als wenn man die Zeitschrift liest und die davor sechs Stunden in der Maske saßen oder 100 Leute hinter der Kamera stehen und dann dieses perfekte Licht.
249 Also für mich hat Instagram zum Beispiel mehr Gültigkeit, weil ich ja sehe, das haben die Leute tatsächlich an. In einer Zeitschrift ist da so weit hergeholt.
251 Ibid. 14.
Thus, in social media, where images of everyday life and the unreachable fashion industry share the same “space”, fashion and lifestyle in digital media become deceptively real. Nevertheless, “more real” is not the adequate term, but rather “more authentic”. Authenticity is a complex term, which has no universal definition. In order to provide a general understanding, however, it can be stated that “authenticity broadly refers to what is genuine, real and true.”

Authenticity is, as the scholars in Marketing and Public Relations, Christine M. Kowalczyk and Kathrynn R. Pounders illustrate in *Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment* (2016), not factual but also socially constructed by those who produce and experience authenticity. As furthermore both authors argue consumers are co-creators of what is perceived as authentic. Representations in both digital and print media cannot be real, since they are not a lived experience but a representation of a lived experience in the form of videos or images transmitted through media.

As Nelson Best explains in *The History of Fashion Journalism* (2017), however, in contrast to print fashion magazines, which approach fashion and lifestyle in a more decent manner, bloggers have been perceived as “warriors” fighting against authoritarian traditional media in the field of fashion. Their idea of fashion and lifestyle is closer to the consumer’s everyday life and less sophisticated, which in turn also strengthens the sympathy of their followers. The key word here is authenticity and how it is socially constructed by readers. Authentic representations of fashion and lifestyle are not more or less authentic, but they are perceived as such.

In contrast to the interviews with both student groups, adults were not able to relate to digital media the same way. Most of them only use digital media in the form of e-commerce. Others also stated to use Pinterest when they need, for instance, for a quick idea of how to combine the colour of the new winter sweater. Thus, in contrast to both student groups, adults enter the digital sphere with a specific purpose.

Adults:

> *What’s the difference between digital and print media for you?*

- I can’t find fashion on an iPad or computer.
- Yes, it’s too short-lived. I look at it and then it’s gone.
- It has a different value.
- My son, 12 years old, he takes his mobile phone and takes a picture here, takes a picture there. I use my phone to call someone, that’s it!

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252 Kowalczyk and Pounders, “Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment,” 349.
253 Ibid.
255 Also ich finde Mode nicht in einem iPad oder vor dem Rechner!
256 Ja, das ist doch viel zu kurzlebig. Ich schaue es mir an und dann ist es wieder weg.
257 Das hat einen anderen Stellenwert.
258 Mein Sohn, 12 Jahre, der zückt immer das Handy und zack ein Foto hier, ein Foto da. Ich nehme das Handy zum Telefonieren. Das war’s!
Unfortunately, my interviews do not specifically show why adults argue the way they did during our conversation. It can be assumed, however, that while high school students have never experienced a non-digital world and university students have grown up with the “new” media in early times of their socialization, adults have been obligated to leave their “old” habits and adapt drastically to the new technological developments.

Nevertheless, as my interviews show, the value of digital media has an indirect impact on the meaning of print media. While digital media are perceived as more authentic, given their constant availability and their representation of everyday life situations, print fashion magazines have been designated as more “special” in terms of “more exclusive” than digital media.

High school students:

*What is the difference between InStyle and Instagram for you?*

- *InStyle* is something special. On *Instagram*, things are soon gone again and you don’t find them so easily and with *InStyle*, you can easily open the magazine again and there you have it. 263

*What is so special about print magazines?*

- I think it’s more comfortable when you have a magazine in your hands. That’s right. Your mobile phone is always in your hand. 264
- Yes, you can always look on your phone. A magazine has to be bought first and then you look at it, and that is something special because you don’t have it all the time. And you also need more time to read it than something on *Snapchat*. 265
- You don’t have it with you all the time, but when you have it, you have it. You can always read through it again. It’s nothing you could wear on the street, but it’s still a kind of inspiration and it looks more aesthetic. 266

259 Wenn ich wirklich wissen will, was gerade Mode ist, dann schaue ich auf die *NY-Times* auf Style. Da gibt’s wirklich tolle Sachen da drauf, Designers und Styling-Tipps. Die Onlineseite ist für mich sehr schlecht gemacht. Also wenn es schnell gehen muss und ich brauche eine Anregung oder eine Idee, dann guck ich dafür auf *NY-Times*.

260 Manchmal kann ich die Sachen gar nicht bedienen. Das regt mich so auf.

261 Ja, auf dem Handy kann ich doch gar nicht beurteilen, ist es ein gutes Foto, ist es eine gute Farbe usw. Also für die Beurteilung von Mode, Ästhetik, Farbe, was weiß ich, brauchst du das gedruckte Ergebnis, weil das ist formiert und normiert. Und auf jedem elektronischen Gerät sehen doch die Farben anders aus.


263 Also die *InStyle* ist aber auch was Besonderes. Auf *Instagram* ist ja bald wieder alles weg und man findet es nicht mehr so schnell und bei *InStyle*, da kann man die Zeitschrift einfach wieder aufschlagen und da hat man es wieder.

264 Also ich finde es schon angenehmer, wenn man eine Zeitung in der Hand hat. Das stimmt schon. Das Handy hat man ja immer in der Hand.

265 Ja, auf dem Handy kann man immer schauen. Eine Zeitschrift muss man sich erst kaufen und dann schaut man da rein, weil ist ja schon was Besonderes, weil man die dann eben nicht immer hat. Und dann braucht man ja auch mal mehr Zeit was zu lesen als jetzt bei *Snapchat*. 54
- It’s like a small book; it’s just something special.267

University students:

What is so special about print magazines?

- On the web, I have everything and simultaneously nothing. I have the feeling that I actually do something [when reading magazines]. It’s not like this with the mobile phone.268
- Indeed, reading magazines is a more legitimized activity than looking at your phone.269

Here we observe a kind of enhanced appreciation of print magazines. In comparison to digital media, print media are usually only accessible through stores that sell them. In addition, as I have discussed in the previous chapters, print fashion magazines are placed in a specific context in daily life, which enforces the meaning and value of each magazine. Digital media, in contrast, are as the participants stated “always available” and consequently not necessarily attached to a specific daily situation or context, which would make their use more meaningful. Nevertheless, since this analysis is based on Hall’s concept that argues that every kind of decoding process is meaningful, I do not want to conclude that digital media are in general meaningless. It appears that print media obtain their value through an occasional use, while digital media do through their daily use and, consequently, common use. Thus, coming back to Rocamora’s article How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs (2013), in which she argues that blogs and print magazines complement rather than exclude each other270, it can be stated that the meaning of digital use enhances the value of print fashion magazines and vice versa.

In the case of adults, the meaning of digital and print media does not collide with each other. Each medium has its specific purpose. Digital media are used either to shop or to get precise information, while a magazine is perceived as the kind of medium that guides and inspires the reader in fashion and lifestyle questions. For them, both meanings operate in two different spheres and are not interleaved with each other as it is the case with both student groups.

Professionality

Up to this point, it has been shown that digital media are used because they are more practical, they provide precise information, when you know what you are looking for, and represent the consumers’ reality in a more authentic way than print media do. Magazines, in contrast, are used as an orientation through the digital landscape and are perceived as more extraordinary than the “common” digital platforms. Hence, when I asked the participants which medium has more validity, especially high school and univer-

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266 Man hat sie halt nicht immer dabei, aber wenn man sie hat, dann ist sie halt da. Man kann ja immer mal wieder drin blättern. Ist jetzt nichts, was man auf der Straße anziehen kann, aber ist ja schon irgendwie eine Inspiration und sieht halt ästhetischer aus.

267 Ist ja wie ein kleines Buch, ist ja dann einfach was Besonderes.

268 Im Internet hab ich alles und dann gleichzeitig wieder nichts. Ich habe auch mehr das Gefühl, man macht tatsächlich was. Das ist ja beim Handy nicht so.

269 Ja, Zeitschriften zu lesen ist tatsächlich eine legitimere Beschäftigung als am Handy zu sein.

270 Rocamora, “How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs”, 162.
sity students related to digital media due to their more realistic presentation of fashion. However, when I asked which type of medium has more authority or respectively value, all three groups related to print.

High school students:

What has more authority for you, InStyle or Instagram?

- InStyle has more authority, because there are only selected items in it.271

Do you think that digital media can replace print?

- No! I feel bored by Instagram, a magazine entertains me more. I think everything looks the same on Instagram, and in Cosmo, I have more diversity. You really get the feeling that people [editors] think about what they are doing and on the web, they just copy something.272

What has more authority according to you?

- The magazine has more authority for me. In a magazine, you have editors who proofread everything and on Snapchat it’s only a person who shows his or her thoughts.273
- There is more effort behind a print fashion magazine, I respect that more, and it’s like the newspapers. Instagram is very, very easy to use, that’s why a magazine is more professional. A blogger is just a person, and a magazine a whole team.274

In this interview group, print magazines appear more impressive because they are produced in a context, to which the reader cannot relate. The production of a magazine happens in a sphere unknown to the consumer. Bloggers and followers, however, share the same sphere in order to connect with each other. Consequently, the individual follower can, as an example, imagine how a blogger took a picture and posted it. The production of an editorial and of the complete magazine, in contrast, remains a mystery to the reader. What they see is only the end product and they believe that there is more effort and more expert knowledge needed for creating a print magazine than a digital blog. Thus, a selected team of people, presenting selected fashion items, reinforces the idea that print is more expressive and more authoritarian.

University students:

Which kind of medium has more authority?

- Still print media. I just can take it more seriously, because I have it in my hands. When it’s printed, then you cannot simply delete it. You see the process. They [the editors] have to be sure what they are talking about.275
- A magazine has more authority for me. It always depends, of course. As far as fashion is concerned, absolutely, because bloggers only wear what they get as presents, or because they have to wear it. That’s why I think InStyle has more, I don’t know, charm? Right, more professionality than a blogger.276

271 Also InStyle hat mehr Autorität, da sind ja nur ausgewählte Sachen drin.
272 Nein! Instagram da fühle ich mich eher gelangweilt, eine Zeitschrift unterhält mich viel eher. Ich finde bei Instagram sieht immer alles gleich aus und bei Cosmo hab ich mal eine Abwechslung. Man hat auch das Gefühl, die Leute machen sich noch wirklich Gedanken bei dem, was sie machen, und im Internet, ja sie machen halt irgendwas nach.
275 Immer noch Printmedien. Ich kann es einfach ernster nehmen, weil man es in der Hand hat. Wenn was gedruckt ist, dann kann es nicht direkt gelöscht werden. Man sieht den Prozess. Die müssen sich schon sicher sein, was sie da sagen.
University students have the tendency to reason their opinion referring to the materiality of a magazine. Rather than speaking of “authority”, the students used the term “value”. Hence, the materiality gives the magazine a certain meaning in terms of value, which in turn, strengthens its “presence” or rather its “existence”. In the first chapter, I have shown how meanings and values of objects are constructed through rituals, drawing on McCracken’s theory (1988). This theory is not easily applicable to digital media, however, because they are simply not materialistic. It seems that the value of print media is not constructed in the same way as that of digital media, even though they are used for the same reason – the interest in fashion and lifestyle. Furthermore, in comparison to digital media, the construction of materialistic value appears to consolidate itself stronger.

Adults:

Which medium has more authority or value according to you?

- The magazine. They distinguish themselves because they are completed, they have a name, they have existed for a certain time and have a style. That’s how you get an impression. And on the web, I have the impression you have a thing here, you have a thing there.\(^{278}\)
- Difficult. Sometimes, when I looked for something on the web, it wasn’t as good as it had been presented. Sometimes, it’s also the other way around.\(^{279}\)
- It [the magazine] has literally a different value.\(^{280}\)
- A magazine is still more professional and relevant. Those are people who learned journalism and journalism has its rules, as tailoring has its rules.\(^{281}\)

Here, print is perceived as more valuable for different reasons. First, because adults recognize the magazine as an established brand, which “has a name and a style”; second, because they perceive journalism in print as a serious profession. The term “brand” is usually understood in relation to retailers. As the Business and Cultural Branding scholar Douglas B. Holt illustrates in his book How Brands Become Icons:


\(^{278}\) Die Zeitschrift. Die bekennen sich dadurch, dass sie abgeschlossen sind, einen Namen haben, so und so lange schon bestehen, den Stil haben. Dadurch hat man einen Eindruck und im Internet habe ich so das Gefühl, ist es so hier ein Ding, da ein Ding.

\(^{279}\) Schwierig, manchmal wenn ich es dann im Internet gesucht habe, war es dann doch nicht so toll wie es da präsentiert wird. Manchmal ists auch umgekehrt.

\(^{280}\) Es hat einen anderen Stellenwert. Im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes.

\(^{281}\) Eine Zeitschrift ist immer noch professioneller und auf Relevanz gemacht! Das sind noch Leute, die haben Journalismus gelernt, und Journalismus hat noch seine gewissen Regeln, wie Schneiderm seine Regeln hat.
The Principles of Cultural Branding (2004), a brand is usually understood as a company with a certain identity, which implements symbols of its identity in the products it fabricates. A magazine is a product made by the publisher – the company. In the consumer’s mind, however, the magazine is a product and company at the same time, which consequently strengthens the identity of the magazine.

**Short Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have mostly referred to the findings of Rocamora in *How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs* (2013), in which she claims that digital and print media complement, rather than exclude each other. My aim has been to show that print and digital media do not only complement each other, but that they also influence each other’s meaning. While digital media are free of charge, a more authentic representation of reality and overused, print magazines appear to be more extraordinary, special and the representation of thorough journalistic work. In addition, the materiality of the magazine appears to strengthen and maintain the value of the medium. Hereby, I have shown that fashion magazines do not obtain their value exclusively through their use, but also through the use of other (digital) media with similar content.

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283 Rocamora, “*How new are new media? The case of fashion blogs*”, 155–162.
Analysis Part III: Fashion Magazines beyond the Reading Experience

Since I did not target a specific magazine readership for this study, I aimed to find people with similar lifestyles from different age groups. According to Bourdieu, lifestyles are composed through the amount and composition of different types of capital\textsuperscript{284} an individual has. The most relevant determiners of lifestyle are cultural and economic capital.\textsuperscript{285}

Individuals obtain their cultural capital via their socialization, which means through family, friends and all the members of the social class they share. Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, then fortify the socialization process.\textsuperscript{286} Thus, lifestyles are a reflection of taste, and taste becomes visible through the individual’s consumption of goods, which represent a certain status\textsuperscript{287} in society.\textsuperscript{288}

As Bourdieu illustrates in *The Forms of Capital* (1986), although cultural and economic capital refer to two different life “sectors”, they are (but not always have to be) interrelated. For instance, a high amount of cultural capital can permit an individual to enter the labour market and increase their economic capital. A high economic capital can provide a higher cultural capital by allowing to be able to afford good education, or it enables the individual to use the time for socializing with other individuals, which can also be a form of acquiring cultural capital.\textsuperscript{289}

For my study, I selected my participants based on their age, which is also related to their economic capital, and based on their cultural capital, by accessing them through their educational institution – the high school (Gymnasium) and university – and by asking the participants themselves to contact people from their network. Moreover, except for one person, all adults had an academic background. Thus, all participants in my research were either on their way to obtain or had already obtained a type of knowledge which according to Bourdieu is related to legitimate culture and consequently, the dominant one. Thus, I claim to have chosen participants from a similar social group, rather than from the same class, since due to their differences in age, they have different economic resources and the economic capital together with the cultural capital are the most important means to practice “high” culture.

Since the participants come from similar social groups, they also share a similar habitus, which is according to Bourdieu a reflection of the individual’s habits, attitudes, opinions and perceptions, which

\textsuperscript{284} There are four different types of capital: The cultural capital, which represents education; the social capital, which represents the interaction an individual has with others; the economic capital, which represents the financial status; and the symbolic capital, which represents the reputation awarded by others [Bourdieu 1987: 17].

\textsuperscript{285} Trigg, “Veblen, Bourdieu and Conspicuous Consumption,” 110.

\textsuperscript{286} Allen and Anderson, “Consumption and Social Stratification: Bourdieu’s Distinction,” 70.

\textsuperscript{287} Bourdieu differentiates here between legitimate, middlebrow and popular culture. The legitimate culture, as for instance theatre, academic books, art etc., is the dominant culture. Therefore, he perceives the realm of consumption as a field of struggle. People who have a large amount of cultural capital and economic capital are dominant and guarantee that the hierarchy of cultures, from the “legitimate” to the “illegitimate”, is maintained [Allen and Anderson, 1994: 70–71].

\textsuperscript{288} Allen and Anderson, “Consumption and Social Stratification: Bourdieu’s Distinction,” 70.

\textsuperscript{289} Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capitals,” 89–90.
are acquired through experience. The habitus is, however, conditioned by the norms of the social group the individual feels affiliated to.²⁹⁰

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate what meanings readers attribute to commercial fashion magazines through their habitus. By doing so, I do not intend to analyse how readers create meaning during the decoding, or rather, reading process, as I did in the first chapter, but to consider, how readers evaluate this media genre beyond the sphere of interaction.

The very controversial and contrary statements in the interviews constitute the challenge in understanding my material. While at one moment, the interviewees described how they can appreciate commercial fashion magazines, at another moment they would be extremely critical towards them. Thus, I conclude following this observation that the meaning of commercial fashion magazines is not only created in a sphere in which the reader interacts with it, but also beyond the reading experience.

Fashion Magazines and the Reader’s Cultural Capital

In her text Teenage girls reading ‘Jackie’ (1987), Frazer intended to break the prejudice in academia that magazine readers are passive and naïve. Interviewing teenage girls on the magazine Jackie, Frazer illustrates how readers are able to reflect critically on the content of a magazine. However, Frazer used an approach in her methodological procedure that has to be critically judged. Before conducting the interviews, she had a dozen of sessions in which the girls were motivated to discuss concepts such as gender, femininity and stereotypes. In doing so, Frazer strongly influenced the girls’ reflection on Jackie and consequently her empirical findings.²⁹¹

In my study, I did not brief the participants as Frazer did in her study. Before the interviews, my participants only knew that I was interested in their reading behaviour. Although I tried to ask mainly “positive” questions, such as what they like about magazines, especially university students had the tendency to critically discuss fashion magazines. At some points, the discussions became so critical and negative that I feared the participants’ critical thinking would overshadow the reasons why they nevertheless read fashion magazines. Consequently, in some situations, I was forced to remind them to also tell me why they appreciate magazines, rather than why they find certain aspects negative.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 71.
University students:

Some aspects from the discussion on why they like commercial fashion magazines and how they read them:

- I really like InStyle and Intouch Style, but some of the texts are terrible, really dumbly written. But for the most part I don’t read them for the texts, but for the pictures and then I have a look at how other people combine items of clothing.

- Yes, I sometimes read InStyle and Joy. And yes, what I find most appealing is just flicking through and the pictures and what the layout looks like. But I read only very few interviews or very few other things, because they are really relatively… well, they are not profoundly touching.

- Magazines like Joy and Elle are stigmatized. Yeah, a typical superficial women’s magazine. I would not be embarrassed to read it somewhere, but there is a stigma attached to it.

- I think it’s a bit like watching trash TV. Because you watch it with ironic distance. “Haha, I’m not like that” but you watch it and afterwards you talk about it.

- What I find annoying is when they present a star’s look and I remember that’s what she wore two years ago, but they sell it to me as in fashion. Then you realize what nonsense they spread.

- I find it annoying when I read something and I think it’s the text of the magazine and then it turns out to be an ad. I actually realize that and this makes the experience of reading more negative.

- So, if I don’t want anything lowbrow, then I grab a book rather than a magazine.

Would you miss a commercial fashion magazine if there was only ‘Flow’ on the market?

- No, [errr] or rather, this is that trash thinking. Because when I buy these magazines for 2€, actually there is nothing in them, for me they have no content. And afterwards I just throw them away.

Here, we see two different types of reasoning why reading commercial fashion magazines can also be a “negative” experience. Some participants report a negative experience which occurs during the reading process. For instance, they do not read texts in magazines because they seem very badly written. In order to make this judgment, the reader must first decode the message. Here, once again, it becomes clear that the reader takes a negotiating position according to Hall’s approach of Encoding/decoding (1996 [1980]). They look through the encoded messages and evaluate them critically. However, this does not stop them from continuing to read them.

The other form of reasoning is not related to the reading experience itself, but a thought or rather, as the participants call it, the “trash-thinking”. Here participants differentiate between legitimate, “non-trashy” culture and illegitimate, “trashy” culture to which commercial fashion magazines belong. According to Bourdieu,

292 Ich mag die InStyle und Intouch Style sehr gerne, aber die Texte sind ja zum Teil echt furchtbar, also richtig dumm geschrieben. Aber ich lese die hauptsächlich nicht wegen den Texten, sondern wegen den Bildern und dann schaue ich halt, wie andere was kombinieren.

293 Ja, ich lese auch schon mal InStyle und Joy. Und ja, was mich an denen am meisten anspricht, ist das Durchblättern und die Bilder und wie das Layout so ist. Aber lese mir jetzt wenig Interviews oder die wenigsten Sachen durch, weil das ist wirklich schon relativ..., naja, weil sie einen nicht tiefer bewegen.

294 So Zeitschriften wie Joy und Elle sind halt auch schon vorbelastest. Ja, typische oberflächliche Frauenzeitschrift. Es wäre mir jetzt nicht peinlich sie irgendwo zu lesen, aber es hat schon ein Stigma.

295 Ich glaube, es ist so ein bisschen wie Trash-TV schauen. Weil man schaut sich das ja so mit ironischer Distanz an. „Haha, so bin ich ja nicht“ aber man schaut es sich an und dann redet man ja darüber.

296 Was mich nervt ist, wenn sie einen Star-Look präsentieren, ich mich erinnere, das hatte sie vor 2 Jahren an, die verkaufen mir das aber als total in. Dann merkt man, was die für einen Schwachsinn verbreiten.


298 Also wenn ich nichts Flaches will, dann greife ich eher zum Buch und nicht zur Zeitschrift.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which [...] confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.300

Thus, cultural capital is not acquired through a specific amount of properties. *Embodied, objectified* and *institutionalized* states contain cultural capital. The question is how high or low this cultural capital is.301 I previously argued that my participants were either in the process of gaining or had already gained a high amount of cultural capital. Relating to their statements, from their perspective commercial fashion magazines, as in an objectified state, have a low cultural capital. Furthermore, objects or works which are popularized, as for instance commercial fashion magazines, are, according to Bourdieu, a representation of popular taste.302 Hence, this genre of magazine is categorized under popular culture and is therefore not representative of high culture. Consequently, my participants also adopted a degrading manner of discussing commercial fashion magazines, because they do not represent the amount of cultural capital they are aspiring to.

Here the data becomes extremely contradictory. In the first chapter, I argued that readers appreciate commercial fashion magazines because of the simplicity, or rather, because they belong to popular culture and require low cultural capital to be decoded. However, as also argued by Bourdieu, consumed goods and their value also represent the owner’s lifestyle and status in society. Then, however, readers distance themselves from commercial fashion magazines. While reading commercial fashion magazines appears to be a legitimate practice at the beginning, it turns into an illegitimate one.

A situation while interviewing a group of adults showed the extent to which reading magazines can appear as a “wrong” activity. One participant303 in the adult group claimed at the beginning of the interview to not read commercial fashion magazines. However, during the discussion, she appeared to be quite familiar with the reading experience and even stated at a later point of the conversation that she bought commercial fashion magazines, especially when she was on a train journey, which due to her job happened occasionally. She was knowledgeable about designer names in the industry and developed strong opinions during the discussion.

300 Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capitals,” 82.
301 Parker “Towards a definition of popular culture,” 161.
302 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16.
303 This person was not invited to the interview by myself personally but by a friend, who perceived her as a magazine reader.
Adults:

A discussion on what they appreciate about commercial fashion magazines, which then turned into a specific discussion of Vogue:

- That editor-in-chief of Vogue dictates what fashion is and I’m not going to take that from that lady! She herself does not have a clue about fashion, she doesn’t know how to sew. She has had the same look for decades and always wears the same bowl cut. There is nothing fashionable about that lady except for the expensive clothes she wears because she got them as a present and the fact that she looks like a stick. She is almost the same age as me and she looks as if she was about to drop.304

- And she has to be everywhere, otherwise your fashion sucks.305

- Exactly! If she is not sitting there. For me that’s too much of a dictate, too much personality. The others, like Elle und Harper’s Bazaar, do a better job at that. They don’t have these strong figures they put out there to tell other people what fashion is and what it is not. And neither should you let that person tell you what fashion is and what it is not. Could be that she is on top of things and her September Issue is important and whatnot, but there’s nothing she contributes to fashion. Actually, she recites mechanically exactly what the designers give to her and these designers are also controlled by the urge to keep themselves above water financially. The only one who doesn’t put up with that is Lagerfeld. The only one who doesn’t explicitly invite that lady [to the Fashion Week]. Like all the others, she has to pay for the ticket and queue.306

In all groups, many participants asserted and repeated continuously that they did not use fashion editorials in magazines as a “serious” dressing guideline. However, later in the discussion, it happened that participants claimed they would like to be able to purchase the things pictured in the magazine. Here again the material appears contradictory.

According to Bourdieu, there is no trickle-down effect in fashion, as claimed by Georg Simmel (1904), in which the lower class seeks to adopt the lifestyle of the upper class. Bourdieu asserts instead that the working class is not aspiring to the lifestyle of the upper class because their consumption is focused on the practicality of goods, rather than on their cultural capital. In effect, rejecting high culture is the base for popular culture. Between the upper (the dominant) and the working (the dominated) class, Bourdieu defines another class: the middle class. With a lower amount of cultural capital, its standing is in a less legitimatized cultural sphere. Unlike the working class, the middle class aspires to the upper class. Consequently, in order to maintain its dominant power and a distinction to the middle class, the upper class returns to popular/working culture.307 For this reason, Bourdieu understands “the consumption realm […] as a field (champ) of power relations.”308 Starting from the assumption that the interview

304 Diese Vogue-Chefin diktiert was Mode ist und das lass ich mir von so einer Dame nicht sagen! Die kann selber gar nichts in der Mode, die kann nicht nähen. Sieht auch seit Jahrzehnten gleich aus und immer die gleiche TopfFriseur. An dieser Dame ist gar nichts modisch, außer dass sie teure Kleider trägt, die sie geschenkt bekommt, und wie ein Hungerhaken daherkommt. Sie ist ja fast genauso alt wie ich, und sieht aus, als ob sie gleich vom Hocker fällt.

305 Und sie muss aber überall sein, sonst ist deine Mode scheiße.

306 Ja genau! Wenn die da nicht sitzt. Das ist mir zu viel Diktat, zu viel Persönlichkeit. Das machen die anderen wie Elle und Harper’s Bazaar besser. Die haben keine so starken Figuren, die sie da hinstellen, die dann anderen sagen, was Mode ist und was nicht. Und auch von dieser Person sollte man sich nicht sagen lassen, was Mode ist oder nicht. Das mag ja sein, dass sie ihren Laden im Griff hat und ihre September Issue was weiß ich wie wichtig ist, aber für die Mode tut die gar nichts. Sondern die betet genau das runter, was ihr von den Designern runtergeben wird und diese Designer sind auch insofern gesteuert, als dass sie sich finanziell über Wasser halten müssen. Der einzige, der sich das nicht bietet lässt, ist der Lagerfeld. Der einzige, der diese Dame nicht explizit einlädt [auf die Fashion Week]. Sie muss sich wie alle anderen auch für die Karte zahlen und sich in die Schlangen stellen.


partners had a high cultural capital, Bourdieu’s “bottom-up” theory would explain why my interviewees read and use commercial fashion magazines but have an ambivalent relationship with them.

In his lecture *Social pace and symbolic value* at the University of California in 1986, which was also published, Bourdieu further claims that geographical spaces are also social spaces, since the closer the agents, social groups and institutions are to each other, “the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer.”

Thus, Bourdieu links people’s perception of reality to geographical spaces, and these can, in turn, be related to political spaces. In fact, there were only few situations in which participants started to think of their personal reflection as “a typically German way of thinking.” For instance, when I asked the participants why they preferred print over digital media, some answered that they thought it was “a typically German thing to like concrete, tangible things”.

University students:

*Discussion on how much they would spend on fashion items*

- The most important thing is that I feel beautiful. But I’m Swabian to the core, I try not to spend too much and instead combine as much as possible. I cannot actually do it, just with things that are worth it, like shoes and coats. I try to buy basics and mix them with second-hand clothes or clothes I bought at a flea market. But I just don’t buy expensive clothes.

*Do you think that digital media can replace print?*

- I think that Germany overall, as far as digital and analogous is concerned, that the Germans on the one hand are conventional, on the other hand they are more “backwoods” [than other countries], just as with cash. The Germans, they love their cash. I think in no other [Western] country, people pay with cash so often. I think that is simply typically German, this “tangible thing”.

Here, the participants consciously relate to their socialization background, Germany, and by doing so, explain their opinions. Thus, since I limited my research to Southern Germany, and as the statement above shows, the material is certainly impacted by cultural perceptions and opinions, which are understood as “typically German”. Here, decent consumption behaviour and the use of traditional (print) but well-functioning goods are related to the “typically German lifestyle” or using Bourdieu’s approach, a “typically German habitus”. However, this form of identity was not formed politically through propaganda etc., instead this shows how the participants identify themselves as part of a broader community with similar properties in contrast to foreign communities. The idea of a “typically German way of thinking” is constructed through the distinction of other national identities. Consequently, the values of commercial fashion magazines, which have been illustrated so far, are influenced by a mentality which is related to


310 The region of Swabia is connected with a stereotype of parsimony.


312 Ich glaube, Deutschland ist überhaupt, was Digitales und Analoges angeht, sind die Deutschen einerseits konventionell, andererseits auch „hinterwälderischer“ [als andere Länder], also wie beim Bargeld. Die Deutschen, die lieben ihr Bargeld. Ich glaube, in keinem anderen [westlichen] Land, wird noch so viel mit Bargeld gezahlt. Ich glaube, das ist einfach was sehr Deutsches, dieses „Handfeste“.
national identity. Hence, my findings might differ from other studies conducted in other Western countries.

**Fashion Magazines and Gender**

Although I initially did not intend to analyse gender representation in commercial fashion magazines, nor to understand how readers respond to these representations, gender issues still appeared in my collected data. All magazines that were discussed during the interviews are addressed to female readers, discuss “female” issues and even carry female names as, for example, *Brigitte, Barbara, Marie Claire, Joy* and *Jolie*. Thus, commercial fashion magazines are not free from gender representation.

In her article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988) the feminist theoretician Judith Butler illustrates the difference between sex and gender. While the human sex is naturally given at birth, gender is a behavioural form of expressing the sex, which is determined by culture. In other words: humans are not born women or men, but they become it. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir, Butler defines gender identity as continuously dynamic and determined by the period of time, in which it appears as “correct”.

Thus, drawing on scholars such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Butler identifies the body as “historical idea”, which performs legitimated gender identities in a certain place at a certain time and claims therefore:

> [...] because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all.\(^{314}\)

Consequently, as Butler emphasizes, gender is not a fact of being but a performance of femininity and masculinity through the human body.\(^{315}\) The images of femininity and masculinity are therefore not given but culturally constructed.

Following these assumptions, commercial fashion magazines do not only innocently present new fashion trends, but, by doing so, they simultaneously construct and co-create a picture of femininity, since they picture fashion through the female body and the female body, in turn, performs the image of femininity. In other words: commercial fashion magazines contribute to a picture of how to become a woman.

Although I did not initiate the discussion, the participants showed that they were aware that commercial magazines show a specific picture of femininity in order to emphasize then that they would neither adapt to nor accept the representation.


\(^{314}\) Ibid. 522.

\(^{315}\) Ibid. 521.
Adults:

Comments after the participants clarified positive aspects of reading commercial fashion magazines:

- Yes and I really have to say, these purely towards fashion oriented magazines, like Elle or Vogue, make me feel [facial expression shows disgust], by now I have learnt through the media how much drama is involved. How much models suffer, if you have ever gone on a diet yourself and have tried to starve yourself down to 58kg, you know what it feels like if you do it just so can become a size zero. I notice, for me, this is also in these magazines. That to me and especially other women, young girls [it is suggested] “Look! This is your perfect body looks like, this is your perfect face and now it’s your turn to act!” and the people in the magazines also look like that and if they don’t, they get photoshopped and taped. And I realize, this actually is a lie. I think this is dishonest and somehow also mean. As a social worker, I know many girls who are bulimic or anorexic and could die.316

Here it becomes specifically clear that, to the reader, commercial fashion magazines are related to a false, unrealistic and harmful picture of womanhood. Nevertheless, since the reader is conscious about these meanings and clearly rejects them, fashion magazines are not harmful to them. According to the reader, this genre of magazine is not a relevant reference for learning how to perform femininity.

Furthermore, this discussion shows again that, in contrast to the finding of McRobbie (1978) and McCracken (1993), readers are not victimized by fashion magazines, neither are they passive or naïve readers. Nevertheless, this study also shows that the gender issue cannot be ignored while studying commercial fashion magazines and remains therefore a critical topic to acknowledge.

During the discussion of female representations, it became clear that gender identity is something adopted rather than immanent. In my interviews with the teenage girls, they often referred to their mothers or older sisters (not fathers or brothers) when I asked them how they chose and when they purchased the fashion magazines. While some explained they read them “because the older sister does”, others stated that their mothers bought them during grocery shopping even though the girls were not present at the moment of purchase. This does not mean that sisters and mothers use commercial fashion magazines as an introduction to womanhood for their younger sisters and daughters. However, it shows that commercial fashion magazines operate in the sphere of womanhood until today.

Although all magazines which were discussed in the interviews address women, not all of my participants were women: Therefore, I have paid attention to using gender-neutral language, such as “they” and “the reader”. In her study Reading Women’s Magazines (1997 [1995]), Hermes also interviewed men reading this genre and explored how these men make meaning of women’s magazines. However, mainly

316 Ja und ich muss echt sagen, es geht mir bei so reinen Modezeitschriften, wie Elle oder Vogue, [angewideter Gesichtsausdruck]. Ich weiß mittlerweile durch die Medien, dass so viel Drama dahintersteht. Ja also wie Models leiden, wenn man schon selber Diäten gemacht hat und versucht hat, sich an die 58 Kg zu hungern, weiß wie man sich fühlt, wenn man das macht nur damit man auch so ein Hungermädchen werden kann. Ich merke, das haftet für mich auch mit in diesen Zeitungen. Dass mir und vor allem anderen Frauen, jungen Mädchen [vorgeschrieben wird] „Guck mal! So ist dein optimaler Körper, so ist dein optimales Gesicht und jetzt mach mal!” und die da drin sind auch so aussehen und wenn sie nicht so aussehen, dann werden sie gephotoshopt und getapet. Und ich merke doch, das ist doch eine Lüge. Ich finde das so verlogen und irgendwie auch gemein. Ich kenne ja genügend Mädchen durch meine Sozialarbeit, die bulimisch sind oder Anorexie haben und sterben könnten.
focused on women, Hermes does not discuss her material in depth, but rather points out to which extent the meaning making of male readers differs from the meaning making of female readers.\textsuperscript{317}

I had two male participants, who either admitted freely to reading women’s magazines or in some way felt motivated to participate in my research project. Thus, I did not exclude them from my research project, but rather saw them as further contribution to the analysis of commercial fashion magazines and their meanings for the readership.

One man was present in a group discussion in the adult group. He reads \textit{Vogue} and as he stated he has used the magazine for many years as an “index”. Although he did not mention what kind of index, I suppose that he used it as an index for performing femininity, since, while talking, his motility had feminine traits.

\textit{Extracts from the discussion:}

\textbf{Adult man}

- These magazines \textit{[Vogue]} were inspiring „Ah yes, you can also do that” and we were actively incited to do something with our fashion.\textsuperscript{318}
- I contemplate the artistic side, the picture [in the magazine] has to tell me something. Not because it has been edited, but because it still contains the natural. The beautiful!\textsuperscript{319}

In her article \textit{Throwing like a girl} (1980), the feminist scholar Iris Marion Young illustrates how specific body comportments and motilities connote a specific sex. In contrast to Erwin Strauss (1966) who argues that feminine and masculine body comportments are naturally given, Young claims that these comportments are culturally constructed and normed by society. Thus, a girl does not behave like a girl, she learns to behave like a girl through bodily expressions.\textsuperscript{320} Again, as also discussed by Butler (1988), gender, and consequently femininity, are an act of performance.

While the male participant’s husband\textsuperscript{321} was sitting quietly next to him during the interview, he (the reader), as I already mentioned, showed obvious body movements and expressions which connote the female sex. Drawing on Young, these body movements are not naturally given by his homosexuality, but adapted by the image of femininity constructed by society or more specifically constructed by the magazine he reads, \textit{Vogue}. Here, fashion magazines are not only used as a guideline for fashionable dressing behaviour, but as a guideline for gender performance for people who display cross-behaviour.

The second male participant was present during a group discussion in the high school. He stated to not read this genre of magazine, but he still wanted to participate in the discussion. During the interviews, he was relatively reserved and did not speak of his own experiences, but rather generalized them. Never-

\textsuperscript{317} Hermes, \textit{Reading Women’s Magazines}, 51–57.
\textsuperscript{318} Anregungen gab’s durch diese Magazine \textit{[Vogue]} „Ah ja, das kann man auch machen“ und wir wurden aktiv animiert mit unserer Mode etwas zu machen.
\textsuperscript{319} Ich betrachte die künstlerische Seite, das Bild [im Magazine] muss mir etwas sagen. Nicht, weil es bearbeitet ist, sondern weil es noch etwas Natürliches hat. Das Schöne!
\textsuperscript{320} Young, “Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility and spatiality”
\textsuperscript{321} He, in contrast, stated to not read any commercial fashion magazines, neither for women nor men, for which reason he did not participate in the discussion.
theless, he clearly stated that he was interested in “male” fashion and usually looked for styling guidelines on digital platforms.

Extracts from the discussion:

Teenage-boy:

- For me too, it depends. If I have the time, I care [about what I wear]. But I don’t buy some magazine for that specifically, but you can also find many things on the Internet.322
- Yes, I think pictures also play a big role in magazines like that. If you like the picture, then you read it. Yeah, I pay more attention to the picture.323
- 7€ [as with Vogue] would be too much, if it were 3€ instead of 2€, then it doesn’t make that big of a difference to me, if I want to read it. Then I buy it even if it costs 3€.324

Would you read InStyle Men?

- [Present girls react with giggling to the question] I don’t think so. Obviously you could… but I don’t know, I think I just wouldn’t.325

As discussed before, commercial fashion magazines, which target exclusively female readers, promote a strong picture of femininity and feminine behaviour to the reader. Consequently, the reading act itself becomes a female practice. According to his behaviour, the boy did clearly not want to be related to this feminine attribute, since this would have questioned his performance of masculinity. Moreover, girls reacted to his opinion and statements, which probably put further pressure on him not to go too deep into the “sphere of womanhood”. Whether the boy actually reads commercial fashion magazines for men or even for women remained, however, unclear during the group discussion. Thus, as my interviews with the two men have shown, commercial fashion magazines act as an “index” for feminine body behaviour and not a legitimized practice for boys who become “manly” man.

Short Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the meaning of commercial fashion magazines is influenced by the reader’s cultural capital and gender issues. Reading commercial fashion magazines is an activity of power struggle. Although the readers appreciate the print media for their simplicity and superficiality, the readers’ high cultural capital collides with the low capital of commercial fashion magazines. The reader is not free from perception and norms and has already built an opinion on the magazine before the actual reading process. It is not possible for readers to be free from pre-established meanings, and thus, they are tied to the influence of “trash-thinking”.

324 So 7€ [wie bei der Vogue] wäre schon zu viel, wenn es jetzt aber 3€ anstatt 2€ wären, dann ist das ja kein so großer Unterschied, jetzt für mich wenn ich es lesen will. Dann kaufe ich mir auch was für 3€.
In addition, I have also emphasized that reading commercial fashion magazines until today is considered and perceived as a typically “feminine” practice. Targeting women and exclusively representing women, commercial fashion magazines are not an objective or innocent form of presenting the latest fashion trends, but also a one-sided representation of performing gender. This, however, is not harmful to the reader as previous studies argue, since my participants clearly showed awareness of and reluctance to this fact.
Final Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to understand the social functions and values of commercial fashion magazines by analysing their meaning and conclude that these meanings are neither linear nor clearly classifiable. In the first chapter, I outlined how the functions of commercial fashion magazines shift according to the interaction stage readers with their magazine are in and according to their age. At the beginning, the purchase of commercial fashion magazines is a quite spontaneous decision. However, while especially adults and university students mostly plan to use the purchase to create a moment of relaxation during daily obligations in the near future, teenagers are driven by their curiosity and attracted by the magazines’ contents. In other situations, participants also read them during trips on the train and use the magazine as a pastime. Readers rarely are dedicated to one magazine only, and if they are, then it is because of a habit. Instead, they evaluate the covers and choose the magazine which they find the most appealing. The symbolic value therefore has hardly any relevance to the reader in the situation of purchase.

Furthermore, planning on creating a moment of cosiness and relaxation, participants expect commercial fashion magazines to be easy to decode. Fashion magazines are appreciated for their simplicity, since an easy decoding process has a relaxing effect on the reader. For this reason, fashion magazines are rarely read in their entirety. While the teenagers, who usually buy the magazines in order to get specific information, have quite a targeting reading behaviour, adults and university students flip through until they find something interesting. Having evaluated the meanings encoded by the producers, readers reject rather than accept them. Consequently, by taking a negotiating reading position, readers disempower the magazine and take control of their reading behaviour. Thus, until the end of the reading process, commercial fashion magazines do not function as a motivation for consumption. Readers use them as a form of relaxation and activity which has an inspirational and entertaining effect on the readers. This does, however, not mean that commercial fashion magazines are an object of relaxation in themselves, but they obtain this meaning through the overall situation in which the reader consumes them.

After the reading process, commercial fashion magazines might function as a motivation for consumption; especially teenagers showed high motivation for shopping after the reading process. However, the magazines’ images need to fit the reality of the reader. If an item pictured in the magazine is too expensive or too sophisticated, readers distance themselves from the magazine. Hence, if the magazine does not reflect the lifestyle of the reader, it loses its function as shopping inspiration and it remains a paper “which is nice to look at”. If readers do not throw them away, commercial fashion magazines sometimes are stored in a way to show them off. Here the readers’ intention is to transfer the symbolic value of the magazines, a reference for fashion and fashionable lifestyle, to the readers’ self-image. University students also use them for personalizing other objects, such as creating a collage or using them as gift paper. The function remains however the same. Commercial fashion magazines are perceived as a handbook for
fashion and readers intend to place themselves in this fashionable sphere.

Consequently, it can be concluded that readers of commercial fashion magazines, regardless of their age, are not passive readers as claimed in previous studies by McRobbie (1978) and McCracken (1993). They actively evaluate and change meanings in magazines encoded by the producer and are not naïvely seduced. Commercial magazines can change from a means of relaxation to a means of shopping inspiration to a means of fashioning the self. Thus, I have proved, against the claims of Hermes (1997 [1995]) that commercial fashion magazines are meaningless, that this genre has in effect a purpose, function and therefore meaning.

In the second chapter, I even went a step further illustrating how the meaning of commercial fashion magazines is also dependent on the use of other types of media with similar content. Here participants referred especially to digital media. Compared to the reading practice of fashion magazines, in which there were only slight differences between the three generations, this part of the analysis clearly showed contrasts. While teenagers and university students showed a high use of digital media, adults only enter digital platforms for a specific reason, such as shopping or getting specific information. The two younger age groups have been socialized with digital media, and therefore construct meanings differently to adults, who rather have been forced to adapt to the new technological developments.

In comparison to digital media, print fashion magazines appeared more valuable and extraordinary. In contrast to online platforms dealing with fashion, which are constantly available and free of charge, print fashion magazines acquire value due to their tangibleness. Furthermore, since digital media are open to everyone, print fashion magazines which are produced by a team of editors, appear to be more professional and reflect the editors’ “expert” knowledge. Commercial fashion magazines also appear more sophisticated since digital platforms construct a more authentic reality for the reader. Hence, for practical usage, digital media are favoured over magazines. However, using the web requires users to know beforehand what they are looking for. This is not always comprehensible for the consumer, especially when the fashion cycle changes and new trends are coming. Commercial fashion magazines are, in contrast, more neatly arranged. Thus, fashion magazines are also used as a guiding help through the web when users need orientation in a new fashion landscape. Therefore, I argue (like Rocamora [2013]) that print and digital media complement each other, but also that they co-determine each other's value and consequently, meaning.

In the third chapter of my analysis, I problematized the fact that the collected material was extremely controversial in various parts of the interviews. Influenced by “trash-thinking”, the participants had negative associations with commercial fashion magazines. The reason behind this reaction is the disparate cultural capital the participants are aspiring to or have obtained in comparison to the cultural capital this magazine genre reflects. The cultural capital of the readers is higher than what the magazine provides, with the consequence that readers cannot fully identify themselves with their magazine consum-
tion. However, drawing on Bourdieu, people with a high cultural capital have the tendency to go back to popular taste in order to bypass the middle class, which has a lower cultural capital. While, in the first analysis chapter, readers assert that they appreciate commercial fashion magazines for their simplicity, in the third chapter, I outline why they dislike them for the same reason. This contradiction emerges, since the reader does not only construct meaning during the reading experience, but they also create meaning according to their habitus, which occurs beyond the reading experience. Furthermore, I have also outlined how the participants consciously relate to their socialization background, Germany, in order to explain their perceptions of and opinions on print fashion magazines. Thus, I conclude that the meaning of reading a magazine has also to be understood beyond the reading experience.

In the last part of the discussion, I show that this genre still carries gender issues, which cannot be ignored. Presenting exclusively the female body and accordingly “female” issues only, commercial fashion magazines still construct a specific and one-sided image of gender, which in turn is then relayed to the reader. This elicited different reactions from the participants according to their gender. Female participants (sex) who perceive themselves as women (gender), reacted to these images with rejection, while one male participant used it as an index for femininity. Another male participant feared the loss of his “manliness” while discussing fashion magazines and was very reserved during the conversation. Thus, I conclude that reading commercial fashion magazines is still regarded to be a “typically feminine” practice, which, however, does not mean that they are solely read by women. The meanings of commercial fashion magazines are consequently strongly related to the reader’s gender.

With this research project, I conclude that reading commercial fashion magazines is a meaningful activity, practiced by active and reflected readers. The meanings of commercial fashion magazines are not exclusively determined by the reading process itself but need to be explored in relation with other media use and the readers themselves. The meanings are very ambivalent and contradictory, which makes it challenging to define them in a proper way. However, this does not mean that they are mutually exclusive but rather that they complement each other.

Although this research has provided answers to questions surrounding the meaning making of commercial fashion magazines, it has also opened up new ones. In this study, I did not discuss how the democratization of fashion has affected the reading of fashion magazines. One could also investigate how readers change their reading behaviour throughout the years, by asking how they have read fashion magazines in the past and how they do it now. Furthermore, since this study especially focuses on reading print fashion magazines, it has not been discussed in depth which meanings are attributed to digital media concerned with fashion. The study of fashion magazines for men remains one of the biggest gaps in this field of academia. As my study has indicated, fashion as well as fashion magazines are in the interest of men, which, however, needs to be – and hopefully soon will be – explored in more depth. This study has only provided a partial – but in depth – understanding of the consumption of commercial
fashion magazines. Finally, it remains to be said that scholars should not be deceived by the apparent simplicity of fashion magazines, but rather acknowledge their meaning and further explore the meaning making processes at work.
References

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**Youtube.** “Shop Direct From The Pages of PORTER Magazine.” Accessed March 5, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUvx_gHfxvQ.
Appendix

Questions for High School Students

Part I: The participants’ individual relation to fashion

1. What is fashion to you?

2. How important is fashion to you in your daily life? Do you care about how you look/your appearance/your styling?

3. To what extent are you interested in fashion, trends and developments/events in the fashion industry?

Part II: Use and value of print fashion magazines

1. Show me your favourite fashion magazine. Tell me why you chose specifically that one and why you like to read it.

2. When and where do you usually buy print magazines? How do you choose them?

3. Does the magazine price influence your choice?

4. When and where do you read print magazines?

5. Describe the way you look through a magazine / the way you read it.
   - Are you reading specific articles?
   - Are you mainly looking at the pictures?

6. Can you explain why you read fashion magazines?
   - Is it for entertainment?
   - Is it an inspiration?
   - Do you learn something? If yes, what?

7. What do you do with the magazines after you have read them?

8. What do you feel when you buy your favourite magazine? Do you have any personal relation to it?

9. Which parts of the magazines are the most interesting/boring ones? Please show me some examples. (see if participants agree or disagree with each other)

10. Is reading fashion magazines a central practice for you in order to be informed about the latest trends, stylings and the overall fashion world?

11. Does reading fashion magazines affect your consumption behaviour related to fashion? Would you like to wear what is pictured?

12. Compared to other kinds of media concerned with fashion, what makes the print magazines more valuable to you? Is that even the case?

13. Please watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUvx_gHfxvQ
    What do you think? Is it a service you would like to have for your magazine as well?
Part III: Use of other media in the field of fashion

1. Which media in the field of fashion do you use besides print fashion magazines? Can you show me?

2. Please tell me when and where you usually use them.

4. What is the purpose?

5. What is the difference between a print fashion magazine and other media concerned with fashion for you?

   ➔ Is there a difference in the feeling elicited through the “consumption”?
   ➔ Do they have a different authority/validity?
   ➔ Do they have a different purpose?

6. Here is a styling guide from InStyle (will be shown in the physical magazine) and here is one from Zalando. Which one do you like better and why?

7. Do you think that other media concerned with fashion, especially digital media, can easily replace print fashion magazines?
Questions for University Students and Adults

Part I: The participants’ individual relation to fashion

1. What is your personal understanding of fashion?
2. How important is fashion to you in your daily life? Do you care about how you look?
3. To what extent are you interested in fashion, trends and happenings in the fashion industry?

Part II: Use and value of print fashion magazines

1. Show me your favourite fashion magazine. Tell me why you chose specifically that one and why you like to read it.
2. When and where do you usually buy print magazines? How do you choose them?
3. Does the magazine price influence your choice?
4. When and where do you read print magazines?
5. How do you “read” your magazine? Are you looking for specific information?
6. Can you explain why you read fashion magazines?
   → Is it for entertainment?
   → Is it an inspiration?
   → Do you learn something? If yes, what?
   → Do you take them seriously?
7. What do you do with them after you have read them?
8. Which are the most relevant pages for you in a magazine? Please show me some examples. (see if participants agree or disagree with each other)
9. What do you value in print magazines that other media concerned with fashion cannot replace?
10. What is the difference for you between a physical magazine and a digital medium concerned with fashion?
11. Is there something about print magazines you critically reflect on?
12. Please watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUvx_gHfxvQ
    What do you think? Would you use this service?

Part III: Use of other media concerned with fashion

1. Please tell me again, what media besides print magazines you use.
2. When, where and why do you use them? Which value/purpose do they have for you?
3. Would you say that the digital possibilities today affect your consumption of printed materials?
4. Which medium affects your general consumption behaviour the most/the least?
5. Which medium has the most value/authority/validity and why?
6. Do you think that other media concerned with fashion, especially digital media, can easily replace print fashion magazines?