

The Circuit of Culture Analysis of Black Women Representation on British Vogue Covers

Analisis Sirkuit Budaya Representasi Perempuan Kulit Hitam di Sampul Majalah British Vogue

Gabriela Laras Dewi Swastika¹, Priscylia Tanaka²

¹Universitas Ciputra Surabaya

CBD Boulevard, Citraland, Surabaya 60219

Email: ¹gabriela.swastika@ciputra.ac.id, ²priscyliatanaka@gmail.com

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Abstract

Media can shape the way the people see themselves, as well as the identity of a particular group collectively. In western countries where most of the population is dominated by white people such as Europe and North America, black people are included in a minority group that is vulnerable to discrimination and racism. The lack of opportunity for them to show their existence in the media has further obscured their identities and women are no exception. Representation in the media is no longer interpreted as representing a particular group's identity but is used as a tool to fulfill media marketing strategies. This research aims to find out the forms of representation of black women in England that are mainly featured on two covers of British Vogue issued in August 2018 and February 2022. This research shows that the representation of black women featured on the cover of British Vogue's August 2018 has represented black African American women, while the cover of the February 2022 has shown black African women. Both covers did not only attract the audiences in the UK but international audiences, moreover these covers have also indicated racial issues and feminism in the field of fashion. In this study, fashion magazine covers did not only show changes in fashion trends, but also the shifts in the representation of women's identity and beauty standards.

Keywords: Black women; British Vogue; Circuit of culture; Colorism; Representation

Abstrak

Media dapat membentuk cara orang melihat diri mereka sendiri, serta identitas kelompok tertentu secara kolektif. Di negara-negara barat yang sebagian besar penduduknya didominasi oleh kulit putih seperti Eropa dan Amerika Utara, kulit hitam termasuk dalam kelompok minoritas yang rentan terhadap diskriminasi dan rasisme. Minimnya kesempatan bagi mereka untuk menunjukkan eksistensi di media semakin mengaburkan identitas mereka, tidak terkecuali perempuan. Representasi di media tidak lagi dimaknai sebagai representasi identitas kelompok tertentu, tetapi digunakan sebagai alat untuk memenuhi strategi pemasaran media. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bentuk-bentuk representasi perempuan kulit hitam di Inggris yang terutama ditampilkan dalam dua sampul majalah British Vogue yang terbit pada Agustus 2018 dan Februari 2022. Penelitian ini

menunjukkan bahwa representasi perempuan kulit hitam yang ditampilkan pada sampul majalah *British Vogue* edisi Agustus 2018 merepresentasikan perempuan kulit hitam Afrika-Amerika, sedangkan pada sampul majalah *British Vogue* edisi Februari 2022 merepresentasikan perempuan kulit hitam Afrika. Kedua sampul tersebut tidak hanya menarik perhatian khalayak di Inggris tetapi juga khalayak internasional, terlebih lagi sampul tersebut juga mengindikasikan isu rasial dan feminisme di bidang fashion. Dalam penelitian ini, sampul majalah mode tidak hanya menunjukkan perubahan tren mode, tetapi juga pergeseran representasi identitas dan standar kecantikan perempuan.

Kata kunci: *British Vogue*; Kolorisme; Representasi; Sirkuit budaya; Wanita kulit hitam

1. Introduction

The media not only influences public opinion on an issue but also influences the way people view and perceive themselves. Not only individuals, news in the media also shapes the identity of groups of people collectively, one of which is a group of black women. Even though the number of black women showing their presence in the media is increasing, this still cannot have a significant impact on them (Asare, 2017). The media adapts to culture and things that are currently popular. Representation is no longer interpreted as something that represents the identity of a certain group, but rather as part of marketing content, so that it can reach a larger audience. The representation of black women in the media is only used for marketing and communication strategies for media institutions. In Europe and America, black women often receive bad narratives in the media, one of which is in the UK. In this country, the media has a history of using narratives that tend to undermine the image of black women in public. Although in recent years the narrative of black women in the UK has begun to change, the number of black women working in the media industry in the UK, especially in

production, is still scarce compared to white women (Sobande, 2020).

Based on historical records, black women played an important role in fighting against black racism through the written word. In the 1960s to 1980s, black activists in England created their own newsletters which were sold on the streets. Apart from being a medium for campaigning, they also want to convey social issues that are often ignored by mainstream media. Two of them were published by black women's activist groups, namely *Speak Out by Brixton Black Women's Group* and *FOWAAD! by the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent* (OWAAD) (Jenkins, 2021). But unfortunately, these two media could not last long, their longest publication period lasted only five years. *Speak Out* was only published in 1980-1985, while *FOWAAD!* in 1979-1983 (Caspari, 2020). Meanwhile, one of the mainstream media in England that shows the representation of black women is *British Vogue* magazine. Since the position of editor-in-chief of *British Vogue* passed to Edward Enninful, who is black, they have featured black women on their covers.

When compared with *British Vogue* under the leadership of the previous editor-in-chief, Alexandra

Shulman, the number of black women appearing on the cover was only five times in her 25-year tenure (1992-2017). On these five covers, *British Vogue* only used supermodels Naomi Campbell and Jourdan Dunn as their cover models (Hargrove, 2017). The two *British Vogue* covers below show a long gap in using black women as magazine cover models within 12 years and 6 months. Media texts are seen as something that describes the actual social conditions of our society. Media texts play an important role in forming overall social definitions. Media texts show what is considered normal and deviant in society, this is usually done by the mass media and advertising, which tend to present a narrow understanding of a particular culture, behavior or lifestyle, and exclude people who are considered different from the general norm (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).

In this research, *British Vogue* magazine has shown progress in featuring more diverse representation of black women on their magazine covers under the leadership of Edward Enninful. The intensity of black women's appearances on the cover of *British Vogue* has also increased, from previously only once a few years to four to six times a year since December 2017. The subject of

this research is the *British Vogue* cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions. On the cover of the February 2022 edition, *British Vogue* featured black female supermodels from Africa on the cover to highlight female identity and African culture. Then the cover of the August 2018 edition featured Oprah Winfrey who is a black woman from the United States, known as one of the most successful black women in the world, who is active in voicing issues of diversity, inclusivity, and anti-racism in the media industry. When *British Vogue*'s February 2022 was released, controversy arose regarding the issue of colorism and misrepresentation. This is because the black female models are shown with skin tones that look darker than black women in general (Busari, 2022). Therefore, this research aims to uncover the representation of black women figures in entertainment media that are portrayed in the cover of *British Vogue* magazine through the rigorous analysis using the circuit of culture. The circuit of culture has emphasized the cycle of representing text scheme in the media that is partaking which consists of by production scheme, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity.

Figure 1.
Naomi Campbell and Jourdan Dunn as Cover Face on *British Vogue* 1992 and 2017



Source: British Vogue

2. Literature Review

2.1. Colorism

In research conducted by Leeds Beckett University on the representation of black women in British magazines, they examined the appearance of black women who appeared in magazines such as *British Vogue* and *Elle*, and examined magazines specifically for black women, namely *Essence* and *Ebony* during the period 2015-2016 for comparison. The results showed that of the 539 images of black women that appeared in general magazines; both on covers, articles and advertisements; the physical characteristics and percentage were 83% were young, 62% had proportional bodies, 66% had the lighter skin, and 60% of them had straight hair. When mainstream

magazines such as *British Vogue* and *Elle* featured black women, their physical appearance was conformed to white standards, namely straight hair, small noses, and lighter skin tones despite they possessed curly hair, dark skin, and wide noses (Jankowski, 2017).

Colorism is the practice of discrimination based on a person's skin color. Colorism can also be defined as a biased view of aspects of a person's physical appearance such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. This comes from Eurocentric beauty standards that are oriented towards European women who come from the white Caucasian. Colorism began to develop after the time of black slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries (Wilson et al., 2021). If racism is a discriminatory act against certain groups based on race, then

colorism is a derivative of it. The difference is that colorism discriminates against people based on the color of their skin. Not only against black groups of African descent, but colorism also attacks black and other colored groups of Asian and Latin American descent, and sometimes even attacks white people who have slightly darker skin tones. Colorism not only creates gaps between black and white groups, but also between light black and darker black groups (Grant, 2020).

2.2. Structure of Magazine

When we discuss how the topic of racial or ethnic diversity is portrayed by the media, three crucial issues emerge that are inclusivity, the role of the media, and most importantly, control of media production. A question that often arises in media research is, "When media producers include members of certain ethnic and racial groups, how do the media depict them?" Control over media production is very crucial, thus prompting the question, "Do people from non-white racial and ethnic groups have control over the production of media images that depict their group?" This section discusses the production process and nature of the media industry rather than media content, but the content of media content reflects the views of the media producers who create it (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). Even though many print media editors have now switched to electronic media, print media remain everywhere. Consumption of print media depends on education level, income, and household type (Kipphan, 2000).

Magazine publishers are usually part of international media organizations that already have big names. Magazines are often associated with free time and are included in tertiary needs. Production costs for magazines can be said to be very expensive. They are usually subsidized by advertisers who use magazines as medium for promoting their products. Therefore, advertising is the main source of income for a magazine (BBC Bitesize, n.d.). The organizational structure of a desk is divided into several departments which are differentiated based on the type of work in the field of art, publication, production, or business and advertising. Magazine content production is usually controlled by the editorial department with the editor-in-chief at the top of the hierarchy and followed by the managing editor and executive editor. The editor-in-chief is tasked with overseeing all content that will be published in the magazine and ensuring editorial operations run smoothly. He/she is also responsible for making all final decisions and may also contribute articles or short essays expressing the editor's point of view on topics making headlines in the current edition. The editors supervise, revise, and have the authority of what articles and other content that will be published in their magazine (JournoGyan, 2017).

2.3. Representation

Representation functions as a marker of identity for certain social, cultural, or ethnic groups, especially for those from minority groups. Representation also functions to give us a depiction of certain social and cultural groups

that are different from ours. Through representations displayed in the media, it can influence people's views about the identity of social or cultural groups that are different from theirs (Long & Wall, 2012). The representation of black women shown on the *British Vogue* covers of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions show a cultural change in the media and fashion industries. This cultural shift has also led to a shift in the representation of women's identity. If previous *British Vogue* featured mostly white women on the cover of its magazine, this has now changed since Edward Enninful served as editor-in-chief. In terms of representation, media texts cannot be separated from the social, cultural, political and historical context in which they were created. In media studies, representation focuses on portraits of individuals and/or certain social groups. Although thinking about an image, we must not forget that representation occurs through all forms of media work, both verbal and rhetorical, as well as how media texts are presented, reflected, and conveyed (Long & Wall, 2012).

Even though the media attempts to reproduce actual reality, all of this is the result of a series of selection processes that only highlight certain aspects of reality and ignore the rest (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). When considering representation in the media, we need to understand the discourse that supports the image of the individual or group being referred to. With the existence of archetypes and stereotypes, media institutions are responsible for the politics of representation. There are various factors that the media considers in

presenting representations of certain groups, one of which is the demographics of people who are in positions that have a large influence on media production. This ultimately triggers questions about the attitudes and values held by media workers because biased media views can influence the stories they tell (Long & Wall, 2012).

Currently, the symbolic meaning of representation has expanded. Representation of a particular social group is interpreted and represented through individuals who we often refer to as celebrities or public figures. A celebrity in media studies is understood as a "product" produced by a media company for consumption purposes which can bring profits to the media company that employs them. Their status depends on their ability to generate economic benefits for the media companies that employ them. However, this does not always depend on material achievements but must also consider how this function is related to the meaning of fame and celebrity in general, as well as how this meaning is constructed by the image of the celebrity concerned (Long & Wall, 2012). As research written by Purba (2018), the representation of women can be seen from many text variants, one of which is contained in advertisements for body care products. Women are just a display and a complement that gives the audience a sense of enjoyment. In advertising, women still often used as objects. Advertisements that appear in mass media showed female figures only as enticement.

Media studies researchers examine media content to assess the significance of the creation of

circulating media content. Media creates the world they want by creating social conditions, images, descriptions, explanations and frames about how this world looks and works. Media is not only the strongest source for various ideas, but also a place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, changed and elaborated (Dines et al., 2018). Media texts, consciously or not, help us define the world and provide examples of appropriate behavior and attitudes and what we should do and think. All of this is summarized into what message is hidden behind media content and is it created for whose benefit; this is the basis of the concept of media ideology. Ideologies usually argue different arguments, one party arguing that the media promotes the dominant ideology while the other party argues that the media contains more contradictory messages, combining the dominant ideology with views that challenge the dominant ideology (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).

Previous research conducted by Swastika (2020) which departed from critical discourse analysis from *Catatan Minggu* column in *Kompas Minggu*. The research result shows that mass media as a public medium has finally entered the private realm of urban society. *Catatan Minggu* occupies the discourse of urbanites and is integrated into their spatial spaces. The images created by the media hit the readers, which they often do not realize, these various images then bind the readers based on imagined ties, so that an imagined community emerges in the form of consumers-readers of the *Catatan Minggu* column in the newspaper.

Media capital requires a media text so that it is believed by readers, viewers, and listeners to be valid in societal discourse. Because this is where media texts produce their images and transmit certain messages to the audience. From *Catatan Minggu*, we can also understand that social, political, and cultural situations influence the reproduction of texts.

The two covers in this research highlight how celebrities are featured on the cover of *British Vogue* which represents the issues raised, while highlighting aspects of identity in a specific group, black women. Black women here are represented by Oprah Winfrey and nine black female models from Africa who work in the entertainment and modeling industry, which is also closely related to the field of media production of fashion magazines. Talking about the representation of black women and their identity is not enough if researchers do not include the perspective of feminism. Throughout its journey, feminism has a long history and has gone through various challenges and obstacles. Feminism is divided into two kinds, namely white feminism and black feminism. Tensions between white and black feminism have existed since colonialism and imperialism in the 19th century (Beck, 2021). The topic of feminism always provokes debate between white and black feminist groups. White feminists profit from white supremacy, they can be unreliable for the liberation of women's rights and at times can oppress black women. Many people misinterpret black feminism as a negative reaction to the feminist movement, which is dominated by

white women, which occurs due to an inability to understand the history and theory of black feminism. Black feminism is a practice that identifies women as agents of social change. This understanding names and values the production of knowledge and lived experiences of black women

who come from various identities, legal statuses, and sexual orientations. In conclusion, black feminism wants to define black women as humans or agents of knowledge and liberatory politics (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019).

Figure 2
British Vogue's Edition in August 2018 and February 2023



3. Research Method

The findings are obtained from the data collection using text study methods on media texts on the *British Vogue's* cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions. The primary data in this research uses cover images from *British Vogue's* issues in August 2018 and February 2022 which were obtained directly through the official *British Vogue* website. The August 2018 edition of *British Vogue* magazine featured Oprah Winfrey on the cover, a TV host and public figure from the United States

who is also known as the world's first black female billionaire. In this edition, through an exclusive interview with *British Vogue*, she discussed things that have shaped her career from the beginning until now, such as race and feminism. Then in the February 2022 edition, *British Vogue* featured nine black female models from Africa on the cover to celebrate and showcase the beauty of black African women. The February 2022 edition of *British Vogue* magazine was deemed not to reflect

the true representation of black women by its audience because the skin tone of the models looked darker than black women in general resulting in controversy regarding colorism. Apart from that, the models' use of black clothes and wigs is considered to further cover up their true beauty.

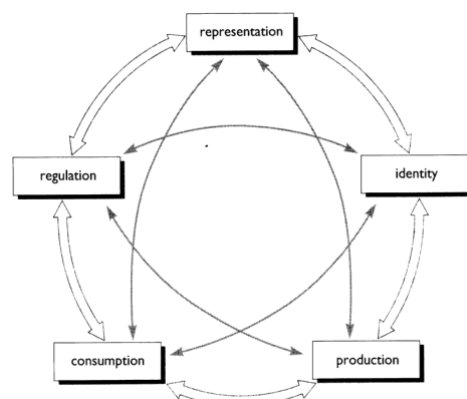
In collecting data, we also use textual analysis to interpret the meaning contained in the media text on those covers of *British Vogue* relating to the representation of black women. Using textual methods, researchers analyze the headline text written on the cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions and its relationship to the cover model chosen to appear in the two editions. Text studies in qualitative research are not static, through this method, researchers can focus on how texts are constructed and how meaning is produced. Researchers who use textual analysis methods in their research usually look more at the existence of a text in a cultural setting. This is known as "intertextual reading", the meaning of a text can be explored by reading other texts and a text never appears suddenly or exists in a vacuum (Rahardjo, 2018).

Textual analysis is a method that aims to understand the meaning produced by a text, how meaning is constructed through the text, as well as the representation of cultural and political implications in a text. Textual analysis also wants to understand what interpretations may be obtained from a text (Hartley, 2010). Texts have multiple meanings and interpretations, so the meaning of a text is never single, but this does not mean that researchers can interpret the text as they wish based on their

personal interests because meaning is carried by code of words, conventions, and style (genre). How the text is written, what social, cultural, historical and ideological context surrounds the text, all of this comes together to form a complete meaning. So, in understanding the meaning of a text, researcher objectivity is needed in interpreting it (Rahardjo, 2018).

Furthermore, as data has been collected, we also do the analysis upon the data. This research uses a data analysis taken from a cultural circuit by Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall which is used to understand the processes and purposes of production, consumption, and regulation that influence the form of identity and representation of black women in England which is intended to be shown through the cover (Gay et al., 1997). Researchers also use other analytical methods which is literature study to support the validity of the data. With this method, it is hoped that it can increase and deepen researchers' insight into theories and issues that are relevant to the problem to be researched.

Figure 3.
The Circuit of Culture



Source: Gay et al., (1997)

In this research, the data and results obtained can be declared credible if they fulfill the following three criteria. Research can be said to have reached a saturation point if the data and information obtained are close to absolute certainty. This means that if the search for data and information continues, the results will remain the same as the data that was previously found. Data saturation referred to here is not oriented to the amount of data and information obtained, but rather if new data and information are no longer found, then data and information mining can be said to be complete (Amin, 2022). In research, scope is needed because it will help researchers to focus on the research boundaries that have been determined and prevent researchers from exploring data and information that is not related to the topic and research problem formulation. Besides that, research can be declared to have passed the dependability test if other researchers can replicate the series of research processes. Dependability testing can be carried out using auditing techniques for the entire research process (Mekarisce, 2020).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Production Circuit

In cultural production, there are two emphasis that need to be discussed, namely cultural artifacts and cultural practices. Cultural production not only involves understanding how a cultural product is technically produced, but also how the cultural product is encoded with certain meanings during the production process (Gay et al., 1997). Cultural artifacts in this research refer to the

media texts and images on the covers of the *British Vogue*'s editions in August 2018 and February 2022. Meanwhile, cultural practices refer to the process of producing meaning in the media texts on the covers of selected editions of *British Vogue*. On the cover of the August 2018 edition, the headline text reads *Oprah's Next Act: An Audience with a Global Powerhouse*, this represents her persona as a public figure whose influence has spread throughout the world. In this edition, she talked with a journalist, Decca Aitkenhead, about race, feminism, and the ups-downs of her personal life (Enniful, 2018).

Then on the cover of the February 2022, the headline text reads *Fashion Now: First Look at the New Season & the Faces Shaping 2022*. The headline described the main discussion in this edition regarding the representation of women's beauty and fashion which has now shifted in Africa. Through the words "the faces shaping 2022", *British Vogue* wanted to create a revolution in the world of fashion and change people's views on the fashion industry. *British Vogue* also wants to celebrate and show the beauty of black women, as well as the rise of the black African supermodel era. Apart from that, through this edition *British Vogue* also wants to emphasize the representation of Africa in the world of fashion is not only for representation of certain standards of beauty, but also about raising economic, social, and cultural status. Every time in each issue *British Vogue* has a tradition of presenting readers with a discussion about the essential or most important aspects of the latest fashion collection. Therefore, in the February

2022 edition, *British Vogue* also included the article *First Look at The New Season* in the main headline (Enniful, 2022). In the production element of this research, the form of representation that *British Vogue* wants to convey through its magazine cover is included in the form of intentional representation (Morgan, 2022). Because what is displayed on the covers of the two selected editions of the magazine is a form of expression and intention from the media editors of *British Vogue* themselves, in which they want to create a fashion industry that is more inclusive of black and colored women and not fixated on white beauty standards.

The cover is the most iconic element of a magazine. Fashion magazine covers not only show changes in trends in the world of fashion, but also show shifts in popular culture, politics, and most importantly changes in the representation of women's identity (Chung, 2016). Fashion magazines are a type of women's magazine. Not only for entertainment functions, but women's magazines also need to be seen as a cultural domain. Although the women's magazine industry is an industry defined by commercial success, it still relies on social and cultural processes for effective operations. From a feminist perspective, media texts in women's magazines are related to the readers' self-perception. Therefore, feminists call for a more positive representation of women's images in magazines and those magazines not only function to entertain their readers but also function as a key to developing a

more realistic self-identity for women (Gough-Yates, 2003).

In the modern era, fashion magazines have become the main medium that has a big influence as a source of knowledge about fashion. Even though images dominate and are the main form of representation in a fashion magazine, media text still plays an important role. The function of media text is more than just "filling" on magazine pages but also contributes to providing readers with an understanding of the descriptive and interpretive meaning of the images displayed in a magazine. Media texts also function to mediate cultural understanding of a phenomenon with their readers (König, 2006). The media texts produced by the media are determined by the cultural and social background of the producers of the media texts. Through media texts, we can see the world from the perspective of the media text producer. People who produce media texts are usually people who have control or authority within a media organization. Apart from that, because media texts also have a commercial function, in the sense that media texts function to attract the attention of audiences and advertisers, what is expressed in the media text also depends on their tastes and needs. The messages included in media texts also depend on the decisions of stakeholders in media organizations. Therefore, it is important to involve people from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in important positions in the media to support the inclusivity of media content (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). In the production element of

the cultural circuit, meaning is produced and exchanged continuously in every personal and social interaction that we participate in in various media (Hall, 1997). In this research, the data obtained in the production element shows how the form of representation of black women shown on the cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions of *British Vogue* shows the values and meanings matched.

4.2. Regulation Partaking

Meaning regulates our behavior. Regulations help us establish several rules and norms that govern social life. This element also wants to form a social structure that can regulate social life (Hall, 1997). In this research, the regulations will highlight the criteria and regulations set by *British Vogue* in determining who is worthy of being the cover model for their magazine and according to the headline in each edition. *Vogue* is one of the most prestigious and respected fashion magazines in the world. *Vogue* is known for the high quality of its journalism. Appearing on the content or cover of *Vogue* is a great honor. The editors of *Vogue* magazine are notoriously picky and critical about who they feature on the cover and content of their magazine. For anyone who is on the cover of *Vogue* magazine, it means that they are a person whose dignity and social status is respected yet is considered attractive (Quora, 2021).

Not only models and celebrities, *Vogue* also likes to feature other influential figures in society who are still rarely touched by the media on its magazine covers. *Vogue* always tries

to explore the best figures from various fields and of all ages. Everyone who becomes a cover model for *Vogue* magazine has qualities, achievements, and uniqueness that can attract the attention of *Vogue's* audience, as well as enhance and strengthen the branding. They are extraordinary figures who dominate their professional field in the media, fashion, and beauty industries (Morgan, 2022). Oprah Winfrey was chosen to be the cover model for the August 2018 edition of *British Vogue* because of her accomplishments and achievements as a TV presenter and black female public figure from the United States, as well as her success in establishing her own media called the *Oprah Winfrey Network*. In addition, her advocacy in favor of diversity and inclusivity of skin color in the media, fashion, and beauty industries aligns with *British Vogue's* editorial policy under the leadership of Edward Enninful.

Meanwhile, on the cover of the February 2022 featured black supermodels from Africa. They were chosen as the cover models in this edition because the editors considered them worthy of representing black African women thanks to their accomplishments and achievements as models. Their presence in the fashion and beauty industry is also considered capable of shifting the standards of female beauty which were previously oriented towards white women. This research explains the regulations set by *British Vogue* in determining who is worthy of being a cover model for their magazine, as well as being able to represent the

target audience and brand image of British Vogue.

4.3. Audience Consumption

Apart from being assessed on the influence of the selected individual in society, this eligibility is also assessed based on their achievements and self-worth. Apart from that, in the era of Enniful's leadership, the *British Vogue* cover models selected were also judged based on the advocacy and social influence they could provide not only to their fans, but also to the *British Vogue* audience. Meaning making is an ongoing process. The meaning created by the producer is not the end of a story or product because it does not tell us how the story or product is interpreted by consumers. Therefore, meaning is not only transmitted and received passively between producers and consumers but is also actively created through the consumption of these products in consumers' daily lives (Gay et al., 1997).

Data for the consumption element in this research was obtained through audience comments obtained from the reply to column to tweets uploaded by the official Twitter and Instagram accounts of *British Vogue*, Oprah Winfrey, Edward Enniful, as well as mass media articles discussing the covers of selected editions of *British Vogue*. In the image of Oprah Winfrey, the followers filled the reply column with various compliments for her appearance on the *British Vogue*'s cover of the August 2018. One Twitter user named LW expressed his admiration for the photo and asked Oprah about her experience of being queen for a day in the photo shoot. Other users also expressed their

praise for Oprah's beauty, who was considered like a queen. Fans also expressed various praises for the cover of the August 2018 edition of *British Vogue* via Edward Enniful's Twitter account. One user named JJ apart from praising the cover of the edition, she also expressed her appreciation for Oprah Winfrey, that Oprah is a woman who is not afraid to stand up for what she believes in.

Then the cover of the February 2022 edition of *British Vogue* received a lot of negative comments from the audience, people who read the edition, and people who just saw the cover. Edward Enniful's followers expressed their disappointment by criticizing the cover photo for the February 2022 edition. One user with the account name @bubu_elephant said that he initially felt happy because he could see a magazine cover featuring black female models, considering the industry modeling has long been dominated by colorism. But on the other hand, he was also disappointed because what was shown on the cover of the February 2022 issue of *British Vogue* still contained many shortcomings, especially in terms of photography, and had not succeeded in showing the true representation of black women. Then another user named NJ also gave similar comments and criticism, that the faces of the models on the cover could not be seen clearly, and the cover photo was a negative depiction of African women. Criticism does not only come from *British Vogue*'s audience but also comes from those who believe that the media industry often displays excessive representations of black women and still adheres to the old

ideas of western culture which has a fetishistic obsession with black women (Lijadu, 2022). Of all the opinion articles about the cover of the February 2022 edition of British Vogue circulating in the media, all of them discuss and criticize the same thing which was the quality of the cover photo. One of them is as follows.

“The industry does appear to favor either extremely light skin or extremely dark skin, neglecting the wide range of shades in between. I wonder if dark-skinned black women took up more space as image-makers, whether this rigid representation would shift?” – FL, Gal-Dem, 2022

Meanwhile, at CNN there is Stephanie Busari, who is CNN’s supervising editor for Africa. She also wrote his opinion and criticism of the cover of the February 2022 issue of *British Vogue* on the CNN Style website. She first saw the cover of *British Vogue*’s February 2022 issue when she was sent a photo of the magazine’s cover by one of her friends via Instagram message. She revealed that she was disappointed with the results of the February 2022 cover.

“What I found is that many of us want to love these images but can’t shake off a feeling of disquiet that is rooted in deeper issues around beauty standards that have excluded us for so long.” – SB, CNN Supervising Editor for Africa, 2022

Apart from the many criticisms aimed at *British Vogue* regarding their magazine cover photo in this edition, there are still some people who support and praise the cover of

British Vogue’s February 2022 edition. As can be seen from the comments’ column on Edward Enninful and Adut Akech’s Instagram accounts, not a few people praised the beauty of the models on the cover and expressed their gratitude to Enninful for making black women the main stars on the cover of his magazine. A user with the account name @thattechmom expressed her gratitude to Enninful for creating something that she could finally show to her daughter after a long time. Instagram users also expressed various other praises for the cover of *British Vogue*’s February 2022 edition via the comments’ column on Edward Enninful’s Instagram post. Basically, we all tend to “talk” to the media texts we consume. Even though we don’t go through the process of interacting through media like the writers and social media users above, we also interact personally and passively with the media texts we consume. For example, we can choose what magazine to read, choose which media articles we will read on the internet and make our explicit comments when reading news or media text on our cell phone screen. Anecdotally, media consumption takes many forms that cannot be measured or easily subsumed into the kinds of generalizations or abstractions generated by market research or the expectations of media producers. Media consumption also not only discusses the match between the textual meaning of media texts and the readers’ cognitive understanding, but also an empirical understanding of media text consumption activities and the

idiosyncrasies of each audience (Long & Wall, 2012).

Understanding the media text on the cover of *British Vogue* magazine is related to a feminist perspective, considering that *British Vogue* is a type of women's magazine. Feminists emphasize their attention to the topic of how the media depicts the image and representation of women. Analysis of media texts from a feminist perspective discusses how the media contributes to the empowerment of women, whatever their social class, race or sexual orientation. Media texts here are also seen as part of wider cultural production, as well as contributing to the social construction of femininity and the image of women in the media (Long & Wall, 2012). The meaning of cultural products is constantly produced and exchanged through the personal and social interactions we participate in in society, as well as in various media. Meaning is also produced every time we express ourselves in terms of utilizing, consuming, or adapting to cultural products in circulation that is when we apply the cultural products we receive in everyday life, namely by giving them value or meaning, or when we compose narratives and stories about these cultural products (Hall, 1997). In this research, it is proven that *British Vogue*'s audience reach is no longer limited to the United Kingdom but has spread throughout the world due to the easy access to the internet and social media. International audiences can now access *British Vogue* magazines and media texts easily from anywhere and at any time. The impact of the media texts produced by *British*

Vogue not only attracts the attention of *British Vogue*'s audience in the UK and fashion observers, but also international audiences and media studies researchers who are interested in racial issues and feminism in the fashion industry.

4.4. Identity that Matters

Meaning speaks about who we are and our origins regarding our cultural, ethnic, and geographic background, so it becomes a question, "How is culture used to mark and maintain identity within a group, as well as overcome differences between groups?" (Hall, 1997). In this stage, we will discuss the identity of the black woman featured on the cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions of *British Vogue*. Stuart Hall in his essay says that there are two different ways of thinking about cultural identity, that cultural identity is collective and has its own history. Cultural identity reflects collective historical experiences and cultural codes but because cultural identities are shaped by different histories, we cannot generalize about people's experiences based on their shared race, ethnicity, or place of residence alone. Cultural identity is not something that is fixed and cannot change outside of historical and cultural contexts. Cultural identity has its own history and undergoes continuous transformation, as well as experiencing the "play" of history, culture, and political power (Williams & Chrisman, 1994).

The identity of the black woman featured on the two selected covers is the identity of a black American woman (Oprah Winfrey, August 2018) and a black African woman

(Adut Akech and friends, February 2022). Even though they come from different countries and continents and have different histories and cultures, they are united by the same advocacy, by skin color inclusivity in the media, fashion, and beauty industries. They are highlighted and made representatives of black women because of their accomplishments in their respective fields. What makes them have added value that makes them considered worthy of being a *British Vogue* cover model is because of their success which was achieved through struggle and hard work as well as their inspirational figure. For Oprah Winfrey herself, she was chosen as the representative black woman on the cover of *British Vogue* because her struggles and ideals were able to inspire black women all over the world to realize the same social ideals. In February 2021, in celebration of Black History Month, *Glamour US* interviewed black women from around the world to share their thoughts on what beauty and representation mean to them. One of them is Funmi Fetto, writer, contributing editor of *British Vogue*, and host of a beauty podcast entitled *On Reflection*. She said that beauty and black culture are closely related. She saw that in England the beauty of black women was celebrated in certain public spaces, whereas in other places, black women tended to be fetishized, ostracized, treated with curiosity, or ignored (Oré, 2021).

In England, black people make up a total of 3% of the total population, but this fact still cannot have much influence on increasing the self-esteem of black women there. Some of them feel that in this country

their natural beauty will only be appreciated if they have a slightly lighter skin tone or meet Eurocentric beauty standards. Meanwhile, for those who do the opposite, they tend to be demeaned, stereotyped, and ignored (Blackett, 2022). In choosing who will appear on the cover of a magazine, careful consideration is required. Because apart from functioning as the “face” of the magazine, the cover also has a commercial function. An attractive cover can sell magazines and attract more readers. People selected to be cover models for a magazine are considered archetypes of the field or group they represent. Archetypes are selected based on an assessment of whether they are worthy of representing a particular group or field or not based on their influence in society. Usually, fashion magazines use celebrities or models as their cover models. In presenting a representation in the media, the decision about who will be shown depends on the decisions of the people who are in decision-making positions in the media. While also looking at cultural background factors, closeness (both socially and culturally), and their preferences (Long & Wall, 2012). In fashion magazines, who will be the cover model of the magazine is determined by the editor-in-chief.

The choice of Oprah Winfrey and Adut Akech and friends as cover models was also due to their social closeness to Edward Enninful. Oprah’s closeness to Enninful began when Oprah began supporting *British Vogue*’s vision to create a more inclusive fashion and media world, several months before Oprah became

their cover model (Enniful, 2018). Then Enniful's closeness to the models on the cover of the February 2022 edition can be seen through the caption on Adut Akech's Instagram upload. Akech called Enniful "papa" and expressed his gratitude for the support, attention, and affection that Enniful gave her during his career as a model. Edward Enniful's closeness to Oprah Winfrey proves Stuart Hall's first theory of collective cultural identity. Although Oprah Winfrey is African American, she is not African, she is a black person who has the status of a United States citizen and was born and raised there. Her identity as a black person makes her ethnically and racially close to Enniful as a fellow black person. Then regarding Edward Enniful's closeness to the cover models for the February 2022 edition, this proves Stuart Hall's second theory of cultural identity that is part of history and originating from a certain place.

Enniful's closeness to them is not only as fellow blacks, but also closeness in terms of culture, history, and geographical background as people of native African descent. Enniful and these models joined forces and worked together to represent Africa on the cover of *British Vogue*'s February 2022 issue. The identity of black women featured on both covers of selected editions of *British Vogue* shows black women as creators of new beauty trends, as well as inspirational and empowering figures. Through their appearance on the cover, the trend in female beauty, which previously focused more on white women, has now shifted to black women and other people of color.

4.5 Representation

Of the four elements of the cultural circuit that have been discussed previously, production, regulation, consumption and identity, they end at one point called representation. These five elements of the cultural circuit do not have a standard order but are all interconnected and form a representation. Representations are formed from a collection of meanings in our minds and ultimately form a conceptual map. The way we articulate the conceptual map is mediated by language, but cultural meanings do not only exist in our minds, but they also organize and regulate social practices, influence our behavior, and have real impacts (Hall, 1997). At this representation stage, we will discuss the representation shown on the *British Vogue*'s cover of the August 2018 and February 2022 editions along with media text that shows the meaning of the representation in it.

On the cover of *British Vogue* magazine, the representation of black women is shown through the media text on the cover and textual images in the form of photographs. We give meaning to things through words, our stories about them, our depictions of them, the emotions we attribute to them, the way we classify and conceptualize them, and the values we place on certain meanings. Culture is involved in all practices that are not only genetically programmed into us, but also carry meaning and value for us, and involve all levels of society, which then form representations (Hall, 1997).

As in the production process for the cover of *British Vogue*'s February 2022 issue, the people involved

behind the scenes are almost all black people of African descent. Starting from behind-the-scenes workers such as editor-in-chief, editors, make-up artists, hair stylists, and artistic directors. In media studies, the issue of representation is often discussed specifically by focusing on the portrait of certain individuals and/or social groups, as well as their privileges and uniqueness. We cannot claim that we have represented certain individuals or groups if we have not actually involved them in decision-making positions in the media because as we have learned in the production aspect, meaning is encoded by certain cultural processes and practices during the production process. What is represented in the media also represents the interests, perceptions and appearance of the world from the perspective of media producers (Long & Wall, 2012).

In representation, some signs are considered more special than other signs so that these signs are considered worthy of representing a particular culture or group. The special signs referred to in this research are models and celebrities who are the cover models for August 2018 and February 2022. In understanding certain cultures or groups, we need figures who are called celebrities or stars as intermediaries so that we can understand that group or culture. we refer. In this case, stars and celebrities function as media texts that underlying representation and approaches that show that representation in the media is a place and process of making social meaning

We have explored the various forms and meanings of representation

as a general category for thinking about how media texts and images convey a view of the world or the world that the media seeks to create for us as audiences. Specifically, representation is used as a label for thinking about how certain individuals and/or social groups are portrayed based on cultural identity, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, national status, and so on. Then there is an idea called stereotypes which explores the positive and negative ways in which certain individuals and/or social groups are represented, as well as how stereotypes work as a form of shorthand to tell us about the world that cannot be avoided when it comes to cultural depictions. The idea of “the politics of representation” emerged which was produced by the negative function of stereotypes, discussing the media’s responsibility regarding the demographics of media institutions and the access that minority groups have to the means to demonstrate the existence of their group in the media.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that fashion magazine covers are a manifestation of developments over time and culture, as well as showing shifts in trends and women’s identities in the fashion and beauty industry. At the production stage, it can be concluded that media texts and images are given certain meanings by media producers during the production process, and the meaning contained in a media text and image reflects the worldview and interests of the producer and media institution that created it. We can see that media texts and images created

by media producers, as well as who the figures will appear on magazine covers, cannot be determined carelessly and must pay attention to and comply with editorial policies to talk about regulatory steps in the circuit of culture. Then at the consumption stage, it is explained that consumers actively give new meaning to the media texts and images they consume through their social interactions in a different way from media producers and remain critical in paying attention to the context contained in media texts and images which they feel is contradictory to their goals. the original.

Regarding the identity stage, meaning explains our origins, starting from cultural, geographical, ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as what factors influence the media's consideration of the identity they want to choose as a representative of a particular social or cultural group in the media. In the aspect of representation, it is explained that representation in the media can help us to understand and provide judgments about individuals and/or certain social groups through signs in the form of text and media images. The *British Vogue*'s covers of August 2018 and February 2022 editions also show that media texts and images have their meaning and can be representative signs. The representation of black women shown through these two covers shows the cultural identity of the group of black African American women represented by Oprah Winfrey and black African women represented by Adut Akech and friends. The representation shown on the covers of the August 2018 and February 2022

editions of *British Vogue* can also influence and shape the audience's views and assessments of black women.

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