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In Vogue

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Abstract

Since its conception, Vogue has undergone many style and content changes. It has gone from a self-described “social gazette” catering only to societal elites, to an iconic fashion industry staple read by people from all social classes. One aspect of this study explores the ways changes were made to help expand the magazine’s reach, including a look at staff members from the past and present, including Arthur B. Turnure, Condé Nast, and Anna Wintour, who made these changes happen. Another important aspect explored in this study is challenges faced by the magazine financially, and the struggle to adapt and stay relevant as the fashion industry changes, moving away from traditional magazines and becoming increasingly digital.

Today, Vogue is the equivalent of the uber popular girl in high school. She is rich, effortlessly cool, always ahead of the trends. She inspires copycats and rivals and is often the subject of rumors and speculation. The girl whose influence, whether you like or not, cannot be denied.

At the time of its creation, Vogue was not intended to cater to only women or even to be a fashion magazine. Vogue was created in 1892 by Arthur B. Turnure as a weekly “social gazette” for high society New Yorkers, men and women alike (Augustyn, 2017). Turnure himself was a socialite as was his original editor in chief, Josephine Redding (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.). The magazine’s creation was even funded by big name businessmen including Cornelius Vanderbilt (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.).

While Vogue offered the occasional fashion advice it did not originally focus on reporting trends. The magazine included sections called “Society Snapshots” and as part of Vogue’s attempts to appeal to both men and women, “Of Interest to Her” and “Of Interest to Him” (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.). The creation of content was divided by gender among employees as well. Men working at the magazine, including Turnure himself, wrote about social events and sports, and Redding was assigned topics related to fashion. She also used her influence as editor in chief to include articles dedicated to animal welfare, a topic she was passionate about (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.).

It was not until a few years later that the magazine began to move towards a focus on fashion. The biggest change occurred when Rosa Payne ran an article about

garment patterns. At the time this was a risky decision because this appeared contrary to the target audience of the magazine (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.). The very wealthy would be able to afford to buy all of their clothes rather than making them. The decision paid off because readers loved the section, and similar columns like “Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes” and “Vogue’s Designs for the Seamstress” were added (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.).

Despite making the change to focus solely on female readers and expanding their circulation beyond the upper class, the magazine was in financial trouble as circulation numbers declined. Vogue’s salvation came in the form of Condé Nast. Nast worked on magazines such as Collier’s Weekly and for the Home Pattern Company, the company in charge of patterns appearing in Ladies Home Journal, before he turned his sights on acquiring Vogue. Nast began negotiations with Turnure in 1905 but because Turnure passed away in 1906, he did not take ownership of the magazine until 1909 (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d., “Vogue puts its 120-year history online”, 2011).

Nast’s experience in the magazine industry helped him make critical changes needed to not just keep Vogue afloat but also to elevate it to icon status. Of the changes made, one of the most notable was the decision to go from being a weekly magazine to a semi monthly magazine. The price for individual issues went from 10 to 15 cents, but readers would get more content per issue with the average number of pages going from 30 to 100 (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.). Among other important changes, Nast made the decision to remove any fiction from the magazine. All of the articles included would be nonfiction, and the focus would shift to

fashion and related content (“The Evolution of Vogue (2012)”, n.d.).

Commercially, Vogue was a success like never before and Nast expanded his reach. He began publishing House and Gardens in 1911, Vanity Fair in 1914, and expanded Vogue’s publication to Europe with British Vogue, today called UK Vogue, in 1916, and French Vogue in 1920 (Table 1).

Unfortunately for Nast, the Great Depression took its toll on his empire and he was forced to turn over financial ownership of his businesses to the bank, and in 1936 he had to merge Vanity Fair with Vogue

The start of Vogue as modern readers know it began in 1988 with the appointment of Anna Wintour as editor in chief (Augustyn, 2017, “Vogue puts its 120-year history online”, 2011, Cartner-Morley, 2018). In the thirty years since her start at the magazine, Wintour’s name has become synonymous with Vogue and the fashion industry as a whole. From the moment Wintour took the reins at Vogue it was clear that she was going to be playing the game by her own rules. The very first cover she created during her reign made a splash in the industry. Shot by photographer Peter Lindbergh, Israeli model Michaela Bercu wore a Christian Lacroix jacket decorated with beads paired with blue jeans (Figure 1) (“Vogue puts its 120-year history online”, 2011, Lidbury & Holt, 2017). Blue jeans had never appeared on the cover of Vogue before this. In an editor’s letter she wrote for Vogue in, Wintour reflected back on the revolutionary shoot writing, “The jacket was actually part of a suit, but the skirt didn’t fit Michaela... Not that that mattered. In fact, it only served to reinforce the idea to take couture’s haughty grandeur and playfully throw it headlong into real life and see what happened” (Wintour, 2012, Lidbury & Holt, 2017).

The cover was new and unexpected, completely different than anything Vogue had put out before. It was so different, in fact, that in the same letter, Wintour recalls the printers calling the magazine to make sure that the cover had not been sent by mistake, writing: "I couldn't blame them. It was so unlike the studied and elegant close-ups that were typical of Vogue's covers back then, with tons of makeup and major jewelry. This one broke all the rules..." (Wintour, 2012). Breaking the rules and making her own has turned Wintour into a true force to be reckoned with in the industry.

Under Wintour's direction, the magazine has become a middle ground between the upper and lower classes. Alongside advertisements for brands like Prada, Gucci, and Chanel, there are ads for American Eagle jeans, Covergirl mascara, and Tampax tampons. This mix of high and low allows the magazine to appeal to a broader audience.

The future of Vogue is tenuous in the age of social media. Social media has taken away the power that fashion magazines once held. Fashion shows are no longer a VIP club. The rise of live streaming means anyone can tune in and see a show without even leaving their bed. Consumers can order the clothes they want without having to wait. Fashion bloggers and Instagram models pose another threat to Vogue. Consumers can find individuals running accounts and blogs that are tailored to one specific style, picking and choosing the content they want, as opposed to Vogue's general coverage. In an article for *The Guardian*, Karen Kay writes of this shifting focus: "Fashion is now far more democratic. There is no one bible and there is a marked shift in the way we consume fashion: the sources of our inspiration are increasingly fragmented and

tailored to more specific audiences" (2017). So where does this leave Vogue if it is no longer the average consumer's go-to for fashion coverage?

Vogue is present on multiple social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Publishing content on these platforms means that content can continue to be posted between issues. Social media also allows the magazine to receive feedback from their audience through engagement in the form of "likes," "shares," "retweets," and "comments." The ability to almost constantly post and update information on social media removes the constraint of space allowing Vogue to post content that may not fit the narrow focus of the print magazine. This can help Vogue reach a broader audience by not being limited to a narrower range of content. Vogue's website is another place where the content can be diversified beyond what is published in the physical magazine.

The market is changing and if Vogue cannot adapt, that may be a death sentence for the magazine. Condé Nast, the parent company of Vogue has faced its fair share of challenges recently. The company shut down its print editions of *Lucky*, as well as *Self* and *Details* and its online counterpart. They even shut down the print edition of "Teen Vogue".

Wintour has been changing Vogue to keep up with the times. She has put big name celebrities on the cover, including Beyoncé, who was on the cover of the prestigious September issue (Steigrad, 2018). The magazine has also continued to mix the high and low ends of the fashion spectrum in order to appeal to the largest audience possible. Vogue has managed to stand the test of time until now but the future of the magazine remains mysterious.

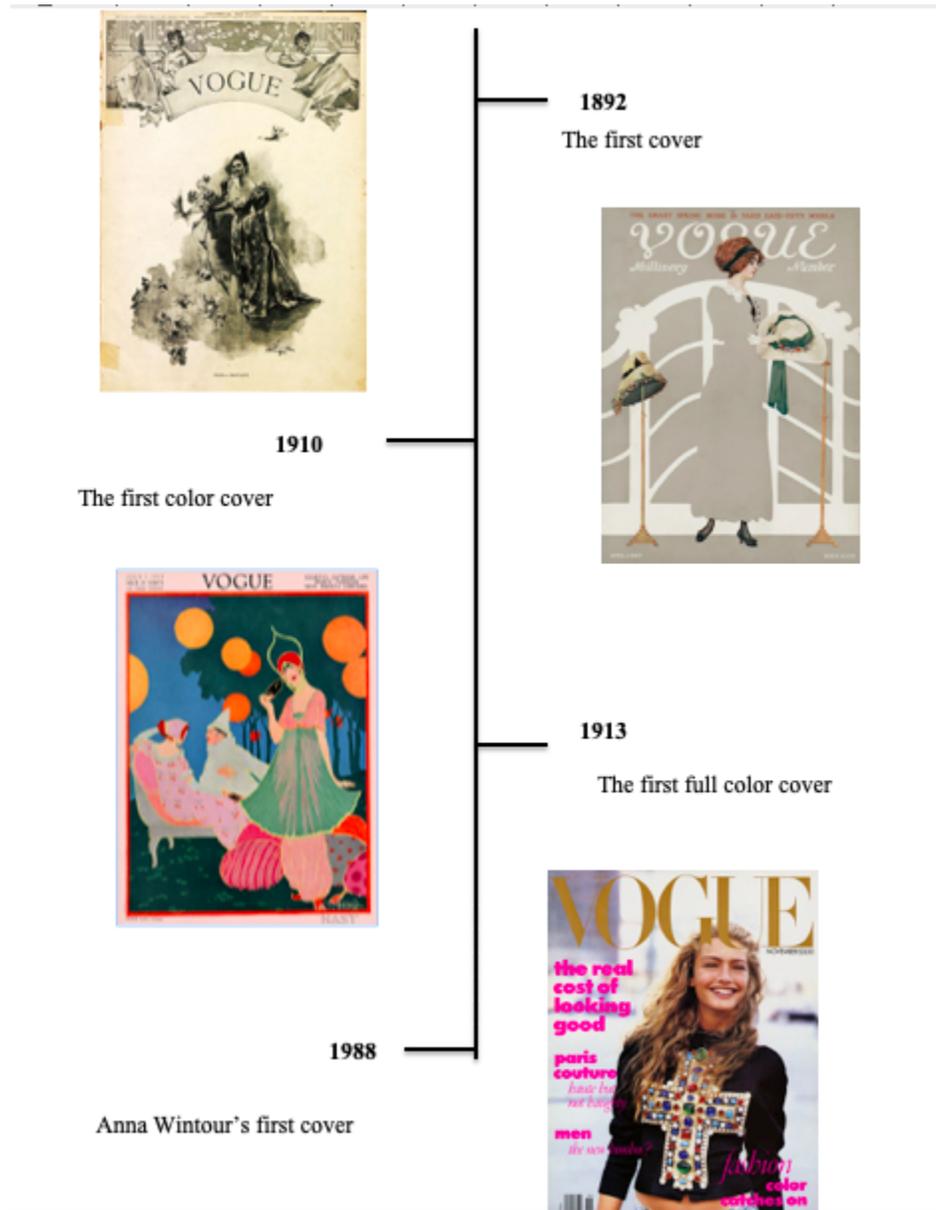


Figure 1: A timeline of notable covers from Vogue's history. The content of the magazine has changed significantly over the years as have its cover images. Image credit myfashionillustrations.wordpress.com

Location	Date Founded	Editor in Chief (as of Dec. 2018)
Australia	2000	Edwina McCann
France	1922	Emmanuelle Alt
Germany	1998	Christiane Arp
Russia	1998	Masha Fedorova
Japan	2000	Mitsuko Watanabe
India	2007	Priya Tanna
Brazil	1973	Daniela Falcão
Korea	1996	Kwangho Shin
Turkey	2010	Seda Domanic
Ukraine	2013	Philip Vlasov
United Kingdom	1916	Edward Enninful
Italy	1963	Emanuele Farneti
Spain	1988	Eugenia de la Torriente
Taiwan	1996	Sky Wu
China	2005	Angelica Cheung
Mexico/Latin America	2000	Karla Martinez
Netherlands	2012	Karin Swerink
Portugal	2002	Sofia Lucas
Thailand	2013	Kullawit Laosuksri

Table 1: Vogue International. A list of all the locations outside of the United States where Vogue magazine is published. Current as of March 2019.

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