

ON WOMEN'S MEDIA

Charting the Future of Style Media and
How It Can Reclaim its Cultural Relevance

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HURS & THE MIX PRESENT

HURS has partnered with female-led research agency The Mix to uncover how luxury brands and media publications can reinvent the style media category – beyond aspiration – to create community, value and growth.

“Media BRANDS who are not putting their readers *first* and lack a distinct point of view risk losing their CULTURAL relevance – and, with it, the next *generation* of consumers.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The online and print publications that should bring value are actually weighing women down. Within the luxury style media audience, 66% feel that women are discriminated against in the media at large. Only 21% of women feel positive about how content addresses women in digital or print articles, and 53% of women have negative feelings towards it.

- 40% of the women we spoke to say women's style media affects their self-esteem due to the "constant demand for self-improvement".

- While style publications continue to focus on aspirational content, readers are looking for inspiration. 79% of women consume women's media for inspiration, but only 26% come away feeling inspired.

- The topic of female empowerment is used to draw women in, but there are some significant challenges in the framing. While publications have made themselves believe women positively relate to the term, only a third (33%) want to read content about female empowerment, with 73% saying that they either don't like or aren't sure about the use of the term 'empowerment'.

- Whilst luxury style media has failed to reinvent itself and has become largely irrelevant as it relates to culture, it remains a critical component of relationship-building between luxury brands and their consumers. Surprisingly, 91% of luxury style media audiences feel a sense of belonging based on the publications they read.

- Readers are looking for a multitude of voices, opinions, and narratives that are a reflection of what's happening in the real world. 56% of the people we spoke to want to explore multiple points of view from a diverse group of people on the same topic, all of which would help style media to feel more inspirational and authentic.

- Community and connection are key to building a successful media brand. An overwhelming 80% say human connection is important for feeling inspired – the thing women are desiring from publications in the first place. Readers want to actively take part in the conversation, over simply reading it.

- There's a clear role for luxury style media vs social media as it relates to connection. Where social media offers a mass approach,

luxury style media creates a cultural lens through which their readers see the world. It makes for a perfect filter for building an authentic community, 58% want a community from publications, and 52% want to connect with the talent featured.





LET'S DIVE IN



INTRODUCTION

by BONNIE *Langedijk*
Founder HURS

The relationship between women and the media has always been a complicated one. Research often focuses solely on the physical portrayal of women in media and how it impacts our self esteem. Few studies go deeper to explore how the narratives, the talent, and the topics these publications feature affect women. Style media in particular has historically told women how to dress, what to buy, and how to act in order to become ‘the best version of themselves.’

But their top-down playbook is no longer enough. With consumers having plenty of options to choose from, many are distancing themselves from the well-known titles of our time that were exclusionary by design. Legacy media brands have lost their position as the conduit to culture. Over the past decade, there’s been a paradigm shift in the media landscape: a redefinition of where consumers spend their time and money and how they interact with media brands,

as well as how these media brands index on trust, value, and relevance. Once upon a time, reading the well-known style titles of our time showcased that you were in-the-know. That’s no longer the case.

The mainstream publications used to be the translators of style. As the middleman between consumers and brands or celebrities these titles were the gatekeepers to information, inspiration and access. But the rise of social media fragmented the media landscape. Today, consumers have direct access to the people, brands, and places they deem relevant, and can interact with them on their terms. On the flip side, brands and celebrities no longer need publications to connect with an audience either. With followings that often exceed that of the aforementioned titles, they’ve become media brands in their own right. Now, they own not only the content they create but also the access to the audience they engage with.

“Legacy MEDIA brands have lost their position as the *conduit* to culture.”

Additionally, media companies have become increasingly reliant on advertisers to keep their businesses afloat. A sea of publications now prioritize their relationship with brands and celebrities over showcasing their true opinions, resulting in a homogeneous media landscape. Consumer magazine digital advertising revenues will reach \$11.3 billion by 2023, while print advertising revenues will account for \$10.3 billion. The promise of magazines once was one of offering a unique point of view. But what happens when their survival is increasingly contingent on keeping those footing the bill happy?

Media has to redefine its purpose for today's world. There's value in connecting with brands and celebrities directly, but telling someone you're great will never be the same as someone else saying it. And there's a power to being showcased within a context of culture, sharing the spotlight with brands,

products and people that live within the same ecosystem. In the oversaturated world of style, many consumers are looking for a filter. An independent voice that shares without dictating, isn't afraid to ask the hard questions, and introduces both brands and audiences to what's new or overlooked. The new blueprint of success for style media brands lies in bringing value to their readers. They want niche over mass, authenticity over perfection, inspiration over aspiration, support over empowerment, and community over crowds. “On Women's Media” is a framework for media and luxury brands to understand how to redefine their position in culture and regain relevance for today's reader.

ON THE PURPOSE OF WOMEN'S MEDIA

“It’s important to consider how the political and social role of WOMEN has transformed. What was the function of fashion media back when it started and what is it *now*? The fact that the media almost hasn’t changed since then gives us a clear perspective on its current state. It is barely representative, informative or educational, and mostly entertaining, which is far from what MODERN women actually need these days. Women have much broader interests and *require* a deeper learning, rather than catching up with surface-level reporting on the things that don’t really matter.”

JULIE *Pelipas*,
Founder and Creative Director BETTTER

METHODOLOGY

To paint a clear picture of how women experience style media publications and what they're looking for, we spoke to hundreds of women, pulling insights from three overarching sources.

First, we conducted two surveys to generate quantitative insights from both the HURS community as well as the wider style media audience. Separating the two groups, allowed us to understand the general public's point of view as well as catch a glimpse of where the market is headed through polling a sub-segment of the HURS audience - which includes industry insiders and initiators of where culture goes next.

Second, we conducted a series of in-depth, 1-1 interviews with industry leaders across the creative sectors as well as group workshops, bringing together members of the HURS community. These interviews were pivotal in gaining deeper insight into

how women experience style media and luxury brands and what they want from publications, further shaping our hypothesis that emerged from the quantitative surveys.



Issue N°15

Issue N°20

ON WOMEN'S MEDIA

“Sadly so much of today’s CONTENT is about chasing numbers and page views. They care more about Bella Hadid’s toe ring than something more *in-depth*.”

TORA *Northman*,
Head of TikTok at Highsnobiety



ONE

THE STATE OF WOMEN'S MEDIA

Women's style media has often come under fire for its lack of diversity, creating a culture of pressure and beauty conformity amongst its readers. Despite us increasingly demanding the industry to more accurately mirror all women, the narrative doesn't appear to have changed.

Within the luxury style media audience, 66% feel that women are discriminated against in the media at large. Only 21% of women feel positive about how content addresses women in digital or print articles, and 53% of women have negative feelings towards it. The online and print publications that should bring value are actually weighing women down.

It's 2023 and women's style media is still making women actively feel worse about themselves. 40% of the women we spoke to say women's style media affects their self-esteem due to the “constant demand

for self-improvement”. Style media has thrived off creating an unattainable ideal for women to aspire to. Instructing readers who to be, what to talk about, and how to live, it is manufacturing the belief that we can shop our way towards resembling the women in their pages.

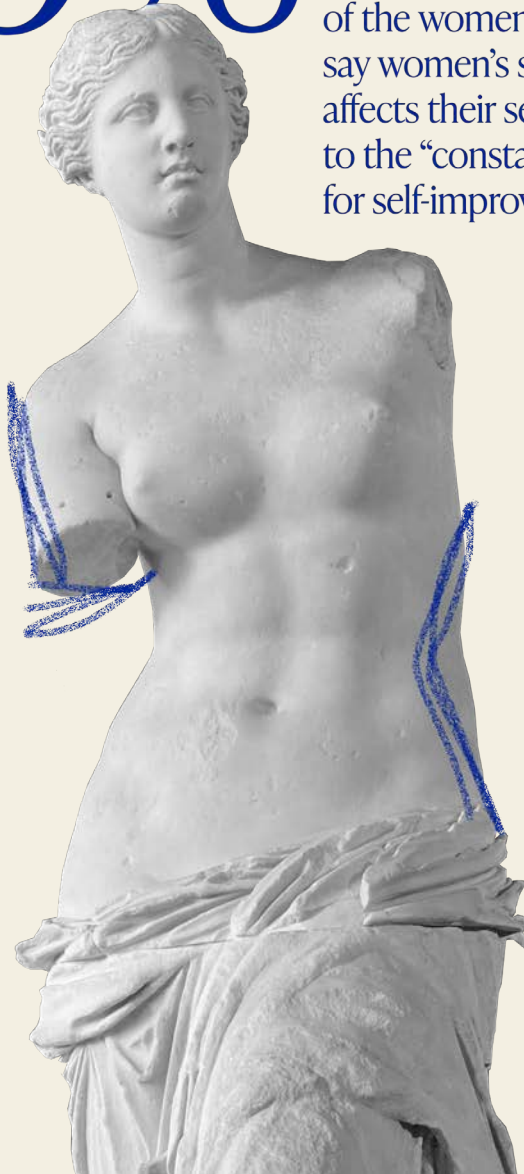
ON WOMEN'S MEDIA

“Brands want to reach women, and publications need to get a lot of eyeballs or subscribers to sell ads. And that can sometimes lead to content that tries too hard to appeal to ‘every’ type of woman, which is impossible.”

CHANTAL *Fernandez*,
Author and journalist

40%

of the women we spoke to say women's style media affects their self-esteem due to the "constant demand for self-improvement".



NEW WORLD MEDIA: A VITAL WORLD FOR CHANGE

by *LEILA Fataar*
CEO & CSO at Platform13

Media has an important role to play in pushing things forward at scale - from updating narratives to building communities and shaping public opinion. And in an AI- and content-dominated future, much more needs to be done to tackle mis- and disinformation, bias and stereotype. We have seen where mainstream media might frame information around a political or financial agenda. The truth and the full story has never been more important.

I believe brands, education systems, companies and relevant organisations must take a leading role in helping teach and embed key new world soft skills like critical thinking, digital literacy and empathy as content across channels becomes even harder to verify.

The need for credible new media outlets
Having worked in advertising, marketing and communications for almost three dec-

ades, I have both seen and been part of the fragmentation of 'information sharing' from print, to online, to social and more. New media can foster a sense of community and belonging for their respective audiences. They can provide a platform for nuanced voices to be heard and shine a light on important issues that might otherwise be ignored by the mainstream media.

Turning to women-focused media specifically, The Mix and HURS study this year highlighted some key issues in the style media space.

- 66% of women feel that women are discriminated against in the media at large.
- Only 21% of women feel positive about how content addresses women in digital or print articles.
- 53% of women have negative feelings towards how women are addressed in the media.

- 40% of women say women's style media affects their self-esteem due to the "constant demand for self-improvement."
- Only a quarter (26%) of women come away from reading content feeling inspired.

These findings are clear: the current state of women's style media is not working for women. It's making them feel worse about themselves, and it is not inspiring them.

Reasons to protect and champion women-led new media outlets

First, it provides a platform for women to share their stories and perspectives. Women have unique experiences and insights that are often overlooked and women-led media can help to ensure that these voices are heard.

Second, women-led media can challenge stereotypes about women by providing a more accurate and nuanced view of women, by women.

Third, women-led media can promote gender equality. When the media portrays women in a positive light, it can help to shift public attitudes towards women and to promote gender equality for everyone.

Another important step is to create more opportunities for women to work in the style media industry. This can be done by supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives, and by hiring more women in leadership

positions. It's also important to provide training and mentorship opportunities for women who are interested in working in the style media industry.

The Future of Women-Led Media

Despite the challenges facing women-led media, there is reason to be optimistic about the future.

The future of women-led media is bright. With the increasing demand for diverse and inclusive content, women-led media outlets are well-positioned to succeed. They're providing a much-needed alternative to the mainstream media, and they are helping to make the world a more equitable place for women.

There are a number of new and emerging media companies that are challenging the status quo and providing a credible platform for women's voices. They're using the power of the internet to reach a global audience, and with it are breaking down the barriers that have traditionally prevented women from succeeding in the media industry.

In a world where the mainstream media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations by taking steps to support women-led style media and to create more opportunities for women in the media industry, we can help to ensure that women's voices are heard and that women's issues are represented.

ON WOMEN'S MEDIA

“In previous decades, women’s magazines were able to rely on a lofty voice that was shot through with privilege; today that tone has shifted to be more accessible, inclusive, and conversational. I liken it to the difference between a knife-and-fork meal at a white tablecloth restaurant and a sandwich-to-go at a snack bar. There is no longer a special dish of the day dictated by the chef; it’s about picking and choosing according to your tastes, making sure there is something for everyone.”

ELLIE *Pithers*,
Journalist and Digital Consultant

TWO



ASPIRATION VS. INSPIRATION

What are women looking for in style media? As one of the cornerstones of popular culture, style media is about inspiration. If done right, publications can make us look beyond what we know. It's about seeing a window into other people's lives in order to stimulate you to take active control over your own.

Yet when we speak to women about whether style media lives up to this, we can see that it categorically does not. Only a quarter (26%) of women come away from reading content feeling inspired.

Instead, the focus of style media continues to lean heavily towards aspirational content, which as told by the figures above, reinforces mainstream media's focus on pressuring women into feeling they aren't good enough.

Inspiration and aspiration are often used

interchangeably, yet there is a gulf of difference between the two concepts. Aspiration is a strong desire or ambition of achieving something. It results in content that focuses on out-of-reach – often luxury – goods and celebrity and influencer profiles. Making the reader believe attaining those products or mirroring the lives of those individuals is somehow necessary to be enough.

Inspiration is the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, often closely intertwined with a creative act. Content that inspires equips women with the stories and tools to explore new perspectives and ideas and to take ownership of their lives. Readers apply the information and insights they have been given on their terms over being told what to wear, how to live, or what to buy.

Inspiration raises you up.
Aspiration keeps you down.

“I would love for today’s media to carve out more of a stage for the ‘everyday’ woman, rather than leaning into the clickbait model - spotlighting trending celebrities and nepo-babies or unattainable fashion wishlists.”

MIMI *Shodeinde*,
Designer and founder Miminat Designs

If you still believe aspiration is the secret sauce of the luxury industry, then think again. Whilst the luxury style media space continues to focus on the same old tropes of celebrity profiles and exclusive shop windows into luxury goods, the rest of the world of luxury has moved on.

As luxury expert Eric Briones, Co-founder of the Paris School of Luxury has stated:

“From now on, luxury is pivoting and becoming horizontal, the pyramid is flattening. The customer exists and has a say, she wants to speak and be heard.”

Whilst luxury style media has failed to reinvent itself and has become largely irrelevant as it relates to culture, it remains a critical component of relationship-building between luxury brands and their consumers. Surprisingly, 91% of luxury style media audiences feel a sense of belonging based

on the publications they read. It’s clear we are great at creating the basis of the relationship but we need to change the terms of the deal.

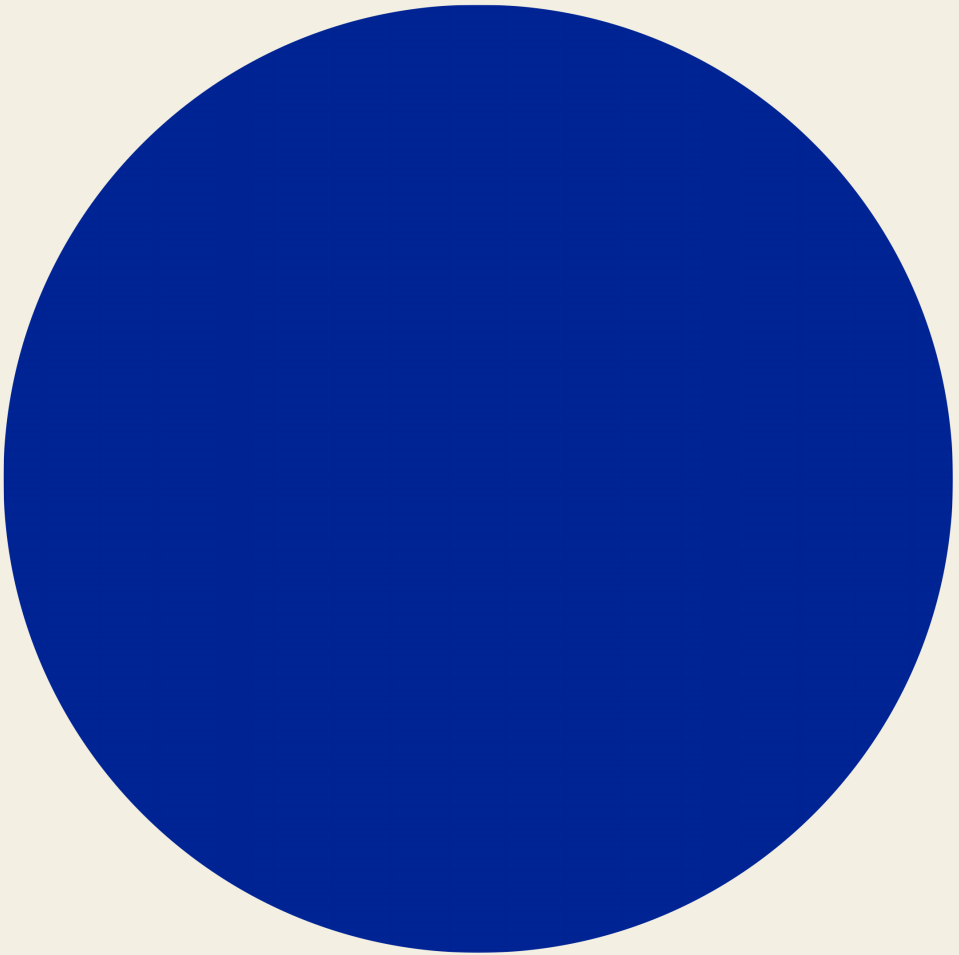
How do we overhaul something that currently affects 40% of women’s self esteem negatively, and yet has the capacity to create a strong sense of community, for the better? As a starting point, style media publications have to abandon their beliefs of what women care about, and start listening to what we actually want to read. Mainstream media has to revisit its purpose, establish how to bring value to their readers and find a way to regain the reader’s trust.

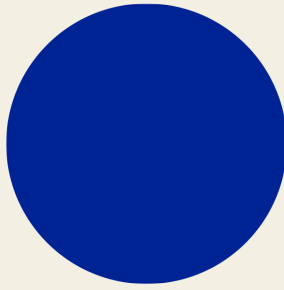
ON SETTING IDEALS

“Where women’s MEDIA remains largely unchanged and has perhaps even regressed is in the number of click bait articles that shape a sense of *insecurity* in women, to increase not only readership but commerce. With the sheer amount of DATA available today along with the revenue struggles that media face, I have seen a significant increase in the amount of articles that promote invasive procedures, silhouettes to diminish waist lines, and photoshopped images of celebrities to perpetuate an *unrealistic* — and completely false — ideal.”

NEADA Deters,
Founder and CEO LESSE

79% OF WOMEN CONSUME
WOMEN'S MEDIA FOR
INSPIRATION





**BUT ONLY 26% COME
AWAY FEELING INSPIRED**

ARE WE STILL LIVING IN A BARBIE WORLD?

by *JORDAN Mitchell*
Co-Founder of Good Culture Inc.

In the wake of the Barbie Movie's global stampede and marketing shut down, it was refreshing to see how a global franchise famed for perpetuating an idealized portrayal of unattainable beauty standards created a film that subverts and pokes fun at the very tropes it was built on. However, beneath the surface of this seemingly progressive movie lies a troubling reality: women, particularly black women, continue to feel upheld to the unrealistic expectations projected and perpetuated by the media landscape.

A recent study by HURS revealed within the luxury style media audience, 66% feel that women are discriminated against in the media at large. While 79% of women turn to women's media for inspiration, a mere 26% come away feeling inspired. This begs the question: are we still living in a Barbie world, where unrealistic ideals overshadow authentic representation?

In today's interconnected world, the media holds significant power in shaping societal perceptions. However, for women – and the lens I can authentically speak to is black women specifically – the issue of under-representation persists. The impact of this extends beyond the media, influencing societal attitudes and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Authentic representation of black women in the media can serve as a catalyst for dismantling harmful narratives and challenging societal biases. When young girls see reflections of themselves on screen, they gain inspiration and believe in the validity of their dreams. I saw this first-hand with my client Clara Amfo, when she was honored with a “Barbie Role Model” modeled in her likeness. It served as personal recognition for all the many childhood years spent not feeling seen or validated.

Visibility in media not only fosters self-esteem and empowerment but also creates a sense of belonging within the broader community. However, true representation also acknowledges the intersectional experiences of black women. By portraying these wide ranging realities accurately, the media can contribute to dispelling stereotypes and create space for black women to be displayed as nuanced individuals.

Yet, the journey towards authentic representation demands more than just token inclusion on the screen or in magazines. The lack of diversity behind the scenes plays a critical role in moving things on. To create a more inclusive media landscape, structural changes within the industry are essential. Black women must not only be represented on screen but also hold decision-making positions, including writing, directing, producing, and executive roles. Empowering them to shape narratives ensure authentic experiences are reflected in the stories told.

It's evident that media outlets with diverse workforces create far more dynamic work.

Creating narratives that challenge, inspire and educate their audiences with stories that transcend race but ultimately address and impact the cultural zeitgeist.

The stats speak for themselves with research from HURS concluding that only 21% of women feel positive about how content addresses women, while a staggering 53% harbor negative feelings towards such articles. These stats speak to the problematic nature of some of the narratives and themes that perpetuate ideals that women struggle to hold themselves to.

To truly disrupt and change the media landscape, we must place greater emphasis on embracing the diversity of voices and experiences that empowers all women, including black women. It's time we break down the walls of Barbie's Dream House and step into the real world and start authentically uplifting real women as an always on priority.

ON ASPIRATION

“Growing up, I loved magazines and I loved the way they made me feel: they were aspirational. But everything is so accessible now, it’s harder to achieve that feeling of aspiration.”

LAUREN *Sherman*,
Editor and Fashion Correspondent at Puck

A black and white photograph of a hand, likely a woman's, wearing a ring on the ring finger. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with fingers slightly curled. The background is dark, making the hand and the ring stand out. Overlaid on the hand is the word "THREE" in a large, white, serif font, centered horizontally and vertically.

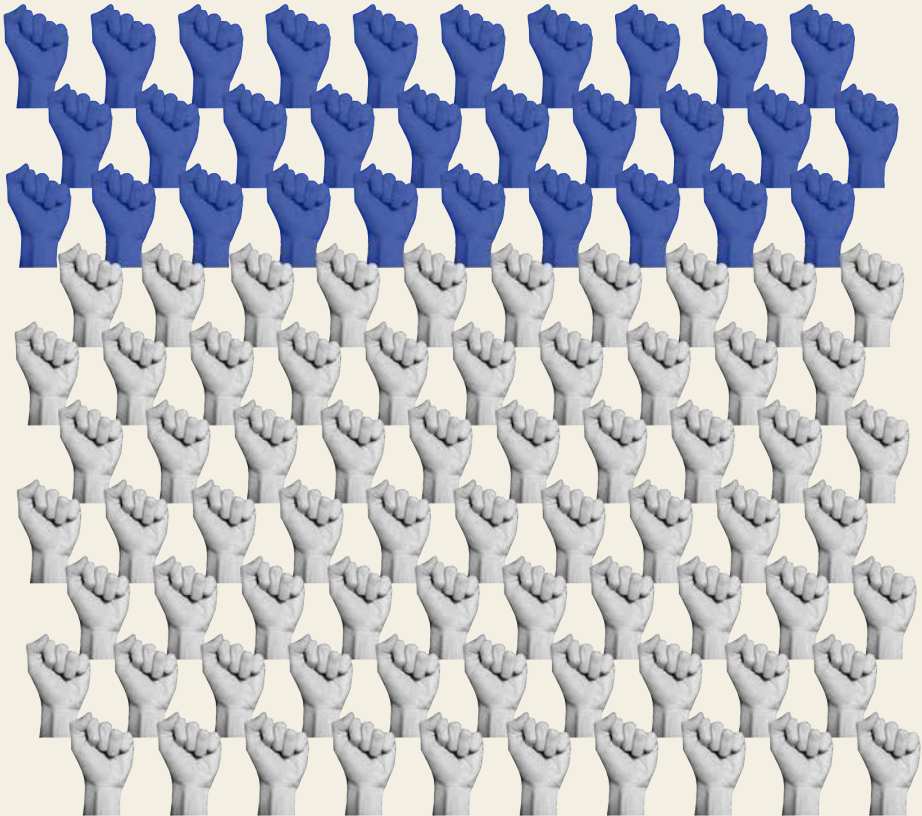
THREE

THE EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE

The thrust towards aspirational content continues to direct style media into a homogenized mono-view of successful womanhood. Mainstream style media has made few or no changes to their formats for decades, and we've accepted feeling jaded rather than stimulated by the stories, people, and products featured on their pages.

We heard from those we spoke to that most profiles still paint a caricature of women, and, although style media has adopted the empowerment narrative, there are some significant challenges in this framing. While publications have made themselves believe women positively relate to the term, only a third (33%) want to read content about female empowerment, with 73% saying that they either don't like or aren't sure about the use of the term 'empowerment'. Above all else, none of it feels real nor authentic.

31% say the word makes them feel bored, and 29% feel tired. Empowerment is fast becoming the 'greenwashing' of modern women's style media. It sounds promising on paper, but in reality it is all a façade: a word that exists within the media to sell the idea of equality and self sufficiency, while those same publications continuously bring us down.



Only 1/3 (33%) want to read content about female empowerment, with 73% saying that they either don't like or aren't sure about the use of the term 'empowerment'.

BEYOND EMPOWERMENT

by CAROLE *Bildé*
CMO at Veuve Clicquot

Women have ideas. Amazing ideas that can change the world.

Women want to become entrepreneurs. In some countries, women working for themselves, or starting their own businesses, are in the majority: 61 percent of working women in South Africa are entrepreneurs, 58 per cent in Ivory Coast, 62 per cent in Brazil. In Nigeria, the figure is a staggering 89 per cent, five per cent more than for men.

It's no secret that life as an entrepreneur can be tough, a rollercoaster of highs and lows. And as everyone knows, the bar for women is high. No complaints, this is simply a matter of fact.

In France, 66 percent of women entrepreneurs believe they encounter more obstacles than their male counterparts. In Japan, the figure is 67 per cent, and 64 per cent in

South Africa. In widely differing economic contexts worldwide, women feel compelled to work harder, do better, than men.

Structural barriers remain, of course. Women report unequal access to funding – not so much jumping through hoops, more a veritable assault course to secure the capital they need. And then there's the issue of support at home. Statistics worldwide continue to reflect the widely-held belief that women entrepreneurs will suffer a negative work/life balance, with an additional burden of guilt when family life is affected. (Spain tops the league of countries where this view is most strongly held). There are persistent psychological barriers, too. Impostor syndrome, low self-confidence and self-esteem are widely reported, notably in Japan, where a majority of businesswomen attribute their success to luck.

This brings us to “empowerment,” a much-used – indeed overused – word, but one that’s centrally important. “Empowerment” is the process by which women gain strength and confidence. If we can reinforce and accelerate this process, let’s do it.

I strongly believe in role models. The more powerful and successful women we see, of all ages, from all parts of the world, the better equipped we are to overcome our fears and doubts. Take every opportunity you can, to enable a woman in your circle to shine.

And yet, the very concept of “empowerment” is loaded with implications that reflect societal perspectives that can be hard to shake off. It shines a light into a deep faultline that continues to run through society. It implies that women need help to rise. An additional boost, a power surge. Even now, women in business are often perceived to be in need of nurturing and assistance to achieve full autonomy, like teenagers preparing to leave the nest (in France, for example, “empowerment” translates as autonomization). Authority and power are gifts to receive. The traditional dictionary definition makes this clearer still: Empowerment - the act of giving somebody the power or authority to do something. Believe me, the women entrepreneurs I’ve met did not need to be boosted, motivated, emancipated. All they needed was to be trusted. Not challenged and tested. In Nigeria, a wonderful woman entrepreneur told me her motto, which I love: “Don’t judge me by the challenges I’ve overcome. Teach me: I can learn.”

We need to promote a culture of trust, not a culture of “empowerment.” A culture of trust is a fairer response to the needs of women in general, and of women entrepreneurs in particular.

The perception and the reality

The balance remains fragile, and the gains we perceive are often non-existent in reality. In a world on the move, nothing much has changed for women entrepreneurs. Since 2018, our Veuve Clicquot “Bold International Barometer” survey of women’s entrepreneurship has been conducted in 25 countries. 50,000 women have responded, producing tangible data that measures shifts in our perception of women entrepreneurs.

Paradoxically, the upheavals wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic brought a measure of hope. Women’s entrepreneurship boomed, with a 10-point increase in France. New ideas blossomed, and entrepreneurship emerged as a key factor in our recovery from the crisis. It seemed, too, that the pandemic may well have weakened or removed some of the barriers typically faced by women entrepreneurs.

But the illusion was short-lived. Old habits have resurfaced, and the same old stories are heard. Today, women’s entrepreneurship is losing ground: in the UK, only 16 percent of working women are entrepreneurs, a drop of 7 per cent in just 2 years. The same goes for women expressing an interest in starting their own business: women accounted for 47 per cent of aspiring entrepreneurs in the UK in 2021, but only 40 per cent in 2023. Economic uncertainty has reinforced that all-too-familiar loss of resilience and self-confidence.

Behind this concept of “empowerment” as an absolute necessity lies another, remarkably persistent belief, grounded in a collective mindset, and supremely difficult to challenge and overcome: the idea that in order to succeed in business, a woman must act like a man.

Indeed, women need to demonstrate greater expertise and authority than men if they are to be taken seriously. This belief is held by a majority of women in business around the world, irrespective of their cultural or economic circumstances. The Barometer from Veuve Clicquot shows that it's held most strongly in Hong Kong and Mexico.

Finally, our Veuve Clicquot Bold Woman Award winners remind us that their unstoppable determination remains their most persuasive weapon. Don't spend too much time focusing on trying to act like a man. Instead, we need to focus on our aims and objectives, our self-belief, our ideas and projects. We need to communicate these with determination, conviction and ambition. And we need to banish the words "small" and "little" from our vocabulary. Women have ideas and projects that need investment. What we don't need is to qualify our initiatives as "small-scale" or (by implication) insignificant.

So, what tools do female entrepreneurs need to succeed?

Visibility. Visibility. And visibility. It's the key that unlocks many doors. The media, investors, banks, and potential clients will support us if they can see us. Ultimately, visibility brings more opportunities to grow your business and your self-confidence. Visibility is the cornerstone of a virtuous arc. Start by documenting your story, your success. Don't expect others to do it for you. Everything starts with you.

The media's impact

Empowerment is also the power to act, to make a difference. The question of visibility is critical, and the media has a central role to play.

Start with the basics: showcase as many

examples of women's entrepreneurship as you can. And then some more. Give many different examples – at Veuve Clicquot, we have developed the Bold Open Database, the first global open database for women entrepreneurs. A multitude of women entrepreneurs you haven't met yet, waiting to welcome you in, passionate about sharing their ideas and enthusiasm in papers as yet unwritten. All you need to do is use the database. It's free.

Talk about success and emulation. Show your enthusiasm for women's entrepreneurship, your unique perspective. Bring excitement and joy to the conversation. Celebrate women's achievements in business – and celebrate them alongside those of men, from time to time. This reinforces a vital message: that success in business is not gendered, and that women's success has the same perceived value as that of men. As a woman entrepreneur put it to me once: achievements are stronger than fear. Achievements are the best rewards.

Strive to rebalance the picture: women entrepreneurs are disproportionately represented in personal services, healthcare and beauty, so be sure to showcase more businesswomen in tech. More women in business and tech means not only greater equality, but more women driving the innovations of tomorrow. More women shaping the world we will all inhabit, in the future.

At the end of the day, the role of the media is to promote and showcase women's self-belief. Yes, it's possible. We need to show our girls that all doors stand open. For men and women alike.

More than "empowerment", I want to believe that "Yes, it's possible." As simple as that.

ON THE NARRATIVE MEDIA CREATES FOR WOMEN

“I get frustrated by the tired ‘STRONG women’ narrative. What does that even mean? We are all probably both strong and *vulnerable*. Social media does that for us, all polished and PERFECT, created by all these ‘strong’ women. I prefer reading more *real* stories. They don’t even have to be over complicated nor too deep and serious, more just real.”

ELLEN *Dixdotter*,
CEO By Malene Birger



FOUR

LIVE IN THE DISCOURSE

As we move into one of the most uncertain epochs in recent history, women want to participate in challenging and meaningful dialogues. For style media to become more inspirational, publications need to include diverse perspectives, featuring a multitude of voices, opinions, and narratives that are a reflection of what's happening in the real world.

56% of the people we spoke to want to explore multiple points of view from a diverse group of people on the same topic, all of which would help style media to feel more inspirational and authentic.

At the root of it all, women find inspiration through connecting with others. An overwhelming 80% say human connection is important for feeling inspired, and this is only achievable by being placed within the conversation. The longing for connection isn't new. Over the past few years, community

has become every industry's favorite buzzword. But instead of truly building one, brands and media publications often confuse the concept of community for readership or customer base. To reclaim its relevance for women – and in culture at large – style media has to put its reader first. Simply publishing glossy content is no longer enough. Style media needs to create content that allows for discourse, and develop digital and IRL spaces to further deepen those conversations alongside it. To make women feel valued and inspired, the industry needs to ensure readers feel seen and heard, allow them to participate in the conversations and create on- and offline communities they can actively take part in.

ON THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

“I’d like to see a MEDIA landscape where the lowest common *denominator* for attention is erased. So, no more shock tactics or faux outrage or endless pages picking people apart who don’t deserve it. It’s unlikely that anyone grew up as a child saying that they wanted to work in media in order to fulfill an ambition to be a vaguely legitimate full-time troll. Working in this space is a PRIVILEGE - we should take it *seriously*.”

CHARLENE *Prempeh*,
Founder A Vibe Called Tech



91%

of luxury style media audiences
feel a sense of belonging based on
based on the publications they read.



52%

Want to connect
with the talent featured

58%

Want a community
from publications

ON COMMUNITY

“Getting a sense of community – of connecting with a real person over a matter of genuine personal taste – is so important.”

ELLIE *Pithers*,
Journalist and Digital Consultant

A close-up photograph of a person's lower legs and feet. The person is wearing a white, pleated skirt and bright red, pointed-toe high-heeled pumps. They are standing on a light-colored marble floor with dark veining. The word "FIVE" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font across the center of the image.

FIVE

CONTENT ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

Consumers today, especially in the light of COVID, aspire to elevate their quality of life, rather than their social status. As Dr. Martina Olbertova, the founder of Meaning.Global, and author of The Luxury Report has said: “The essence of luxury is its inner substance, like timelessness, well-crafted handmade things with functionality and durability that transcend the present moment. This essence of luxury has been stripped away.”

This creates a clear role for luxury style media vs social media. Where social media is mass market and remains surface-level, luxury style media should be a mass of niche, creating a cultural filter that educates, informs and inspires. While social media platforms have been sold to us as a means for connection, those we spoke with want to connect through the media brands they identify with. 58% want a community from publications, and 52% want to connect with the talent featured.

Alongside the sensory aspects of the experience, the wider context is also powerful: “As well as the increase in self-esteem that luxury can offer, we can benefit from the neurotransmitters associated with belonging to an exclusive group,” says Lee Chambers, an environmental psychologist and wellbeing consultant.

Connection and community is how luxury brands and style media can move from aspiration to inspiration. It’s about time style media moved away from its dated, top-down approach which only celebrates the same few and pushes women to buy into a one-dimensional ideal that was unattainable to begin with. The new era of women’s media is centered around dialogues with readers, creating a strong sense of community and telling the stories of those often left overlooked or unheard. Creating media brands that put their reader at the center.

80%



say human connection is

important for feeling inspired

ON CONNECTION

“Whilst I love easily consumable digital forms of media, it also prevents us from physical human interaction and emotion.”

EMMAN *Debatista*,
Image Director and Brand Consultant



SIX

WHAT DOES THE NEW ERA OF WOMEN'S MEDIA LOOK LIKE?

- Style media publications have to abandon their beliefs of what women care about, and start listening to what we actually want to read. Mainstream media has to revisit its purpose, establish how to bring value to their readers and find a way to regain the reader's trust.

- Media brands need to start prioritizing inspiration over aspiration. That means focusing on features that equip women with the stories and tools to explore new perspectives and ideas and to take ownership of their lives over dictating what to wear, how to live, or what to buy.

- Readers can spot inauthentic coverage from a mile away. While advertisers have been a key part of the media ecosystem for decades, the power balance between publications and brands is failing readers. Style media has to rethink its relationship with advertisers, and how those partner-

ships can once again bring value to those both parties are trying to reach.

- For media brands to continuously bring value to their readers, they need to stop trying to be for everyone. Instead, media brands should be a curated filter on culture, creating a relationship of trust and authenticity with their audience. Through creating belonging, media publications can become the perfect foundation for building meaningful communities.

- Creating content that allows for discourse is key to building a style media brand for the future. To make women feel valued and inspired, the industry needs to ensure readers feel seen and heard, allow them to participate in the conversations and create on- and offline communities they can actively take part in.

BY: MIMI *Shodeinde*, Designer and founder Miminat Designs

“We’re obviously living in such a DIGITAL age but I think ‘real world’ events and interactions are often the best drivers for *connection* and ultimately change too.”

BY: ELLIE *Pithers*, Journalist and Digital Consultant

“In an IDEAL world big corporations and mega-rich people would have less influence over newspapers, magazines, internet publications and social media. I think the media landscape - if you include social media and digital media in that - is thriving, it’s just becoming more difficult to find interesting writing and *genuine* recommendations from people with good taste that is reliable and personal.”

BY: ELLEN *Dixdotter*, CEO of By Malene Birger

“Having worked with the MEDIA in different ways for the last 20 years, I have to say it feels like there is very little *newness* to it.”

BY: YOMI *Adegoke*, Journalist and Author

“A way of bringing like-minded readers together could be exciting too, whether that be in physical spaces or online. Apps, events, online groups - anything that allows you to connect with other people interested in the same or similar stuff.”

BY: ANNA *Meacham*, Founder and CEO Huxley

“It’s less about consumption and more about my EDUCATION. I’m hoping to be inspired by other people’s life experiences, learn something new and encounter insights that genuinely *reshape* my perspective on the world and my role within it.”

BY: CHARLENE *Prempeh*, Founder A Vibe Called Tech

“It feels as if there’s a more DIVERSE discourse with voices such as Sinéad Burke guest editing Vogue UK, the appointment of Kenya Hunt as Editor of Elle and the success of Sharmadean Reid’s Stack World. I think it’s interesting that these women are not solely trying to push empowerment *narratives* but are providing inspiration simply by how they’re going about their work.”

BY: SYDNEY *Gore*, Writer, editor and journalist

“I think the entire structure of the industry needs to be dismantled and rebuilt”

BY: NEADA *Deters*, CEO and founder LESSE

“When it comes to mainstream women’s media, there seems to be a lack of distinction between the titles. I would love each to have a more singular point of view, and focus on producing articles and content of substance – with thoughtful research and editing – rather than volume of articles.”

BY: LYDIA *Zacharis*, Buying Manager NET-A-PORTER

“Style media tends to be a monologue vs a dialogue, but dialogue is where inspiration comes.”

BY: CHANTAL *Fernandez*, Author and journalist

“We are coming out of a period of transition to digital that created a lot of chaos for publications as they CHASED crazy traffic numbers or pivoting to video or whatever it was. And even leaders with good intentions struggled to manage that while *maintaining* a strong point of view for their brands.”

BY: DAVINA *Wedderburn*, Head of Brand & Communications at BFC

“Stories need to have DEPTH and growth and take you *somewhere*.”

BY: ESTELLE *Dévé*, founder and designer Dévé

“With the rise of NICHE publications focused on very specific centers of interest, I do think *community* events make a lot of sense. We live in such a fast-paced world that it is quite hard to meet new people in person and the idea of events joined by women with similar interests to mine is very appealing”

BY: TORA *Nortman*, Head of TikTok at Highsnobiety

“So much of this industry is based on where you've been before and who you know. When I actually think young people have more vision and better ideas and should be given more opportunities.”

BY: EMMAN *Debatista*, Image Director and Brand Consultant

“In an ideal world, my main objective would be INCLUSION and diversity, unifying all women in media to include BIPOC, trans and non-binary people, filter/ban all bigotry, ignorance and hate and have a more open *conversation* on platforms discussing social and political issues.”

BY: BEX *Day*, Photographer

“In an ideal world the MEDIA landscape would be one that mirrors today's society in a healthy and *progressive* way - it would be vastly spread, diverse and inclusive.”

BY: JULIE *Pelipas*, Founder and Creative Director BETTTER

“WRITTEN words in fashion too often serve the advertising and promotion interests and less about valuable messages or critical views. The institute of *critique* is slowly dying and that is the saddest narrative of today's media landscape.”

ON WHAT WE WANT FROM MEDIA

“I want all or nothing: A comprehensive media universe that encompasses events, video, audio, retail, print, social and everything beyond. Or, something singular; I have a deep appreciation for media which is extremely pure, meticulously considered and genuinely unique.”

ANNA Meacham,
Founder and CEO of Huxley

THE FINAL ACT



THE FINAL ACT

Women's media still makes women actively feel worse about themselves. To stay connected to consumers, brands and publications need to speak through – not to – women. While women come to style media to be inspired, few are left feeling that way. Instead, they're met with a consistent narrative around self-improvement. The focus on celebrity-led content and the caricature of women presented in the media is so unattainable that it leaves us feeling inadequate. Style media and brands focus on aspiration over inspiration, showcasing only a perfectly polished and one-dimensional image. The publications and brands that will win tomorrow focus on providing women with stories and tools that inspire us to further grow into who we were always meant to be. When it comes to luxury products, the pyramid is already flattening. The style publications that want to stay relevant, need to follow.

Even though women's media has failed to serve women, it remains key to building relationships between people and brands. So how can we continuously create value for our readers? Rather than being spoken to through a singular lens – often in association with the word empowerment or girlboss – women want to read real, relatable stories. Consumers look for conversations that mirror everyday life, featuring a range of opinions and being invited in to share their take.

“Rather than trying to be something to everyone, their role is to be the filter – to educate and inform and deepen the information that’s shared superficially on social channels.”

With the pace at which social media moves, publications have to understand their role in consumer’s lives. Rather than trying to be something to everyone, their role is to be the filter – to educate and inform and deepen the information that’s shared so superficially on social channels. And to create platforms for women to connect through the topics that matter to them most. All in all, women have had enough of the tired stereotypes and one-dimensional way they’re portrayed and spoken to. We deserve better – to be a part of the dialogue, to be presented as the multifaceted women we are and to be provided with a place where we can connect with those who share our modern attitude towards it all.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT

“The role of social media has undoubtedly made an incredible impact on the media landscape in terms of content and the opportunity to discover new talent and untold stories. I admire that, but I’m also very mindful of the noise and downsides of it.”

FAYE *Toogood*,
Designer



CREDITS

EXPERTS

YOMI *Adegoke*
IKRAM *Annouri*
CAROLE *Bildé*
JODIE *Blake*
IVANIA *Carpio*
BEX *Day*
EMMAN *Debatista*
NEADA *Deters*
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ANNA *Meacham*
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MIMI *Shodeinde*
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FAYE *Toogood*
DAVINA *Wedderburn*
LYDIA *Zacharis*

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CEO and founder LESSE
Designer and founder Dévé
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Founder Platform13
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Writer, editor and journalist
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Founder and designer Alighieri
Co-founder Good Culture Inc.
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Founder and Creative Director BETTTER
Journalist and digital consultant
Founder A Vibe Called Tech and author
Editor and Fashion Correspondent at Puck
Designer and founder Miminat Designs
Founder AS CREATIVES
Designer
Head of Brand & Communications at BFC
Buying Manager at NET-A-PORTER

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

THE MIX

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Insights and Research in collaboration with
The Mix:

GEMMA Mitchell

Partner & Managing Director at The Mix

ELLIE Webster

Director at The Mix

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

Browns

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BONNIE Langedijk

Author, Founder of HURS

MATTER

With support from MATTER

FRANCESCA Shuck

Founder of MATTER

IMAGERY

MARIT Simons

MAXIME van Namen

PRINTED BY

Mount St. Printers

