

Walmart pulls Cosmo from checkout aisle

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Dive Brief:

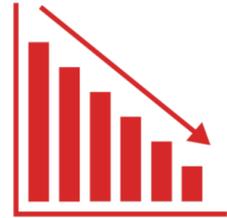
- Walmart on Wednesday confirmed to Retail Dive that it will no longer shelve the magazine Cosmopolitan in checkout aisles. Walmart will "continue to offer Cosmopolitan to customers that wish to purchase the magazine, but it will no longer be located in the checkout aisles," the spokesperson said. "While this was primarily a business decision, the concerns raised were heard."
- Those concerns were raised by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, (formerly Morality in Media), a conservative-leaning anti-pornography advocacy group that has long advocated for the removal of Cosmo from store shelves.
- A spokesperson for the magazine didn't address the move directly but pointed out in an email that the magazine has produced "award-winning content produced by leading female journalists." "With our focus on empowerment, we are proud of all that the brand has achieved for women around the world in the areas of equality, health, relationships, career, politics and social issues," the spokesperson said.

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Early in its lobbying Walmart to remove Cosmo, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation said it was "fighting female objectification in the #MeToo era." On Wednesday the group declared victory. But the move also got a lot of push-back for cynically co-opting the movement, and some experts don't see how it helps Walmart much.

"It sounds like Walmart is doing a CYA ('cover your ass') literally and figuratively," retail consultant Denise Lee Yohn, author of *What Great Brands Do*, told Retail Dive. "They are trying to appear sensitive to the issues of sexual exploitation that have recently become prevalent in the fashion industry, but not really doing anything substantive."

Companies are under scrutiny these days as consumers call out companies on a variety of controversial topics, and research shows that customers actually want businesses to take a stand when it fits with a company's values. "Walmart's leaders probably feel like they can make a statement through their decision," Yohn said.

Cosmo features the kind of revealing photos found in a Victoria's Secret catalog, and is known for sex tips for women, which many feminists view as unapologetic sex-positivity. But the magazine covers a host of topics, and in 2013, then-Cosmo editor-in-chief Joanna Coles called it "deeply feminist."

"It's this intoxicating smorgasbord of ideas that really reflect what a young woman is interested in, from sex and love to work and giving back and friendships and family," she told Politico. "I think that it's only people who have never read it who have a very trivial view of it."

By continuing to sell the magazine, Walmart itself seems to realize that many of its shoppers appreciate it. To do so but remove it from checkout lines "seems to signal that Walmart believes the magazine's cover images are more controversial than the content in its pages," Yohn said. "And that will likely only appease a fraction of the brand's customers."