Fashion as 'force for change'?

How ideologization reshapes the work of intermediaries in the legitimation of culture

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Abstract

What happens when politics enters strongly aesthetic cultural fields? This article proposes a novel conceptual framework, which we propose to call ideologization, to understand how political-ideological considerations influence cultural legitimation. We build on theories of legitimation and cultural intermediaries to examine the strategic case of fashion as a cultural production field at the intersection of aesthetics and economics. Combining an analysis of frames in fashion magazines since the 1980s with critical discourse analysis of British Vogue *in turning point year 2020, we theorize ideologization as consisting of three elements: aesthetic agenda-setting; the reimagination of relations between producers, consumers and intermediaries; and the generation of discursive contradictions. This process of ideologization, which we see across cultural fields since the late 2010s, has strong implications for intermediaries who act as framers and brokers of legitimate culture. We conclude by proposing future research to further develop the ideologization framework and detail the long-term impact of political-ideological logics on cultural fields.*

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Introduction

'Your definitive guide to everything you'll want to buy, wear, and admire and be inspired by as a new season dawns'. British *Vogue*'s 2018 September issue opens in a narrative style native to fashion culture: consumerism, novelty, aesthetics. While the editor Edward Enninful hints at political themes in his letter to the reader, he does so in the same breath as familiar fashion tropes of style, supermodels, and celebrities. Two years later, the political themes have taken mainstage. 'From climate change to child poverty, domestic abuse to the struggle for democracy, people will no longer be silenced. In the fight against injustice, the power of the collective voice is being heard', the same editor writes. The idea to dedicate the *Vogue* September issue to 'Hope' was not limited to British *Vogue* but rolled out across 26 international *Vogue* titles, all filling their pages with interviews with activists, social movement leaders and the occasional politician. Many ads in the magazine play on political themes such as sustainability and diversity. In the 2010s, we witness a similar development in other cultural fields from film (Yaren and Karademir Hazır, 2020) to

comedy (Nieuwenhuis and Zijp, 2022): cultural discourse, previously dominated by an 'art for art's sake' logic, has gained a distinctive political-ideological edge.

But how and why does this shift to a political-ideological logic of cultural production take shape? How can we theorize this process? This article takes the case of fashion to develop a framework to understand the shift from aesthetics to politics in cultural legitimation, which we call *ideologization*. We look at fashion magazines as cultural intermediaries (Kawamura, 2018) that play a vital role in the legitimation of culture. Concretely, we analyze a historical corpus of fashion magazines (1986–2020) and conduct multimodal critical discourse analysis of British *Vogue* in 2020, resulting in a three-component theoretical framework that enables a deeper understanding of the role of politics in contemporary legitimation work of cultural intermediaries.

We zoom in on (luxury) fashion to understand how cultural fields grapple with increasingly moralized cultural consumption and social movements campaigning for sustainability and diversity (Baumann et al. 2022; Godart et al. 2022). In fashion, the tension between aesthetics and economics is traditionally stronger than in most cultural fields; today these competing modes of legitimation are challenged by political and moral claims. These tensions are navigated by cultural intermediaries (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012; Cronin and Edwards, 2021) who are responsible for framing, legitimizing and brokering culture (Baumann, 2007). Combining theories of cultural intermediaries, legitimation, and social movements we propose a new conceptual framework to analyze how political-ideological considerations shape cultural legitimation: *ideologization*. This new framework for studying shifting relations between culture and politics highlights three intersecting dimensions: aesthetic agenda-setting; the reimagination of relations between producers, consumers and intermediaries; and the generation of discursive contradictions.

Ideologization has far-reaching implications, both materially for fashion and conceptually for the study of culture. Cultural intermediaries like *Vogue* reinvent themselves as moral entrepreneurs (Otto et al. 2022) or cultural entrepreneurs in lifestyle movements (Haenfler et al, 2012) that navigate the discursive contradiction between profit and politics. This results in an ambiguous cultural legitimation framework, leading to cultural fields in flux. In addition, ideologization potentially uncovers economic-material aspects of fashion that are usually ignored out of aesthetic disinterestedness (Bourdieu, 1993). We expect that as the climate crisis and political pressure on the cultural field intensify, ideologization will gain pace, with potentially far-reaching consequences for the hierarchies and legitimation processes in fashion and other cultural fields. Rejecting this off-hand as 'greenwashing' misses the larger consequences of the introduction of political discourses in cultural production. We therefore end with a call to integrate the political-

ideological side of legitimation into the study of cultural production across regions and cultural fields.

Legitimation: cultural intermediaries between economics and aesthetics

This article investigates how legitimation by cultural intermediaries in fashion shifts to a political-ideological logic. Previous literature, following the dominant cultural patterns of the 19th and 20th century theorized by Bourdieu and others, highlighted how economic and aesthetic logics structure the legitimation work of cultural intermediaries (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014). In a time of increased politicization and moralization of all culture, including fashion (Baumann et al. 2022; Godart et al. 2022), we extend the scope to look at political logics in legitimation. We first discuss how legitimation and cultural intermediary work is usually studied in culture generally and in fashion specifically, before turning to our new approach to politics in cultural legitimation.

The symbolic value of cultural practices is not the product of some idiosyncratic artistic genius, but rather created in a collective process of *legitimation* (Bourdieu, 1993). This process determines whether a practice counts as worthy and legitimate according to the rules of a cultural field. Or, as Baumann argues, 'legitimation is a process whereby the new and unaccepted is rendered valid and accepted' (2007: 48). Some works are recognized as legitimate art, some garments as true fashion, and some foods as worthy gastronomy, while others are not (Lamont, 2012). This process of legitimation is an open-ended and never-ending process (Alexander and Bowler, 2021).

While legitimation is done collectively, some actors have more authority in this process than others - especially those in critical positions in cultural fields, so called cultural intermediaries (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012, 2014). Recent literature on cultural intermediaries underscores their symbolic power to create and confer cultural legitimacy on new practices, elevating their worth and status (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014; Foster and Ocejo, 2015; De Keere et al. 2021). Intermediaries can be found in different roles and positions along chains of symbolic production, from royal correspondents (Clancy, 2022) to digital influencers (Colucci and Pedroni, 2021), comedy scouts (Friedman, 2014), music bloggers (Arriagada and Concha, 2020), bartenders (Ocejo, 2017), walking guides (Wynn, 2012), and non-human actors like algorithmic recommendation systems (Murray, 2021). Media actors like critics, journalists, and magazines have an especially powerful role in the legitimation of cultural products (Janssen and Verboord, 2015; Kawamura, 2018; Chong, 2020).

However, intermediaries must make sure their claims to authority and legitimacy are credible. An important way to do so is by framing new products in light of generally accepted and

legitimate narratives of culture (Johnson et al. 2006). *Framing* is a central part of any (cultural) legitimation process (Nagy-Sándor and Berkers, 2018: 414). Legitimation frames are thereby connected to more widely accepted discourses of legitimacy (Baumann, 2007). In addition, intermediaries use their social networks to 'harvest' legitimation frames (Godart and Mears, 2009). This highlights intermediaries' role as brokers of social relations in networks of cultural production (Foster & Ocejo, 2015, O'Brien *et al.*, 2017). Framing and brokering are key aspects of intermediaries' work.

In their work, intermediaries navigate cultural and economic legitimation logics and rely on frames derived from these logics. Yet research suggests that political factors may also play a role in intermediaries' legitimation work. For example, Lavie and Dhoest (2015) demonstrate how politics contributes to the legitimation of TV series in Israel. In the same vein, Yaren and Karadimik Hazır (2020) suggest that the political content of certain films have elevated their status in the eyes of Turkish film critics, while also noting the need for more research in how politics interacts with cultural legitimation.

The role of politics - defined here as conflict over 'values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change' (Oliver and Johnston, 2000) - in cultural intermediary work has been overlooked in cultural sociology and other relevant fields like cultural studies or fashion studies[1]. Partly, this oversight is caused by attempts within cultural fields, by intermediaries and other cultural actors, to 'keep politics out'. However, this oversight also exposes a gap in theoretizations of cultural legitimacy. For instance, researchers have overlooked the connection and resemblance between intermediaries and social movement actors that target cultural production (Haenfler et al. 2014). Studying ideologization therefore contributes to greater understanding of intermediary work and legitimacy in cultural production. Moreover, it connects processes in cultural production with the more widely studied moralization and politicization of cultural consumption, so-called 'ethical consumption' (cf. Baumann et al, 2022).

This article turns to the field of fashion to redress this gap in the literature. Fashion is a strategic case for several reasons. First, fashion is a field where a strong aesthetic logic must be continuously defended against economical and practical-material logics (Entwistle, 2009). This makes it an ideal case to study interactions between aesthetic and other logics of legitimation. Simultaneously, its labour-intensive and transnational material side has severe social and ecological impacts. This opens the field of fashion to political contestation from social movements, governments, and consumers. Finally, the strong transnational hierarchies of the field offer a clear

[1] Cronin & Edwards (2021) offer an account of the role of the political in intermediary work in the charity sector but do not focus on legitimation work.

view on how symbolically powerful cultural intermediaries legitimate new fashion trends. For these reasons, fashion stands in as a strategic case for all cultural fields that operate on the intersection of aesthetics, economics, and other logics.

Legitimation and politics in fashion sociology and fashion studies

In fashion, the tension between aesthetics and economics become exceptionally visible (Crane, 2019). Fashion is an 'aesthetic economy' (Entwistle, 2009), in which aesthetic quality is the core commodity being traded (Entwistle, 2015). Fashion's aesthetic value is at least partly the product of fashion professionals' economic market calculations. While legitimacy in fashion usually revolves around aesthetics, economic market dynamics strongly influence this aesthetic logic.

As sociologists, cultural scholars and fashion scholars have pointed out (though from different vantage points) aesthetic quality of fashion is a constant object of struggle (Rocamora and Smelik, 2019). However, for all its superficial fluctuations, fashion has stable anchors of institutions and narratives underlying its legitimation process (Mears, 2011). Aspers & Godart (2013:185) therefore note that fashion should be seen as an 'unplanned process of recurrent change against a backdrop of order'. While aesthetic change in fashion is constant, sometimes appearing in cyclical forms - for example when 1990s trends reemerge in the 2020s - this process always happens in a context in which some things remain stable over extended periods of time (Sproles, 1981).

Fashion magazines play a key role in this stabilization and legitimation (Barthes, 1990; Moeran, 2006; Rocamora, 2009). Both producers and consumers rely on fashion media to create order within the ever-accelerating output of new fashion styles (Kawamura, 2018). For a long time, fashion magazines have been important intermediaries and creators of value. At the same time, fashion journalists and organizations are in competition for the authority to make claims of legitimate fashion (van de Peer 2023). In other words: cultural intermediaries simultaneously aim to legitimate cultural goods and their own status as legitimator. This drives continuous change, preventing the emergence of permanent and universal aesthetic narratives of fashion. Fashion magazines operate in a fast-changing environment (Findlay and Reponen, 2023). The digitalization of fashion media and the rise of novel competitors vouching for authority in the field, from bloggers (Findlay, 2017) to influencers (Caldeira, 2020) have put the position of magazines under pressure making declining readership and the closure of titles not unusual. This makes it even more important for magazines to defend their own authority to make legitimation claims, thus being 'doubly concerned with legitimacy' (Baumann 2007: 51).

Different parts of the field have their own aesthetic logic (Laan and Kuipers, 2016), which is reflected in the frames used by fashion media. High fashion magazines like *Vogue* employ

different legitimation frames, embedded in different aesthetic discourses than commercial magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and or 'local' (i.e., non-transnational) fashion and women's magazines like *Woman's Own*. They also have different audiences: *Vogue* is mainly read by industry insiders and those aspiring to be and considered very powerful (Reponen, 2023), while commercial and local fashion magazines cater to more mainstream readerships (Moeran, 2006). Because the symbolic power of high fashion potentially leads to the trickle-down of their aesthetic legitimation frames to commercial and mainstream magazines, high fashion actors are constantly trying to reinforce this hierarchy between mainstream and high fashion magazines (Van de Peer, 2014; 2023). Often, they rely on the classic strategy of displaying disinterest in economic and commercial considerations. The strong economic dimension underlying fashion production is thereby obfuscated.

In this status game, high fashion actors often employ art frames or broker relations with avant-garde art, setting in motion a process of 'artification' (Shapiro and Heinich, 2012). While the last decades of the 20th century saw a commercialization of high fashion, Van de Peer (2014, 2023) argues this has led to a countermovement of designers, brands and critics trying to deny the commercial context of fashion. They do so by invoking intellectualizing frames of legitimation that embed fashion in an intellectual discourse. Scholars disagree on the extent to which this attempt at artification has been successful (Crane, 2019).

Additionally, earlier research has highlighted the importance of other forms of legitimacy like wearability (Pedroni and Volonté, 2014), materiality (Crane, 2019), and femininity (Kuipers et al., 2017). Together, these components make up the dominant legitimation framework in fashion. As cultural intermediaries, media involved in fashion legitimation usually invoke frames derived from this framework. However, as fashion is becoming a ground of political struggle (Lusty, 2021), we now see that political themes are increasingly used to legitimize fashion.

To analyse this 'political turn', we uncover how fashion magazines invoke political-ideological frames of legitimacy. We use the term political-ideological here rather than political because we don't want to suggest that these legitimacy frames are necessarily connected to the formal domain of politics. This leaves us sensitive to a wider range of political themes that can enter fashion legitimation. We use the term political ideology as "a system of meaning that couples assertions and theories about the nature of social life with values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change" (Oliver and Johnston, 2000: 43).

In developing a new framework of 'political-ideological legitimation', we depart from the usual perspective on politics in cultural studies and fashion studies. While broader than 'political', the term 'political-ideological' is narrower than the common understandings 'politics' in cultural theory and cultural studies, commonly framed as 'the politics *of*' a field or practice, like fashion,

design, or beauty. This broad understanding of politics sees all cultural practices as political in the sense that they reflect power structures (Hall, 1980). Fashion scholars usually approach politics in the same vein. Kaiser (2022) for example, conceptualizes politics in fashion as the tension between the imposition of power relations through structural subject formation and the agency of individuals to resist in dress and style choices. This perspective informs many studies that analyze dress choices as acts of resistance to dominant discourses, for example on hijab wearing (Shirazi and Mishra, 2010) or online body inclusivity (Connell, 2012).

Our 'political-ideological' approach, in contrast, foregrounds meaning systems envisioning concrete structural social change (or lack thereof) envisioned by powerful actors in fashion employing these frames, for example through arguing for a more sustainable future. Our approach is thereby akin to Van de Peer's study on the conservative worldview underlying fashion critics' reviews (2023) or Titton's reflections on the current feminist moment in fashion (2019). This perspective on the political-ideological offers a narrower yet more structural (less 'culturalist' if you wish) view of politics than the usual approaches in cultural and fashion studies.

Our approach is, instead, informed by Baumann's theory of artistic legitimation (2007: 58), who likens arts worlds to social movements. Cultural and political actors are especially alike in their attempt to claim or deny legitimacy by referring to frames: "tight cognitive structures that direct thinking and interpretation about a concrete issue, condition, event, or object." In recent processes of ideologization, magazines invoke frames to appeal to political ideologies, 'through the tools made available in discourse' (Baumann, 2007: 58). Parallel with earlier analyses in this journal of 'artification' we therefore suggest speaking of the 'ideologization' of high fashion, in which political-ideological themes serve to legitimize trends.

Methods

This article undertakes a two-step analysis. First, it analyzes a large set of fashion magazines to establish the conventional framework of legitimation in fashion. Second and against this backdrop, a multimodal critical discourse analysis of *Vogue* provides a closer look at the entrance of a political-ideological frames of legitimation in contemporary high fashion. The following details the methods used.

First, the dataset of fashion magazines was originally compiled for a previous study on the portrayal of beauty in fashion magazines (citation redacted for anonymization) from three years (1982, 1996, 2011) and five countries (UK, France, Italy, Poland, and the Netherlands) [2]. The

[2] For the original corpus, coders sampled a minimum of 250 pages with images (the unit of analysis of the original study) per magazine per year, working backward from the December issue.

compiled set mostly captured variables on visuals, but also incorporates textual data. This includes the introduction texts and titles of editorial shoots. We use these to study legitimation frames in introduction texts. We complemented this set with an additional sample of *Vogue* in September 2018 and September 2020 from UK, France, and Italy (see table 1). These "September issues" made in the fashion capitals present new collections in the most aestheticized part of the field, present a strategic locus to study legitimation. We included textual data from covers, shoots, the letters of the editors. We also included advertisements but analyze those separately below, so the original set and the extension are coherent. This final dataset consisted of 412 introductory texts, usually one or two sentences without images.

[Table 1 about here]

Within this dataset, we looked for frames pertaining to broader modes of legitimacy. We used a coding procedure based on reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2021), since this provides a good method to capture and categorize latent and manifest meaning of texts with more flexibility than strict qualitative content analysis methods. First, we cleaned, translated and familiarized ourselves with the data. We coded 100 of the 412 introductory texts to establish 19 coding categories. In a second round, we coded all introductory texts. Afterwards, we revised the coding categories and converged them into 15 overarching frames by eliminating categories with few observations and merging categories that spoke to a similar frame (see table 2). These frames were counted over the years and cross tabulated with year, country, and magazine to uncover potentially relevant relations.

[Table 2 about here]

Secondly, we analyze legitimation in twelve issues of British *Vogue* in 2020, a year we consider a 'turning point'. In 2020, fashion insiders called for the industry to change after the pandemic as reflected in the widely circulated and signed a petition by designer Dries van Noten ((Binkley, 2020). The British edition of *Vogue* has considerable symbolic status within the broader genre of high fashion magazines. This status is underlined by its central position within the commercial strategy of its publisher Condé Nast and its offline readership of 800,000 and 13 million social media followers (Condé Nast, 2022). Rather than having competing international issues, the company increasingly merges editorial content across *Vogue* editions within regions. In 2021, British editor-in-chief Edward Enninful was named the editor for all European *Vogue* titles, confirming British *Vogue's* position atop the European hierarchy of *Vogue*.

To uncover the wider discourses in which legitimation frames are embedded in *Vogue*, we use multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) (Machin and Mayr, 2012; Jancsary et al, 2016; Wodak and Meyer, 2016). Critical discourse analysis is traditionally used to uncover how power

and ideology are constituted through language (Van Dijk, 1993). Multimodal critical discourse analysis extends this approach beyond verbal text to the visual and the auditory (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jancsary et al. 2016; Mayr, 2016). Scholars in MCDA have shown how visual modes of communication reinforce the meaning of the accompanying verbal text but also convey meanings that are less easily communicated through verbal text. Sometimes the author uses images to convey a more subtle undertone. Visual modes may also be used to convey messages that are problematic in nature when conveyed in verbal text or to elicit emotional responses that are difficult to achieve without visuals. MCDA therefore analyses different modes of communication and their interaction in conveying meaning. This goes beyond an analysis of *what* meaning is communicated to also include *how* this meaning is constructed and what meaning potentials different semiotic resources have (Mayr, 2016). Thus, including different modes in the analysis of fashion discourse enriches our grasp of underlying meanings and ideologies. Especially in a visual field like fashion, images contribute significantly to meaning construction. Ignoring how the visual and the verbal interplay would lead to a partial analysis of fashion discourse.

The second part of our analysis is based on the five-step methodology laid out by Jancsary et al. (2016), in order to see how political-ideological elements in recent discourse intersect with the dominant legitimation frames uncovered in the first part of our analysis. First, we characterize the genre of fashion magazines (as done in this article's theoretical section). Next, we explored the manifest content to capture the vocabulary in the 2020 British *Vogue*. What rhetorical and stylistic techniques are used? In the third step, we looked at the latent meaning, highlighting what is there, but also what is absent from the broader fashion environment. Fourth, we analyzed how the visual and the verbal relate and how they had diverging or converging meanings. Together, this leads to an analysis of legitimation in British *Vogue* 2020.[3]

Findings: shifting frames of legitimation in fashion

I. The aesthetic legitimation of fashion, 1982-2020

How are fashion styles legitimated? The first step of the analysis traces the dominant legitimation framework in fashion magazines over the years. Using the method outlined above, we uncovered different frames throughout the years (see table 3). We highlight the most important takeaways considering the research question.

[Table 3 about here]

To start, aesthetic frames are more important than economic frames throughout the 1982 – 2020 period. This confirms existing observations: the fashion field revolves around an aesthetic

[3] Copyright constraints do not allow us to include *Vogue* images here.

logic that obfuscates the underlying economic dynamics of fashion (Van de Peer, 2014: 447). Yet as legitimation is an ever-ongoing struggle (Alexander and Bowler, 2021), and fashion is a process of 'recurrent change against a backdrop of order' (Aspers & Godart, 2013), the aesthetic legitimation framework has more and less stable legitimation frames.

Unsurprisingly, the legitimation through materiality and temporality is relatively stable. Especially materiality is important: consistently more than 30 percent of frames in any given year frame fashion in terms of its materiality, ranging from the beauty of certain yarns to the comfort of them (for example 'while the tones are deliberately cool, these autumn materials are deliberately warm, supple and comfortable: wools, mohairs and shetlands to face the first cool breezes' in the Italian 1996 *Cosmopolitan*). Temporality, which emphasizes how much the discussed fashion is of the current, previous, or future moment, also is important to legitimize new fashions ('This season it's all about profiling, quilting, studding and dubbing, playing with color and material transitions' in 1982 *Vogue Italia*). While increasing somewhat towards the end of the period, the temporal frame consistently scores above 28 percent of frames. This is unsurprising considering the view in the literature that fashion magazines tie current trends to old ones to 'create a reasonable harmonic continuity' (Moeran, 2006: 735). Finally, color also is important in the first three sample years, while tailing off in the last years.

In terms of less stable frames, noteworthy are references to celebrity personalities and fashion itself. The prevalence of the 'personality' frame grows quickly throughout the observed period, especially for high fashion magazines. This frame refers to celebrities, designers and other famous people from within and outside the fashion world. While only 22 percent of editorials in 1986 high fashion magazines invokes this frame, about 55 percent does so in 2020 (for example 'It was guest-list only when *Vogue* gathered Manhattan's style crowd during NY Fashion week. Terry Richardson took the pictures and we asked: how do you celebrate?' in British *Vogue*, 2011). This mirrors arguments about celebritization (Van Krieken, 2012) and the power of celebrity endorsement for cultural products (McCracken, 1989). We see growing influence of celebrities as 'legitimizing' agents. Another trend is the rise of the 'fashion' frame referring to the fashion world itself, such as the fashion week shows in the fashion capitals of Paris, London and Milan (for example 'Paris still the fashion city, bustling and bubbling with new ideas… You will feel like a femme fatale in this dress' in Dutch *Cosmopolitan*, 1982). This suggests that the fashion field becomes somewhat more self-referential, especially in the high fashion segment.

[Table 4 about here]

In sum, the first part of our analysis reveals a relatively stable legitimation framework with materiality, temporality and color as the main ways to legitimize trends. We call this dominant

legitimation framework the *aesthetic* framework as most frames deal with issues of sensory pleasure, including visual pleasure but also tactile comfort. Against this backdrop, the framework incorporated new frames revolving around celebrities and fashion itself – both are also primarily cultural and aesthetic. Over the observed years, political-ideological frames were invoked in only two percent of the texts. However, if we look at additional data about the number of political-ideological frames in advertisements, we see a steep increase between the years 2018 and 2020 (see Table 4). For a closer look at how these political-ideological frames play out in practice, we now turn to our discourse analysis of the 2020 British *Vogue*.

II. The ideologization of fashion in British Vogue

How do political ideological logics enter the legitimation of high fashion? Three main dynamics emerge from the analysis which together constitute the *ideologization* of cultural legitimation. First, we see an interaction between new political-ideological frames and the stable aesthetic backdrop, which we call *aesthetic agenda-setting*. Second, we show that *Vogue* implicitly reframes relations between producers, consumers, and intermediaries in terms of a social movement – a *reimagination of relations*. Finally, we argue that these two elements lead to *discursive contradictions*.

Aesthetic agenda-setting

The dominant legitimation framework of materiality, personality, and temporality mediate how, and which political-ideological issues enter the fashion discourse in *Vogue*. This aesthetic framework enables and constrains how political-ideological frames come to the fore and what political-ideological issues find their way to the magazine versus what issues do not. We call this component of ideologization *aesthetic agenda-setting*.

An important example is the political-ideological issue of sustainable fashion. This is widespread in British *Vogue* throughout 2020, featuring in 10 out of 12 issues, finding its way to the most editorial-aesthetic parts of the magazine (the editorial photoshoots) and to less editorial-aesthetic aspects of the magazines, such as interviews with designers or commercial buying guides. This issue can be expressed meaningfully in aesthetic terms for photoshoots as it pairs well with the important material frame. We see this in the text "Planet organics (…) the new age in accessories is a natural phenomenon" or "sustainable style and comfort that will last". It can be made visually appealing and in line with the visual aesthetics of fashion, for example by using natural landscapes as a backdrop for photoshoots. This fluid interaction between the political-ideological issues and the aesthetic legitimation system enables political-ideological issues to develop into legitimation frames.

Other political issues can be equally 'aestheticized'. Halfway through the year, Black Lives Matter protests propel the issue of racial diversity onto the fashion agenda, and the (Black) editor of *Vogue* describes his participation in the marches. As Kuipers et al. (2014) argued, the issue of racial diversity easily interacts with fashion aesthetics: for example through the visual language of fashion by simply including more models of color, but also through the legitimation frame of individual celebrity by spotlighting notable Black designers like Rihanna. Thus, this political issue pass through the aesthetic legitimation prism into the magazine, developing into a new frame of legitimation.

Politics also interacts with the celebrity frame of legitimacy. Emblematic is the *Forces for Change* initiative that British *Vogue* kicked off in September 2019 and is re-started in January 2020. Through this initiative, *Vogue* spotlights 'people changing society for the better', 'truly inspirational figures', deemed 'forces for change' in the world. This initiative in partnership with BMW and Nike is carried by duchess Meghan Markle. This emphasis on individual celebrity to include politics is also reflected in the September issue, in which 20 'inspirational faces' are included on the fold-out cover, with footballer Marcus Rashford and model Adwoa Aboah in the centerfold. Within the magazine, interviews with these activists are accompanied by photos reflecting the high fashion visual aesthetic: serious, artistic portraits in greyscale. This political-ideologically charged content is expressed through the aesthetic lens of fashion, both in its visual representation and its invocation of the celebrity legitimation frame.

However, this is a double-edged sword: the interaction with the aesthetic legitimation system enables, but also constrains which issues can be expressed in *Vogue*. While some political issues can interact with the aesthetics of fashion, others cannot or can only do so in those parts of the magazine in which the aesthetic legitimation framework is less pronounced, like long-form articles.

Racial diversity is trumpeted when it comes to representation within fashion aesthetics, but the position of people of color within fashion supply chains hardly makes it to the magazine. Similarly, gender equality, especially women's representation in the fashion and politics, is celebrated with interviews of female politicians, activists, and designers – but the dangerous labor conditions and underpayment of women in fashion's supply chain are not discussed. An individualized approach to fashion politics is highlighted at the expense of structural approaches. As Parkins and Findlay's argue in their recent study of the cooptation of feminist politics by neoliberal discourses on feminist wedding websites, aesthetic agenda-setting might 'reinforce hegemony even as it attempts to resist it' (2021: 298). The aesthetic framework determines the limits of the political agenda in *Vogue*: some harder to aestheticize issues are left out. But how does *Vogue* legitimize its own engagement in these issues? For that we turn to the next point: the reimagination of relations.

Reimagination of relations

As political-ideological frames enter high fashion discourse, *Vogue* starts to reframe its own role, and the role of advertisers, readers, consumers, and producers in the fashion field. It casts these actors, and the relations between them, in a distinct frame of political activism and social movements. The letters of the editor featured in the first pages of every issue, and the Forces for Change initiative are exemplary of this tendency.

In his letters, the editor reimagines *Vogue*'s role as spearheading social change and answering the call of activists. In April, Enninful writes: 'The reality of climate change means the need for action could not be more pressing – and with the fashion industry a prime factor, I take this magazine's duty to build change from the inside out seriously.' (*Vogue* April 2020). In the September issue, Enninful writes: "I knew instantly and deeply believed in what British *Vogue*'s interpretation [*of that month's theme*] needed to be – an ode to the extraordinary voices, old and young, who in this difficult year have devoted their energies to fighting for a fairer society.' In August, he writes that the re-emergence of activism and the fight for social justice is one of the more 'joyful phenomena' of the past years. The backdrop of these words is a picture of two models standing in front of a mural of Nelson Mandela. This interaction between the visual and the verbal carries multiple meaning potentials. The editor puts himself and *Vogue* editorial discourse in line with those of Nelson Mandela and the fight against Apartheid, giving fashion a political veneer. The picture at that page suggests that activism is cool and fashionable, giving Mandela and the fight against apartheid a fashion veneer. This makes fashion explicitly political, politics fashionable, and by doing so *Vogue* reframes its own role as a high fashion magazine that is open to activism and is aware of its sociopolitical context. By signaling that '*Vogue* is cognizant of the shift' (Vogue, January 2020), the magazine shows its 'doubly concerned with legitimacy' (Baumann 2007: 51). The letters of the editors do not so much legitimize fashion, as they legitimize *Vogue*'s position as a tastemaker in a changing political context. This cannot be seen separately from the challenges to the magazine's position stemming from digitalization and declining readership.

In the Forces For Change initiative *Vogue* reframes the role of advertising commercial companies and actors as 'forces for positive change', ranging from a futuristic electric BMW car to Financial Times' 'radical' editor-in-chief. In the accompanying text, Enninful is quoted saying that the people and products showcased are not just 'a moment, but a movement'. The images of the Forces for Change initiative, whether it is a futuristic BMW car speeding through a green landscape or an athlete sporting hijab fashion, suggest speed and movement underlining the 'change' coming.

The activist streak is also present in how it compels consumers to care about political-ideological issues like racial inclusion and sustainability. In January 2020, an editorial photoshoot is titled 'A call for action'; in the text consumers are exhorted to buy less. In April 2020, readers are presented a ten-point 'eco-manifesto' urging them to live an 'eco-friendly life'. In September 2020, a two-page introduction to the 'activists of tomorrow' tells readers: 'It's about forging a path to a better, brighter future. Be the change!'. On the backdrop of the editorial photoshoot a few pages later, we again see historical activists like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

Designers and companies are reframed in these political-ideological terms, too. Prominent figures like Miucci Prada and the late Virgin Abloh are asked to reflect on the role of politics and activism in their work (September 2020 issue). In May, designer Bethany Williams is featured because she advocates 'clothes with a consciousness' and her designer work can be used 'as a platform for change'. Multinationals like BMW are framed as companies contributing to 'positive change'. The entry of political-ideological issues thus also reframes the legitimate role and purpose of different actors in the field. This corresponds with the insight of the cultural intermediary literature that intermediaries not only legitimize products, but also broker and define legitimate social relations (Foster and Ocejo, 2015). Ideologization thus also impacts the second aspect of intermediaries' work.

We call this component of ideologization the *reimagination of relations,* since it not only focuses on the legitimation of new fashion styles but reframes the relation of the magazine with advertisers, consumers, and producers of fashion. This fits within the broader logic of fashion magazines to educate readers about the inhabitants of the global 'fashion village' (Moeran, 2006) and as brokers of cultural production fields (Friedman, 2014). To consumers and readers, this signals that not just the legitimation of new styles is changing, but also the roles of different actors within the fashion system.

New contradiction in the fashion discourse

Finally, the discourse analysis reveals the emergence of new contradictions in the discourse of high fashion. These discursive contradictions spring directly from new political-ideological logics of legitimation, as these question some of the fundamental logics of contemporary fashion as an inherently capitalist endeavor. As these new political-ideological frames exist side-by-side with existing frames of legitimation, this leads to contradictions within the discourse.

These contradictions are notable both within and between issues. Throughout the year, *Vogue* published long-form articles that reflect on the fashion industry and call for a slowdown of fashion to achieve more sustainable and ethical production. This is accompanied by calls to

consume less or more consciously. Yet at the same time, *Vogue* includes photoshoots and extensive 'buyers guides' that stimulate consumption. One issue features a photoshoot with vintage dresses framed as the sustainable re-cycling of old trends, while also interviewing Giorgio Armani aboard his superyacht, celebrating the polluting lifestyles of the super-rich. *Vogue* is aware of this inconsistency, as it writes that the yacht and Armani's call for more eco-friendly fashion 'may pose a paradox' but that 'his work is rooted in an anti-disposable philosophy of timelessness' (January 2020).

Likewise, there are contradictions in the main themes of different issues. The September issue, traditionally announcing new trends, is dedicated to activists fighting for social change. Clearly being the most political issue of the year, it addressed political problems within the fashion industry and well beyond it. However, the following October issue takes a different tone. It spotlights new fashion trends and is remarkably a-political, with little attention for any political issue at all. This is exemplary for the contradictions in the discourse of British *Vogue*.

Fashion magazines always try to integrate various contradictory goals such as educating consumers about new trends, satisfying advertisers, and informing the fashion industry itself, leading to somewhat 'schizophrenic' content (Moeran, 2006: 727; cf. Tse, 2016). However, the current contradictions spring specifically from the clash between political-ideological frames of sustainability and inclusion and aesthetic frames of novelty and celebrity. This is not necessarily problematic for readers, as magazines fulfill different functions for different readers. The current contradictions may even attract new readers. For now, the important take-away is that the interplay between aesthetic and political-ideological issues inevitably creates *discursive contradictions*.

Discussion: tensions and implications for intermediaries

In this article, we set out to understand how political-ideological logics influence legitimation in fashion. The traditional legitimation of fashion is based on a distinctly aesthetic logic that frames new fashions mostly in material and temporal terms, forming 'the backdrop of order' in the fashion system (Aspers and Godart, 2013). By contrast, our discourse analysis shows how political-ideological issues are entering the legitimation of fashion in the late 2010s. This new set of legitimizing frames has three central elements: aesthetic agenda-setting, the reimagination of relations, and discursive contradictions. Together, this constitutes a process we propose to call ideologization, in which cultural intermediation and social movements are converging in the introduction of a new political-ideological logic.

These findings illuminate how *Vogue* as an intermediary brokers connections with the art world (as 'artification' suggests), and with the world of activism and social movements. To

understand this, we look to the literature on lifestyle movements, a category of social movements that go beyond the paradigm of centrally organized movements that exert pressure on formal politics. As Haenfler et al. (2012) argue, lifestyle movements ask their followers to take individual action in their daily lifestyle choices, like consuming responsibly, to achieve social change. These deeply individualized movements are loosely organized as networks of like-minded people. In these movements, so-called 'cultural entrepreneurs' emerge as authority figures that can steer the movements ideology and tactics. In this light, we argue that through aesthetic agenda-setting and the reimagination of relations, *Vogue* is reinventing itself as a new type of cultural entrepreneur. It thus not only seeks authority within a cultural field but frames itself as a political authority within a lifestyle movement, perhaps also to defend its own powerful tastemaking position in fashion in an act of double legitimation. *Vogue* is thereby similar to corporate moral entrepreneurs in fast food and other fields that respond to moral and political concerns of its customers (Otto et al., 2022). To speak with Baumann (2007), through ideologization, cultural fields are thus not only like social movements, but like lifestyle movements while cultural intermediaries are taking up the role of moral entrepreneurs (Otto et al., 2022).

The resulting discursive contradiction is not surprising. Capitalism and, by extension, fashion are riddled with contradictions (cf. Simmel, 1957). The current contradictions in *Vogue*'s discourse are itself the result of a deeper contradiction between some of the political issues propagated and the inherent nature of fashion as an engine for the consumption of aesthetic novelty. Similar discursive contradictions have been noted by Johnston and Taylor (2008) in their analysis of the Dove Beauty marketing campaign. The campaign's ideological critique of contemporary beauty standards combined messages of self-acceptance and a rejection of beauty standards with an encouragement to buy more Dove beauty products. Johnston & Taylor concluded that Dove steered clear from more a radical critique as this would have negatively affected sales and profit (2008: 962). This suggests that contradictions like those in *Vogue* are the result of a fundamental tension between profits and politics, or perhaps a struggle between two separate discourses of fashion striving for dominance (cf. Rear and Jones, 2013). We can hypothesize that this tension will only increase as ideologization gathers pace. How do producers feel this tension? Do consumers? And how is this approached in the training and education of cultural workers? This development quickly sparks avenues for future research.

This inherent material implication of ideologization demonstrates that this development fundamentally differs from artification. Ideologization enhances the visibility of the material production of fashion (and cultural production). While artification disguises the economic nature of the aesthetic economy of fashion and feigns a disinterestedness to earthly motives of profit (cf.

Bourdieu 1993), ideologization potentially uncovers this economic dimension. The ideological frames foreground how the production of fashion impacts sustainability and inequality, making it quite impossible to deny the economic and material side of fashion.

Aesthetic agenda-setting can be seen as a move to prevent this 'return of the repressed' economic category. It remains an empirical question how long the pre-existing aesthetic legitimation framework can resist the political-ideological pressure. Especially as intermediaries broker relations with social movements, this may prove to be difficult. Ideologization can thus uncover the material reality that cultural producers in high-status segments so often try to deny.

Conclusion: the durable impact of ideologization

This article proposes a novel conceptual framework to understand how legitimation in cultural production is impacted by political-ideological considerations, which we propose to call ideologization. We analyzed shifting legitimation in fashion magazines by, first, analyzing legitimating frames within a historical dataset of fashion magazines and, second, doing a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the British *Vogue* in 2020. We can now draw a conceptual picture of ideologization and how it relates to the broader understandings of processes of cultural legitimation, and their engagement (or lack of it) with political engagement and organization.

The main components of this framework are threefold. First, the introduction of a political logic is mediated by a (previously) dominant aesthetic legitimation system. This both enables and limits the political issues that can come forward and develop into legitimation frames. This component is called *aesthetic agenda-setting*. Second, cultural intermediaries reframe their relationship with both the consumers downstream and the producers upstream, most importantly by discursively enlisting producers and consumers in a movement that fights for social change. We can call this the *reimagination of relations*. Finally, we notice how these two components together result in *discursive contradictions*. Together, these three elements constitute the process of *ideologization*.

This study has several limitations. First, fashion magazines represent a narrow part of a specific cultural field. Our sample is geographically and hierarchically limited. As a result, our conceptualization of ideologization remains open-ended. Ideologization may take on additional elements in other cultural fields or in less-mediatized parts of cultural fields. However, since fashion is a strategic case at the intersection of aesthetics and economics, our conclusions carry implications for cultural fields beyond fashion.

Accordingly, the three-part ideologization framework serves as an invitation to analyze similar shifts from 'autonomous' culture to cultural politics happening in other cultural fields. Political logics are creeping into cultural fields from film (Lavie and Dhoest, 2015) to gastronomy

(DeSoucey, 2016). We can hypothesize that ideologization takes a different shape in every field, depending on pre-existing aesthetic legitimation systems, field relations, and sociopolitical context. The proposed framework can be used as a sensitizing conceptual tool to compare these developments across different fields and contexts, opening a variety of new research questions.

Moreover, these findings expand the literature on ethical consumption practices and the cultural implications of lifestyle movements (Adams and Raisborough 2010; Haenfler et al., 2012). While this literature provides insight into the consumer side of ethical consumption., our framework foregrounds the (cultural) production side. This helps us understand why legitimation on ideological grounds has become important and how key players, notably intermediaries, adopt these frames and use their influence to make them more durable.

The conclusions of this article also add to the literature on cultural intermediaries. Recent literature suggest that the authority of cultural intermediaries is challenged by digitalization and this is no different in the fashion context of influencers and bloggers (Caldeira, 2020; Foster and Ocejo, 2015; Duffy, 2013). Ideologization equally puts pressure on the role and authority of intermediaries, as they now must resolve tensions between aesthetics, economics *and* politics (cf. Cronin and Edwards, 2021). To speak with Cronin (2004), ideologization adds another 'regime of mediation' that intermediaries must navigate. As we saw in *Vogue*'s case, this leads intermediaries to mimic the role of cultural entrepreneurs in a lifestyle movement. The inherent discursive contradictions question whether this is a viable long-term strategy for them.

Indeed, these new frames are often challenged by activists and NGOs as hypocritical or cynical forms of 'greenwashing': a deliberate ploy to mislead consumers about the dismal social and environmental track record of the fashion industry. Usually wielded as a counterclaim to uncover industrial malpractice, 'greenwashing' has little sociological conceptual purchase (Jones, 2019). From the perspective developed here, the 'greenwashing' argument sometimes rightfully exposes superficial engagement with political claims, as well as inconsistencies in the fashion field. However, it fails to acknowledge the deeper consequences of political-ideological discourses for cultural fields, especially for legitimacy. However minimal the material improvements of the fashion industry might be, the cultural implications of ideologization are potentially far-reaching.

In this light, we can ask what ideologization will lead to. To speak with Guillén (2001), is ideologization "feeble, civilizing or destructive"? If feeble, ideologization will be a weak, passing phenomenon. Since ideologization is essentially a struggle over legitimacy, we think this is unlikely. As Alexander & Bowler (2021) argue, struggles over legitimacy endure when judgement criteria are ambiguous, multiple groups have a stake in the game, and while the stakes are changing. All these conditions apply to fashion, and indeed to other cultural fields. We demonstrated that the

judgement criteria in fashion are in flux and ambiguous. Moreover, fashion's material production has substantial social and ecological consequences. With the acceleration of the climate crisis, this increasingly draws in new actors with a stake in the game. Ideologization is thus likely to endure, especially in cultural fields with strong material aspects.

But is ideologization civilizing or destructive? In other words, will intermediaries incorporate ideologized legitimation frames and retain their authority position, or will ideologization upset the order of cultural fields and delegitimize key actors? The latter scenario seems unlikely, as the results indicate that actors like *Vogue* try to incorporate certain political-ideological frames. This is further underlined by the recent reorganization undertaken by *Vogue*'s publisher Condé Nast to renew *Vogue's* relevance in a time of challenges posed by digitalization and declining ad revenues (Caldeira, 2020). Key actors do not give up without a fight. Organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) suggests we can expect other players to jump on the 'brand wagon'. Yet, ideologization potentially invites new actors in fields of cultural production – like lifestyle movements and political actors – who bring new legitimation frames that threaten the ways of old.

Ultimately more research is needed to gauge the consequences of ideologization. We can do so by studying how cultural intermediaries at various loci in cultural fields legitimate culture on political grounds, in line with recent calls from Baumann, Kennedy and Johnston (2022). This requires further integration of social movement literature with insights from the cultural intermediary and legitimation literature, so we can undertake productive ideologization research This way, the sensitizing ideologization framework outlined above can be further extended and we can fully grasp to what extent ideologization is a permanent force for change.

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Table 1: Sample of magazines. N of observed introductory texts to editorial shoots in italics

Total n = 412	**1982** ***(n = 145)***	**1996 (165)**	**2011** ***(77)***	**2018** ***(14)***	**2020** ***(11)***
Italy ***(n = 88)***	Anna *(n = 15)*	Anna *(9)*	Anna *(3)*	Vogue *(4)*	Vogue *(2)*
	Vogue *(13)*	Cosmopolitan *(6)*	Cosmopolitan *(5)*		
		Elle *(13)*	Elle *(8)*		
		Vogue *(5)*	L'uomo Vogue *(1)*		
		L'uomo Vogue *(4)*			
United Kingdom ***(72)***	Woman's Own *(7)*	Woman's Own *(9)*	Cosmopolitan *(6)*	Vogue *(6)*	Vogue *(5)*
	Cosmopolitan *(4)*	Cosmopolitan *(7)*	Elle *(6)*		
	Vogue *(3)*	Men's Health *(1)*	Vogue *(4)*		
		Elle *(11)*			
		Vogue *(3)*			
France ***(113)***	Modes et Travaux *(1)*	Modes et Travaux *(15)*	Modes et Travaux *(2)*	Vogue Paris *(4)*	Vogue Paris *(4)*
	Cosmopolitan *(8)*	Cosmopolitan *(2)*	Cosmopolitan *(7)*		
	Elle *(31)*	Elle *(11)*	Elle *(4)*		
	Vogue Paris *(3)*	Vogue Paris *(13)*	Vogue Paris *(4)*		
	Vogue Hommes *(1)*	Vogue Hommes *(4)*			
Netherlands ***(67)***	Libelle *(10)*	Libelle *(8)*	Libelle *(9)*		
	Cosmopolitan *(6)*	Cosmopolitan *(6)*	Men's health *(2)*		
		Elle *(13)*	Cosmopolitan *(6)*		
			Elle *(7)*		
Poland ***(72)***	Przyjaciółka *(43)*	Przyjaciółka *(17)*	Przyjaciółka *(2)*		
		Elle *(6)*	Cosmopolitan *(2)*		
		Cosmopolitan *(2)*			

Table 2: Description of frames

Frame	Description
Materiality	Referring to the types of fabric used in clothing. This could be for instance in reference to the fabric itself, but also to softness, comfort, or feeling of a specific fabric.
Temporality	Emphasizing how certain fashions are part of the current season, hark back to trends from historical eras, or are part of a fashion of the future.
Colour	Emphasizing the colours and patterns of garments.
Personal celebrity	Mentioning individual designers, models or celebrities to lend credibility to the fashion choices made.
Use value	Emphasizing the practicality of certain fashions, for instance for keeping someone warm in wintery conditions, or being practical to exercise in.
Sexyness	Emphasizing how someone wearing the fashion could feel or look sexy.
Gender	Referring to a fashion being either an example of femininity or masculinity
Body	Referring to the interaction between fashion and body, such as how a certain type of garment makes a body pronounce certain features.
Exoticism	Exoticizes foreign locations or cultures.
Urban or natural geography	Referring to either natural or urban landscapes such as for example the mountains, the beach, or the urban cityscape of Paris or London.
Fashion	Referring to the fashion world itself, including runways, designers, labels, or fashion weeks.
Art	Referring to the world of arts, including exhibitions, artists, museums, et cetera.
Economic	Referring to economic considerations, for instance whether a garment is a good investment or is cheap.
Political-ideological	Referring to "a system of meaning that couples assertions and theories about the nature of social life with values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change" (Oliver & Johnston 2000: 43). In the case of fashion, these include ideas that explicitly promote social change to achieve environmental sustainabilty, racial and gender equality, wealth redistribution, fair labour practices and animal welfare.

Table 3: Proportion of frames in introduction texts to editorial photoshoots in fashion magazines referring to a certain narrative 1982 – 2020, as percentage of coded introductory texts in given year

	Political-ideological frames	Economic frames	Aesthetic frames												
Year	**Political-ideological**	**Economic**	**Colour**	**Temporal**	**Materiality**	**Use value**	**Personal celebrity**	**Urban**	**Nature**	**Art**	**Body**	**Exoticism**	**Gender**	**Fashion**	**Sexyness**
1982	0%	6%	26%	28%	47%	28%	14%	3%	6%	0%	7%	4%	3%	0%	8%
1996	1%	1%	28%	33%	32%	9%	12%	4%	9%	4%	6%	7%	7%	2%	8%
2011	3%	3%	19%	35%	31%	6%	18%	12%	4%	10%	5%	3%	12%	16%	19%
2018	0%	7%	0%	50%	36%	7%	36%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	7%
2020	18%	0%	0%	36%	36%	0%	55%	9%	9%	0%	9%	0%	18%	27%	0%
Total over all years	**2%**	**3%**	**24%**	**32%**	**37%**	**15%**	**16%**	**5%**	**7%**	**3%**	**6%**	**5%**	**7%**	**5%**	**10%**

Table 4: Proportion of pages of adverts (of number of total pages of adverts) with a political message

Magazine	September 2018	September 2020
British *Vogue*	2.7% (4 out of 147 pages)	21.5% (20 out of 93)
***Vogue* Italia**	2.0% (5 out of 254)	14.9% (14 out of 94)
***Vogue* Paris**	2.6% (4 out of 150)	8.6% (7 out of 81)