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U.S. UNIVERSITY & SWISS UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

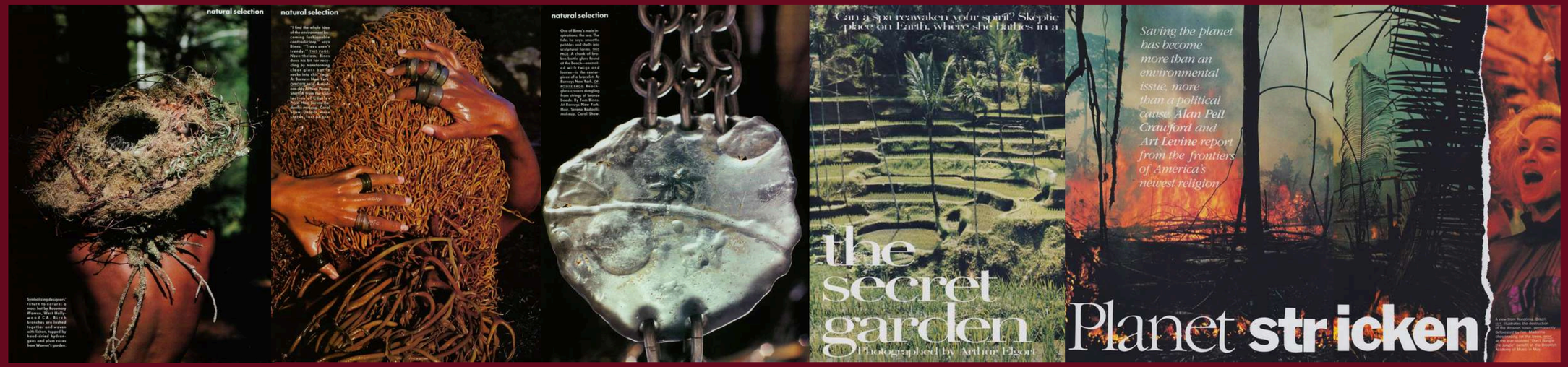
By-Buying the Environment:

Environmental Messaging in Vogue U.S. Magazines from 1960-2025

Julia Baldi
Environmental Science Thesis
Advisors: Professor Della Croce, Professor Piccinelli
May 4th, 2026

Overview

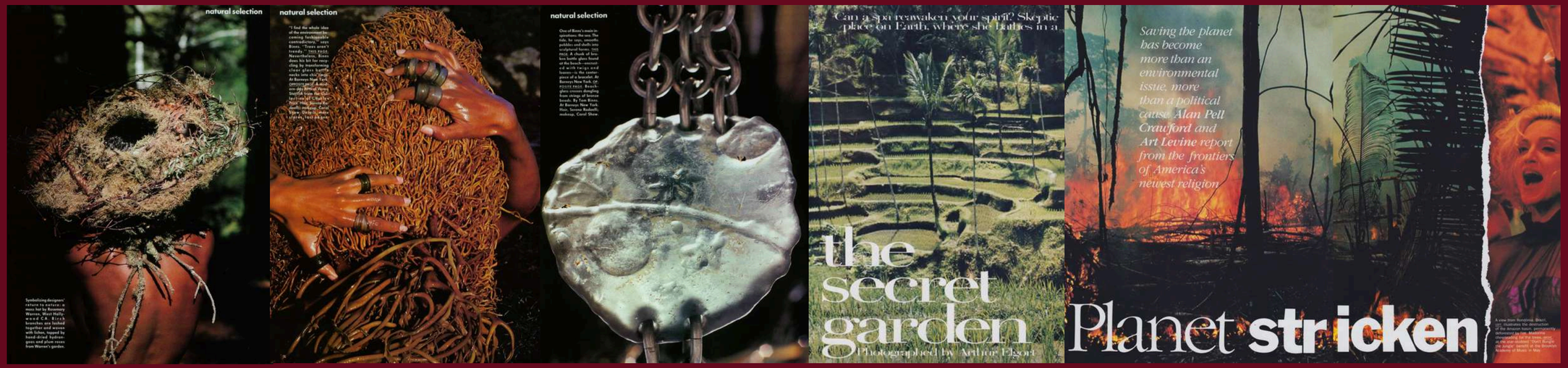
Objective: Analyze the evolution of environmental rhetoric in Vogue U.S. magazines (1960–2025).



Overview

Objective: Analyze the evolution of environmental rhetoric in Vogue U.S. magazines (1960–2025).

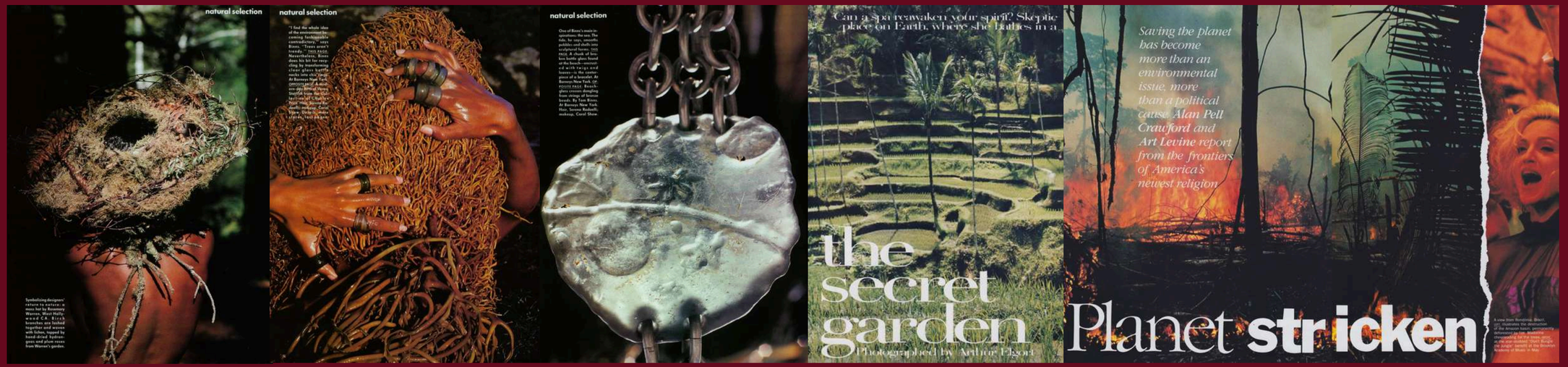
Method: Mixed-methods design: Quantitative (binary monthly presence) + Qualitative (thematic analysis).



Overview

Key Findings:

- Decline of ‘environment’ presence
- Narrative evolution
  - Altering *why* we consume, never *that* we consume



Introduction

1. The Role of Media

- Architect of social reality (Lippmann 1922)
  - Actively constructs meaning, taste, norms, lifestyles

Environmental Discourse:

- Framing of nature (Hansen 2010)
  - Crisis, economic oppurtunity, moral failing

Introduction

1. The Role of Media → 2. Fashion and Lifestyle Magazines

- Intersection of influence and impact
  - Constructors of meaning
  - Promotional platforms for one of the largest polluting industries
- Environmont framed as a commodity
  - Buy

Introduction

1. The Role of Media → 2. Fashion and Lifestyle Magazines → 3. Vogue U.S.

- Massive reach (Vogue U.S. 2025)
  - 10.8 million print readers
  - 12 million digital users
  - 57 million social media followers
- Influential voice on consumption
- Commercial platform, not scientific journal
  - Insight on how the industry can take urgent crises, strip it of imminant danger, and repackage it as a lifestyle and fashion accessory

Research Question

01

How has environmental rhetoric and messaging evolved in Vogue U.S. magazines from 1960-2025? And in what ways has the magazine linked environmental concern to consumer behavior?

Research Question

Term Selection:

“Environment”

Research Question

Term Selection:

“Environment”

Includes: “environmental,” “environmentally,” “environmentalist,” “environmentalism,”

Research Question

Term Selection:

“Environment”

Manual verification:

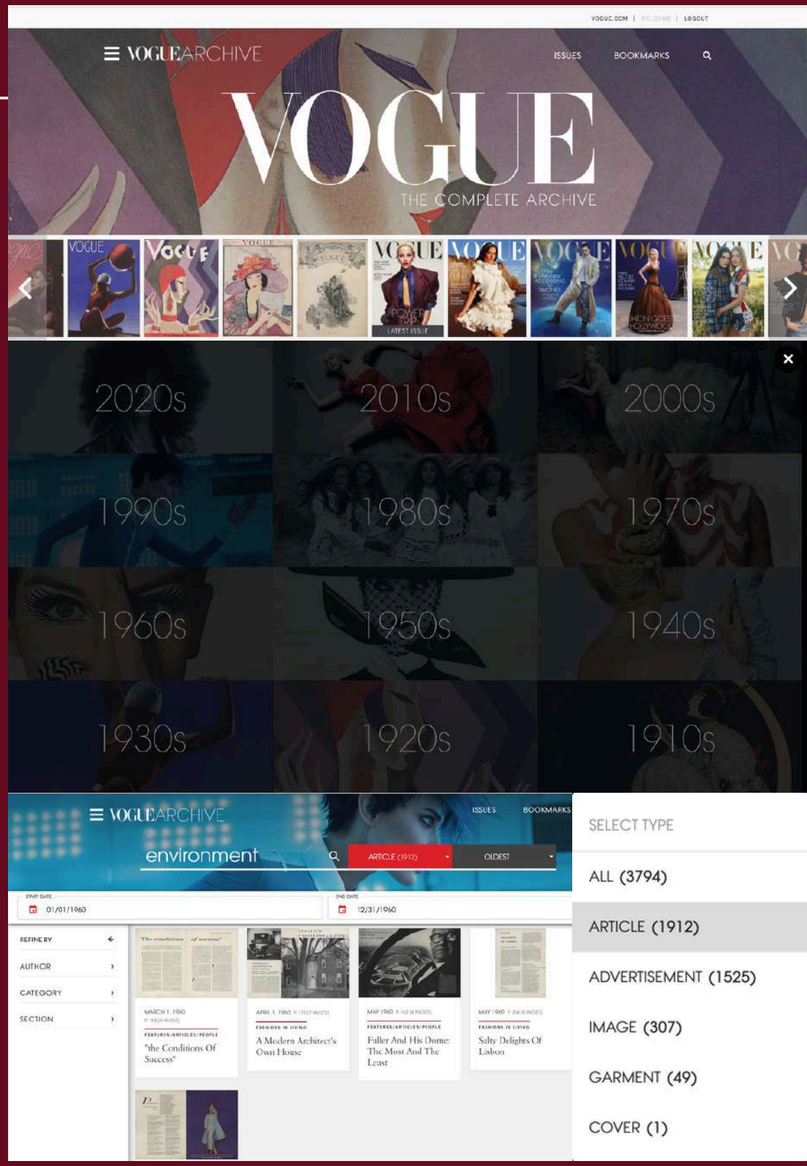
Valid: any usage of the root term ‘environment’ that explicitly referred to the natural, ecological, or physical world external to human construction

Invalid: Work, home, social, etc. environment

Quantitative Research

Methods

Database: Vogue U.S. digital archives (Condé Nast)



Methods

Database: Vogue U.S. digital archives (Condé Nast)

Collection: Tracked of every valid mention, date, category – manual validation needed

People, the planet eaters

Unless we stop destroying nature's beauty, we will become living robots, "utility people." "Devastation of the Environment," from a new book by Nobel Prize Winner KONRAD LORENZ

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Devouring our environment is the second deadly sin (overpopulation is the first) in the canon of witty Vienna-born superscientist (medical doctor, zoologist, naturalist) Konrad Lorenz, who founded the science of ethology—inter-relationship of plants and animals on the earth—and won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1973 for this work. The fame of Lorenz's books (from* King Solomon's Ring, *1952, to* On Aggression, *1966) has put the seventy-year-old in touch with the rebellious young; and, somehow, they have loved it when he told them they were storming in the wrong direction. The following chapter from* Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins *(published this month by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.) shows how much beauty—in nature and in man's own works—is needed to keep us sane, reveals one more Lorenz-facet: his humanism.*

It is a widespread but erroneous belief that "nature" is inexhaustible. Every species of animal, plant, or fungus—for all three are part of an intricate mechanism—is adapted to its environment, and to this environment belong not only the inorganic parts of a certain habitat but also all the other living inhabitants. Thus all the living beings of a habitat are adapted to *each other*, and this applies also to their confronting each other in apparent hostility, for example, the predator and its prey, the eater and the eaten. On closer consideration, it is evident that these beings, seen as species and not as individuals, not only do not harm each other but even form a mutual-interest society.

Obviously, the eater has a strong interest in the ongoing existence of the species he lives by, whether it be animal or plant, and the more specialized he is in a certain kind of nourishment, the greater his interest in its survival. In such cases, the predator is unable ever to exterminate the prey species, for the last pair of predators would starve long before it even encountered the last pair of prey animals. If the population density of the prey species falls below a certain level, the predator ceases to exist, just as, fortunately, most whaling concerns have done. When the dingo, originally a domestic dog, came to Australia and ran wild there, it did not eliminate any of the prey species that it lived on; instead, it exterminated both the large marsupial predators, the marsupial wolf, *Thylacynus*, and the Tasmanian devil, *Sarcophilus*. The marsupials, armed with terrible teeth, were infinitely superior to the dingo as fighters but, because of their primitive brain, they required a much denser population of prey animals than the more intelligent wild dog. They were not bitten to death by the dingo but killed in competition—they starved.

It is rare that the multiplication of an animal species is regulated directly by the amount of available nourishment. This would be uneconomical for the predator as well as for the prey. A fisherman living from certain fishing grounds will be well advised to exploit them only so far that the surviving fish can reproduce sufficiently to make up for the fish caught. Where this optimum lies can be worked out only by a very complicated maximum-minimum calculation: should we fish too little, the sea will remain overpopulated and not many young will mature; should we overfish, too few will be left to breed the number of progeny that the area can properly nourish. As V.C. Wynne-Edwards has shown in his book, *Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behavior*, many animal species practice an analogous kind of economy. As well as the marking of territories to preclude too close aggregation, there are various other behavior patterns calculated to prevent overexploitation of the available environment.

Quite frequently, the eaten species gains advantages from the eater. Not only is the reproduction rate of nutritive plants and animals adapted to the consumer, so that a vital equilibrium would be upset if this factor were obliterated. (The great breakdowns of population seen in quickly breeding rodents immediately after their attaining highest population densities endanger the survival of the species much more than does "culling" by predators, which helps to preserve a balanced medium.) The symbiosis often goes much further. There are many grasses "constructed" to be kept short and even trampled down by large ungulates. In our lawns, we imitate this process by mowing and rolling. If these factors drop out, these grass species are soon supplanted by others that have been unable to stand up to such treatment but are hardier in other ways. In short, two life forms can have the same relationship of interdependence that exists between man and his domestic animals and plants. The laws governing such interactions are often similar to those of human economy, a fact expressed in the biological term for the science of these interactions: ecology. However, *one* economical conception, about which we shall have more to say later, does not occur in the ecology of animals and plants: overexploitation of natural resources.

The interactions of the many animal, plant, and fungus species coexisting in a habitat and forming a common life society, or biocoenosis, are manifold and complex. The adaptation of different species of living beings, produced during periods whose size order corresponds with geological rather than with historical epochs, has led to a state of equilibrium as expedient as it is unstable. Many regulating processes support this equilibrium against the inevitable disturbances caused by weather and similar influences. Slowly occurring changes wrought by evolution or gradual alterations of climate cannot endanger the balance of a habitat, but sudden influences, even if apparently slight, may have catastrophic effects. The introduction of a seemingly harmless animal species can devastate wide stretches of land, as rabbits have done in Australia. This interference in the balance of a biotope was caused by man. Similar ravages may be brought about without his interference, but this is rarer.

The ecology of man changes much more rapidly than that of other creatures, and the speed of its change is dictated by his technological progress, which keeps accelerating in geometrical proportion. Thus man cannot avoid making fundamental changes, and, all too often, he causes the total breakdown of the biocoenosis in which and on which he lives. Exceptions to this rule are seen in a few "wild" tribes, for example, certain South American jungle Indians who live as gatherers and hunters; also in the inhabitants of several oceanic islands, who carry on some agriculture but otherwise live on coconuts and sea animals. Such human cultures influence their biotopes in a way no different from that of populations of animal species. This is the one theoretically possible way in which man can live in equilibrium with his biotope; the other way is by *creating*, through crop growing and animal breeding, a new biocoenosis, cut out to suit his needs and, in principle, just as viable as one that has arisen without his help. A biocoenosis of this kind may be seen in many old farms, where, for generations, the same families have lived on the same land; they are one with it and, having sound ecological knowledge acquired by experience, they give back to the soil what they have taken from it.

The farmer knows something that the whole of civilized mankind seems to have forgotten, namely, that the (Continued on page 188)

Methods

Database: Vogue U.S. digital archives (Condé Nast)

Collection: Tracked of every valid mention, date, category – manual validation needed

Metric	Count/Value
Total Issues Analyzed	887
Raw Search Hits	3794
Valid Entries	582
Data Retention Rate	15.3%

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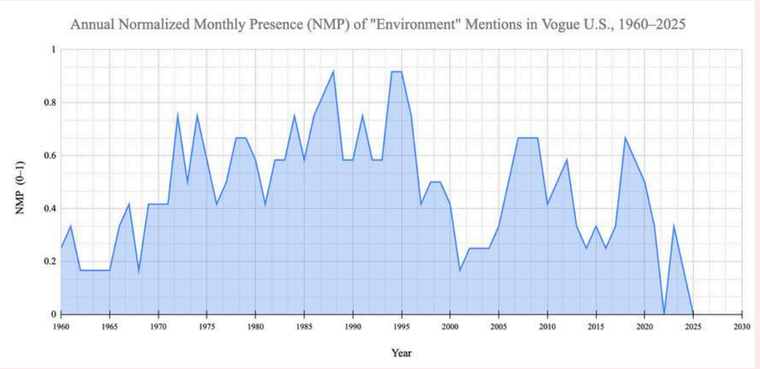
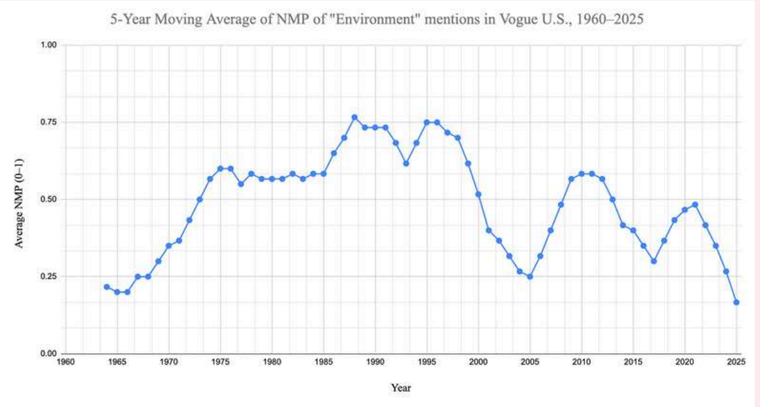
Methods

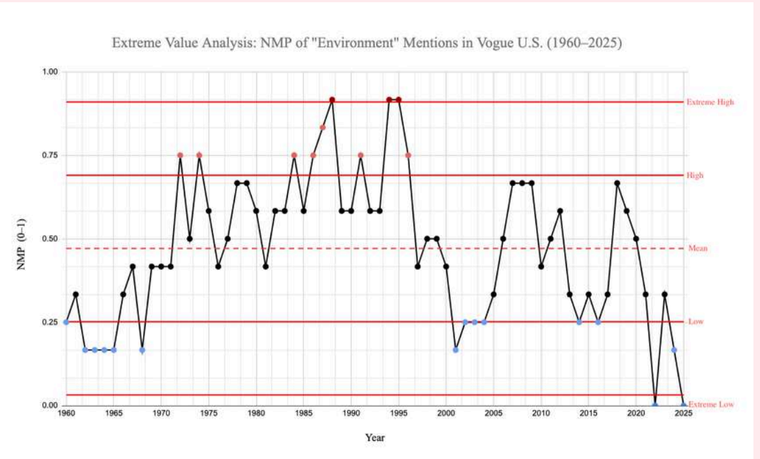
Metric: Normalized Monthly Presence (NMP)
Binary scoring (0-1) per month

Calculation: Proportion of months per year with presence

Analysis:
(1) Annual normalized presence of “environment”
(2) 5-year moving average
(3) Outlier analysis







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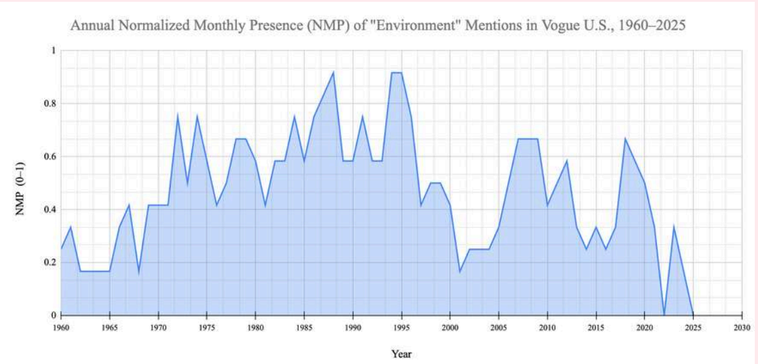
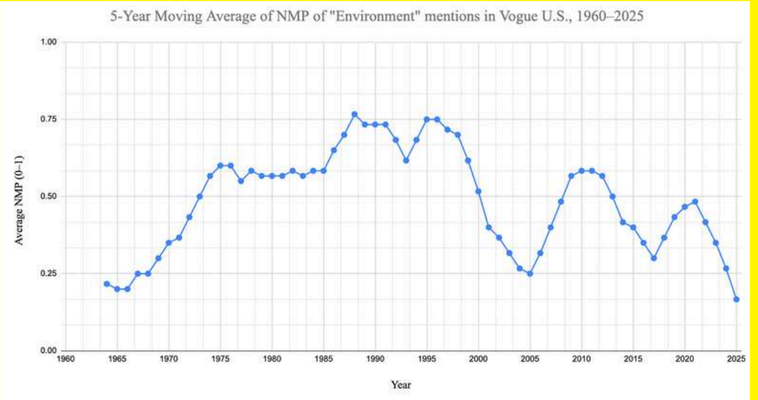
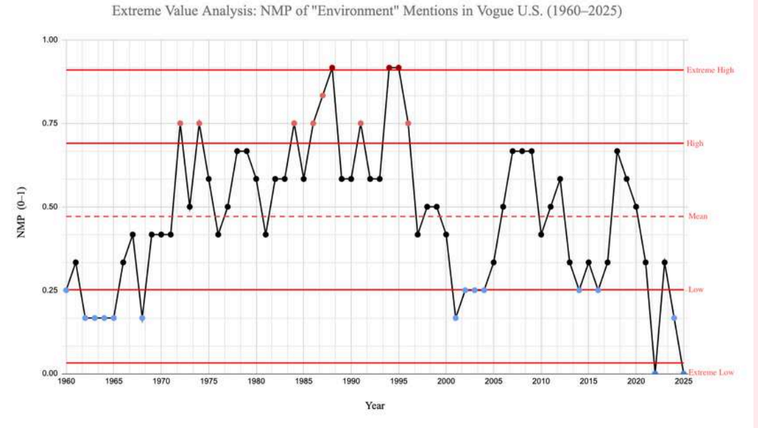
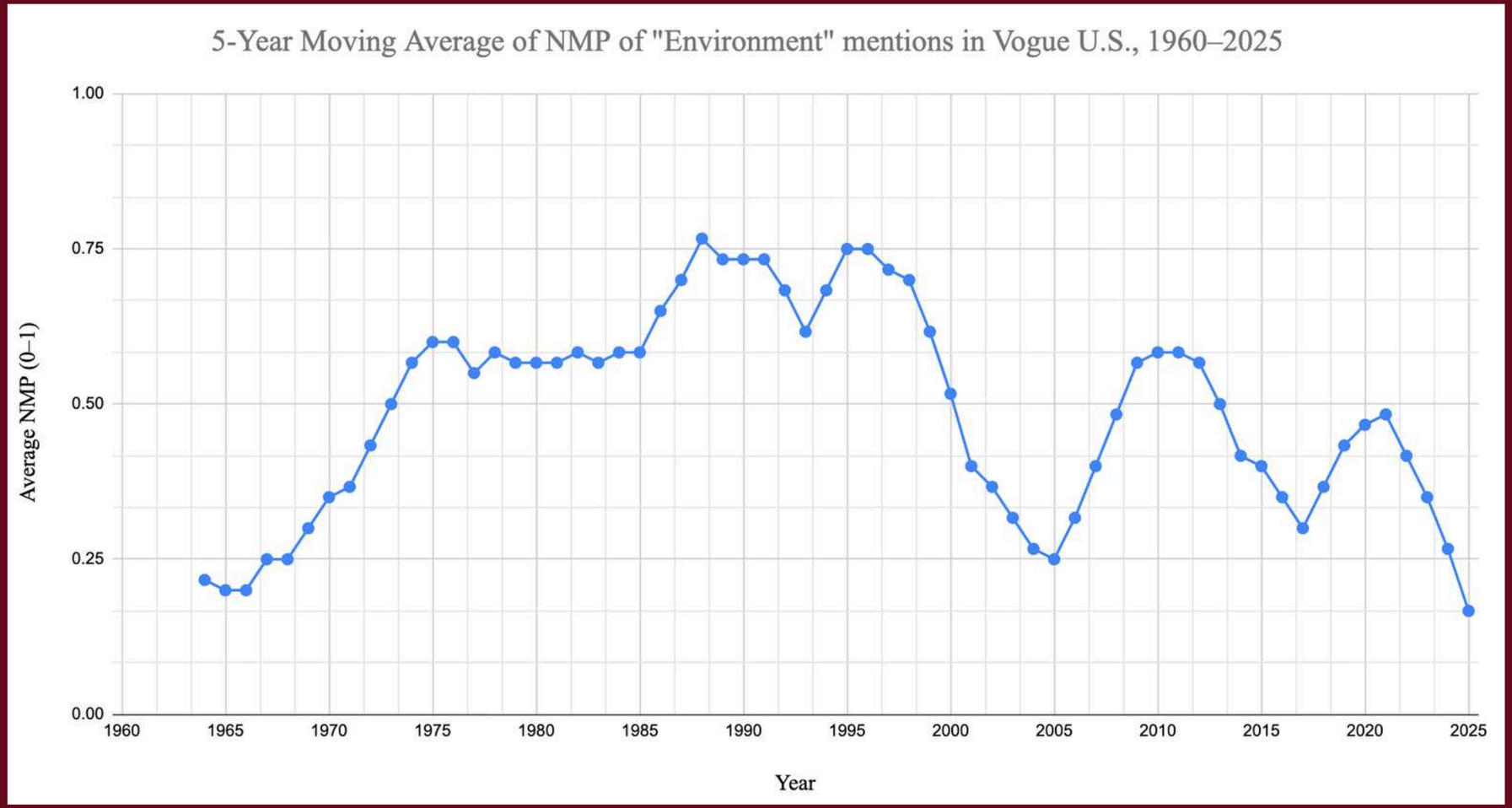






Results

Quantitative: 5-Year Moving Average of NMP



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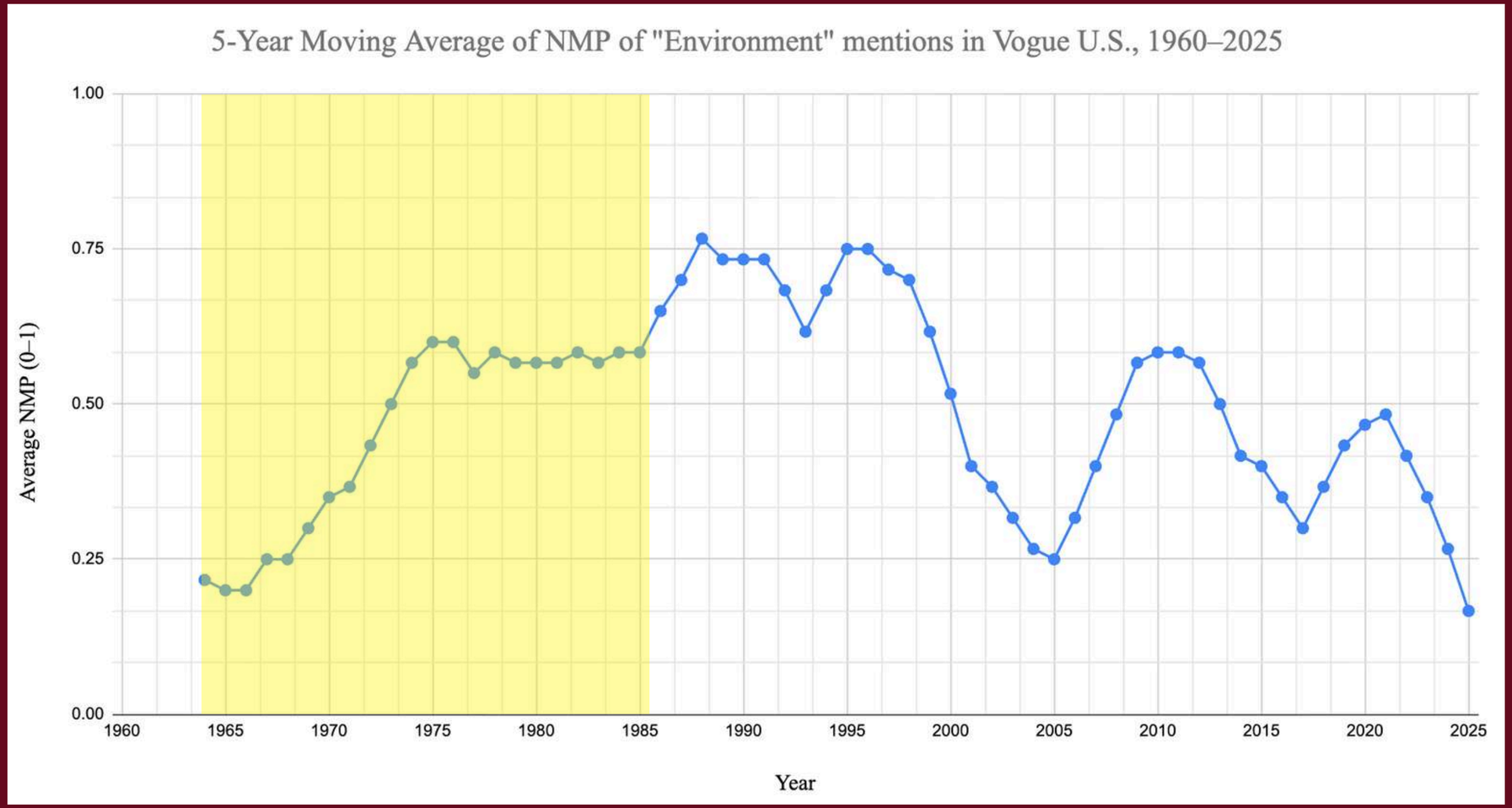

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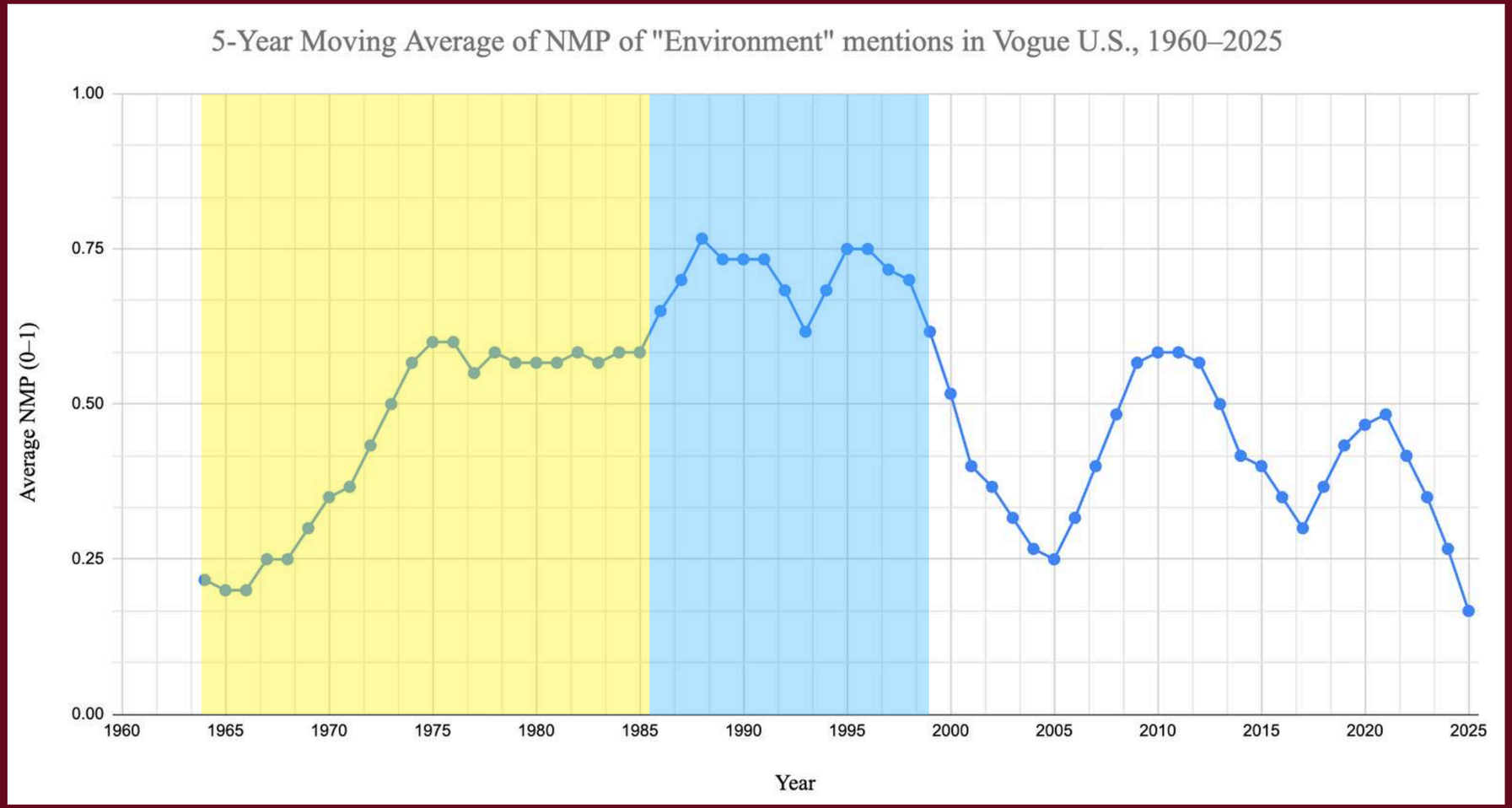

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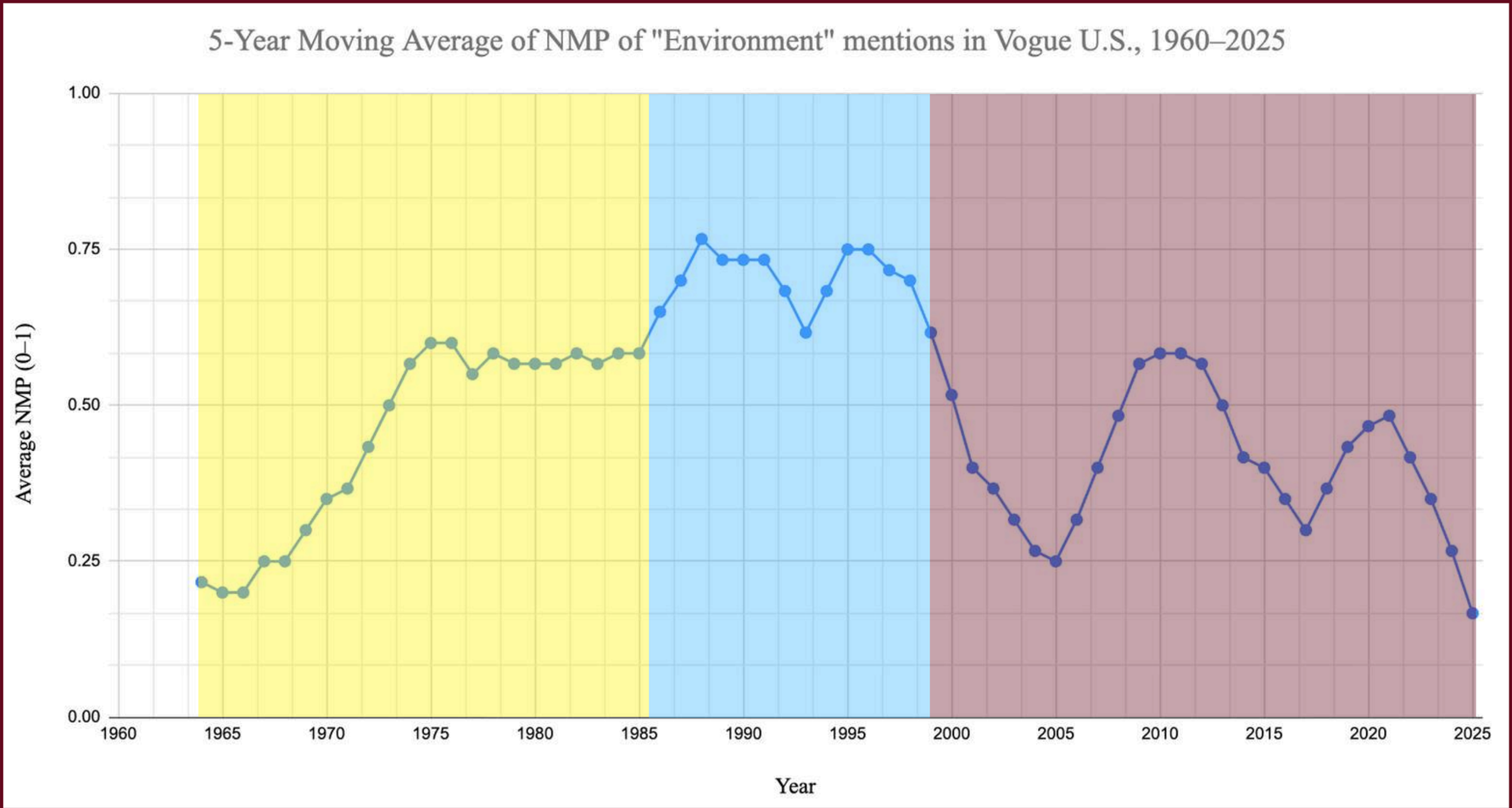
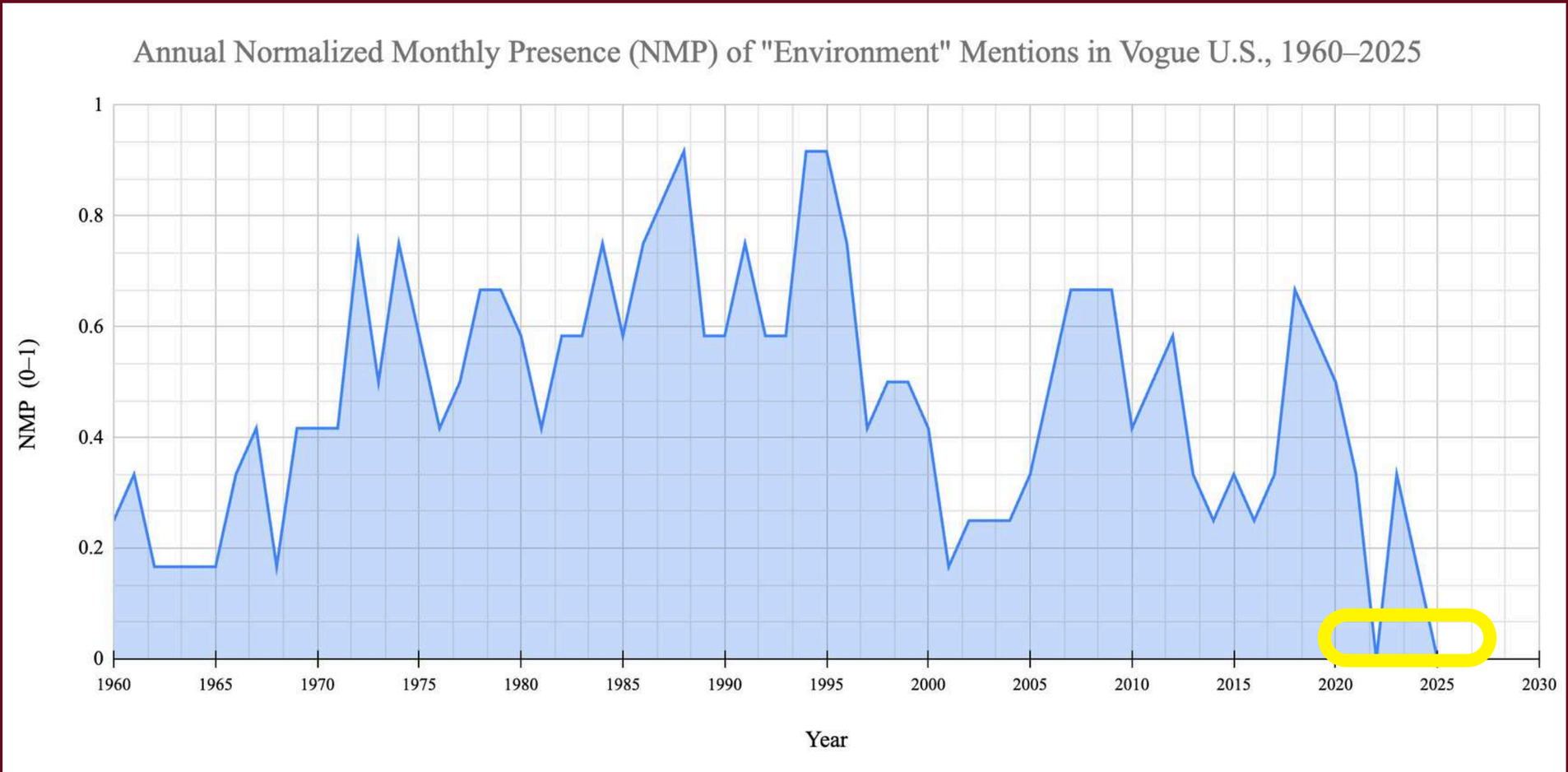
Quantitative: 5-Year Moving Average of NMP



Results

Quantitative: NMP of “Environment” Mentions



Results & Discussion

Quantitative implications:

- Environmental concern in Vogue is treated as a trend cycle, not sustained ethical commitment
  - Deeper sociological issue explored in Anthony Downs's "*Up and Down with Ecology: The Issue-Attention Cycle*" (1972)
  - Vogue does not drive the conversation, but it spins the discourse into a profitable opportunity and follows larger trends

Results & Discussion

Quantitative implications:

- Environmental concern in Vogue is treated as a trend cycle, not sustained ethical commitment
- Silence of language
  - Disappearance of the word “environment” by 2025 signals a rebranding of rhetoric for ecological crises – disappearence in the creation of meaning for the environment
  - Replacment with more narrow, culturally-relevant terms

Results & Discussion

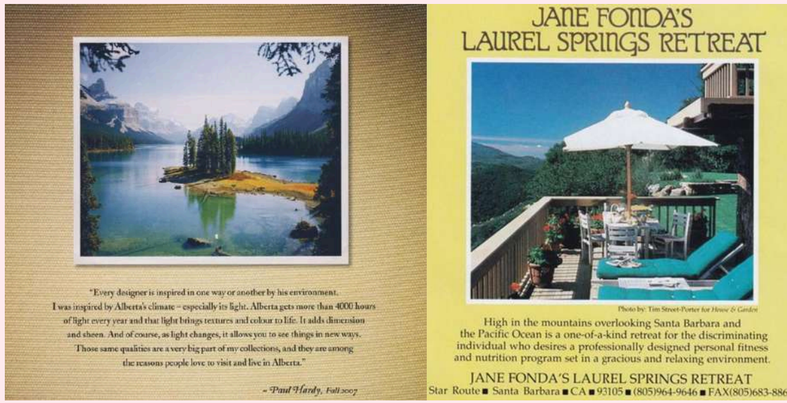
Quantitative implications:

- Environmental concern in Vogue is treated as a trend cycle, not sustained ethical commitment
- Silence of language
- Selective separation of audience with Vogue business platform
  - Released in 2019
  - Business to business platfrom
  - Intentional divergence of audience

Qualitative Research

Methods

1. Kept track of all quotes of valid entries and surrounding text and context as needed

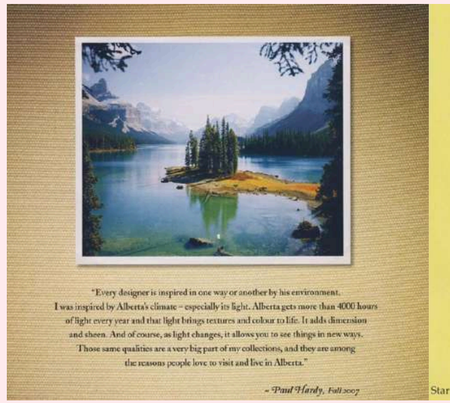


Methods

1. Kept track of all quotes of valid entries and surrounding text and context as needed

2. Method: Thematic Analysis of validated texts

Themes
Lifestyle
Threat
Victim

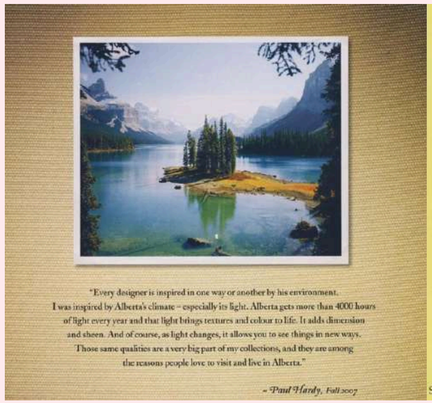


Methods

1. Kept track of all quotes of valid entries and surrounding text and context as needed

2. Method: Thematic Analysis of validated texts

Themes	How to consume
Lifestyle	*Identity*
Threat	*Protection*
Victim	*Solution*



Results & Discussion

Qualitative

Decade	Lifestyle	Threat	Victim
1960-1969	84%	13%	3%
1970-1979	33%	45%	22%
1980-1989	19%	73%	8%
1990-1999	24%	48%	28%
2000-2009	29%	21%	50%
2010-2020	26%	16%	58%
2020-2025	15%	10%	75%

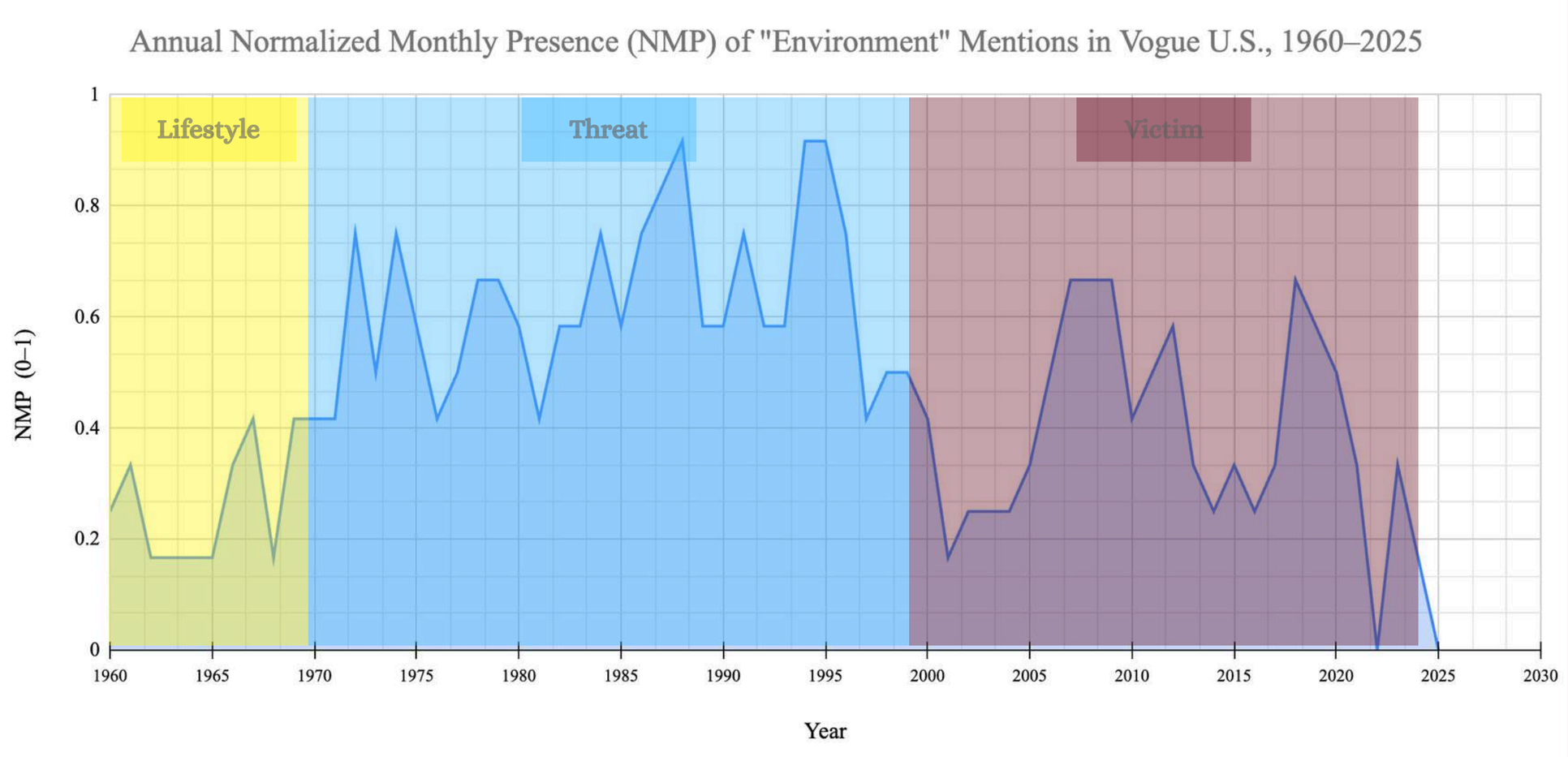
Results & Discussion

Qualitative

Decade	Lifestyle	Threat	Victim
1960-1969	84%	13%	3%
1970-1979	33%	45%	22%
1980-1989	19%	73%	8%
1990-1999	24%	48%	28%
2000-2009	29%	21%	50%
2010-2020	26%	16%	58%
2020-2025	15%	10%	75%

Results

Quantitative: NMP of “Environment” Mentions with Thematic Trends



Results & Discussion

Qualitative implications:

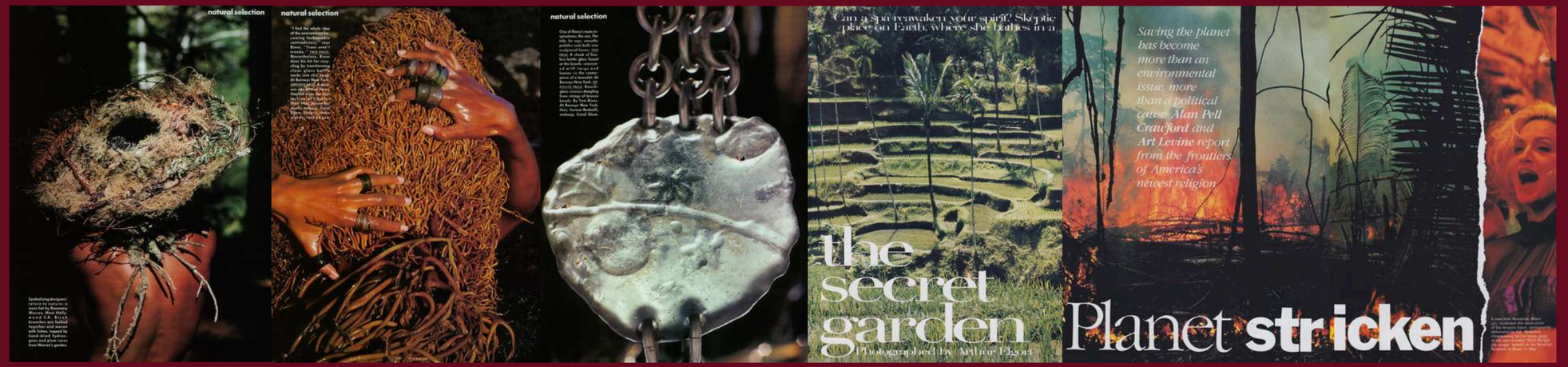
- Narrative switching as a profitable tool
- Illusion of progress
  - Tone changes, outcome remains the same
  - Awareness ≠action

Conclusion

Core Identity: Vogue is a commercial enterprise, not an environmental journal

Contained Discourse: Non linear coverage, strategic silence, intentional audience targeting

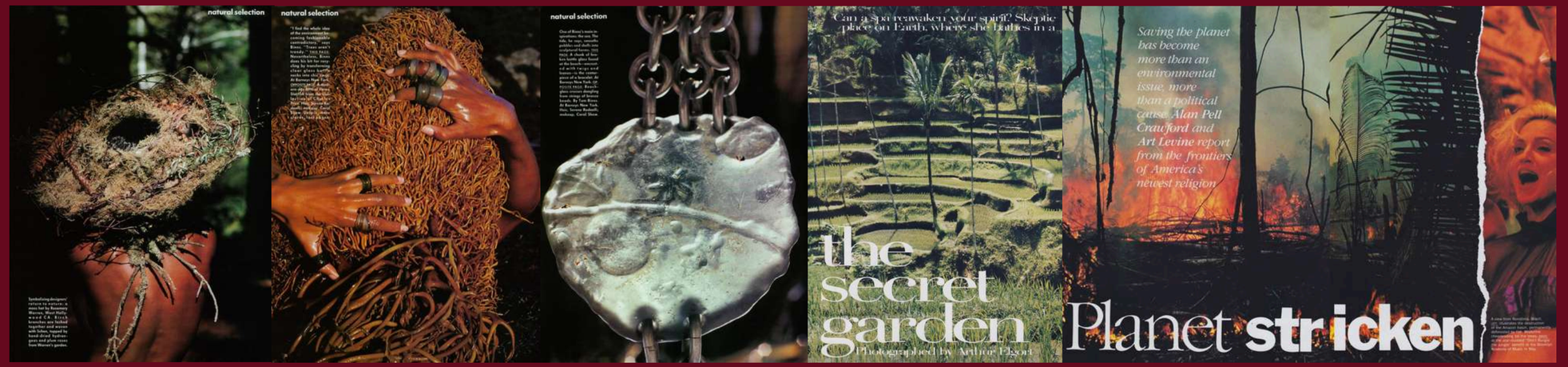
Illusion of progress: Tone and reasons to buy evolves, buy never challenged



Conclusion

By-buying the environment, we do not save the planet, we mask and damage it more.

By buying the environment, the only thing we truly purchase is the illusion that the world can be saved without changing the way we live.



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Thank you!
Any Questions?

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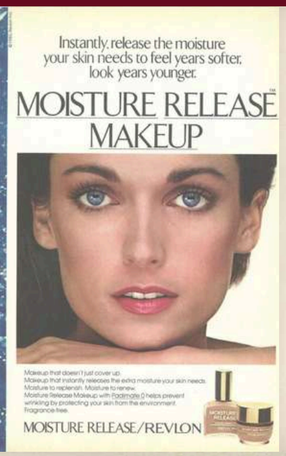
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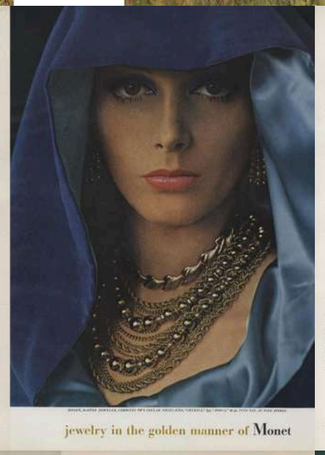
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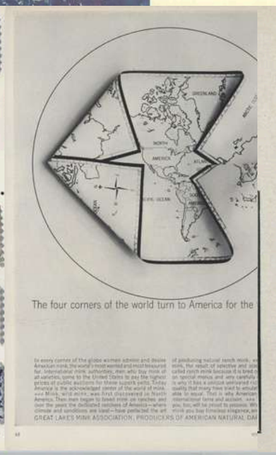
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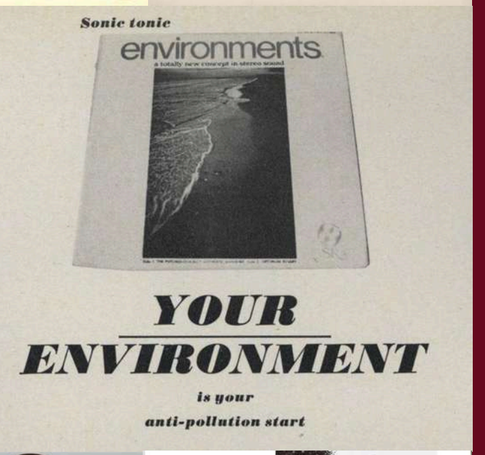
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Nostalgia
March With Me

Research Question

01

How has environmental messaging evolved in Vogue USA magazines from 1960-2025? And in what ways has the magazine linked environmental concern to consumer behavior?

02

What are the longitudinal trends in the frequency of environmental terminology within Vogue USA over this 65-year period? And what are the implications of these trends based on historical contexts?

03

How has the framing of the environment changed over time? Specifically, what dominant narratives have emerged, and how has the representation of nature shifted in relation to the fashion industry's interests?

Results & Discussion

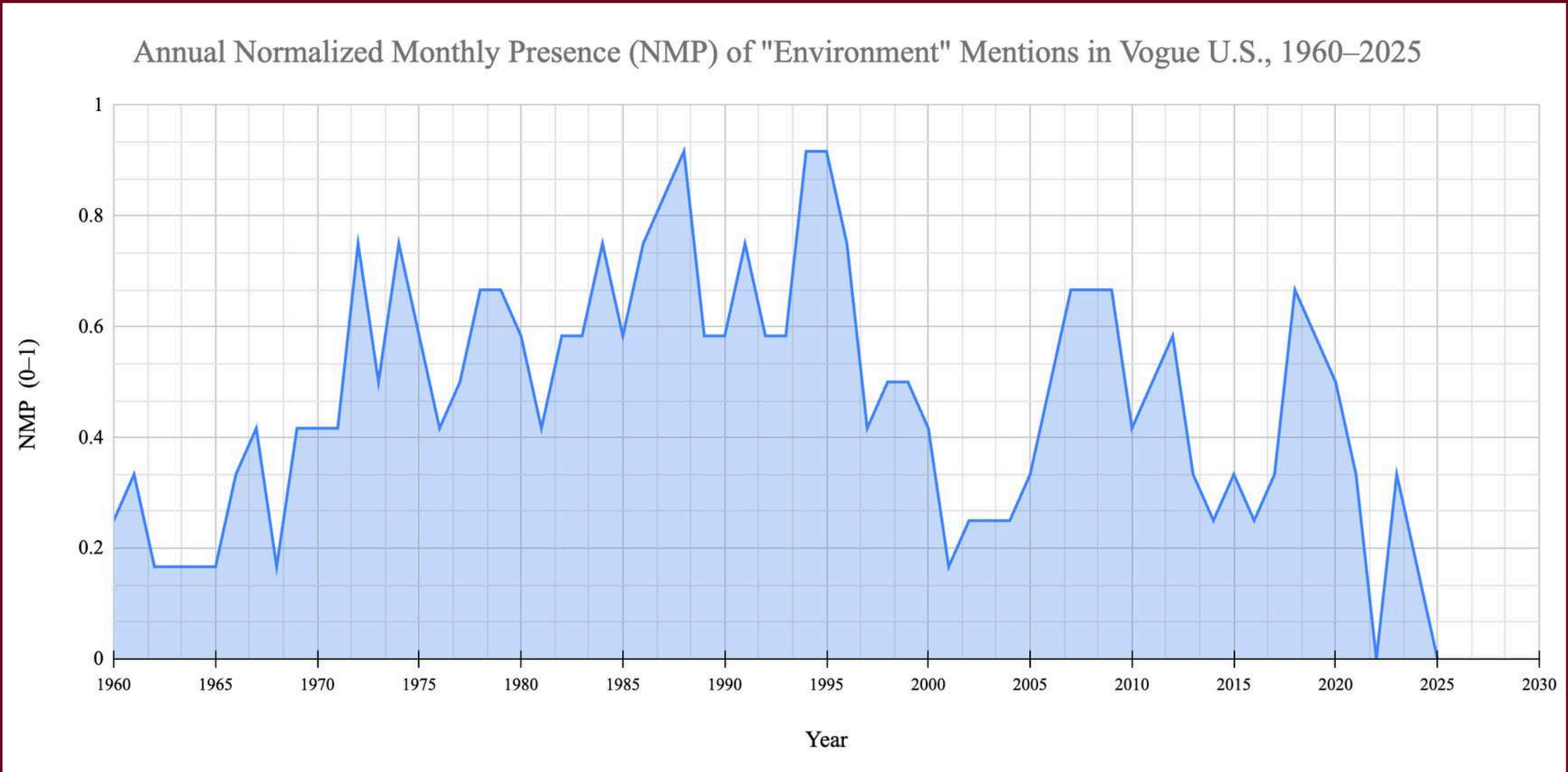
Quantitative

Metric	Count/Value
Total Issues Analyzed	887
Raw Search Hits	3794
Valid Entries	582
Data Retention Rate	15.3%

Distribution Category	Percentage of Valid
Articles	64%
Advertisments	34%
Garments	1%
Images	0%
Covers	0%

Results

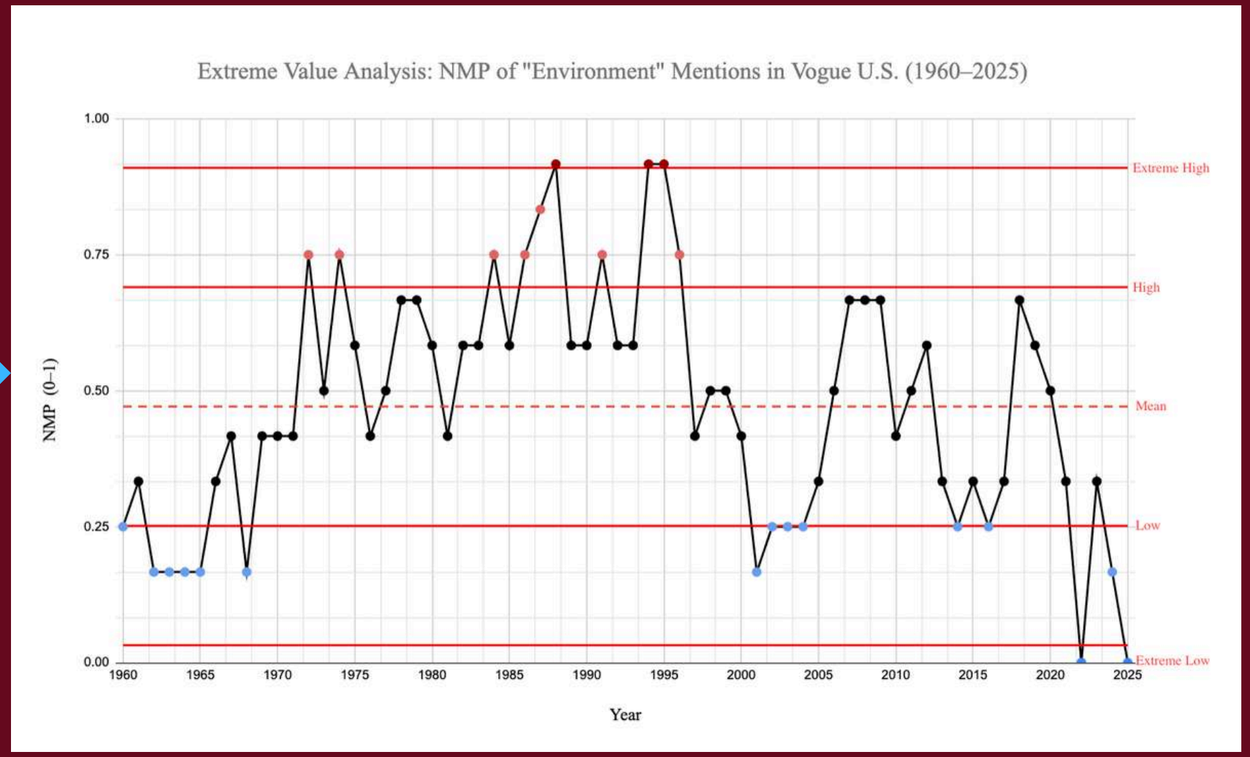
Quantitative: NMP of “Environment” Mentions



Results & Discussion

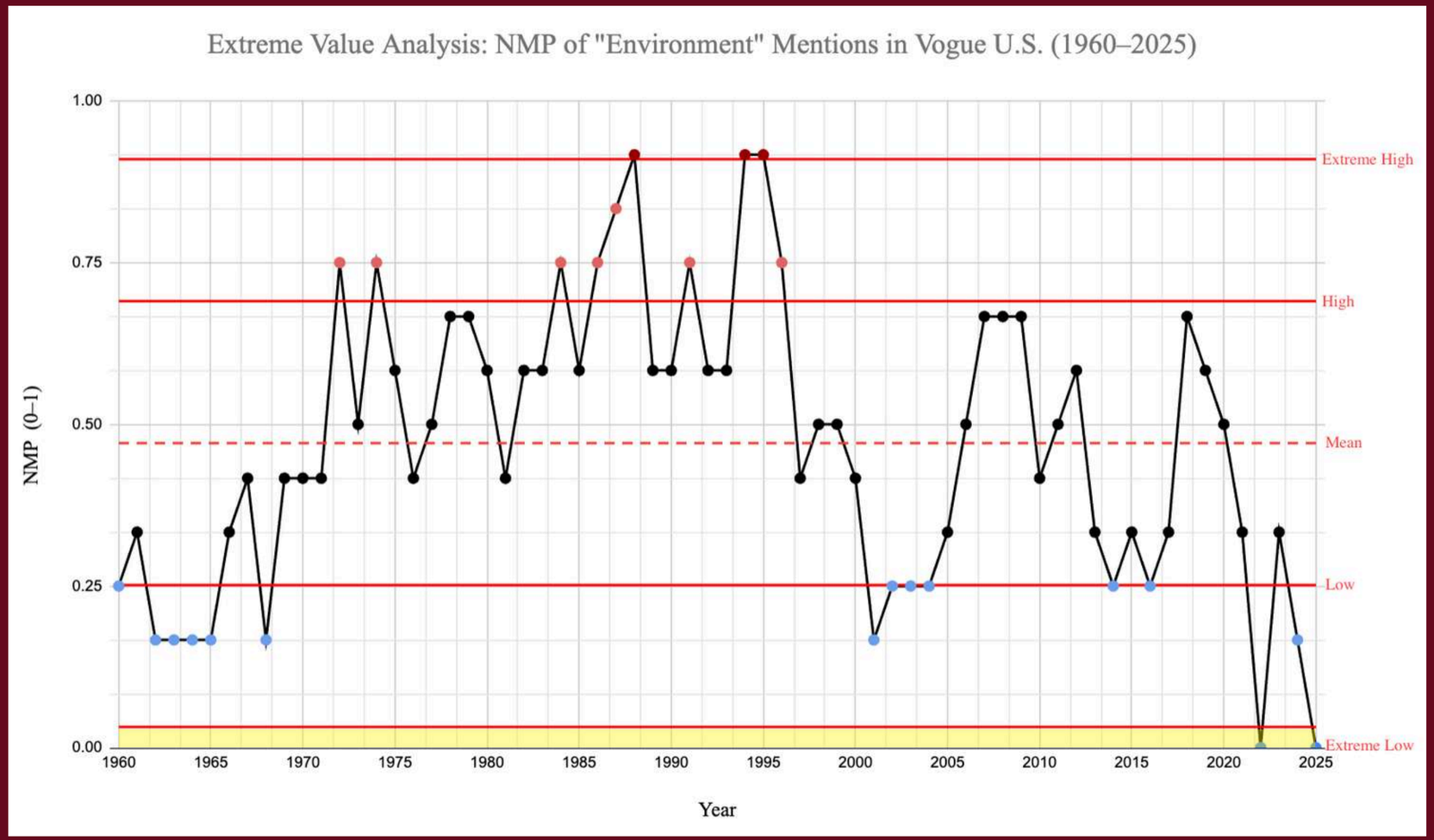
Quantitative: Outlier Analysis

Metric	Value
Mean	0.48
Standard Deviation	0.22
Extreme High	> 0.91
High	> 0.70
Low	< 0.25
Extremely Low	< 0.03



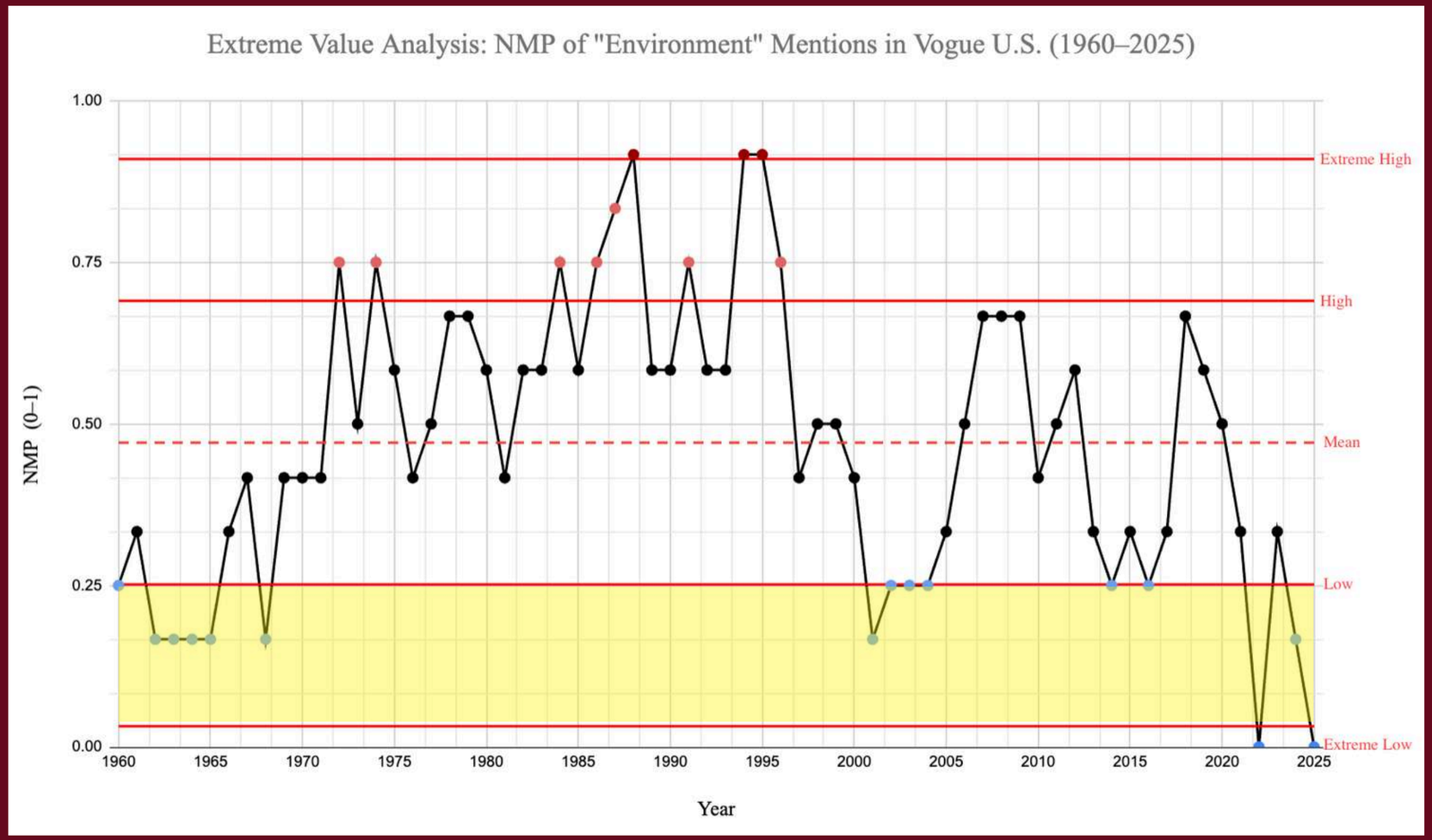
Results & Discussion

Quantitative: Outlier Analysis



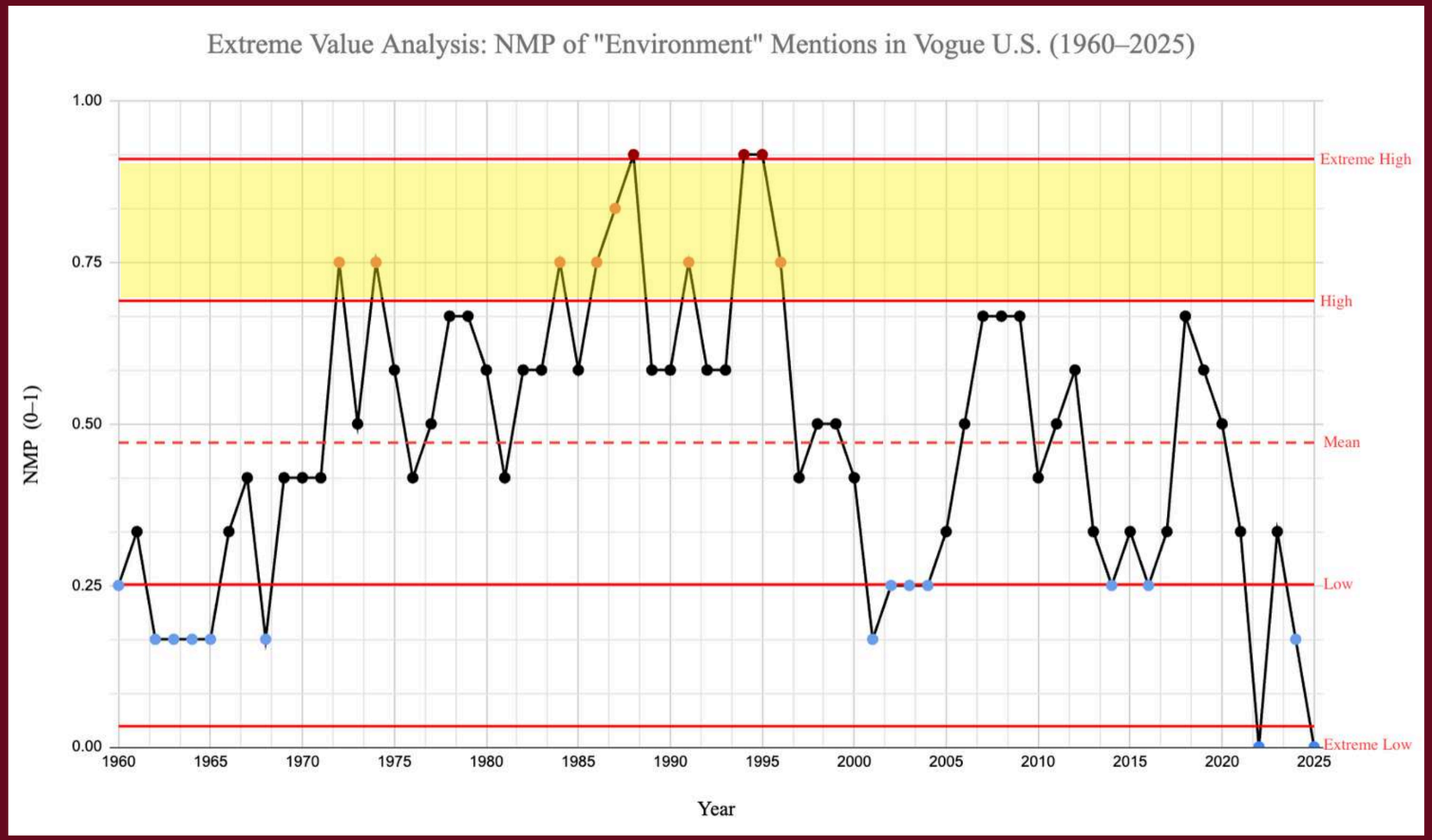
Results & Discussion

Quantitative: Outlier Analysis



Results & Discussion

Quantitative: Outlier Analysis



Results & Discussion

Quantitative: Outlier Analysis