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# The Speed of the Fashion Life Cycle

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Bachelor of Arts

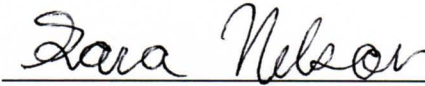
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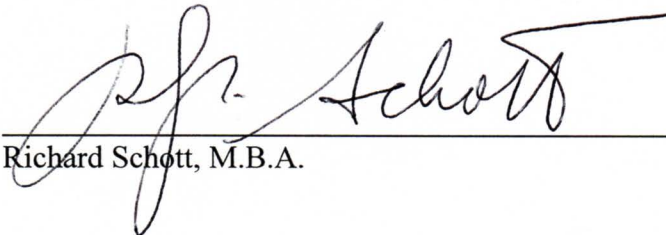
Departmental Distinction in Fashion



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The Speed of the Fashion Life Cycle

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Honors Senior Thesis

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## Outline

- I. Introduction
  - a. Fashion Industry
  - b. Fashion definition
  - c. Trend definition
  - d. Thesis and paper contents
- II. Background Definitions and Information
  - a. Youth
  - b. Skirt lengths/hemlines
  - c. Life Cycles
    - i. Short-term
    - ii. Long-term
    - iii. Trends and fads
- III. 1950s and 1960s
  - a. Emergence of youth culture
  - b. Media and retail
  - c. Skirt hemlines
- IV. 1970s and 1980s
  - a. Youth culture
  - b. Media and retail
  - c. Skirt hemlines
- V. 1990s and 2000s
  - a. Youth culture, Millennials

- b. Media and retail
  - c. Skirt hemlines
- VI. 2010 - Present
  - a. Youth culture
  - b. Blogs and social media
  - c. Retail, ecommerce and fast fashion
  - d. Skirt hemlines
- VII. Conclusion
  - a. Changes in hemlines
  - b. Speed of new media
  - c. Future of life cycles

## **I. Introduction**

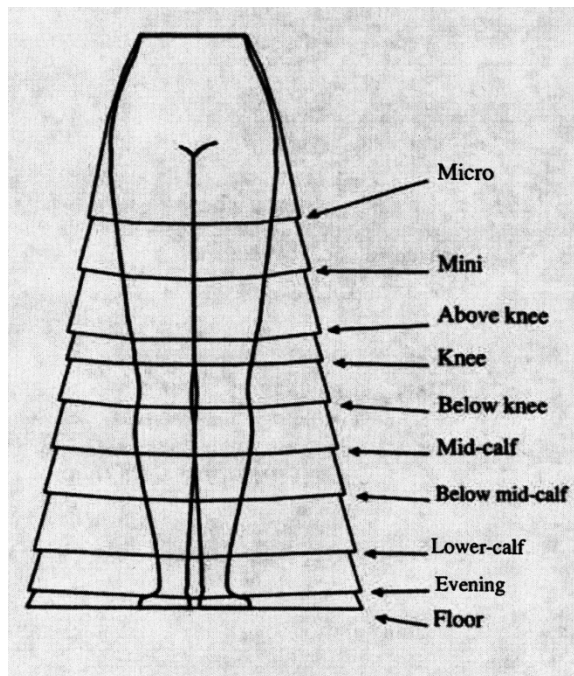
The fashion industry is ever changing and is considered rather unpredictable. Fashion is unique for every individual in every country around the world. Even though there are definitions for fashion and style, it remains a questionable topic that is often under researched, under developed, and under analyzed. The definition of fashion that relates to this paper is, “the prevailing style, as in dress, during a particular time” (Merriam-Webster 1). Trends will also be discussed often and people frequently use the term fashions and trends interchangeably. Trends can refer to both fashion change, innovation, and fashion adoption behavior, diffusion. A trend involves a certain item of dress, a way of wearing an item, or a certain style, silhouette, material, color, or pattern and more specifically in the fashion industry it has been used to describe what a majority of people at a given time and place agree to be the right way to dress (Mackinney 1). The fashion industry along with fashion has certainly transformed over time because of numerous factors and influences. Fashion is influenced from economics, psychology, sociology, marketing, business, politics, and anthropology and other areas of study. Age, occupation, sexual orientation, location, and social class can also affect fashions. The fashion industry must always be aware of these areas to adapt and change with the consumers’ demands. Even though fashion can be unpredictable with all the sources of influence, there are existing theories and models of the fashion life-cycle that help to further understand and observe how fashion and trends are adopted. Skirt hemlines and trends over time are an interesting subject to consider with regards to the fashion life-cycle. This paper will analyze skirt hemlines and trends from the decade of the 1950s through to the present, with a focus on the youth culture in the United States, to display that the fashion life-cycle still exists, but has become shorter because of various changes in the media and retailing.

## II. Background Definitions and Information

Initially, the term youth must be considered and clearly defined to understand the age group and who is considered within this analysis. The youth market consists of those individuals that are no longer children, but not yet adults. The youth culture and market only first emerged as a distinct part of the population during the 1950s. The term youth is extremely general and can include tweens, teenagers, college students, and young adults. Tweens are generally considered to be between the ages of 10 and 13, teenagers are between the ages of 14 and 18, college students are ages 19 to 24, and young adults are between 25 and 35 (4imprint 1). These age descriptions are flexible and there is overlap of a year or two, but this analysis will consider the youth market of tweens, teenagers, and college students. The young adult age demographic will not be considered with regards to the trends and hemlines studied.

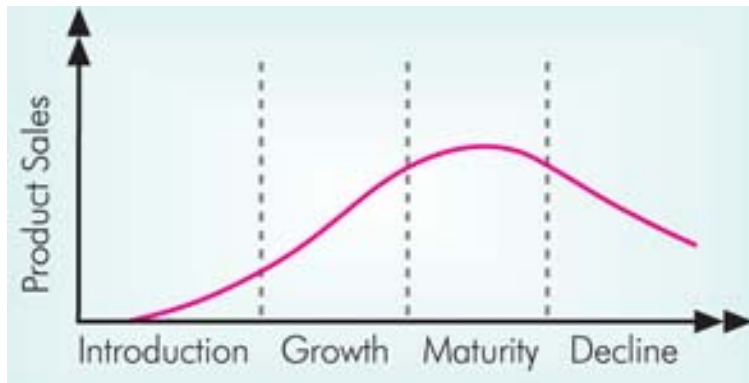
The main focus with regards to trends will be skirts, especially skirt length, also called hemline, and the terms must be defined since they will be mentioned throughout the analysis. Starting from shortest to longest first is the micro-mini which is extremely short and the length is less than 15 inches. The mini skirt is a short skirt that is about 15 inches from waist to hem and the hem falls about mid-thigh length. Above-the-knee skirts are about 1 to 2 inches shorter than mid-knee and the length is 21 to 22 inches from the waist to hem or 19 to 20 inches from the floor. A knee length skirt is around 23 inches from waist to hem, mid-kneecap length or 18 inches from the floor. Below-the-knee skirts have a hemline 1 to 3 inches below the knee and are 14 to 17 inches from the floor. Below-the-knee skirts are also known as street or cocktail length skirts. Mid-calf skirts are about 27 inches from waist to hem with the hemline around halfway between the knee and ankle, also known as the midi or ballerina length. Below mid-calf length is about 31 inches from waist to hem and also called long skirts. A lower-calf skirt,

a long or maxi skirt, is about 33 inches from waist to hem and 8 inches from the floor. Evening length skirts are about 40 inches from waist to hem and also known as formal length or full length. The last skirt length is floor length and the garment literally touches the floor (Smith 36). All the skirts defined above can be seen in the Figure 1 below. Skirt hemlines and trends have fluctuated over time and life cycles must be considered to truly analyze the changes.



*Figure 1*

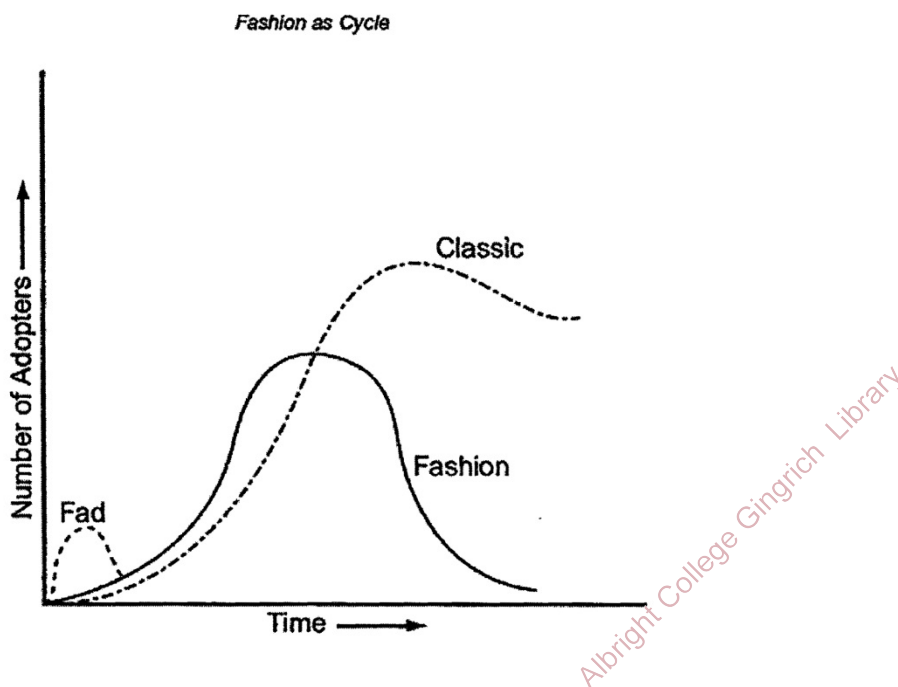
Within fashion and the fashion industry there are life-cycles of garments, styles, colors, patterns, silhouettes, and materials, including both short-term and long-term cycles. They have been theorized to further explain fashion flow, diffusion of fashion into the population, the rate and extent to which fashions are accepted by the consuming public, and the duration of a fashion. The basic or standard fashion cycle has five stages and is considered the period of time or life span during which a fashion or trend exists and it includes an introduction, rise, peak, decline, and obsolescence as seen in Figure 2.



*Figure 2*

Short-term and long-term fashion cycles both include all five stages, but a short-term fashion cycle can last from months to about a year or two while long-term fashion cycles can last as long as a century and may even exceed the life span of humans (Lynch 1). During the introduction period a new style is introduced to the public through a designer's collection and are commonly only worn by those who can afford it, usually including fashion leaders, athletes, and movie stars. The rise stage is when a style gets attention from buyers, the press, and the public and manufacturers will adopt the design or style and make adaptations for mass production. After the rise in popularity, the peak stage exists when the style is most popular and is considered main stream fashion. The length of the peak stage determines whether a style or trend becomes a classic or a fad, which will be defined further. The decline period occurs when people get tired or bored of a trend and begin to look for new styles, even though they may still wear the older trend, they are not willing to continue purchasing it at the same price. The fifth stage, obsolescence, happens when consumers have turned to new looks and styles and therefore a new cycle will begin as manufacturers stop producing the previous trend and retailers will not stock the trend (Abbasi 1-2). Referring back to the peak stage, trends and styles will commonly either become classics or fads. Classic styles never reach complete obsolescence and remain in acceptance for an extended period of time. Classic styles have

included a pair of jeans, a classic blazer, and a T-shirt even though there exists cycles within the cycles of these classics that have made adaptations to the color, texture, or silhouette of the styles. The reverse of a classic style is a fad which is a very short lived fashion that usually takes consumer's by surprise and then fades very quickly. Fads tend to be of a strikingly new quality that sets them apart from current fashion, short-lived, with a rapid growing in popularity and accepted only in, and intensely popular within small groups, and lastly are often nonessential and mostly for amusement (Heckman 1). Therefore, it is important to make it distinct that not all trends can be considered fads, but fads can be considered trends. Figure 3 displays the difference between a fad, a typical fashion style, and a classic.



*Figure 3*

The terms are not interchangeable even though this paper will display how the life cycle of trends have generally increased in speed through the fashion life cycle and if current trends were placed into past decades they may have strongly been considered fads since trends moved at quite a slower pace.

### III. 1950s and 1960s

To begin, the decade of the 1950s and 1960s was when the youth culture and market truly began to emerge. During the 1950s, "... the American teen population grew from 10 million to 15 million," and there was a, "...rise in youth spending sustained by a combination of part time work and parental allowances..." (Osgerby 3). The youth market was still ignored by many department stores because teenagers and the youth were still expected to dress like their older counterparts. Up until the 1950s and 1960s, teenagers were not seen as independent or having any true control over their own lives, thus their fashion styles reflected what their parents wore. When teenagers gained more independence and freedom beginning in the 1950s they no longer wanted to look like miniature versions of their parents (Koo-Seen-Lin 2). The emergence of the teenage or youth market did not happen immediately and the early 1950s still saw a great amount of focus on authoritarian conventions. It was not until the late 1950s that the youth were embracing their independence which only expanded further during the 1960s when the youth market noticed their power within society. Fashion became more central to a young person's identity during this time period. An extremely notable and famous model in the 1960s, Lesley Hornby, also known as Twiggy, observed, "The world is all for youth now...because the young people have so much time and money to spend, all the businessmen say let's cash in on youth" (Youthquake 2). Once the new youth subculture came about, the fashion industry had to begin to take notice and take advantage of the opportunities within the market.

Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, the only sources of media with regards to fashion were magazines, newspapers, radio and word of mouth. Right before 1950, in the year 1948 television became commercially available to the American public, but a majority of families did not own television sets, nor where there a large amount of stations (Tortora 500). In April of

1950 there were 5,343,000 television sets in American homes, but by 1953 50% of Americans, around 25,233,000, owned a television set and the first color program was broadcast. Right before the year 1960, 42,000,000 American homes owned television sets and some owned two sets at that point (PBS 1-2). The growth of mass media during these two decades assisted in the dissemination of teenage fashion and the influences on fashion from television were more evident among the young (Tortora 500). Teen magazines became more popular along with TV music shows, including American Bandstand, which kept the youth informed of styles and trends. There was a global circulation of media that began as well and became more rapid which allowed for America's youth to be influenced from trends worldwide. Retailers in the fashion industry did not take the youth market serious at first considering the department stores ignored this market and their desire to dress more independently. "Sally Tuffin, an English designer, commented on the 1950s saying, 'There weren't any clothes for young people at all. One just looked like their mother'" (Fashion Revolution 1). By the 1960s there were little boutiques beginning to open up that did target to teenagers and younger women and their success from providing budding fashion to the market became evident to larger retailers (Kass 21). The media, including the expansion of television in the 1950s, and retailers adapting to the emerging teenage and youth market influenced the changing youth trends and hemlines during these decades.

The 1950s were a crucial transition period for the youth market and their ability to take control over their fashion choices. Mentioned previously, this decade was when the teenage culture was pulling away from the classic idea that they must dress like their parental counterparts. Majority of the youth still remained consistent with that idea, especially young girls mainly the tween age range. Their silhouettes echoed their mothers with full skirts,

princess-line styles, and full circular skirts that were typically around mid-length (Tortura 523). Koo-Seen-Lin describes 1950's skirt lengths in his article, "they weren't quite as prim as the floor length looks of decades past, but society still hadn't regained its momentous opulence from the '20s" (3). The 1920's saw extremely short flapper dresses as a trendy skirt length, but the 1950's remained at mid-length. In a school atmosphere, tweens and teenagers always wore dresses and most schools required the dresses to come to at least mid-knee but they usually covered the whole knee (Rich 1-3). Figure 4 illustrates the length of school dresses.



*Figure 4*

Teenagers typically preferred full skirts, including the poodle skirt trend, which were full-circle felt skirts with a poodle applique in a contrasting color (Phipps 1). The full skirt and length still mirrored the silhouette of mothers, but mothers and older women were not wearing poodle skirts. College aged women also remained true to the hemline of mid-length, and a newspaper article from the 1950s described pleated skirts as a classic for their wardrobe (Jacobsen 1). The mid-length continued into the early 1960s although there was some uncertainty with styles, but gradually skirt lengths shortened to above the knee or even shorter by the mid-1960s. Young girls were wearing more A-line styles, not as full as the previous

years, along with women in general, and the hemline was shorter and showing more of the thigh. With regards to school wardrobe for teenagers, the hemlines were shorter as well. Skirt lengths were falling just above the knee, even though outside of school teenagers were wearing there skirts much shorter (Rich 2-3). The mini skirt was introduced in the 1960s by boutique owner and designer, Mary Quant because she noticed the need for fashion that matched the spirit of the youth (Walker 1). Figure 5 shows an early image of the mini skirt and how short they were made.



*Figure 5*

Styles during the 1960s were being adopted by the youth first, before the older demographics which in previous years was not the case. There was resistance from parents and school administrators when young women embraced the shorter styles and mini-skirt but the youth wanted their independence and felt they could determine their own fashion sense. The micro-mini also emerged by the end of the 1960s, which was the shortest of the short skirts to be worn during the decade. During the youth movement in the 1960s, the hippie subculture emerged, but not until the end of the decade, and teenagers that associated themselves with this

subculture wore maxi dresses. The longer, more romantic skirts were not widely worn because not all teenagers considered themselves hippies or embraced that lifestyle. The shorter hemlines dominated the 1960s with the youth market, even though authority figures did their best to resist the rise of the hemline to the degree where it was considered inappropriate for young women.

#### **IV. 1970s and 1980s**

Moving into the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s, the youth culture was quite different when comparing the decades. During the 1970s, the youth market was still entirely embracing their new found freedom, control and desire to have independence. The youth were passionate, enthusiastic, and radical. The counter culture or hippie subculture continued and expanded in the early 1970s (Tortura 534). The 1970s was a difficult transition period because there was a recession and the youth had previously not obtained much further education after high school. By the mid-1970s, the interest in continuing education increased and more youth decided it was acceptable to make more money (Watson 1). By the 1980s, America began to see the change towards self-serving youth and the youth market began to stop dominating the fashion scene. The teenage market lost energy compared to the prior decades where youth was showing their new found control. New consumer groups emerged in the 1980s, including two groups considered in this analysis, including yuppies, young upwardly mobile professional persons, and tweenies, ages 5 to 12 years old. Preppy college age students became yuppies and tended to dress more conservatively, they replaced the hippies of the 1970s (Thomas 1). The 1980s embraced extravagance, transformation, materialism, and showcasing wealth since the economy moved back out of recession.

During the more depressed economic period of the 1970s and then the more upbeat or flashy decade of the 1980s, the Internet and World Wide Web was still not present and a tool

for fashion media. Teenagers during these two decades were still not staring at iPhones or searching the Web but instead were still limited to magazines, movies, television, and music for their sources of inspiration with regards to fashion. The personal computer was invented in 1977, but it was mainly used by wealthy businesses and not adopted into the everyday American home until much later (U.S. History 1). The first personal computers did not have the Internet either, so they were not used for browsing and entertainment until almost 20 years later. During the 1970s there were numerous popular teen fashion magazines including Tiger Beat, 16 Magazine, Teen Beat, and Dynamite (Fidler 1). These magazines were not strictly fashion directed, but they included movie stars, television stars, advice columns, advertisements, and other aspects which all influence teenage fashion and purchases. The mid to late 1970s also had inspirations from punk music, disco music, and the film industry. Once the 1980s hit and the United States were out of the recession, the film industry exploded and television and sitcoms boomed. Cable television became a standard and television channels such as MTV and Nickelodeon became popularized which had an extreme influence on the youth market since they were made particularly for their viewing. MTV brought about more fashion inspiration to the youth market from sources such as musicians, movie stars, and television stars. There were also abundant pop music influences including Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Prince (Richards 1). As discussed in the Survey of Historic Costume, “teen fashion trends owe much to the music world. Kids pick up styles from concerts and videos and quickly take them to the street” (610). Teen magazine popularity also continued into the 1980s, with Bop being added to the existing list. Malls began to become a common hang out environment for teenagers in the 1980s which had an impact on their shopping and browsing. Going to the mall became more of a social experience rather than just a destination to pick up clothes and

accessories. Fashion was still not being viewed on cell phones and the Internet, and social media had not even been thought of at this point in time. Trends were not in the palm of the hands and were still taking a while to filter into the masses, although they were gaining speed from the growing film industry, television expanding to the teen markets, and the spread of teen magazines.

Hemlines began to vary more during the 1970s and 1980s and were definitely changing at a faster pace than the 1950s and 1960s. When looking at an overview of the 1970s, hemlines were seen at the mini length, midi length, and the maxi length, but not particularly at the same time or among the same demographics. The hippie style continued into the early 1970s and even became more widely accepted. Therefore, long, floor length maxi skirts were still being worn early on in the decade. Floor length hemlines included the granny dress which was popular among young girls and teenage girls (Thomas 1). The granny dress was often loose, floral print, sometimes had lace detail, and a high neck and is displayed in the front left in Figure 6.



(Thomas 1).

*Figure 6*

The mini skirt was still being worn at the beginning of the 1970s as well, as displayed in the above photo along with the girl in the front left in a granny dress. Short and mini dresses were popular among teenagers, whether they considered themselves part of the hippie culture or not. The midi length was pushed into retail locations and stores stocked large numbers of this length, but a majority of women continued to wear short skirts and maxi length (Tortura 561). Although the midi length was introduced with more of a focus on an older demographic, this displayed the power of the consumer and how they rejected a certain style during the time period. Teenagers also preferred to wear shorter length skirts in general with regards to skirts that were not of a maxi length (Phipps 1). By the time the mid-1970s hit, teenagers were transitioning towards the midi length as the disco and punk style tribes were becoming massively accepted and there was a transition from the hippie culture. For youth and younger girls, skirts settled at a mid-length around the late 1970s (The People History 1). The disco lifestyle was more accepted by the older youth age group, which includes the college age demographic in this paper because the lifestyle was seen during the night life and club environments. The midi-length dominated the disco scene, while the punk style tribe still enjoyed the shorter mini lengths (Whitmer 1). The 1970s saw a true array of hemlines, but the hemlines were not moving up and down at a rapid pace. There were unique styles for different groups of people or cultures during this time period. Each group did prefer certain lengths though and were not necessarily seen wearing each length all at one time, especially among the youth. A certain hemline length may have reached its obsolescence for one style culture or tribe as they were termed, but the hemline length would have been seen just becoming accepted by another group.

The 1980s styles were beginning to vary even more than the past decade, along with the hemlines moving in length at a more rapid pace. In the early 1980s hemlines were around knee length, which was a continuation of the midi length that was popular towards the end of the 1970s, but were also seen at calf length. By the time it was the mid-1980s the short skirt emerged again and bared the knees. Sometimes the length fell to about mid-thigh and short was considered to be back in by 1987 (Phipps 1). Traditionally, teenagers and the youth market embraced the shorter styles again. The fabrics in skirts and dresses had changed since the 1970s, but the shorter skirts were a wardrobe must have for the youth market (Stanley 1). As mentioned previously, the yuppies were a group that came about in the 1980s and were more conservative. Therefore, the young women associated with the yuppies and preppies wore conservatively-cut skirts that were not at a mini-skirt length (Tortura 604). Longer maxi lengths were not common among the youth in the 1980s, which correlates with the theory that hemlines reflect the economic conditions (Baardwijk 5). The 1980s were a prosperous decade and all about materialism which reflects the shorter lengths observed, especially among the youth. The youth were still gaining freedom during this decade, specifically financial freedom which gave them even more independence in determining their fashion. As the 1980s drew to an end, the youth market was about to experience even more change with regards to media and fashion which would continue to affect their fashion choices.

## **V. 1990s and 2000s**

The youth culture in the 1990s was quite a change from the 1980s and the focus was no longer just on materialism. America's teen were termed "drifting dreamers and the ambitious generation (Krenger 20). There became a lengthened transition from teenage years to adulthood for numerous reasons such as the marriage age becoming older and an increased focus on

education, with more youth attending college. The average age to get married in 1960 was 20.3 and jumped to age 24.8 by the year 1996 (Furstenburg 899). Additionally, 90% of teenagers expected to go to college (Krenger 20). Furstenburg also points out that most youth were employed by their mid-teens in the decade of the 1990s (903). The youth during this decade felt an increased amount of pressure to succeed, participated in sexual activity at younger ages, and had to handle the threat of AIDS. They also struggled with trust and disbelieve authority because of the tendency for authority to be hypocritical in nature. The positive attributes of the youth culture in the 1990s was that they were the first youth market to be viewed as having a great potential for attain success and they had a desire to believe, hope and trust in general (Rogers 1). They were a culture that was searching for meaning, love and purpose in life rather than the decade previously that was obsessed with showing off their wealth and material items. This potential for success and more apathetic youth transitioned into adulthood and the next youth market was not as positively viewed. The youth culture in the 2000s was not as unselfish or concerned with the bigger picture, but instead more focused on the self. The teen market was growing and is compared to the baby boom generation with regards to size, and the tween age group was standing out, especially to retailers (Tortora 602). The group of youth in the 2000s are considered to fall into the category of Generation Y or also called the Millenials. Therefore they possess some of the qualities and values found within that group based on multiple studies and research. The youth market in the 2000s placed more emphasis on extrinsic values including money, fame, and image rather than intrinsic values such as self-acceptance, group affiliation, and community. They were described as narcissistic and lazy but also open-minded, confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, and receptive to new ideas and ways of living (Main 1). The youth in this decade tended to feel entitled and were assertive with what they desired.

With regards to their tastes, they were inclined to be more fickle and capricious, which is common among the youth in general, but this generation experienced everything at a much faster pace than the previous decades (Tortora 602). Although some attributes and tendencies overlap, no decade of the youth market has been the same and during the 1990s and 2000s the youth had even more of a voice and market power.

There were substantial media influences over these two decades and the speed of communication was about to reach a whole new magnitude by the 2000s. During the 1990s there was still emphasis and excitement over teen magazines. Young and Modern, also known as YM, Seventeen, and Teen were among the most popular magazines and were said to be, “glossing them [the youth] up with current fashions” (Morgan 1). Also, in 1998 there was a wave of teen versions of popular grown up magazines such as Teen Elle, Teen Vogue, and Cosmo Girl! In addition to the magazines, other sources including television shows, movies, and music were still making an impact on fashion. Television influences still included MTV for the older youth and Disney Channel for the younger end of the youth demographic and also tweens. These examples are just two among many other television channels and there were an even greater amount of shows being added since the 1980s. The movie *Clueless* and the girl music group, Spice Girls influenced girls’ fashion and the bands Nirvana and Pearl Jam influenced the incredibly popular grunge trend in the 1990s. Music could be listened to with MP3 players in the 1990s and although the youth did not necessarily use cell phones, cell phones were becoming wide spread and the college age demographic may have had their own (Brassfield 1). Everything, especially communication was happening at a much faster pace during the 1990s. With regards to retailing during this decade, catalogs became extremely wide spread and popular; along with TV shopping channels (Tortura 601). This was speeding up the

process of how consumers obtained product and discovered new styles as well. Brick and mortar stores were noticing the opportunity within the youth market and there were 4,000 stores aimed exclusively at teens in 1995, and by 2003 this number increased to 10,000 (Tortora 602). Stores such as Abercrombie and Fitch and Hollister became incredibly popular during the 2000s. One of the most important changes in media during the 1990s was the discovery of the Internet. The Internet was brand new to America in the 1990s and was an important communications tool for military and academic researchers to begin with, but by the end of the decade in 2002, half a billion computers were connected to the Internet. By 2006, 73% of Americans were using the Internet and in 2008, 1,574 billion computers were connected to the Internet (Tortora 587). In the 1990s, the Internet was mostly a publishing medium, but by the 2000s it increased to become a communication medium as well (Manovich 320). This expanded the sources of fashion to an unbelievable extent and all the magazines from the 1990s could now be viewed online by the year 2006. The Internet also brought about ecommerce and online shopping. Ecommerce did not grow extremely fast, but was built up slowly over these two decades and by 2007 it was widely accepted to obtain product online. Tortora notes, "Michael Barbaro of the New York Times reported that purchases of apparel on the Internet had over taken sales of computer hardware and software. This led Barbaro to conclude that 'consumers had reached a new level of comfort buying merchandise on the Web'" (601-602). Social media came about around 2005, and although only 5% of the public used social networking sites in that year, by the year 2008 27% of the public was using them. There were far more Millennials using social network sites even from the beginning, with their generation using higher percentages of sites including Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and others (PewResearch Center 28-30). The chart below, Figure 8, shows the change from 2005 to 2010 with regards to social networking.

<b>Social Networking Users</b>					
% of adults who use social networking sites					
	Feb/Mar 2005*	Aug 2006*	Nov/Dec 2008*	Jan 2010**	05-10 Change
All	5	11	27	41	+36
Millennial	7	51	71	75	+68
Gen X	7	10	38	50	+43
Boomer	5	4	13	30	+25
Silent	2	*	2	6	+4

\*Data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. Question wording varied from 2005 to 2008. The 2005 item was worded "Use online social or professional networking sites like Friendster or LinkedIn." The 2006 item was worded "Use an online social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or Friendster." The 2008 item was worded "Use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn.com."

\*\*Question wording: Have you ever created your own profile on any social networking site?

Figure 7

Information in general was being spread at a much faster rate and fashion was included. The Internet, catalogs, TV shopping channels, social media, and cell phones all provided consumers with quicker communication, more modes to obtain products, and more sources of discovering trends.

Consequently, skirt hemlines reflected the attitudes and values of the youth along with the new media and retail locations, and hemlines were shifting much more rapidly. The 1990s saw a mixture of the grunge look, ravers, cyberpunks, and emo groups which all took on their own styles and looks. Grunge really took over by 1994 and they wore very feminine skirts at a variety of lengths (Phipps 1). They included maxi skirt lengths, pencil skirts that hit around the knee, and also plaid short pleated and skater skirts. The images in Figures 8 and 9 display popular 90s trends for teenagers.



*Figure 8*



*Figure 9*

Other popular items were baby doll dresses and slip dresses, which were worn by multiple groups among the youth (Brassfield 1). These dresses were typically shorter in length and loose fitting because casual dress became more widely acceptable during the 1990s. The popular expensive labels in the 1980s transitioned into practical clothing by 1995 (Phipps 1). It began to be difficult to pin point a single hemline length for the decade. The youth market during the 1990s, as mentioned, became a lot more fickle with regards to their fashion and style. Phipps indicated, “The consensus among fashion leaders was that long and short hemlines could coexist” (2). Even though fashion leaders were not determining the trends among the youth as powerfully during this decade, they were still paying attention to what consumers desired. The 2000s continued to see an assortment of hemlines being acceptable and worn among the youth. Some popular styles included colorful, short ruffle skirts being popular around 2004 and also denim short skirts. The variety of acceptable options in dress that was available to consumers was enormous by the 2000s. In 2007 the mini dress was trending, but by 2008 the maxi was being described as a must-have summer item (Hart 1-2). There were not as many style tribes

around during the 2000s but there were still obvious trends, although they were changing at a quicker speed. Along with the shorter hemlines observed in 2004, there was also the boho trend that existed and included long, flowy, loose skirts and was popular among the older youth demographic. The term derived from the word bohemian and was an upscale version of hippie trend observed in the 1960s. The length varied from maxi to knee length or even hi-low hemlines with the skirt being shorter in the front and longer in the back (Donahue 2). In the year 2008 dresses were short or long as well and could be fitter or unfitted or have tight bodices and full skirts (Tortora 631). The revival of previous decades was also happening faster and the mid to late 2000s saw a return of the 1990s grunge style. Therefore, hemlines were still varying quickly and almost as soon as this trend went out it saw an almost immediate revival. With regards to the younger youth market, during both the 1990s clothing displayed clear reflections of adult styles in silhouette, hemline length, and preferred fabrics (Tortora 641). Overall, these decades were the first to see a true mixture of hemlines and no one hemline length dominated for much longer than around a year or even a season at a time. There was also more variety being seen in skirt styles with anything from ruffles to pleats to lace and more. The speed of information and life cycle of trends was not about to slow down, but instead the advances in technology, media, and retail continued to move quicker.

## **VI. 2010 - Present**

Keeping up with today's youth is quite the task because of the increased speed of communication and activities in general. Today's youth have grown up with the Internet and the digital world and are comfortable with technology. They have a great exposure to digital media and spend a significant amount of time online engaging in social media. The youth market is referred to as, "Digital Natives" or "Generation Z" (4imprint 2). Additionally, they

want to be engaged in a way that allows them to share and to contribute because they are open-minded and have grown up to understand the importance of teamwork. They can be described as social, connected and informed (4imprint 5-16). This is possible because of their sources including increased social media and cell phone use. The youth want information quickly and are no longer waiting for their next magazine or catalog. The fashion industry must keep up with this new and advanced youth market and stay up to date through social media, blogs and retail. These youth are not going to wait a whole season to move onto the next trend, they get bored with product at a much faster rate and want to move onto the next new item. They are exposed to much more advertising as well since it can be viewed from an incredible amount of sources along with at an incredible pace with technological advances. Today's youth market wants to be in control, engage, interact, and have the next new product ready in essentially an instant. They are influenced by events such as the Coachella Music Festival and young designers are taking hold of opportunities that exist because of the readiness of information and inspiration. According to Beverly Macy, a social media radio host, "A cool fashion mash-up is trending that brings music, entertainment, technology, lifestyle, and social media together" (1). The youth market is creative and combines all their resources to be innovative and find their own individuality. A study completed by Wendy Gordon and Virginia Valentine described the differences between the 20<sup>th</sup> century consumer and the 21<sup>st</sup> century consumer. They used terms such as, "stable and predictable, large and extensive, need for certainty, rigid, and rational," to describe the 20<sup>th</sup> century consumers, and in contrast termed the 21<sup>st</sup> century consumer as, "ever changing, quick and responsive, information sharing, imaginative, creative, intuitive, guided by vision and values, flexible, proactive and entrepreneurial" (7). Also discussed by Detterbeck referring to a 2011 report, "the centrality of convenience is especially prevalent among

millennials” (16). The youth market today wants easy access to resources and the only way to keep up with their pace and demands is through social media, blogs, fast fashion, and ecommerce sites.

Social media and blogs are both great resources for discovering new fashion trends and also finding sources of innovation. Both are incredibly popular among Millennials because they want to always be on top of what is new and fresh. Social media, including Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and others all are connected to the fashion industry and relay information to consumers at a rapid pace. There are live tweets during fashion shows along with well-executed fashion show video streams (DiMauro 1). This provides consumers with immediate knowledge and information on trends and styles. Snapchat also provides consumers with live feed of fashion events and even shows backstage activities. Retailers know the importance of being active on social media and that it can, “further customer loyalty, raise brand awareness, spread advertising messages, create online communities, and communicate with customers” (Dorado 4). The Millennials want to be connected with brands and retailers and feel like they have a voice and opinion with regards to their tastes and style. Social media provides such quick information to large audiences and it is what the youth market truly desires and is the only way to reach them in addition to keeping up with their demand. Apparel Magazine quotes, “A recent study from eConsultancy shows that social networks and blogs are the fourth most popular activities online, and that 10 percent of all time spent on the Internet is spent on social media sites” (2010). Blogs are crucial in the fashion industry and assist as an inspiration for the creation process along with existing as a source of public opinion, interests, and preferences in fashion publication and marketing (Sedeke 2). Bloggers are popular and expanding because consumers are interested in what other consumers have to say and they are a

great source for advice on products. Social media and blogs have indefinitely sped up the life cycle of trends and fashion in general because of their ability to reach mass audiences instantly. Sedeke states, “Studies on the active blogging movement illustrate how rapidly a fashion cycle transpires online. Ideas circulated on blogs are generated, discussed, embellished, and forgotten on a quotidian cycle” (21). Blogs quickly react and respond to the current happenings which suits well to fashion news and even determines an impact on the fashion scene. Millennials are not ignoring these sources of information either considering 90 percent of bloggers are in their 20s, which relates to the college age youth demographic discussed (Sedeke 17). Social media and blogs are not the only reason for the rapid changes in recent years within the fashion industry.

Retailers are adapting to the new youth market and the desire for new product sooner and sooner. Fast fashion has emerged and ecommerce has expanded to an inconceivable extent as well. Numerous sources have noticed how quickly a design goes from just a sketch to in the stores. AFP Relaxnews wrote, “Long gone, Hilfiger said, are the days when it took six months for the catwalk shows to reach the consumer” (2). Fast fashion broke away from seasonal selling and places new inventory constantly throughout the year. In previous decades this was unheard of and was also not necessary since consumers were satisfied with the rate of obtaining new product. The new generation of youth needs to be stimulated and see new items more often and fast fashion has responded to their demand. Stores such as Forever 21, H&M, Zara have made the two season, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter more obsolete and the fashion customer is becoming more and more used to this (Memic 6). The target group for fast fashion falls right within the youth market. The age range is around 16-24 and is typically female due to the fact that they tend to purchase clothing more often and usually spend more (Memic 15).

Consumers will undoubtedly stay on top of trend while shopping at fast fashion retailers and they should expect to keep returning because the product is not made to last just like the trends are not lasting. Consumers progressively move away from stores that do not refresh their assortments often enough (Caro 15). New and fresh products are essential to keeping the youth market's attention. Ecommerce has discovered new strategies to keep up with customer demands as well and adapt to their attributes and tendencies. Retailers use the web to display the most up-to-date collections and often run sales called flash sales. Flash sales last only a single day and impose a narrow time window which serves the same purpose as limiting inventory and therefore stimulates impulsive buying and creates a perceived sense of scarcity (Memic 21). Consumers love the rapidness and sense of immediacy with regards to shopping. The youth market enjoys the variety, speed, and instantaneous availability of new trends and it can be observed from the assortment within stores, online, and through all the outlets the fashion industry has at their fingertips.

So where are hemlines hitting in this new decade? Not just long, not just short, not just midi, but almost ever length at those hemlines and in between, and all the time it seems because the trend shifts at such a rapid pace. In 2010, hemlines fell at the knee, above the knee, at calf length and maxi length (Thomas 1). The lengths were up and down with a single season and then the season following will follow the same type of way with hemlines not remaining one length for longer than just a few months. Just in the year 2012 articles are discussing how the maxi, short and tea length are trending and shortly after in 2013 knee length and calf length are popular (Cristina, Conrad 1). There almost seems to be a complete absence of official trends, especially within the youth market. They quickly jump from one item to the next or simply just create their own style with no regard to what trend is being pushed onto them from the fashion

industry itself. Teenagers and the youth will always want to find a balance between standing out, yet fitting in with their peers and the speed of the fashion industry and communication in general has led to an implausible amount of variety and assortment readily available to the youth of today. In the past year of 2014 the fashion industry and retailers that market to the youth have provided clothes inspired from almost all the past decades. American Eagle Outfitters carries a variety of lengths in one season now, in the year 2014, as seen in Figure 10.



*Figure 10*

The 1990s have made a comeback again, which displays the continuing speed of revival since it was just said to be back just a few years prior. Walking into a brick and mortar store there are lengths varying along with styles and consumers must, “mix and match to make their existing wardrobe go further” (MTWorld 2). With the rate that trends are moving, the youth or any age demographic can hold onto an item with reassurance that it will come back into style within a season or two. This depends on if the product is made to last that long though, because the fast fashion retailers are not as focused on quality so that consumers must return to get the next trend or what should be termed a fad because of the short life cycle. One of the most popular bloggers, Leandra Medine of Man Repeller, recently stated, “Today, trends are as plentiful as the stars that occupy the sky” (3). The industry has adapted to the speed of demand from today’s youth and the life cycle of clothing has consequently sped up. Skirt hemlines are

no longer lasting for a season, when previously, as discussed, almost entire decades only saw a great majority of one length dominating.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Looking throughout the past, it is made apparent how the fashion industry has evolved along with the values and attributes of the youth market. The hemlines and trends have reflected the media, retail, and consumer demand and when observing the history of hemline length among the youth market, it is clear how the industry and life cycle are moving at a much faster pace. A brief overview of the hemlines discussed can display this observation. In the 1950s the mid-length hemline and skirts dominated for the entire decade with the youth market still mimicking their parents dress. It took quite a while for the hemline to move to shorter lengths including the mini skirt and knee length skirt around the mid-1960s. By the late 1960s, the hippie subculture was also wearing maxi skirts which continued into the early 1970s. The mini continued to be popular throughout this time period as well since not all of the youth were part of the hippie culture and preferred a different style. The late 1970s saw the midi length make a return and in the early 1980s the youth was wearing knee length. The youth quickly went back towards the mini and short skirts by the mid-1980s and then in the late 1980s and 1990s hemlines were moving even more rapidly. The 1990s saw quite a variety of lengths making an appearance almost all at the same time and by the 2000s and recent years there are hemlines available at any length almost all the time. Each season provides consumers with a new trending hemline or even from month to month a hemline can change or even coexist with numerous other hemlines.

Through the observation of how the media and retail outlets have advanced at an incredible rate it is no surprise that the industry has had to speed up and adapt. Consumers,

especially the youth, want everything, including clothing and trend information almost immediately. Social networking and fast fashion were unheard of and not even a thought in the first decades discussed and fashion news and communication was only coming from magazines and word of mouth which would take a great deal longer to reach the consumer. There is nearly open communication between retailers, product developers, and consumers in recent years with the popularity of sharing, commenting, and discussing. Through the use of blogs and social media this is made possible and connects the fashion industry to consumers in a completely new way and has ultimately affected the nature of the fashion life cycle and trends. The fashion industry and leaders do not necessarily dictate fashion styles and trends like they used to in the 1950s and 1960s, but instead consumers and the industry almost determine trends together. The consumers want to be connected and involved with the industry to obtain product they desire and the industry wants to be connected in return to be successful and provide consumers with the product they are demanding. The fashion life cycle is not likely to slow down because media is only continuing to speed up and the youth are continuing to want product and information at a rapid pace. The fashion industry can try to slow the pace of their information and product reaching consumers, but they will not be as successful and the information cannot be held back for long with the way there is open communication between the industry and consumers. Consumers want the information and product quick and the industry must respond to their desires and rather than this process of communication slowing down, it has only sped up at an exponential rate. Ultimately, the industry should expect to continue functioning at the speed they currently are and consumers should expect the nature of trends to be similar to fads where they come in and out within a few months and can also coexist within seasons.

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