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THE HEMLINE INDEX: WHAT YOUR LOVE OF LONG SKIRTS SAY ABOUT THE ECONOMY.

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"If you see a guy in a three-piece suit staring out the window at female legs this autumn, don't jump to sexist conclusions. Maybe he's not just a chauvinist pig, after all: he could be diligently seeking clues to the financial future."
 – Fort-Worth Star Telegram, 1978.

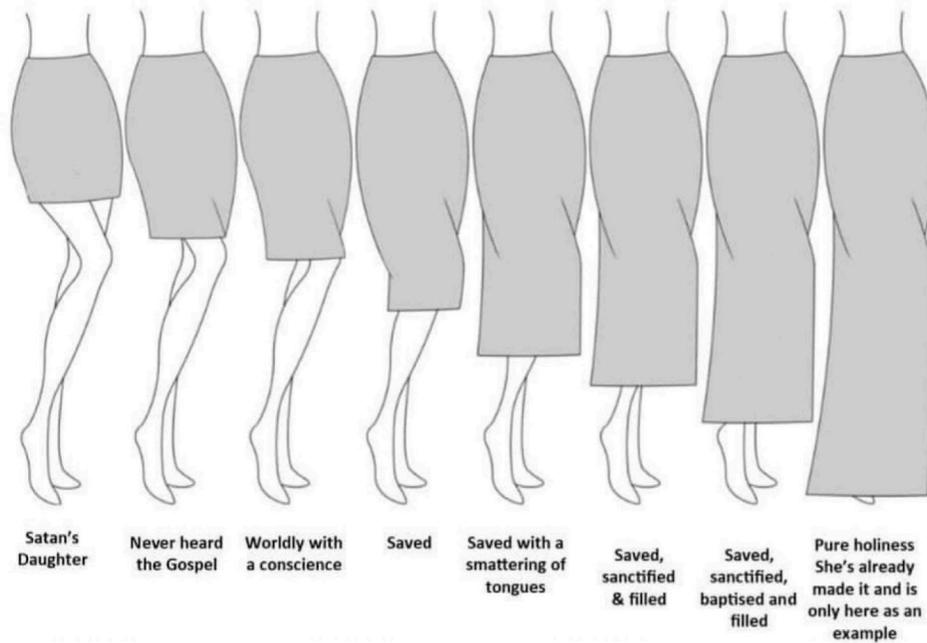
They say the eyes are the windows into the soul. However, it is the 2020s, and the internet gives insight into the latest trends. So when thousands of Nigerians agreed with an X user who tweeted (<https://x.com/RufaiHafsati/status/1815471662868894069>), "Long skirts are superior," it alluded to a change in the zeitgeist. Many believe this is an example of an acquired preference but what if it is a subconscious result of a fallen economy?

UNDERSTANDING THE NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH MAXI SKIRTS:

The viral tweet was not an isolated opinion, the rise of *modest fashion shows* (<https://the49thstreet.com/inside-the-hijabi-fashion-exhibition-by-alara/>) and the domination of the long skirt at events like Lagos Fashion Week and GTCO Fashion Weekend paints the picture— the Mary Amaka is back.

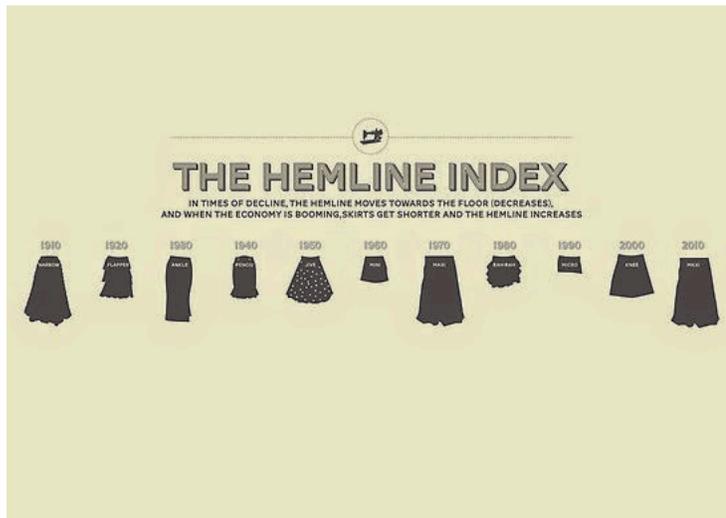
'Mary Amaka' and 'Deeper Life Skirt' are colloquial terms for long skirts in Nigeria. Their terms reference Christian lexicons because the only reason one is encouraged to wear maxi skirts is modesty.

Spiritual Health via Skirt Length



Credit: X (<https://x.com/themultiplemom/status/1649486774962475026>)

The younger generation breaks away from that as the Internet implies, they are wearing it because it is stylish. Nevertheless, there is a documented history of women ditching their short skirts whenever the economy crashes like in 1929.



THE HEMLINE INDEX:

On the 13th of February 2008, Claire Brayford wrote an article (<https://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/34787/The-Hemline-Economy>) for the Express UK website; she spoke about a long-standing myth called "The Hemline Index". She joked about how American designers such as Marc Jacobs, Jonathan Saunders and Phillip Lim had debuted below-the-knee skirts at their FW08 collections and if that meant a recession was around the corner.

Well, it is the 2020s and we have all heard about "The Great Recession" also called the 2008-2009 stock market crash.

The Hemline Index theory suggests that skirt hemlines rise or fall according to stock prices. As the economy performs well, the length of skirts is cut short and when the economy struggles, skirts get longer.

HISTORY OF THE HEMLINE INDEX:

This theory began in the 20th century and University of Pennsylvania professor, George W. Taylor is credited with the observation. Taylor never mentioned the Hemline Index in his 1929 thesis Significant post-war Changes in the full-fashioned Hosiery Industry; he stated that the rise of short skirts in the Roaring 20s made investing in *hosiery* (<https://www.instagram.com/lauxes.ng/?hl=en>) a good idea.

Over time, his words got twisted and he became known as the man who noticed the change in skirts was rooted in an economic shift. His thesis was debunked by Clara Berg (Curator of Collections for MOHAI (<https://mohai.org/>)), stating that longer skirts "were seen as a symbol of prosperity" not the other way around. Women were no longer forced into rationing, so wearing something with so much fabric was seen as a sign of affluence.



The 1920s style.

However, looking at the fine print, history suggests that fashion follows the zeitgeist; not necessarily the economy.

The first reference in The Hemline Index is the 1920s. A few years after the end of World War I, the people were happy and the fashion trends expressed this newfound feeling of liberation. Long skirts symbolize modesty, austerity, and conservatism. None of these values was at the forefront of society's mind in the Jazz Age. With a prosperous economy to match their mood, the long skirts along with restrictive clothes were discarded. By 1929, Wall Street crashed and hemlines did drop.



A similar event happened in the 1940s. In 1947, Dior dropped the voluminous skirts, the trend would be seen as a foreshadowing of the 1949 recession. In the mid-1950s, young Europeans gravitated towards the bohemian jazz club scene, inspired by the post-war era, they wanted to dance and have a good time. In a bid to rebel against the conservative society, more women shopped for streamlined and modern styles.

One of the breakout designers from this decade was Dame Mary Quant (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Quant). She used fashion to question hierarchy and gender rules. As the skirts were going higher, the economy was growing and by the mid-60s, both Mary Quant and Parisian couturier, André Courrèges (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Courr%C3%A8ges) had received international fame for their mini skirts.



1960s.

All good things come to an end and so did the mini skirt. There was an economic slump in the 70s and the skirt lengths dropped. By the 80s, the mini skirts made a comeback and this time they were shorter than ever. The 90s saw a different path with the mini, there wasn't any specific trend. There was an emphasis on dressing to fit a community;

grunge, punk, or Mc Bling.

By the early 2000s, mini skirts were still en vogue. Up until the great recession and after, the mini skirt casually made a comeback but then came the pandemic at the dawn of the 2020s.



Diesel FW22

THE 2020s:

After a long year of wearing comfy clothes (mostly pyjamas and tracksuits), the mini skirt became a coveted fashion piece in 2022. Skirts that could easily be mistaken for thick belts hit the runways and the average skirt lover owns a pair of mini skirts, including me.

Initially, post-pandemic saw a 90s-like rise in community trends; fueled by nostalgia, we were introduced to various styles such as the return of the Y2K, barbie-core, coquette core, and ballet core. These micro trends have failed the test of time, however, they all embraced the mini skirt.



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The pandemic did a number on the economy and slowly the realization of the situation is dawning on us. Coincidentally, so is the popularity of the long skirt. Nigeria, for one, has been heavily plagued by the retrogradation of its economy and the way Africa has crawled back into every fashion discussion. The discussions stray away from moral obligations and place long skirts on a stylish pedestal.

A Nightmare on Ozumba Mbadiwe Street, Lagos

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH THE HEMLINE INDEX?

By Ifeoluwa Olutayo (<https://saharanstyles.com/author/ifeoluwa-olutayo/>)

The hemline index isn't the most reliable theory. But you can't ignore that a string of factors which are largely influenced by a booming economy lead to rising hemlines. There isn't much data to run with but it might be hard to deny that the skirt lengths and society's style choices reflect the mood and situation of the era; including the political and economic state of the world.

So which are you; believer or sceptic?

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