

# Street Fashion in Armenia

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## **Abstract**

Fashion is one of the biggest forms of communication an individual can use in their day-to-day life. It seems simple enough, however, there are a lot of factors that contribute to a person's choice when it comes to the way they dress. This research aims to understand some of the factors that have a major impact on a young woman in Armenia between the ages of 18 to 28. in terms of their choices in fashion. Thus, the research explores the history of fashion in Armenia, and the turning point of fashion, which is social media. It also explores other important factors and social issues that influence fashion in Armenia significantly. Hence, the research findings include three major themes and topics. The first one is social media and its impact on causing a shift in the fashion industry. The second theme dives deeper into social issues related to gender and its influence on fashion. Finally, the third theme explores social judgment and societal norms, and their correlation with fashion.

## Street Fashion in Armenia

When it comes to defining the term fashion, there are several things that need to be taken into consideration. Fashion is more than just the latest and trendiest clothes. It is a very distinct form of communication. It is a form of self-expression through clothes, accessories, even hair, and other non-physical factors, such as behavior and attitude. In other words, fashion is an integral part of communication. It is one of the many methods that so many people use to communicate a certain message to someone, as the way one dresses can tell a lot about who they are and how someone else should perceive them. And, of course, with time, fashion changes and transitions, just like many other aspects of life.

Looking at the history of fashion and its evolution, the drastic changes can be very evident. During the earlier times, much earlier than the 15th century, people weren't all that concerned about fashion. A lot of the clothing during that time reflected an individual's status and their social standing. It wasn't until the 16th century that fashion became a more conventional concept to people. Later on in the 19th century, fashion became one of those factors that was dictated by designers, specifically from Paris, France, as it was considered the "fashion capital of the world" (Sarina, 2021). It was during that time that the first fashion designer ever became known, Charles Frederick Worth. Thus, House of Worth was founded, which made the desire by the public to wear all of his best creations even more. (Sarina, 2021)

Even though most of women's fashion during that period consisted of corsets and gowns, the 20th century fashion brought more practical and comfortable clothing. During the 1920s especially, with women gaining a bit more independence and the right to vote and join the workforce, their dressing styles changed from elaborate to more casual. Not only that, but the short bob haircuts also became popular during that period, and the tight corsets were replaced by more straight silhouettes. With each passing year, more and more fashion designers became well known,

such as Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurant, Givenchy, Paco Rabanne, Cristobal Balenciaga, and so on. (Sarina, 2021)

It wasn't until the 2000s that the very popular fashion style "Streetwear Style" was known. And very quickly, with a fast changing world, fast fashion started to coexist with all those high fashion brands (Sarina, 2021). Online shops emerged, social media boomed, and so fashion started to change and transition at a very rapid pace. And with social media influencers and bloggers, the change occurred at an even more rapid pace. Today, fashion is one of the least constant things out there. With different social media platforms, and more and more influencers, fashion trends come and go very quickly. And with some consumers being media obsessed, they have no choice but to be exposed to those fast changing trends, and feel the need to adapt accordingly as well.

Given the continued popularity of street style, one of the main purposes of this research is to examine street fashion in Armenia and how it transitioned throughout the years, and the issues that have an impact on it. It is important to note that a personal observation of mine was one of the biggest motivations for this research. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Armenia, I moved back home to Kuwait to be with my family. Being away from Armenia for a whole ten months and coming back was a complete eye opener. One of the biggest changes I immediately noticed was how drastically different the young women were dressing in July 2021, compared to when I first left in September 2020. A lot of the street fashion I was seeing on social media, I was starting to see in Armenia as well.

And even though Armenia easily adapts to new ideas and concepts, it is never as rapid as it was with the young women's street fashion. Skinny jeans became wide legs, tops became more cropped, and hoodies became over-sized in a matter of a short few months. Hence, it really inspired me to take a deeper look and add more depth to my personal observation. In other words, this

research examines what the street fashion in Armenia looks like, what are the things that changed throughout the years, and issues that had an impact on those changes.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, street fashion has changed drastically in Armenia due to so many different factors, such as the rise of social media, influencers, and many other issues like the Covid-19 pandemic. This change has especially been evident in 2020 and 2021. Hence, this research paper is aimed towards understanding the transition of, specifically, street fashion in Armenia, and some of the major aspects that had an impact on the transition, especially over the past few years.

One of the main points that have impacted the transition of street fashion in Armenia is the drastic increase in social media users, specifically Instagram and TikTok. As Aliyaapon Jiratanatiteenu et. al. suggest in their article “The Transformation of Japanese Street Fashion between 2006 and 2011,” young girls and women started to shift their sources of fashion inspiration. The authors suggest that these girls started to use the internet as their main source of fashion inspiration, rather than looking through fashion magazines, as they used to do (Jiratanatiteenu, 2012). This is also the case in recent years, with over the top use of social media platforms, more and more young girls are running to Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms to get inspired, and create their style. Not only that, but many of these girls rely on social media influencers when it comes to their fashion choices as well.

Another important factor that contributes to the transition of fashion is personality traits, self-expression, social media, and the correlation between the three of them. In the article “Watch, Share or Create: The Influence of Personality Traits and User Motivation on TikTok Mobile Video Usage,” Bahiyah Omar and Weng Dequan discuss the connection between TikTok and five

personality traits, which are “neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness” (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 124). In the end, the authors found no direct correlation between the five personality traits and TikTok. However, I believe there is a major connection between TikTok and one of the personality traits, which is openness to experience. With the overwhelming amount of content on social media, especially TikTok, more and more people are willing to experiment with the things they see on their feeds. This is also true for fashion. Young women are using TikTok to find and follow new fashion trends, explore new and unique fashion items, and experiment and style different statement pieces. Hence, there is a connection between social media, and being open to new experiences, but they are not as direct as other correlations.

Openness to experience is also closely tied with experiencing new “aesthetics.” Young women are using social media to explore and find their true “aesthetics” and are expressing them through their fashion choices. According to Cecilia Hallgren and Yulia Engqvist Johansson’s “The Effortless Fashionista,” these social media influencers are not only selling and promoting a specific product or service, but they are selling an entire lifestyle or an “aesthetic” to these young influential girls. Hence, with these different “aesthetics” young women are shaping and framing themselves in the exact ways they want to be perceived by others. In other words, these influencers are helping these women with the concept of self-presentation and self-perception as well (Hallgren & Johansson, 2021). In addition, the significant impact that social media influencers have is also evident in younger generations, specifically, generation Z.

When it comes to Armenian women, the difference between the different generations is evident from their fashion choices. As Claude Léa, Paulina Malek, and Lisa Runnvall conclude in their article “Influencers’ impact on decision making among generation Y and Z Swedish females

when purchasing fast fashion,” both generations Y and Z are more influential, compared to previous generations (Léa, Malek & Runnvall, 2018). This goes back to the fact that women from these generations are exposed to more and more information on social media that is easy to access, than ever before. This, of course, can have both positive and negative consequences.

Similar to Léa, Malek, and Runnvall, Elram Michaela and Steiner Lavie Orna discuss consumer behaviors and purchase intentions in their article “Fashion Conscious Consumers, Fast Fashion and the Impact of Social Media on Purchase Intent.” One of the key statements in their article is the fact that consumers often do their own research before purchasing a product. This is especially important because with the use of social media, and specifically, TikTok, more and more “ordinary” people are posting their own reviews about products they were recommended by certain influencers or any other random products (Michaela & Orna, 2015). This also circles back to Léa, Malek, and Runnvall’s idea about the purchase intentions of generations Y and Z. Since young generation Y and Z women are more exposed to certain information on social media, they are more influential than previous generations, hence, are also more likely to take impulsive decisions when purchasing products (Léa, Malek & Runnvall, 2018).

Another important factor to consider is “cancel culture.” This is a term widely used by Gen Z, which refers to the withdrawal of support from certain influencers, companies, and brands, for certain reasons. Nowadays, Gen Z specifically, is more likely to follow certain people or brands because of their high reputation, and cancel certain brands for a specific reason. As Revlon-Chion, Bolat, and Liang suggest in their research “Instant buying of fast fashion: Are influencers to blame?” credibility and positive image are some of the important factors that the audience looks for when following a certain influencer. Hence, the authors agree that consumers are more likely to react positively if an influencer promotes ethical fashion, and is socially responsible (Revlon-



Chion, Bolat & Liang, 2020). Therefore, they are also more likely to discontinue their support from certain influencers and brands, move on and support other brands, and get inspired by other influencers very quickly and easily. This never-ending cycle keeps repeating itself, which is one of the main reasons why we see the sudden change and transition in fashion at a rapid pace.

While social media has had a significant part in helping young women shape their fashion senses and styles, it evidently has some negative consequences as well. So many young influential women scroll through different social media platforms and often get discouraged and even downhearted with all the beauty standards they see. When young women are constantly exposed to these “perfect beauty standards” they have no other choice but to feel like they are less than those women and influencers on social media. However, what they fail to realize is that those “perfect beauty standards” and having the “perfect body” are completely unrealistic. The negative impact of social media on women’s body image is especially evident in Tiggemann and McGill’s article “The Role of Social Media Comparison in the Effect of Magazine Advertisements on Women’s Mood and Body Dissatisfaction.” The authors claim that there’s a very significant correlation between negative body image in women and the images they see on different forms of media. In addition, the constant self-comparison to the images they see and the constant self-assessment causes a very negative impact on their self-perception and body image (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). With social media, women are more compelled to self-compare, as there are more images and content out there to compare with.

These unrealistic expectations often affect women and their fashion choices as well. For instance, some women tend to choose baggier and oversized clothes to hide their bodies and other aspects they feel insecure about. A great example of this is a famous singer-songwriter, Billie Eilish, whose signature look is baggy clothing. Eilish wears oversized clothing in her day-to-day

life, at red carpet events and award shows, and even during her concerts. In an interview with Dazed magazine, the 19-year-old singer at the time opened up about her fashion style. She claimed that wearing those oversized clothes was a deliberate decision, “The only reason I did it was ‘cos I hated my body’,” she added (Allwood, 2020, p. 8). However, Eilish’s fashion choices became so iconic that so many young teens and adults started to follow the oversized clothing trend for similar reasons. Hence, it is evident that the “perfect beauty standards” all over social media have an impact on young women and their fashion choices.

Last but not least, another key factor to consider when it comes to street fashion is gender identity. Youn-Hee Lee' and Young-In Kim in their article “Gender Identity Expressed in Contemporary fashion” tackle different concepts regarding fashion, such as masculinity, femininity, genderless fashion, and even unisex fashion. These factors are especially important to consider in a country like Armenia, where gender identity is a very taboo topic. The authors conclude that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are starting to change and shift with time, allowing more and more people to express themselves through their fashion choices (Lee & Kim, 2005). This drastic attitude shift is important to consider in Armenia as well, as some individuals may still feel restricted to express their sexual identities freely for many reasons. Hence, they rely on their fashion choices as a form of self-expression.

The sources cited previously are of great importance to this research. The first few sources discuss the impact of social media and influencers on young women and their fashion choices. Some other sources discuss consumer behaviors, consumer intentions, and so on. And the rest of the sources tackle other important issues such as gender identity, body image, self-perception, and the ways they affect young women when it comes to taking fashion and street style-related decisions. Hence, looking at similar cases from different countries and cultures, helps shape and

build an understanding of the factors that influenced a transition in women's fashion choices in Armenia, and factors that have an impact on the fashion in general.

### **Research Question**

This research mainly focuses on answering the following research question: *What are some of the factors that impact street fashion in Armenia?* It is important to note that the research focuses on street style primarily, as it is one of the most common forms of fashion in day-to-day life. With the primary research question being a bit broad, several questions follow. A secondary research question focuses on the connection between social media and street fashion, answering the following: *In what ways has social media affected young women's fashion choices in Armenia?* And finally, besides social media, the research explores other types of factors that have had a significant impact, through answering the following question: *What are some social issues that have had a role in affecting Armenian women's street style?*

### **Methodology**

For this research, it was important to use different types of methods to get a deeper understanding about the topic, and make the research more effective. Using mixed methods was the most suitable for this specific research. The mixed method research (MMR) relies on both quantitative and qualitative research supporting one another. In addition, with this method in mind, it was important to keep objectivity throughout the entire research. Even though the idea for this research came from a personal observation of mine, it was still crucial to put those feelings and bias aside and keep neutrality throughout this research to get clearer results.

Using MMR was an important element of this research as the different components such as the qualitative and quantitative research can explore the same topic using different angles and approaches. In other words, they “investigate different aspects of the same topic” (Leavy, 2017, p. 167). Not only that, but quantitative research usually uses hypotheses, which refer to “statements about how variables relate to each other” (Leavy, 2017, p. 167). These hypotheses are then tested in several ways. In this case, the hypotheses are tested to see how they affect different groups of people. Quantitative research also employs a more directional language, using words such as “effect, influence, etc...” Qualitative research, on the other hand, is quite different. It mainly focuses on using nondirectional language through the use of words such as “explore, seek to understand, etc...” Hence, the MMR was important to understand the relationship between the two different methods and how they correlate to each other (Leavy, 2017).

For this research I used the quantitative method to help create a guide to answering my main research question, which is “What are some of the factors that impact street fashion in Armenia?” The quantitative research helped in understanding to what extent street fashion has changed in Armenia throughout the years. It also helped with understanding some of the factors that primarily impact street fashion in Armenia. On the other hand, the qualitative research through the use of focus groups, continued to answer the primary research question, and helped in getting a clearer understanding regarding the secondary and tertiary research questions as well. Hence, MMR offered “multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued” (Leavy, 2017, p. 168).

## Methods

This research mainly relied on two key methods: surveys and focus groups.

Since the research required data collection in many different areas and aspects, one of the most effective ways was conducting surveys. The main data collection was done through online surveys, as it was easier to reach a larger number of people and get detailed quantitative and numerical data. The surveys mainly targeted young women between the ages of 18 and 28. This wide age gap was important to consider as it involves individuals from two different generations, generation Z, which make up the individuals between 18 to 24-year-olds, and generation Y, 25 to 28-year-olds. My choice with the generation Z to generation Y ratio mainly refers to the idea that the research is meant to target a younger audience, Gen Z. However, it was also important to gather data related to generation Y to get a clearer vision of the topic.

The online surveys were mainly sent to friends, relatives, and acquaintances, who are undergraduate and graduate students from different universities, such as The American University of Armenia, Yerevan State University, and so on. Besides institutions and universities and considering the ages of participants, it was also important to reach and include post-graduates or any other individuals no matter their educational level. After sharing the survey with different participants, they were also asked to forward the survey to other people who fit in the target audience. This, in turn, is what helped the survey reach a larger number of participants, with diverse ages, backgrounds, and, of course, opinions.

The survey questions were split into two main types: open-ended questions, and closed-ended questions. The first few questions helped to gather demographic information about the participants, such as age, occupation, and so on. The second part of the survey included other types of close-ended questions through the Likert scale. Participants were given different statements and

asked to answer to which extent they agree or disagree with each statement. This part of the survey was crucial, as it helped to get an understanding of the participants' consumer behaviors and attitudes towards fashion, shopping, self-perception, and more.

Finally, the last part of the survey focused on open-ended questions. This part of the survey allowed the participants to express their thoughts and opinions freely and give more detailed information regarding specific questions. These questions added much more depth to the research, as they allowed getting to know how Armenian consumers think and behave when it comes to fashion and street style. I believe that it was especially important to keep these types of questions open-ended, to give the participants the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions in complete honesty.

Another important addition to the research was the focus group. Focus groups help get a deeper understanding about the topic and add more depth to the research through an informal discussion with the participants. It was important to have one focus group that included members from both generation Y and generation Z. Having one focus group with different age groups helped understand how different age groups feel about certain things and topics related to fashion, consumer behavior and attitude, social media, and more. It guided the research in figuring out the different types of connections the participants made with fashion in general.

### **Research Findings and Analysis**

During the beginning stages of this research, my main focus was understanding the transition of street fashion in Armenia between the years 2015 and 2021. As mentioned, this research mainly came up because of my personal observation when I came back to Armenia after being gone for 10 months during the pandemic. It was surprising to me how different young

women were dressing and styling their day to day casual outfits. Hence, I really wanted to understand where this transition came from, what were some of the factors that impacted this transition, and, of course, why it happened.

Most of my initial literature review focused on themes that were directed towards understanding the fashion industry in Armenia from different perspectives, including the consumers and their behavior, the producers of fashion, and, of course, fashion bloggers and influencers. Not only that, but I also wanted to focus on the generational gap between generation Y and generation Z in terms of their fashion choices and consumer behaviors and understanding the difference between their self-perception and self-expression. Finally, I wanted to take a closer look at what other factors had a major impact on the transition of street fashion in Armenia, including important events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and more.

Keeping in mind these themes and other similar ones I constructed the survey questions to get both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the transition of street fashion in Armenia. The first part of the survey focused on gathering demographic data about the participants. The second part was meant to gather quantitative data related to consumer behavior, self-expression, self-perception, and more. And the last part gave the participants the freedom to express their thoughts and opinions freely regarding specific topics like the difference between generation Y and generation Z in terms of fashion and much more. I started sharing the surveys with close friends, family members and acquaintances. I also asked participants to forward the survey to as many people as they knew in my specific target audience, which was 18-28-year-old Armenian women.

One of the first obstacles I faced with the survey was not reaching as many participants as I would have liked. It was very difficult to share the survey with participants beyond my personal

circle of people. One thing to keep in mind was the language of the survey. Initially, I created my survey in English only. After not getting the results I was looking for I created an Armenian version of the survey as well. After I started sharing both surveys together, people started to participate in the survey, not in the Armenian version, but the English version instead. That could mainly be due to the fact that having the Armenian version available was comforting for the participants in case they needed to use it. While I let the survey circle around for a few more weeks, I started to work on the focus group.

One of the most important steps with the focus group was finding the participants. I didn't really mind having family and friends take part in the focus group, but I also wanted to include other members as well. Hence, through friends and acquaintances, I gathered around 8 participants, some of whom were from different backgrounds, countries, age groups, etc.. As the participants wished to remain anonymous in this research, they were given pseudonyms. Selena was one of the first participants I contacted. She is a 22-year-old English and Communications student, born and raised in Kuwait, attending the American University of Armenia. Alin, similar to Selena, is another EC student at AUA, who comes from Kuwait as well. Lena is another senior student at AUA, 23 years old, majoring in EC, born and raised in Syria, but has been living in Armenia for about 10 years. Nina, like Lena, comes from Syria, and has been living in Armenia for almost 10 years as well. Nina is a 23-year-old student, studying at the Yerevan State Medical University. The two other participants, Marina and Anna, are also med students at YSMU, who have been living in Armenia for a while as well. Even though I had two more participants who were also willing to attend, they ended up not making it, hence, I had six participants in total.

The focus group was the most significant turning point of this research. While preparing for the focus group, I came up with a list of questions as a guideline, which were similar to the



open ended questions in the survey. In other words, the survey and the focus group took place parallel to one another, which is one of the main reasons why the research started to shift towards a different direction. Throughout the focus group discussion, different types of themes kept coming up, which I hadn't thought about including in my research initially. As the conversation developed, I realized how deeply Armenian women's street fashion and style in general is connected with different types of social issues. Hence, it made me even more interested to understand why looking at women's fashion is important in terms of these social issues. In other words, this research not only explores the correlation between fashion and social media, but it also explores the deeper impact that social issues like gender and social judgment have on women's fashion in Armenia.

With this shift in the direction of the research, there was also a significant impact on my primary research question, which used to be *How have young Armenian women's fashion choices transitioned in Armenia between 2015 & 2021?* It undoubtedly had an impact on the rest of the questions that followed the primary research question as well, as my attention shifted from one theme to another. Not only that, but it also affected the literature review as I needed to research further topics and themes and, of course, it impacted the research findings as well. In other words, the research findings begin by understanding the history of fashion in Armenia, and focusing on various themes such as, the connection between fashion and social media, gender, and societal norms.

### **The history of fashion in Armenia**

Fashion in Armenia has come a long way, just like every other part of the world. Prior to the twentieth century, the clothing in Armenia was rarely for aesthetic purposes, instead, they were meant to be functional. These types of clothing were known as the traditional Armenian

*taraz* [costume]. One of the most significant and dominant elements of a *taraz* were its colors. Each color on a *taraz* represented a specific meaning, such as red for bravery, purple for wisdom, white for prudence, and so on. Wearing a *taraz* could also let you know a lot about the person. For example, a *taraz* could represent a person's marital status, which also functioned as a way of attracting a partner for marriage. It could also tell a lot about a person's wealth, as the *taraz* had more and more gold and silver decorations and threads. And, of course, it could give away other aspects of a person's lifestyle, such as the number of children they had and more (Casparian, 2018).

Today, it is very unlikely to see young women and men wearing a traditional *taraz* as their day-to-day style. Nowadays, a *taraz* is used as a way to represent Armenian history and culture; it is used as a costume for Armenian national and folk dances (Casparian, 2018). Even though we don't see someone wearing an entire *taraz* as their daily style, it is still very interesting to see the way different elements of the traditional *taraz* make their way into the more modern fashion today. One of the focus group members, Nina, loves to see people introduce and incorporate Armenian accessories to their style, whether that is through a bag, a belt, etc. (Nina, focus group, March 17, 2022). It is one of the many ways people in Armenia express their unique style, which follows current fashion trends yet expresses their culture and history through traditional accessories.

A lot of fashion brands these days try to restore the traditional Armenian fashion in different ways. One of the most known brands in Armenia is Pregomesh by singer-songwriter, Sirusho. Pregomesh is a jewelry company that aims to spread the word about Armenian history and culture through the use of fashion and self-expression. One of their main objectives is "to help Armenians to adhere to their roots and meanwhile be trendy and original" (Pregomesh,

2022). The different historical patterns, ornaments, and symbols and the modern design of the jewelry are one of the most significant ways that allows people to keep up with the changing world of fashion, while keeping their roots and traditions alive. Pregomesh along with other similar brands attempt to give “new breath to the cultural heritage of humanity” (Pregomesh, 2022).

### **Fashion and social media**

Nowadays, with the existence of social media, fashion trends are changing faster than ever. And with the Internet and different types of social media platforms being created, a lot of young people are shifting their sources of fashion inspiration (Jiratanatiteenun, 2012). That is also the case with Armenia. Many people claim that social media has worked as a source of inspiration for them. According to the survey conducted for this research, out of around 100 participants, 14.9% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement “I use social media as my main source of fashion inspiration.” 39,6% agreed with the statement, and 31.7% responded “neutral.” And only 11.9% disagreed with the statement, and 2% strongly disagreed with it.

In addition, when the participants were asked whether or not social media influenced their fashion choices, around 65% of the participants answered yes. A lot of the participants claimed that social media was one of the biggest influences of fashion in their lives, along with other forms of media such as movies, TV shows, etc. Participants also claimed that social media has been a way for them to change up their styles, find new trends to follow, and so on. While other participants claimed that social media didn't have an impact on their fashion sense at all, others claimed that even though it might not have a direct impact, they felt like social media unconsciously influenced their choices in different ways, as social media has become an

inescapable part of everyone's life. In other words, most of the participants agreed that their fashion was influenced by social media, one way or another.

Another significant point to mention is when the participants were asked whether or not their styles had changed much throughout the past several years. Around 75% of the participants answered that their styles had changed ranging from a slight to a very drastic change. From those participants, around 16% claimed that there was a direct correlation between their change in style and social media or trends. Even though the rest of the participants didn't mention social media specifically, their claims made it clear that they were being influenced indirectly. For instance, a lot of the participants claimed that their clothes changed from neutral colors to more colorful ones, which is one of the biggest trends in fashion nowadays. More and more clothing brands are focusing on producing clothes with bright, vivid and even pastel colors. Another important one was that some participants claimed that they started to wear different types of jeans, such as mom jeans instead of skinny jeans. The different types of jeans we see today like wide leg, straight leg, and more, are some of the biggest and trendiest changes we see in the fashion industry today. These claims are important to take into consideration as they represent an indirect correlation between social media and young women's fashion choices in Armenia.

While different forms of media, including social media platforms like facebook and instagram, have existed for a while now, they haven't caused this drastic of a transition in fashion until recently. One of the biggest causes of the rapid and drastic transition goes back to the Covid-19 pandemic, which started in early 2020. With the safety regulations that came with the pandemic, such as social distancing, a lot of people were forced to go on social media, and even online shops for their shopping and other needs. Before the pandemic, a lot of companies were hesitant to completely rely on online stores for their products. However, after the pandemic

everything shifted. A lot of clothing companies had no choice but to turn to online stores to satisfy their consumers. They also shifted their focus and attention towards social media, as it was one of the few ways they were able to keep contact with their consumers. This was effective because most people were spending the free time they had scrolling through social media platforms and other mobile applications (Kim, 2021).

One of the biggest factors that connected the transition of fashion, the pandemic, and social media is TikTok, the newest and trendiest social media platform today. It was so popular that it became the number one application on the IOS App Store around the world in 2020 (Koetssier, 2020). Through TikTok, ordinary people were able to share their styles from the comfort of their own homes, making it accessible to not just their own circle of people, but to the entire world (Michaela & Orna, 2015). With the way TikTok works, people were able to see what others were doing all the way on the other side of the world.

Unlike other social media platforms, TikTok allowed people to see what others were doing, no matter how near or far they were, without needing to follow their accounts, through what is known as the “for you” page. That was also the case in Armenia. As Alin claims during the focus group, the pandemic was the turning point of the fashion industry here in Armenia. She adds that the pandemic had a significant influence on the fashion industry because of social media’s influence (Alin, focus group, March 17, 2022). During the pandemic, a lot of young people started to use TikTok, either for entertainment, or content creation. Hence, a lot of people in Armenia were exposed to the trends they were seeing circling around the world. Other people were creating similar content in Armenia, inspired by what they were seeing going on around the world, which is one of the biggest ways the fashion trends started to reach Armenia faster than ever.

One thing that most of the participants agreed on is the fact that most of the change happened within the younger generation, also known as generation Z. Marina mentioned that the fashion in Armenia has evolved so much recently, especially in the younger generation. She added that the younger generation specifically are mostly who follow fashion trends, while the older generation is still connected to the older fashion (Marina, focus group, March 17, 2022). In addition, 62% percent of the participants claimed that they noticed a difference in the way generation Y and generation Z styled themselves. Some of the main differences that came up were that Gen Z is way more confident, bold, expressive, and experimental with their fashion, in comparison with the previous generations, as they are not afraid to try new things, and don't really care about what others think. And one of the main reasons for this difference is evidently social media.

On the other hand, generations previous to Gen Z feel a different type of influence from social media. While they aren't being directly influenced by social media and the trends, they feel a lot of pressure to continue to fit in, and continue to be and feel young. As one of the survey participants mentioned, "millennials, as the first generation to be heavily present on social media, are more noticeably affected by its pressures and that translates in the way they dress as well" (Survey, 2022).

Gen Z's difference in fashion also circles back to the emergence of online shops during the pandemic. One of the most significant points to mention is that most of the online stores that were opening up on social media were created by Gen Z, as Alin claimed, "the sellers are mostly our age" (Alin, focus group, March 17, 2022). This explains why online stores have trendier clothes rather than other types of local stores in the country. It also ties everything together, as it is evident that Gen Z is able to find and follow the trends quickly, and bring them to the country

through online shops as soon as possible. Since these online shops are mostly on social media, the younger generation are exposed to them more than others. With the pandemic, the regulations to stay home, the popularity of TikTok, these online shops became the most convenient ways to shop. This wasn't only convenient for the consumers, but for the small business owners as well, as they were able to run an entire store from the comfort of their home.

### **Fashion and gender**

Fashion and gender have always been connected to one another. It all starts before we are even born. Our friends and relatives automatically assign the colors we are supposed to wear, pink for girls and blue for boys. Some parents dress their children according to our biological sex from the moment we are born until we grow and choose for ourselves. They dress little girls as feminine as they can like little barbie dolls, and dress boys to look quite the opposite, tough and masculine. So, we grow up with so many connections embedded deep within us regarding gender and fashion, that we make a lot of our decisions in terms of the way we dress very unconsciously. We also keep passing them down to the other generations, without realizing the damage it may do to some people.

What's even interesting is that the fashion industry does nothing but fuel the connections we were taught from a young age. As one of the focus group members, Selena, brought to our attention, there are fashion restrictions the moment we walk into a store, where we already see "women" and a "men" sections. We already have that restriction in our heads the moment we walk into a store, or shop from online websites, where there are different tabs for different genders (Selena, focus group, March 17, 2022). This makes it difficult for some people who identify with different genders to express themselves freely, and feel free to shop for clothes due to fear and judgment. In other words, our fashion and sense of style is already very restricted and

limited to what we are expected to wear because of these different types of boundaries we experience on a daily basis.

The fashion industry is not the only thing that restricts us from expressing ourselves with fashion freely. One of the other significant factors to mention is the male gaze. The gaze theory was first described by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey and later adapted to literary text. And while there are several layers to uncover with the theory, the male gaze sees a woman as a thing for the heterosexual male to see, defeat, and control (Vanbuskirk, 2021). To put it differently, it is defined as the “eroticization and objectification of the female,” by Elizabeth Skomp in one of her articles. In addition, what’s important to mention is that the gaze stems from the need or desire to counteract or destroy the threat felt because of a woman. Hence, the “gaze” doesn’t necessarily have to be literally by male, but those who “own and activate the gaze” are in the patriarchal position (Skomp, 2003).

Even though “the male gaze ” first originated in the film industry, it extends to women’s real life experiences and day to day lives. For instance, it affects the way women are shown in different advertisements, magazines, social media posts, etc., which not only affects the women in those mediums, but all the other women as well. With those real life experiences becoming a type of norm for the “owner of the gaze,” it evidently impacts the way they perceive a woman trying to express herself freely through her clothing and sense of style. This in turn impacts women with their personal choices in terms of the way they choose to dress to avoid feeling sexualized and objectified.

This gaze impacts women in many different ways, one of the biggest ones being fear of others. A significant issue a lot of women face because of the male gaze is sexual harassment in the public, whether that is on the street, in a taxi, or at the mall, which is also known as



catcalling. Catcalling is any type of sexually explicit comments, sounds like whistling, staring, or even groping directed towards a woman. In certain cases, catcalling may be followed by following the woman and chasing her around, and in other severe cases, other types of sexual harassment and even sexual violence. These instances usually limit a woman's movement and choices in her day to day life as a form of precaution (Eddo-Lodge, 2014). This may also include the way she chooses to dress.

That is the case in Armenia as well. Many women feel restricted with their fashion and feel pressured to dress in a way to avoid certain consequences. Not only that, but women try to wear clothes that cover as much as their bodies to avoid the unwanted attention and its outcomes. (OCmedia, 2018). Many of the focus group participants mentioned their concerns with the male gaze and how it has a significant impact on their choices in fashion. One of the key ideas that came up is that some women avoid certain types of clothes, like shorts, skirts, or any other types of revealing clothing to avoid the male gaze. "Some people take the way you dress as something else," said Selena, one of the participants (Selena, focus group, March 17, 2022). Another participant, Lena, shared her concerns as well, "I sometimes keep in mind to not wear short skirts or even shorts if I'm going to be out late, because. I don't feel safe in the streets," she added, "because of male gazes, I don't know, but it's something you keep in mind" (Lena, focus group, March 17, 2022).

Another important factor that leads to a correlation between fashion and gender is beauty standards. Nowadays, social media is one of those tools that feeds the audience "perfect beauty standards." However, these beauty standards are rarely realistic, making them impossible to achieve. For example, with social media being so prevalent, a lot of young women constantly see unrealistic body types, like huge hips and tiny waists, and judge themselves for not meeting

those standards (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). This constant comparison can also be influential on their fashion choices.

Armenian women feel the same way when it comes to self-perception and self-expression. 10.9% of the survey participants strongly agreed with the statement “Social media impacts my self-perception and self-evaluation.” Also, 41.6% agreed with it, and 31.7% felt neutral about it. And only 12.9% disagreed with the statement and 3% strongly disagreed. Afterwards, when participants were asked about the correlation between self-perception and fashion, 51.5% agreed that their self-perception impacted the way they chose to dress, and 22.8% strongly agreed. The rest of the participants, 23.8%, chose neutral as their answers, and only 2% of the participants disagreed with the statement. This goes to show that there is a direct correlation between self-perception and self-expression when it comes to fashion in Armenia.

### **Fashion and societal norms**

One other significant factor that has a major impact on fashion in Armenia is societal norms. Societal norms are defined as “the socially acquired valuing of any causal explanation of behaviors and outcomes that accentuates the weight of the actor as a causal factor” (Cambon et al., 2006). And societal norms often lead to judgment. That is because when something is known to be a certain way, judgment is inevitable when it changes. Many people believe that the Armenian society is very quick to judge in so many different aspects of life, fashion being one of the most significant ones. This leads to some sort of restriction in the way people choose to dress to avoid judgment. During the focus group, when the participants were asked whether or not they felt restricted with their fashion choices, some of them felt like they were. For instance, Nina claimed that she restricted herself and wore different things from what she wished she could

wear, to avoid feeling judged by other people and feel more comfortable (Nina, focus group, March 17, 2022).

There are a lot of factors that lead to this judgment. For instance, a lot of it stems from the differences between generations and age groups. As the style of the younger generation changes quickly and becomes more westernized, these fast changing trends become unfamiliar for the other generations. Lena claimed that “Mostly the people that are judging you are the older generation,” she adds, “this is kind of a shock for them, this westernized fashion sense, so that’s why they judge, because it’s new to them” (Lena, focus group, March 17, 2022). Selena, agreeing with Lena, claimed that some people don’t keep up with those coming and going trends, so it makes it difficult for them to change their ideas of what’s appropriate to wear and what’s not. Hence, the only thing they’re able to do is judge what’s new and different (Selena, focus group, March 17, 2022).

Another significant factor that leads to judgment is shame or “amot” in Armenian. According to Christian Garbis, a lot of Armenians grow up hearing the words “amot eh” for “anything that meets with the disapproval of the parent or guardian, or that may be frowned upon by Armenian society at large.” “Amot eh” is a very specific form of judgment that stems from people’s “complexes and fears of expressing their own opinions or deep-rooted personal feelings,” therefore, shaming the other seems to be the easy way out. Hence, this limits the freedom of the younger generation to dress differently as well, trying to escape shame and judgment. It is “single-handedly quelling creativity and freedom of thought in modern Armenian society,” he added, it “precipitates fear and thus intolerance for diversity and the creative spirit” (Garbis, 2013).

### **Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

One of the main limitations of the research that is worth mentioning is the number of participants for both the survey and the focus group. Evidently, the number of survey participants doesn't represent the way every young Armenian woman feels about fashion. That was also the case with the focus group. But, even though the number of participants was not that big, some of the themes and topics that came up during the survey and the focus group were the things that made this research effective. Yet, one avenue for further research can include interacting with a larger number of participants. This can include male participants, experts and professionals from the fashion industry, or even different age groups to get a different perspective on the topic.

Another important limitation is the fact that the survey and the focus group were conducted parallel to one another. While I let the surveys circulate, I worked on conducting the focus group. Hence, the focus group took place before analyzing the results of the survey, which was one of the main reasons why a lot of different themes and topics came up and shifted the direction of this research. Hence, another important avenue for further research would be conducting a focus group according to the survey results, as I believe it would've led to a completely different discussion and research.

Finally, there were some important statistics that came up in the survey, which can lead to an entirely separate research. One of the most important topics is fast fashion, as the survey showed that nearly 75% of the participants were consumers of fast fashion. This can be the beginning of a very interesting research connected with consumers of fast fashion, the reason behind its popularity, the consequences it may have on businesses, consumers, or even the environment, and so on.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the main purpose of this research was to understand some of the biggest factors that influenced the day-to-day fashion in Armenia. The research showed that one of the biggest impacts was social media. It plays a big role in various aspects of life, including fashion. It is evident that social media has become an important part of young women's lives in terms of fashion, as it serves as a source of inspiration and influences their styles both directly and indirectly. Social media has also played a huge role in leading young women to change their styles and their streetwear. This was especially evident after the Covid-19 pandemic, when a lot of people started to use social media more and more, specifically TikTok. While the impact of social media on fashion is evident, it is especially noticeable on the younger generation, Gen Z, compared to others. This ties back to the idea that a lot of social media users are from the younger generations. These young individuals also had a role in creating businesses on social media, bringing and spreading the new trends they were seeing on the apps to the country from all over the world, which led to spreading the newest trends in the country faster than ever. This caused an impact in the fashion industry as well.

Another important factor that has a correlation with fashion are different types of gender related issues. One of the most important ones is the internalized connections a lot of people have with fashion, like wearing specific items of clothing, or colors, etc.. Another important issue is the male gaze theory, which eroticizes and objectifies women. This is a major issue as it restricts some women in the way they choose to dress in their day-to-day lives, to avoid the male gazes and the consequences that follow, such as sexual harassment and even sexual violence in certain cases.

The third factor is the societal norms and social judgment within the Armenian society. A lot of the social norms that exist in our society are presented as traditional or even religious acts.

Hence, going beyond those norms and traditions brings up the term “amot eh,” which is a phrase a lot of Armenians grew up hearing in their daily lives. This term is a way for people to limit the freedom of the younger generation in terms of the way they dress, limit their creativity with self expression, and even limit diversity within the country by making them feel shame for things they shouldn't be shamed for. Hence it is another factor that contributes deeply to the fashion in Armenia, as it prevents some people from dressing the way they wish to dress to avoid shame and judgment.

Finally, the varying thoughts and opinions of the focus group and survey participants are one of the main factors that added depth and meaning to the research. The topics and discussions that came up because of these methods were of great value to my research. They helped me get a clearer understanding of a personal observation I had, and dive much deeper into the topic than I ever expected. Lastly, I wish that this research serves as an acknowledgment that fashion is more than the clothes we wear every day, but it is a way of self-expression, communication, and identity. Evidently, fashion also represents the much deeper issues we face in our everyday lives, whether that is gender or society, and the much needed steps we need to take to work on changing those issues.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Focus Group Consent Form [English version]

#### CONSENT FORM

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by **Alice Arabian**. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is to gather qualitative data for the capstone project. Within the bigger context of the project, the focus group conducted by Alice Arabian is meant to focus on gathering data related to understanding the transition of street fashion in Armenia throughout the past several years.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the focus group will be conducted on zoom, and might be recorded on video. As a participant, I will be asked to explore personal thoughts and opinions related to self-expression through fashion, personal style, self-perception, and social media. The focus group will last from one to two hours, however, the participants are free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the focus group for more than two hours, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that this focus group involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this focus group.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:** As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in publications or presentations that may result from this focus group.

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this focus group by any method and in any media for academic purposes (which may include webpages, documentary clips, etc..)

**OR**

\_\_ I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My identity will be concealed. I will be given a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that may result from this focus group.

\_\_ I agree that while data from the focus group may be published, no sound or images from it may be reproduced.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.  
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

FOCUS GROUP ORGANIZER: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).

## **Appendix B: Survey Consent Form [English version]**

### **Survey consent form to appear on the first page of the survey**

I have been informed that the purpose of this survey is to gather quantitative data for a capstone project. The survey conducted by Alice Arabian is meant to focus on gathering data related to understanding the transition of street fashion in Armenia throughout the past several years.

**This is to state that I agree to participate in this survey for the capstone project conducted by Alice Arabian. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: [hourig.attarian@aua.am](mailto:hourig.attarian@aua.am)).**

**I understand that** my participation in this study is anonymous; the data collected in the following survey will only be published as aggregated data; the data may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes; and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

[checkmark box]

### **Appendix C: Questionnaire [English version]**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your current level of education?
3. Are you currently working or studying?
4. If you are working, what is your current occupation?
5. What is your marital status?
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements
  - I buy new clothes, regardless of the current fashion trends.
  - I plan shopping trips carefully and strategically.
  - I use social media as my main source of fashion inspiration.
  - Social media impacts my self-perception and self-evaluation.
  - My self-perception impacts the way I choose to dress.
  - My personal style reflects the way I like to dress (regardless of other people's opinions like family, friends, significant other, etc...).
  - I am a consumer of fast fashion (Zara, Bershka, etc...).
  - I prefer to wear higher end or luxury brands (Gucci, Prada, etc...).
  - I shop international brands over local brands.
  - I mostly shop from online stores.
7. What are some of the main factors that impact your choices and decisions regarding your day-to-day style?
8. Does social media impact your fashion choices? If yes, how?

9. What are some of the things you take into consideration when shopping for new clothes?  
(e.g. trends, price, comfort, etc...)
10. Has your personal style changed much in the past few years? If yes, how?
11. Do you see a difference in style between generation Y and Generation Z? If yes, what are the differences?