

To Decode Gen Z's Mind Set and Satisfaction Toward Thrift Shopping, and Uncover the Key Drivers that Shape their Purchase Decisions

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Abstract:

Investigating the attitudes, purchase behaviour, and satisfaction levels of Gen Z consumers toward thrift shopping, with particular emphasis on the influence of digital platforms in shaping contemporary consumption patterns. Situated within the broader transition from a linear fashion system to a circular economy, thrift shopping is increasingly perceived as a practice aligned with sustainability, affordability, and individual expression. The study examines how young consumers engage with second-hand fashion as both an economic alternative and a means of identity construction, while also reflecting growing environmental awareness. Digital media, especially social networking platforms, play a pivotal role in enhancing visibility, normalizing second-hand consumption, and influencing purchasing decisions. At the same time, consumer behaviour reflects a nuanced evaluation of perceived benefits and risks, including concerns related to product quality, hygiene, and reliability. Factors such as seller credibility and customer feedback significantly shape decision-making processes in this context. The study further highlights the interplay between favourable attitudes toward sustainable consumption and actual buying behaviour, which is often mediated by social perceptions and functional considerations. Overall, thrift shopping is presented as an evolving and multifaceted consumption trend shaped by economic, social, and technological dynamics.

Keywords: Thrift shopping, Gen Z, Consumer Behaviour, Sustainability

1. Introduction

The global fashion landscape is currently navigating a seismic shift as the traditional linear "take-make-waste" model is increasingly challenged by the principles of the circular economy and a burgeoning collective environmental consciousness. Central to this paradigm shift is the resurgence of "thrifting"—the curated acquisition of pre-loved items—which has transcended its historical associations with economic hardship to become a definitive hallmark of contemporary style and ethical living. Generation Z, a demographic of digital natives who now command significant global purchasing power, stands at the vanguard of this movement, recontextualizing second-hand consumption as a form of "recommerce" that aligns with their core values of sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility.

For this cohort, fashion serves as a primary vehicle for identity construction; they leverage the "treasure hunt" nature of thrift shopping to bypass the homogenized, mass-produced offerings of fast-fashion giants in favour of unique, vintage pieces that facilitate radical self-expression and "sartorial storytelling." This transition is further catalysed by the "de-stigmatization" of used clothing, fueled by expansive social media

ecosystems where platforms like TikTok and Instagram have rebranded thrifting as both a savvy financial strategy and a badge of eco-conscious honour. In emerging markets, such as India and Indonesia, this trend is particularly potent, as a youthful population blends traditional cultures of reuse with modern digital marketplaces to create a new hybrid consumption model.

However, the psychological landscape of the Gen Z consumer remains nuanced and complex, characterized by a delicate negotiation between perceived value and perceived risk. While the hedonic satisfaction of finding a high-value luxury item at a fraction of its original cost drives high engagement, it is often tempered by functional concerns regarding hygiene, product durability, and the lack of traditional return policies. Furthermore, while social stigma is fading, a residual "social risk" persists, where the fear of negative peer judgment or the perceived loss of status occasionally conflicts with the desire for sustainable living. This tension creates a "value-action gap" where positive attitudes do not always translate into consistent purchasing behaviour. Consequently, understanding the satisfaction levels of Gen Z requires an exploration of how these consumers weigh the intrinsic rewards of environmental stewardship against the extrinsic pressures of quality and social acceptance. By synthesizing modern consumer behaviour theories with empirical evidence from the burgeoning thrift market, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that determine long-term satisfaction. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate how the interplay of economic pragmatism and ideological commitment is not merely a transient trend, but a foundational pillar of a more resilient, transparent, and responsible retail future that will define the global economy for decades to come.

2. Research Problem

The rapid expansion of the global "re-commerce" sector highlights a pivotal transition in retail, yet the psychological determinants governing the long-term engagement of Generation Z remain inadequately defined. This discrepancy is further complicated by the emergence of Instagram as a dominant market catalyst; however, the extent to which digital curation and social validation on the platform influence actual consumer satisfaction is poorly understood. Furthermore, while the current thrifting boom is highly visible, it is unclear if this shift is rooted in a fundamental behavioural change or if it is merely a transient aesthetic trend driven by social media algorithms. Consequently, this study investigates the interplay between digital influence, perceived risk, and consumer motivation to determine what truly sustains satisfaction within the Gen Z thrift ecosystem. Ultimately, this research aims to identify whether the intersection of social media influence and second-hand consumption can foster a permanent, satisfying alternative to traditional fast-fashion model.

3. Objectives of The Study

- To analyse the attitude and satisfaction level of Gen z towards thrift shopping.
- To find out the factors influencing the purchase decision of thrift shopping.

4. Research Methodology

- **Sample:** The sample of the study consists of 65 Gen Z s in Thrissur district who use Instagram and are aware of thrift shopping, selected based on time and convenience.
- **Data Collection:** A structured Questionnaires were provided to 65 Gen z respondents in Thrissur district and it is framed in such a way that all the questions could provide information as per the survey

requirements such as attitudes, behaviour and satisfaction. Various journals, books and websites helped to create a base of the study.

- **Data analysis:** Percentage analysis, Ranking and graphs used to analyse and present the data.

5. Review of Literature

- A journal by Zulfa, Terrisa, Anwar, & Rianda, 2024. The Influence of Brand Image, Price Perception, and Lifestyle on the Decision to Purchase Thrifted Clothing in Online Shops (2024), in the journal Inovasi Makro Ekonomi. The research method used in this journal is qualitative, with sampling techniques employing observation and interviews. This journal discusses how brand image, price, and fashion lifestyle significantly impact purchasing decisions for thrifted clothing in online shops. The research findings indicate that the variables of brand image, price, and fashion lifestyle simultaneously and partially have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions for online thrift shops in Pontianak City.
- The journal by Setyo Nugroho & Negeri Surabaya, 2023. Thrifting: The culture of consuming secondhand clothing among college students. Journal of Social and Cultural Dynamics. This study used a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This study describes and outlines the key issues. The article examines why students choose thrifting as an alternative to mainstream fashion, as well as its impact on their views regarding fashion consumption and sustainability. The study's findings indicate that thrifting among millennial students is not merely a form of cost-saving but also part of an environmental awareness movement and an expression of an alternative lifestyle. Thrifting has become a symbol of more mindful and sustainable consumption.
- According to Aycock, to investigate the driving forces and perceived worth of customers who shop at online second-hand luxury apparel stores. Five distinct motivations—economic, critical, hedonistic, fashion- and status-seeking—were taken into consideration. 216 students from a Mid-Southern institution participated in the study. Online second-hand luxury fashion companies were advised to provide Gen Z and millennial customers—who are both digital natives—trend-driven clothing and accessories. According to the author, factors including economics, culture, and fashion have a big impact on young adults' perceptions of value and plans to buy when they search for luxury clothing online. According to research, millennials and Gen Z buyers are more likely to buy second-hand luxury clothing online for aesthetic and intellectual reasons than for financial ones.
- Henninger, Alevizou & Oates explains, consumers may not always behave in accordance with their own conduct when purchasing sustainable fashion due to a lack of knowledge and awareness, which can lead to a discrepancy between consumer attitudes and behaviors and impede the continued development of sustainable fashion. Green cleaning is a regular phenomenon, despite the fact that businesses frequently use the phrases "green," "environmental protection," and "ecology" in their marketing materials to express the notion of sustainability. As a result, buyers become suspicious of the brand and refrain from making purchases.

6. Data Analysis

Demographic		Percentage %
Gender	Male	49
	Female	51

Age	Below 18 18-20 21-23 Above 23	0 75 22 3
Frequency character		
How frequently do you buy online	Frequently Occasionally rarely Never	56 36 8 0
Role of Instagram in promoting thrift shopping	Frequently Occasionally rarely Never	60 26 14 0
Level of satisfaction in thrift shopping	Satisfied Neutral dissatisfied	55 30 15
Customer keep in mind while buying product	Price & Affordability Fashion trend & Uniqueness Fit & size Return & Exchange	41 30 25 4

1. FASHION TREND AND UNIQUENESS

Statements		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total	Mean	Rank
Thrift stores offer unique and stylish clothing	F	16	30	17	2	0	65	3.92	2
	W	80	120	51	4	0	255		
I can find trendy outfits through shopping on <u>instagram</u>	F	16	36	12	1	0	65	4.03	1
	W	80	144	36	2	0	262		
Thrift shopping allows me to experiment with different styles	F	13	32	18	2	0	65	3.86	3
	W	65	128	54	4	0	251		
I prefer thrift items because they are different from regular store clothes	F	9	29	23	4	0	65	3.66	4
	W	45	116	69	8	0	238		

2. PRICE & AFFORDABILITY

Statements		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total	Mean	Rank
Thrift shopping helps me save money	F	18	30	15	2	0	65	3.98	1
	W	90	120	45	4	0	259		
Thrift items are affordable compared to new branded clothes	F	17	28	17	3	0	65	3.90	2
	W	85	112	51	6	0	254		
I prefer thrift shopping because it suits my budget	F	13	29	16	6	0	65	3.70	4
	W	65	116	48	12	0	241		
Low price is a major reason for choosing thrift items	F	12	36	14	2	1	65	3.86	3
	W	60	144	42	4	1	251		

3. BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND PURCHASE DECISION

Statements		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total	Mean	Rank
Reviews and feedback influence my decision to buy thrift items	F	14	26	24	1	0	65	3.81	2
	W	70	104	72	2	0	248		
I check seller credibility before purchasing thrift items	F	10	38	16	0	1	65	3.86	1
	W	50	152	48	0	1	251		
I am satisfied with my thrift shopping experience on instagram	F	9	30	24	2	0	65	3.70	4
	W	45	120	72	4	0	241		
I am likely to continue buying thrift items in the future	F	8	33	22	2	0	65	3.72	3
	W	40	132	66	4	0	242		

7. Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that thrift shopping is predominantly practiced by young consumers aged 18–20, with a balanced gender representation. A high level of online shopping engagement is observed, with most respondents purchasing frequently, highlighting strong digital adoption. Instagram emerges as a key platform influencing thrift shopping behaviour. Respondents generally perceive thrift shopping positively, particularly in terms of fashion trends and uniqueness, where the ability to find trendy outfits (Mean = 4.03, Rank 1) is the most influential factor. In terms of buying behaviour, checking seller credibility (Mean = 3.86, Rank 1) and reviews significantly impact purchase decisions. From a pricing perspective, thrift shopping is strongly associated with cost savings and affordability, with “saving money” (Mean = 3.98) ranking highest. Overall, affordability, uniqueness, and digital influence are the primary drivers of thrift shopping, with moderate to high satisfaction and a positive inclination toward future purchases.

8. Conclusion

The shift toward thrift shopping among Generation Z in Thrissur represents a transition from a linear "take-make-waste" model to a more circular and sustainable fashion economy. This research confirms that for this demographic, recommerce is a deliberate choice driven by the desire for authenticity and social responsibility rather than just economic necessity. By leveraging the "treasure hunt" nature of second-hand markets, these consumers bypass mass-produced fast fashion to find unique pieces that facilitate radical self-expression and personal storytelling. Instagram has proven to be the most significant catalyst in this movement, serving as a digital ecosystem that de-stigmatizes used clothing and rebrands it as a savvy, eco-conscious badge of honour. High engagement with online platforms is tempered by concerns regarding hygiene, product durability, and the absence of traditional return policies. This creates a distinct buying behaviour where checking seller credibility and reading customer reviews are essential prerequisites for a purchase. Furthermore, while social stigma is fading, a residual social risk remains where the fear of peer judgment occasionally conflicts with the desire for sustainable living, creating a gap between positive attitudes and consistent purchasing actions.

Ultimately, the study reveals that the intersection of digital influence and second-hand consumption is fostering a satisfying and permanent alternative to traditional retail. Satisfaction is primarily derived from the ability to secure trendy, unique items that are unavailable in mainstream stores, combined with the practical benefit of significant cost savings. As these young consumers continue to weigh the rewards of environmental stewardship against the pressures of quality and social acceptance, thrifting is cementing itself as a foundational pillar of a more transparent and responsible retail future.

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