

THRIFT FASHION AMONG GENERATION Z: CONSUMER AWARENESS OF THRIFT FASHION AMONG GENERATION Z IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Thrift fashion is a relatively new concept in Sri Lanka. However, there is a probability to improve the awareness of second-hand clothing and sustainability. The research objective is to identify characteristics of the thrift fashion market in Sri Lanka and give insight into points of awareness of thrift fashion among Generation Z. This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods. Google surveys and interviews offered broad insights, while additional interviews delved deeper into responses and behaviours. Generation Z in Sri Lanka (born 1995-2010) shows interest in second-hand clothing, reflected in thriving thrift shops. Generation Z is propelling the thrift fashion trend, driven by its focus on sustainability and social responsibility. This trend allows them to showcase their style, discover unique pieces, and build a wardrobe while avoiding the negative impacts of fast fashion and reducing waste. In Sri Lanka, the thrift fashion market stands out for its increasing popularity, affordability, and wide array of clothing options. It emphasises sustainability, offers accessibility through physical and online thrift stores, and collaborates for social impact. Generation Z is highly interested in thrift fashion due to their cost considerations, preference for online shopping, influence of social media, style, brand consciousness, desire for individuality and environmental awareness.

Keywords: Consumer awareness, Generation Z, Thrift fashion, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the research

This study explores the thrift fashions among Sri Lanka's Generation Z, driven by sustainability. Gen Z embraces thrift fashion for self-expression, sustainability, and savings. Challenges include societal judgments, limited awareness of quality, and hygiene concerns. Instagram, YouTube, and peers influence Gen Z's views. The study advances Gen Z thrift fashion literature, highlighting awareness, stigma reduction, and quality improvement. Social media and peers shape attitudes, impacting sustainability-focused efforts.

1.2. Problem identification and objectives

The fashion industry discards vast amounts of clothing in landfills annually. Fast fashion refers to low-cost, mass-produced, machine-made apparel that quickly ends up in landfills. Environmental harm stems from pre- and post-consumer fashion use, with contamination worsening. The slow fashion movement addresses overproduction and overconsumption for social and environmental justice. Terms like "organic" and "eco" fashion inundate consumers. Creating value from discarded items is the most sought-after solution today. Therefore, thrifting has been identified as vital for sustainable slow fashion, extending clothing life cycles through used purchases. In Sri Lanka, thrift fashion is emerging with potential for sustainability. This research aims to uncover the market traits and Gen Z's awareness of thrift fashion. The objective of the research is to identify characteristics of the thrift fashion market in Sri Lanka and give insight into points of awareness of thrift fashion among Generation Z.

2. Literature Review

Today, the fashion industry has gradually expanded from fast and slow fashion to thrift fashion. The fashion industry is lucrative but environmentally harmful, discarding vast amounts of clothing in landfills annually, contributing to climate change (Bick et al., 2018), (Geegamage et al., 2021). Fast fashion refers to low-cost, mass-produced, machine-made apparel that quickly ends up in landfills (Le Normand et al., 2023). The US discards 92 million tons annually (Geegamage et al., 2021). Fast fashion brands overconsume resources, particularly in t-shirt production (Lehmann et al., 2019). Environmental harm stems from pre- and post-consumer fashion use, with contamination worsening.(Lehmann et al., 2019). The circular economy model promotes reuse and product longevity by recycling, creating value from discarded items (Geegamage et al., 2021 and Hvass, 2014). Second-hand consumption builds identity social, and cultural capital (Han et al., 2021). The slow fashion movement addresses overproduction and overconsumption for social and environmental justice (Buchel et al., 2022 and Zahid et al., 2023).

Thrifting is vital for sustainable slow fashion, extending clothing life cycles through used purchases at a reduced price (Chi et al., 2021 and Turunen et al., 2019). Thrift shopping promotes environmental consciousness and recycling due to available vintage and out-of-season items (Payne, 2022). Ferraro et al. (2016) identify thrifting and second-hand consumption as shopping at second-hand locations. Thrift shopping occurs online and in physical stores, emphasising quality for environmental gains. Most thrift stores are nonprofit organizations (Geegamage et al., 2021). Social media notably engages thrift store patrons (Gopalakrishnan and Matthews, 2018). Buyers share thrifting journeys and purchases on social media (Ferraro et al., 2016).

Thrift fashion customers "Generation Z" encompasses individuals born between 1995 and the early 2010s (Palin and Sköld, 2022). Recent research highlights that they shop frequently thrifting (Gazzola et al., 2020 and Oscario, 2023). Thrifting is a Gen Z lifestyle, making them key in driving sustainable fashion change and as the largest consumer group, Generation Z is socially active in media (Oscario, 2023). Young customers find second-hand shopping reasonable and cool (Hristova, 2019). Some motivations for used goods purchases are economical motivation – fair pricing and comparison shopping,

recreational motivation–visual stimulation, thrill, authenticity, social contact, and nostalgia, critical motivation – distancing due to moral or ethical reasons (Ferraro et al., 2016). Thrift shopping excites hunting and reimagination (Vangkilde, 2015). Fashionistas, Hedonists, and Treasure Hunters buy used for fashion drives (Ferraro et al., 2016). Thrifting now profits, not for affordability (Xu et al., 2014).

Customers value self-expression, hedonics, economics, environment, and social aspects when purchasing used clothes (Geegamage et al., 2021). Therefore, price, quality and style, brand awareness, eco-consciousness and social awareness correlate with thrift shopping. Age, gender, living area and income are common purchase variables worldwide (McQueen et al., 2022, Herjanto et al., 2023, and Barrera-Verdugo et al., 2022). Moreover, nostalgia drives used item buying (Geegamage et al., 2021). Consumers need accessible disposal options, designer encouragement, organized collection methods, and basic education on sustainability (Geegamage et al., 2021). Thrifting is a straightforward approach to sustainable fashion, bypassing imports, manufacturing, labor, emissions, and marketing. It prolongs the item's lifespan and offers financial benefits (Payne, 2011). Is it evident that people also ignore thrift shopping? Non-second-hand clothing consumers worry about quality, self-enhancement, and image (Geegamage et al., 2021, McNeill et al., 2015, Ferraro et al., 2016). Their dislike shows several reasons, including social acceptance and status-consciousness, quality and hygiene-consciousness, style and self-expression-conscious, time and professionalism-conscious. Terms like "organic" and "eco" fashion inundate consumers (Blasi et al., 2020).

Thrift fashion is also popular among Generation Z in Sri Lanka. Generation Z is the youngest demographic cohort in Sri Lanka, characterized by their familiarity with technology, social media, and global connectivity (Kahawandala et al., 2020 and Anushalini et al., 2022). They comprise 25% of the population and have distinct preferences and behaviors. Key Characteristics of Generation Z in Sri Lanka are driven by digital naiveness, social consciousness, environmental awareness, and individuality (Anushalini et al., 2022 and Mahendran et al., 2021). Generation Z is responsible for their life and behaviour in society. They have adopted second-hand fashion to reduce the fashion industry's environmental impact (Williams and Hodges 2022). Is it evident that people also ignore thrift shopping? Non-second-hand clothing consumers worry about quality, self-enhancement, and image (Geegamage et al., 2021). Education can counter stigmas, highlight thrift's benefits, offer style and aesthetics and foster a sustainable fashion ecosystem through collaboration (Liyanarachchi et al., 2022). Physical thrift fashion shops, online shops, and social media groups exist. According to Google Maps, most thrift fashion shops are located in the Western province, Colombo District and hard-to-find shops in other areas.

Physical shops

- i. Grace store (VXJ4+H5, Hokandara)
- ii. Goodwill (106 2nd Cross Street, Colombo 01100)
- iii. Twice upon a time (9/7 1st Lane Mission Rd, Sri Jayawardanapura Kotte 10100)
- iv. SALORA Western fashion collection (Moratuwa – Piliyandala Rd, Piliyandala)

- v. The Vintage ABAYA (100b Srimath D.B.Jayathilake Mawatha, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia 10350)
- vi. Dress mode (304 A, Galle Rd, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia)
- vii. Cheap side (517 Galle Rd, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia)
- viii. Vintage world (P4J2+Q9C, Wellaway)
- ix. Second Chance Thrift Store (Colombo 03)
- x. The Re: Shop (Colombo 05)

Online shops

- i. SL thrift store (https://www.instagram.com/sl_thrift_store/)
- ii. Thrift Sri Lanka (https://www.instagram.com/thrift_srilanka/)
- iii. Thrift store.lk (https://www.instagram.com/thrift_store_lk/)
- iv. Twice but nice.lk (<https://www.instagram.com/twice.but.nice.lk/>)
- v. Angles attic backups (<https://www.instagram.com/.angels.attic./>)
- vi. Thrift Lankan (<https://www.instagram.com/thrift.lankan/>)
- vii. The thrift stop shop (<https://www.instagram.com/thethriftstopshopp/>)
- viii. Vintage Hut (https://www.instagram.com/vintage_hut/)
- ix. Thrifts for you (<https://www.instagram.com/2ndhandthriftsforyou/>)
- x. Second-hand tribe (<https://www.instagram.com/secondhandd.tribe/>)

3. Methodology

This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate Sri Lankan Gen Z consumer awareness of second-hand clothing. Google surveys and interviews offered broad insights, while additional interviews delved deeper into responses and behaviors. Generation Z in Sri Lanka (born between 1995-2010) shows interest in second-hand clothing, reflected in thriving thrift shops.

Data were collected through surveys and interviews as shown in Table 1. A Google survey gathered data on thrift fashion and second-hand clothing awareness among Sri Lanka's Generation Z. Open for 4 days, it garnered 100+ responses, offering insights into this market's consumer awareness. The questionnaire for the Google survey was based on seven key factors such as customer awareness and knowledge about second-hand clothing, reasons to do second-hand shopping, how they do thrift shopping (online /physical), reasons to buy thrift garments, the idea about sustainability, challenges they face when they buy second-hand items, do they like to improve second-hand clothing market.

Data was collected via 8 face-to-face and online interviews in English and Sinhala, later translated into English as shown in Table 2. Transcripts were electronically coded for efficient data management. The interviewer assessed communication and sensitivity for reliable results. Interviews were transcribed, edited for clarity, coded, and reviewed for respondent insights. Other than customers, an interview was held with the owner of SALORA vintage clothing and admin of the Facebook thrifting group and the owner of the thrift store's Instagram page.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants.

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Age	Over 35	0%
	35-26	4.4%
	25-13	94.1%
	Below 13	1.5%
Gender	male	41.2%
	female	58.8%
	Prefer not to say	0%
Currently living district	Colombo	69.1%
	Gampaha	16.2%
	Kalutara	1.5%
	Other	13.2%
Income	Rs. 0- 10000	30.9%
	Rs 10000-30000	33.8%
	Rs 30000-50000	11.8%
	Rs 50000-100000	20.6%
	More than Rs 100000	2.9%

Table 2. Summary of the interview participants.

	Age	Gender	Occupation	Currently living area
Interview 01	24	Female	Undergraduate	Maharagama
Interview 02	22	Male	Undergraduate	Piliyandala
Interview 03	25	Female	Undergraduate	Katubadda
Interview 04	19	Female	After AL	Kottawa
Interview 05	24	male	employee	Maharagama
Interview 06	20	female	unemployed	Rathmalana
Interview 07	23	male	employee	Boralla
Interview 08	24	female	employee	Bambalapitiya

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Age, residence, gender, and employability directly correlate with thrift shopping behavior

The majority of respondents, 94.1% are between 25-13 years. A second-hand clothing store owner identifies that they are the customers to whom you can sell anything related to second-hand. The second largest group of 4.4 % is between 35-26 years. Below the age of 13 people also show interest in second-hand clothing, which is 1.5%. Female respondents of 58.8 % and 41.2 % male respondents participated. The majority of second-hand preferred customers live in the Colombo district, which is 69.1%. The second largest group lives in Gampaha district which is 16.2 %. Most respondents are undergraduates, with 30.7% employees, 4% school students, and 1.3% non-employees. It can be suggested that a factor in increasing customer numbers in the Colombo district is easy accessibility. Interviewer 2 commented that she lives in Maharagama, where she can easily access Thrift shops.

4.2. Thrift fashion culture exerts influences from native culture and media, creating a local context

Sri Lankans have experienced second-hand clothes through gifting, exchanging, and purchasing from various sources since childhood. With the thrift shop culture consumer awareness gradually developed. Thrift shopping gains attraction in Sri Lanka from social media, influencers, YouTube, and articles. Thrift clothes have been socialized in various ways, such as donating and selling to thrift shops, garage sales, flea markets, and online platforms (Ranaweera and Halwathura, 2021).

“I am the youngest child in my family. You know, I used so many second-hand items. Like clothes, shoes, toys, books. So, I have used second-hand clothes from my childhood and still I do and now I like to buy garments from thrift shops.” (interviewer 3)

4.3. Consumer awareness of thrift fashion benefits environmental protection

79.2% of respondents were familiar with second-hand clothing or thrift fashion, with more than 3/4 familiar with the concept. According to the interviews, most interviewers are eager to wear second-hand clothing to protect the environment. Interviewer 5 commented, “Fashion is a big environmental polluter, so using old clothes helps cut down new clothing production.” Interviewer 7 commented “I know the fashion industry harms the environment very much. That is the biggest reason to wear second-hand clothes. I want to be an environmentally friendly person.”

4.4. “Branded cloth at an affordable price” chiefly guides customers in second-hand clothing

Interviewers cited various reasons for thrift shopping, but peer group influence has been shown an important factor in influencing thrift fashion. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube offer thrifting inspiration. Interviewer 1 commented “First I saw a video about thrifting hauls from the “Dress with Sinki” YouTube channel. Then I started to search for it. I found some Facebook thrift groups and I joined them.”

“My main motivation to do second-hand shopping was my friend's trip to Piliyandala, where I bought high-quality and branded garments at low prices that gave me an amazing experience. This trip was the main motivation to do thrift shopping and has been continuing since then.” (interviewer 6)

The survey reveals diverse motivations for second-hand shopping as shown in Table 3 and Figure 1.

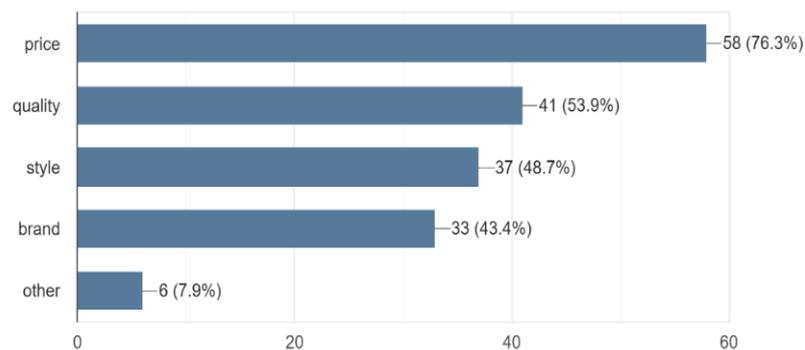
Price (77.3%) chiefly guides customers in choosing second-hand clothing. Interviewer 3 commented “I choose second-hand clothes primarily due to affordability. Additionally, I prioritize good quality and long-lasting durability.” Interviewer 4 commented “I desire branded clothes, but cost limits choices. Thrift shops offer affordable branded options like Levi jeans, Tommy Hilfiger shirts, and jackets.” It is seen that consumers' preference is branded clothing at affordable prices. Interviewer 3 commented that they consider social

Table 3. Reasons to do thrifting according to the responders.

Reasons to do thrifting	Respondents
Affordability	40
Quality	5
Branded garments	6
Unique garments	20
To try imported garments	1
As hobby	2

What factors influence your decision to purchase secondhand clothing?

76 responses

**Figure 1. Main reasons for thrifting.**

status in clothing choices. Even for second-hand purchases, these matters. Therefore, generally damaged or faded items are avoided, and they tend to select colors that suit with skin tone. Interviewer 5 commented that thrifting is good for trendy items, and they mix and match in second-hand shopping. Affordability consistently emerged as the primary factor, enhancing spending capacity. Secondly, quality does matter. Sri Lanka's flourishing thrift fashion market mirrors changing consumer preferences. Sri Lanka's thrift fashion market enables cultural connection and self-expression through vintage and second-hand attire.

4.5. Physical thrift stores: The most demanding thrift shopping method

Survey respondents found second-hand clothing options in Sri Lanka scarce, with limited outlets posing a primary shopping challenge. 73.3% favored physical thrift stores, 36% social media groups, and 12% online platforms for second-hand shopping. 13 % liked to do any shopping method. Usually imported second-hand garments are at physical thrift shops and online stores and social media groups have local second-hand garments. Interviewer 2 commented that she likes to wear foreign fashions and imported garments and is a big fan of physical thrift shops.

4.6. Hygiene, bulk availability of out-of-trend items, damages, and limited availability of ongoing trends are to be improved

Responders to the survey said different challenges customers face when shopping for second-hand clothing in Sri Lanka, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Factors affect the negativity of thrifting among non-secondhand consuming customers.

Reasons	Responds
insufficient shops	27
Quality	14
Cost	3
Low quality	2
Not a big trend	4
Cleanliness	1
Out-of-trend garments	3
Hygiene	2
Social status	3
Not enough time	3
The size doesn't fit	1

According to this chart, “insufficient shops” is the main barrier to thrifting customers. A shop owner cited hygiene, out-of-trend items, damage, and thrift's limited trend as reasons to decline thrift clothes. He says, “Thrift shopping is stigmatized due to its view of used clothing as dirty or out-of-date.”

5. Conclusion and Implications

Identified characteristics of the thrift fashion market in Sri Lanka among Gen Z are as follows. Generation Z in Sri Lanka increasingly recognizes the benefits of thrift fashion, leading to the development of thrift stores, online platforms, and sustainable fashion communities. Generation Z's awareness and engagement in second-hand clothing fashion are influenced by social media, which provides influencers and content creators with a platform to showcase and advocate for fashion choices. Affordability is another key characteristic. Second-hand clothing is budget-friendly, offering stylish decisions at lower costs. Cultural and economic factors influence the acceptance and adoption of second-hand clothing fashion in Generation Z. Differences in cultural norms and purchasing power may affect the level of awareness and engagement. Diverse selection, style, and style freedom are key expectations of Gen Z. Thrift fashion enables experimentation with styles, fostering individual expression. They are also brand-conscious. Sri Lankan thrift stores offer unique, individualistic fashion options. The customer awareness of sustainability is evident. Buying habits correlate with the idea of social responsibility. Therefore, thrift fashion in Sri Lanka aligns with fashionability, affordability, and circular fashion ideals, reducing waste and appealing to eco-conscious consumers. Challenges for Thrift Fashion in Sri Lanka are limited infrastructure and access to thrift stores or online platforms that hinder used clothing availability. Solutions like education, partnerships with local designers or influencers, and highlighting thrift's uniqueness can boost thrift fashion's prospects in Sri Lanka.

Recommendations to boost Generation Z's involvement with the second-hand clothing market in Sri Lanka are as follows. The research recommends addressing their demanding factors first then can be driven by the concept of responsible clothing followed by

- Affordability: Introduce varied pricing and promotions for diverse income levels.
- Improved Access: Expand physical stores and online options for easier second-hand clothing access.
- Brand Collaboration: Partner with fashion brands/ designers to integrate thrift sections, bridging retail and thrift fashion.
- Influencer Partnerships: Collaborate with fashion influencers to share insights, style ideas, and experiences.
- Clothing Events: Foster the community by promoting swaps and thrift fashion events.
- Education Campaigns: Raise awareness of thrift fashion's ecological benefits, encouraging sustainable consumption.
- Ongoing Research: Study market trends, preferences, and challenges to adapt strategies.

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