

Thrift shopping: The New Sustainable Arc Pre- and Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Thrifting is a concept that dates to medieval times when used clothing was taken from the rich and sold in the smaller rural villages. Although in this paper we are going to be looking at 'thrifting' as an evolved concept, turned into a trend. The basic idea of thrifting is reusing, and repurposing used clothes and varied items. There are two sets of extremely opposite opinions when it comes to thrifting. There are a lot of parameters that influence opinions surrounding thrifting and this study plans to highlight arguments that explain both perspectives better.

In addition to understanding the nature of the trend, the study also aims to analyze the growth pattern of thrifting throughout India and focus on the causes of its gaining popularity. There is a lot of rising awareness about thrifting and social media platforms have largely contributed to the same. While social media has helped a lot of thrift businesses improve their outreach and acted as a catalyst, it has also helped the masses understand the benefits and impacts of thrifting. In pre-and post-pandemic times, a massive shift in consumer behavior led people towards online thrifting therefore the paper includes comparative research of thrift markets in the pre- and post-pandemic era. This research paper examines the point of view of consumers as well as the insights from the sellers and understands how they plan to fight the challenges such as accessibility, awareness, and acceptance of thrifting.

Keywords: thrift stores, social media, thrive online, consumer research, sustainability.

Introduction

The industrial revolution brought technological changes as well as massive economic changes in all sectors of the economy. One of these sectors is the textile industry. Extensive textile production began to occur because of the ever-increasing demand. This also gave birth to the concept of thrifting, the excess of clothing items that were filling up landfills started reselling at cheaper prices. Thrift shops started emerging for apparel, jewelry, shoes, antiques, etc. We'll look at a modernized version of secondhand businesses that mostly operate through social

media channels. Social media has a huge impact and is showing up in every industry. With the use of a social platform, we can observe how the concept of thrifting has taken on a whole new meaning. We can see if a consumer leans toward this type of consumption for hedonistic or socio-economic reasons. Before the pandemic, some people had heard of and were involved in the purchase of used clothing. Even so, some consumers are still hesitant to buy second-hand products. Thrifting, on the other extreme, has become a new craze and is in the spotlight during this pandemic since it is linked to the topic of preserving the environment from the detrimental effects of fast fashion.

These thrift stores have a curated or personalized collection of items, and these are then either bid on or sold on a first come first serve basis. We will look at an analysis of when this concept picked up, how the consumers react to it, the age group that responds to this trend, and so on. The social media platforms facilitate an online website to deploy a

business and help it grow due to the easy accessibility, creative content, and user-oriented communication.

We are currently going through a pandemic that gripped us about two years ago and as we progressed through it in a quarantine mode, all our day-to-day activities became online. In this period there was a surge of online thrift stores based on social media platforms. Unlike other studies, this one research focuses on cultural adaptability during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is tied to the Indian youth's thrifting culture. The focus of this research is to know and understand the motivation for thrifting among young people, as well as the relationship between thrifting as well as the environment, and to explain thrifting-related cultural changes among youngsters.

We will study how the pandemic might have affected this sudden increase in the thrift stores and if this upswing is going to last or fade eventually.

Literature Review

Table 1: Literature Review

S. No.	Title	Findings
1.	An examination of thrift store shoppers (Mitchell & Montgomery, 2010)	This study highlights the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> People thrift for mainly two reasons that are value seekers [saved money] and special purpose [purchasing unique items]. The presence of a thrift store is attained by either store visibility, experience, or word-of-mouth. The differentiator amongst the multiple competitors is relationship management and word-of-mouth. This helps the shoppers to decide which store they should purchase from.
2.	Millennials' motivation for shopping second-hand clothing is part of a sustainable consumption practice.(Kiehn&Vojkovic, 2018)	The findings of this research highlighted the millennials' main motive to thrift - <ol style="list-style-type: none"> to keep up with the current fashion trend be unique sustainable consumption
3.	Rebirth fashion: second-hand clothing consumptions value and perceived risks (Hur, 2020)	The major findings of this paper: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The prime driving force was hedonic, economic, ecological, and social values. The barriers were mainly concerns related to cleanliness, quality, style, and social status.
4.	Understanding factors leading to rise of Instagram thrift stores: an explorative study(Saxena, 2021)	The identified factors in this study that drive Instagram thrift stores are unique trendy clothes at affordable prices, ease of buying products, aesthetically styled and relatable product pictures, and lastly, increased green consumerism.

S. No.	Title	Findings
5.	Consumer perception towards the sale of second-hand clothes in the localities of Odisha, state of India(Tarai& Shailaja, 2020)	This study concluded that the citizens of Odisha would rather spend extra money if guaranteed new, good quality hygienic clothes than take a risk of buying second-hand clothes which are presumed as unhygienic and poor in quality.
6.	Thrifting culture during the covid 19 pandemic and its impact on the environment(Lestari &Asmarani, 2021)	Due to the adverse effect of covid 19 on the economy, thrifting has provided a solution to reduce your expenses and still own unique fashionable clothes. This also supports sustainable fashion and the environment.
7.	Customer engagement in second-hand fashion marketplaces after the pandemic(Lopez & Ouattara, 2021)	a) This paper concludes that consumers are more aware of the benefits of thrifting. Price and uniqueness are the key factors for the demand. b) Fear of contamination, lack of awareness of benefits, and trust shared with existing brands hinder people from thrifting. c) Physical thrift stores are the gateway to winning their trust. Online thrift stores can have a physical presence via pop-up stores and deliveries.
8.	Millennial perceptions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing: an exploration of clothing preferences using Q methodology (Sorensen & Jorgensen, 2019)	The researcher has compared fast fashion vs second-hand clothes. Although fast fashion provides trendy clothes, it lacks durability, is expensive, and has unethical practices. On the other hand, second-hand clothes are durable, affordable, experience the joy of hunting, and follow ethical fashion. The drawbacks here are lack of value, hygiene-related issues, and unorganized setup. To fix this, stores organize their clothing according to sizes and trends along with marketing messages that mention price, cleanliness, and spot trends quickly. Since consumers have awareness about sustainability, it has allowed them to see the difference they can make by their consumption choices

The table above explains the importance and benefits of thrift stores. The gaps have been identified by the researcher as follows:

1. Most of the study conducted so far is based outside India. There is a need to understand the awareness of thrift stores in the Indian context.
2. Thrift stores were more popular for books in the past. Whereas post-pandemic there has been an inclination towards other products as well. The reason is unknown.

Objectives of the Study

Based on the reviewed literature the researcher has formulated the following objectives:

1. To study the change in awareness of thrifting in India after the global pandemic.
2. To identify the factors that led to the sudden growth of online thrift stores amidst the pandemic.

3. To understand the change in the perception of thrifting amongst the general population from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic.

Research Methodology

This study uses both a qualitative and a quantitative methodology. The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

The primary data is gathered through a variety of questionnaires, each having its own goal and objective that will aid in the research paper's purpose. The surveys focused on the perception of thrifting, the consumer's insight, and the thrift shop owner's point of view.

Data is also obtained from literature studies, pandemics, and other studies to act as secondary research.

Findings

1. Understanding the general opinion of thrifting

To understand the general perception about thrifting we collected primary data via surveys.

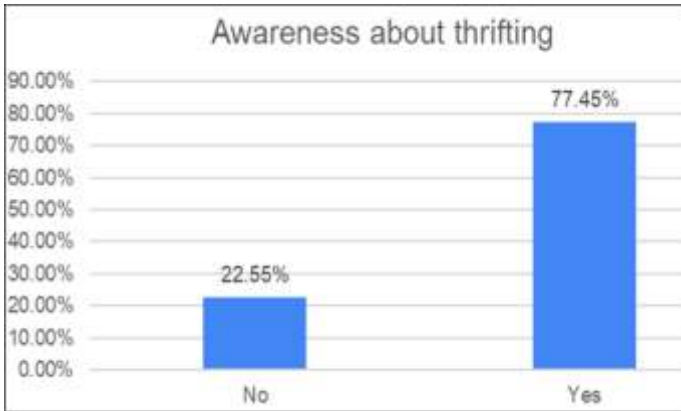


Figure 1: Awareness about thrifting

According to our study, 77.45% of people are aware of the concept of thrifting. It is also important to highlight that they lie in the age group of 18-25 years. Not only are they aware but they also support its purpose and benefits.

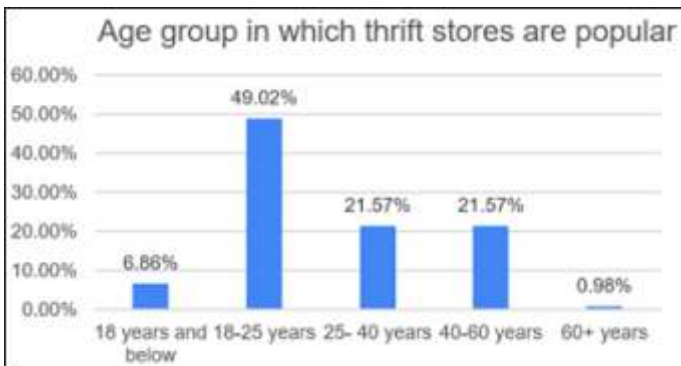


Figure 2: Age-wise popularity of thrift stores

This is an important finding as the common misperception was that people aren't aware of thrifting or even if they were there was a lot of hesitation to support it, but the data proves that most sections of the society especially the youth are highly supportive of the concept.

It is interesting to realize that although 91.2% of the respondents were supportive of the concept, only 59.8% were ready to indulge or are open to changing their consumption patterns. While 11.8% feel that they aren't ready to thrift a comparatively large section is still unsure.

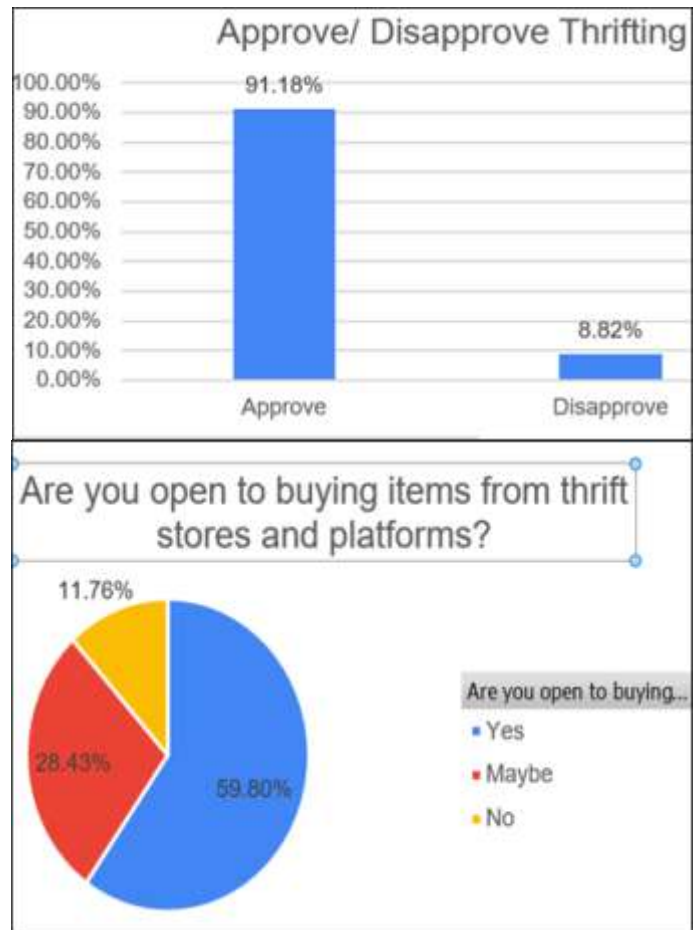


Figure 3: Respondents' support towards thrift stores

Most of the respondents are in support of thrifting because of its environmentally friendly and sustainable nature and because it is highly cost-effective. But on the other hand, thrifting's adversaries do make a compelling case when they raise their concerns related to the hygiene issues, its reliability, and make a case about how thrifting is stealing donations from the poor.

But this survey has explained that the public including all age groups is becoming more aware of thrifting as a concept and while a section of the society is still unsure about it, change is on its way.

2. Understanding the consumers who've thrifted before

When we look at the research paper from a point of view that takes age as the first parameter, we can derive some conclusions.

6. Income bracket-wise representation of the comfort of consumers in buying thrifted items

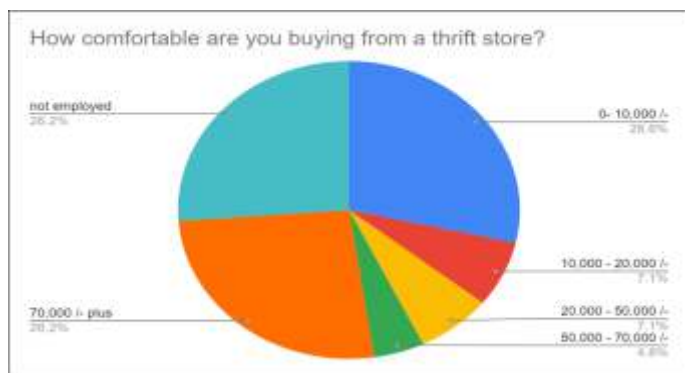


Figure 7: Income bracket wise representation of thrift stores

We see in the above pie chart that the non-employed and the smallest earning bracket consumers are most inclined towards thrifting, these are the respondents that are from the younger age group as well.

Online thrift stores have a risk factor that any online business has of security and safety, but along with this the thrifted items are second hand and have a prospect of being damaged in some way. Also keeping in mind that the age group which has the highest consumption rate is 18- 25 which is also the age where a person cannot spend a large amount of money on articles so thrifting poses a viable option.

About 53% of people have run across the concept of thrifting before the pandemic itself but the rise in these online platform stores has been during or after the lockdown phases.

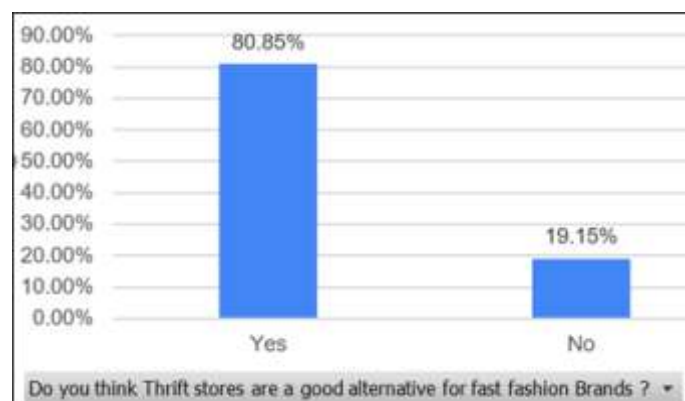


Figure 8: Thrift Stores vs Fast Fashion Brands

80.85 % of the respondents also thought that thrift stores are a good alternative to fast fashion brands that exploit laborers.

The constant change in trends in this fast-paced world also affects fashion and hence the textile industry. Fast fashion brands introduce new collections and seasons of clothing articles and manufacture the apparel in enormous bulks. According to Business Insider, an article on fast fashion read that 80% of these clothes end up in a dumping ground or the ocean in not less than six months. Since the manufacturing is in bulk the quality deteriorates, and this results in wastage. These brands also source their laborers from countries where it is cheap and underpay these workers.

When we look at thrifting as an alternative to this dilemma, we can say that instead of the clothes polluting our environment and increasing the carbon footprint, they are being reused or recycled. This extends the life of the textile and avoids immediate wastage of textile.

7. Suggestions from the sellers:

Understanding the thrift store owner's perspective is also important to draw a proper conclusion and get insights into the growth of thrifting.

As mentioned in the methodology, we interviewed an online thrift shop owner to get an understanding of how thrift stores have grown and the role of the pandemic.

Following are a few questions asked and their answers:

Name of the Thrift Store: The Ellehsin

This online thrift store was started before the pandemic of 2020 and has been operating through a social media platform- Instagram. It has also seen a significant rise in its profit margin since 2020.

- The owner confirmed that most of the customers lie in the age group of 18-25 years which proves that this concept is accepted more within the younger generation.
- As youngsters have more resources and platforms to make themselves aware of the benefits of sustainable fashion and movements which are environmentally friendly, they approve of the idea of thrifting faster.

- When asked why people avoid or aren't in support of thrifting, the owner replied that even if youngsters are aware of the concept older generations aren't or continue to have reservations about the same.

Tracking the growth of thrifting post-pandemic

1. Effect of the pandemic:

The way that shopping centers have generally remained closed throughout recent months might have moved individuals to find this type of web-based shopping, as well. Since the beginning of the pandemic, A 2021 Fashion Resale Report on well-known thrifting stage, ThredUp, subtleties how the worldwide handed down market is relied upon to "twofold in the following five years, arriving at \$77B." truth be told, ThredUp has even named thrifting 'another pandemic habit.' Apart from sustainability, another motivation behind why individuals are floating towards handed-down clothing is the economic slump brought about by the pandemic, which has urged them to look for more economical choices. While Instagram shops and garage deals existed pre-2020, the pandemic carried expanded on-screen time extravagances to individuals and the frugality market on Instagram blast. Article of clothing and material businesses are fixed as perhaps the biggest contamination of water. They add to nursery outflows, and landfills containing pieces of clothing made of non-biodegradable texture. (Kim, 2021)

Ideas for economical style incorporate making the example of utilization roundabout at the core of which is reusing, reuse, and broadening the existence of an article of clothing. Mindful of current realities, these understudies focus on being maintainable. Earning while at it is an additional motivation.

2. Role of social media

The huge spike in how much time spent on our phone additionally coincided with the Indian government's restriction on Chinese applications last year, after border strains between the two nations developed. One of those applications was the Chinese fast fashion monster, Shein. Youthful customers began searching somewhere else for

their fashionable fix and finding it on Instagram in a sort of fastest-finger-first game - through planned "drops" - made thrifting thrilling. Initially, these customers are the very demographic that pioneered the astronomical online media ascent of thrift shops - through hauls, Reels, and posts that had been consumed voraciously throughout recent months. Thrifting has been advancing because of influencers like Emma Chamberlain who routinely includes frugality hauls on her YouTube channel. (Theses et al., 2021) Because of the worldwide pandemic, the internet, and media have been our best way to remain social and associated with the remainder of the world. We start and end our day with Instagram, and in light of expanded utilization and commitment, it assembled the ascent of the Instagram market and business that began blasting in this period. Numerous web-based media makers advanced thrifting/roundabout/handed down fashion and various Instagram business pages sent off because of individuals tolerating handed down fashion broadly," The key is posting such aesthetic pictures that get the attention of the crowd.(Pencarelli et al., 2021)

Conclusion

Thrifting is a shifting trend that has been around for a lot of decades that has now grown in a unique kind of market. Social media acts as a catalyst for these online thrift stores and makes them nonpareil to the basic online thrift stores. There is room for customization, a unique collection, and a personalized experience for the buyer which sets these stores apart.

We see that a younger generation is more susceptible to thrift shopping, while the older community is not as inclined towards it. The predominant motive behind thrift shopping is the price factor. Although the sustainability factor is a close second. Thrifting promotes sustainability as it deals with the reusing and recycling of articles that salvage our environment. It also cuts down on the consumption of fast fashion brands which is one of its other advantages.

Thrifting is growing and spreading like a veil through the social media platforms reaching everybody, with its environment-friendly agenda and fashion-friendly aspects.

This is a trend that is here to stay as the younger community has more acceptance towards it. As we progress into an environmentally strained time, we need to make more conscious eco-friendly decisions that will lead to a sustainable life and thrifting is just one of these choices. Thrifting is a small ray of a responsible, conscious future that will keep revolutionizing over time.

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