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# Postmodern consumerism and sustainability shift in fashion trends: A shift in the secondhand fashion culture in urban youth community

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Fashion have given an overall view of how humans express themselves through styles and trends in various eras throughout history. In this contemporary era, thrifting has become one of the trends present in the community and discourse of young people as an alternative for a sustainable way of consuming of fashion. On the surface, the second-hand sales in the fashion industry is shifting as it forms a new paradigm for the definition of consumerism in the contemporary era. **Methods:** To understand the problem, this paper used qualitative methods through in-depth interviews and conceptual research. The informants for this study were limited to 19 to 21 year olds with different professions to determine consumption patterns and awareness of the fashion industry and sustainability. **Findings:** The findings indicate that style and identity have shifted the purpose of thrifting, transforming second-hand clothing into a fashion trend and a form of ethical consumption. Economic considerations, particularly price and affordability, remain dominant, while the sustainability value of second-hand clothing receives less attention. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, although thrifting promotes environmental awareness and reduces reliance on fast fashion, its sustainability impact remains limited due to the persistence of overconsumption, overproduction, and symbolic rather than substantive sustainable practices. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This article offers a novel reinterpretation of thrifting culture through Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumerism, revealing how digital-era fashion consumption transforms sustainability discourse into a symbolic performance of perpetual consumerism within contemporary cultural communication.

**KEYWORDS:** consumerism; fashion; identity; sustainability; thrifting; waste.

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## 1. Introduction

Fashion has always been political. It is a media for one to express their voice and identity in a society. Fashion is a product that will always be political because it is meant to express the voice, identity, color as an individual in a society. With fashion, one could represent their persona through the embodiment of garments. Hence, for some people, fashion is everything (Hendariningrum & Susilo, 2008). It can also be said that fashion is a manifestation of trends that represent throughout man's history and development of culture, politics, and social movements. Therefore, it is no longer surprising when fashion is raised as a relevant topic in various contemporary discourses and issues, because it will always intersect with all the trajectories of civilization.

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With the current population of 8 billion lives on earth, followed by a 0.85% growth rate per year, the world has to keep up with the people's needs for style (Worldometer, 2025). In the face of a denser population and ever-increasing demands, a clothing market has emerged called fast fashion. The term fast fashion was first introduced in the 90s in New York Times to depict Zara's ability to produce textile products in store within fifteen days from the design (Manalu & Zahra, 2023). Fast fashion itself is a term to describe the fashion practice that uses a low production cost with a huge retail result (Entwistle, 2000 in Palm, 2023). Fast fashion as a trend that peaked in this contemporary era has its benefits which could satisfy the people's needs of fashion. The rampant demand and need for fast fashion has led to fashion production practices that generate a lot of textile waste from public consumption.

According to a 2019 report by the House of Commons, the amount of fast fashion products consumed globally each year has reached about 60 million tons. As a result, the consumption of fashion products is a 4% contributor to the world's waste stream, which is an estimated 92 million tons per year (Kumar et al., 2020). What's more, the fashion industry contributed 2.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions. That's 4% of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions (Berg & Magnus, 2020). Through the following data, the research which the author conducted in 2020 in Bantar Gebang supports how the most dominant waste on the garbage mountain in Bekasi is textile waste, which is understood to be more difficult to compose. Over time, people have become increasingly aware of the wastefulness of the fashion industry. With that in mind, fast fashion has finally moved out of the spotlight and sustainable clothing has become the norm. This trend turnaround came about as the 2000s way of dressing became popular again and the fashion industry began to embrace the notion of thrifting. The word thrift itself means the careful use of money, especially by avoiding waste. Hence, the term thrifting in the fashion industry is a trend of buying and selling second-hand clothes by minimizing the selling prices.

Thrifting itself has now become popular in several markets in Jakarta, such as Pasar Senen, Pasar Baru, and Blok M Square. In addition to offline sales, thrifting can also usually be found on various social media platforms where sellers can use their personal accounts to promote their own used clothes promotions curated with their own style. Shopping apps or sites that only sell used and vintage goods such as Carousell and the huntstreet have also started to emerge and starting to get sales traffic from various levels of customers. Not only that, but bazaars and pop-up markets are also becoming more popular as they provide direct access to curated vintage clothing that is more on-trend (Syafa'ati & Khusyairi, 2024)

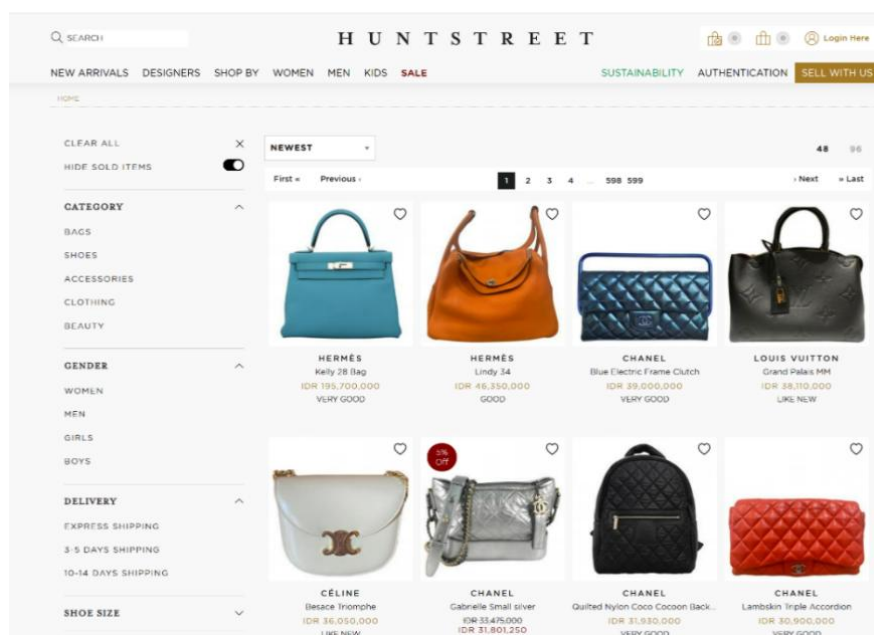


Fig. 1. The huntstreet, a website to sell your own used goods (<https://www.huntstreet.com/>)

As the trend shifted from fast-fashion to secondhand clothing, the question of fashion waste was raised again. The viability of environmental sustainability goals as one of the triggers of the thrifting trend surfaced as consumers began to forget the original essence of thrifting. The higher demand in the thrifting sphere leads to more secondhand clothing products, which in turn contributes to more unnecessary fashion waste. As reported by the Jakarta Globe (2023), imported secondhand clothing dived 277 percent from 8 tons in 2021 to 26 tons in 2022 (Jakarta Globe, 2023).

This study also bring up various sustainable perspectives understood in some countries that have a sizable industry in second-hand clothes such as Pakistan and United Arab Emirates to assess how different cultures in society perceive the thrifting trend. Based on OEC (2023), Pakistan is the number one country that imported second-hand clothing with a value of 335 million USD and is followed by the United Arab Emirates which imported a total of 237 million USD. This comparison was conducted as a form of novel research to understand the fundamental and diverse behaviours of countries with high demand and large markets in the thrifting industry. This comparison is drawn back to the reality of Jakarta as a metropolitan city that is characterised by its adherence to contemporary fashion trends.

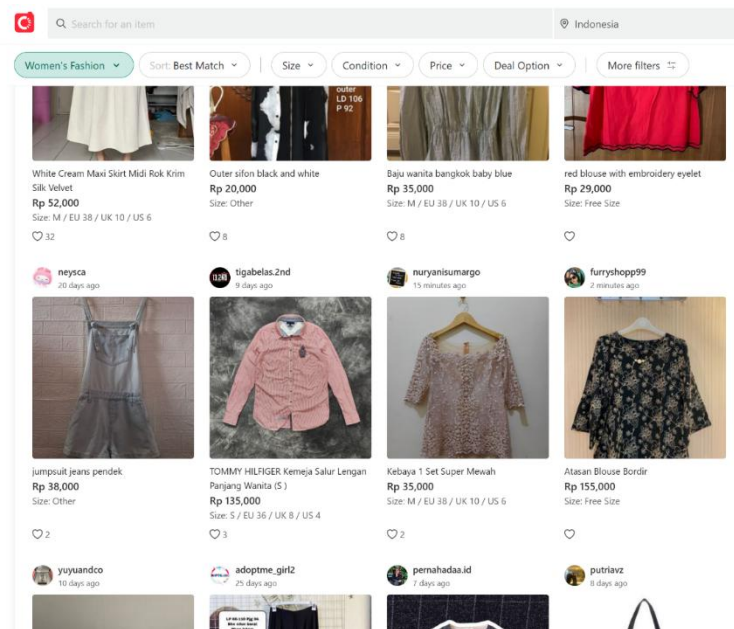


Fig. 2. Carousell, a website to sell your own used goods (<https://id.carousell.com/>)

Thus, this paper tries to raise the value in the paradigm shift of the thrifting trend through the symbolization of consumerism offered by Jean Baudrillard. With the perspective offered by Baudrillard, this paper seeks to dismantle the meaning of consumerism through the symbols and culture that now surround second-hand fashion. Through Baudrillard's perspective, the breakdown of symbolization can be seen through how the shift in the meaning of sustainability and the reuse of second hand clothing can dismantle greenwashing efforts and the cycle of overconsumption inherent in the fashion industry.

This study then expands on previous studies related to the behavior and culture of consumerism among young people by drawing on the context of symbols and their underlying meanings. The moral obligations and responsibilities associated with consumption are understood to be contingent on individual perceptions and the prevailing norms of social structures when interpreting the phenomenon of consumerism within a given society (Ruiz-Navarro et al., 2021). However, the issue becomes more complex when there is a shift in the objective of assessing consumerism behaviour in this contemporary era. By understanding the symbols attached to thrifting activities, the problems of

consumerism experienced by the thrifting trend can be brought to light, thus prompting critical reflections on the consumption of clothing and the management of fashion waste in the contemporary era.

## 2. Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach to understand the shifting paradigms related to the fast fashion phenomenon and thrifting culture in the fashion industry. This research will be using two types of data sources, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data used comes from the findings of in-depth interviews. In-depth interview is a qualitative method that is used without the use of pre-determined questions so that the informants can share their experiences of the phenomenon under study in a more in-depth and comprehensive manner (Given, 2008). The selection of informants was conducted using the snowball sampling method. The informants will include 7 women and men with the age range of 19 to 21 years old who have consumed fashion in the fast fashion category and second-hand clothes in the last five years. The number of informants was constrained on the basis of data saturation and the researcher's time limitations. During the interview process, the study direct questions to the variables raised in this research, such as shopping frequency, where to buy clothes, reasons for fashion shopping in a particular place or media used, and awareness of the issues raised in this research.

In this research, the informants used as the primary data sources are from different professions and backgrounds to find patterns of young people's multiple understandings of identity and sustainability in the fashion industry. The diversity in age, background and profession of individuals is known to reflect personal lifestyles and clothing choices (Hao, 2023). Primary data obtained from in-depth interviews will be interpreted and processed to understand young people's consumption patterns and their understanding and awareness of sustainability in the fashion industry from the perspective of post-modern consumerism. The results and descriptions of the informants used as primary data in this research are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Informants description

No	Occupations	Data Source	Informant Amount
1	Social Media Manager	Primary	1
2	Fashion Producer	Primary	2
3	Student	Primary	1
4	Librarian	Primary	1
5	Private employee	Primary	1
6	Accountant	Primary	1
Total			7

The information obtained through these in-depth interviews will then be supported by various secondary data sources, such as fashion annual reports, related journals, news, and various online shopping thrifting websites and media in Indonesia. This next method is also referred to as conceptual research. Conceptual research is a method used to understand an empirical phenomenon in order to develop a new approach or theory (Heinonen & Gruen, 2024). In conceptual research is further divided into four types, which are informed frame working, creative synthesis, innovative structuring, and freeform conceptualizing. This research will then use a creative synthesis approach that seeks to combine various disciplines so as to create new theoretical developments on an empirical phenomenon.

Through the creative synthesis approach, the phenomenon of the shifting definition in fashion trends can be seen through two lenses, namely in terms of sustainability and consumers behaviour. Through a creative synthesis approach, this study adopts a deconstruction method to analyze the contradictory realities surrounding the second-hand fashion industry and its sustainability goals. The deconstruction method has been shown to

facilitate understanding of the way in which meaning is never fully explicit, but rather embedded in the dominant system (Aguilar, 2025).

This study did not set a time limit on selecting the secondary sources used in this research, because tried to focus more on the substance and also reports that could enrich this research further more. Therefore, the secondary data sources that did not include the same substance as the purpose of this research were excluded. Then, the results of the secondary data processing analysed expected to provide recommendations on the issues raised in this research through the creative synthesis approach that has been carried out. Thus this research was developed using the following conceptual framework in Figure 3.

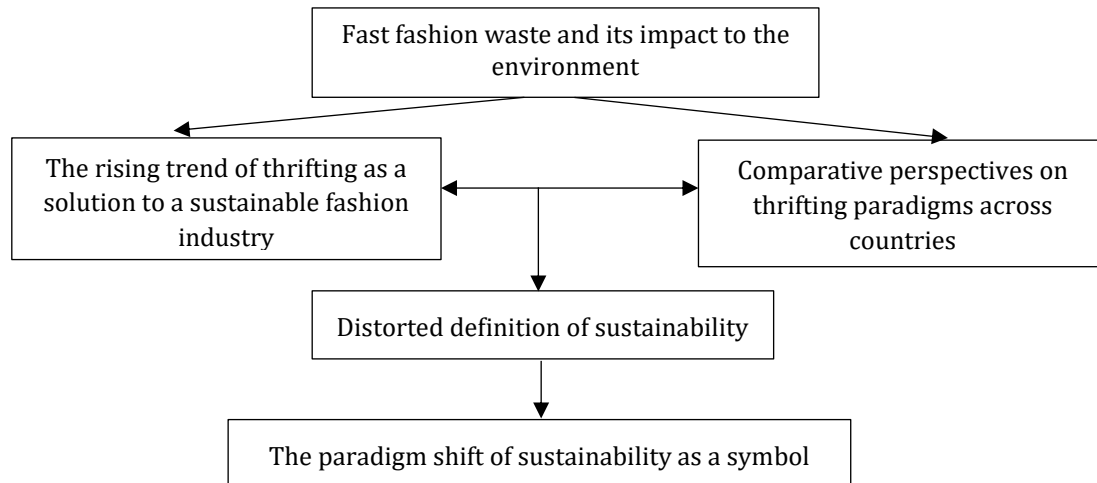


Fig. 3. Conceptual framework

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Interview result

Based on the in-depth interviews, each of the informants gave quite diverse answers. First of all, each informant has their own habits in consuming fashion in their daily lives. In this study, the fashion consumption of the informants within the last 1 month. According to the question about the frequency of buying clothes, four informants said that they did not buy clothes at all in a month. Meanwhile, the other three gave the same answer that they bought clothes once every two weeks. The conversation about fashion and identity continued throughout the interview. Most of the informants agreed that fashion largely represents an individual's identity. In contrast, two of the seven informants stated that the clothes one wears do not determine an individual's identity because clothes are only one of the aspects of self-expression.

*"Perhaps, yes. Clothes can define an individual's identity to a large extent." (Participant 1)*

The subsequent inquiry in the interview delved into the role of online marketplaces and physical stores in the purchase of clothing. Four informants mentioned Carousell several times as an answer. As mentioned in the introduction, Carousell is increasingly recognized as a platform for buying and selling second hand goods, especially among young people who need affordable clothing. In light of the responses provided by five informants, it can be concluded that the acquisition of clothing through online platforms is a more expeditious and effective process, obviating the necessity of physical store visits. It was concluded from the results of the interviews related to the place of purchase used by the seven informants that thrifting is often done by more than half of the informants.

*"I usually buy new clothes from Carousell, Shopee, Instagram, but almost always at thrift stores or second-hand clothing markets like Pasar baru." (Participant 4)*

The second-hand clothes purchased by the informants were not only purchased through the Carousell website, but also bought directly in stores. Out of the seven informants interviewed in this paper, four mentioned places such as local markets or bazaars where thrifting takes place. These places include Blok M Square, Pasar Baru, Pasar Senen, and Mall Cijantung, while the local bazaars mentioned are slowmovebazaar and savealotmarket. While more than half of the informants shop for thrift items both online and in person, three others mentioned using the Shopee app to purchase new clothing. In addition, the fast fashion outlet Uniqlo was mentioned by one informant. So was purchasing clothes specifically from tailors. The interview indicated that thrifting is a widely available activity that can be accessed through various channels and mediums.

*"... I buy second hand clothes because they are second-hand." (Participant 3)*

*"... I usually custom-made my outfits at a tailor because I can get the uniqueness of the textile and the shape that fits exactly to my body." (Participant 5)*

The interview continued with questions about the sustainability awareness that thrifting is trying to raise as a solution to the problem of fast fashion waste. The practice of consuming second-hand garments, which is becoming increasingly prevalent and expanding rapidly among young individuals, is believed to be directly proportional to the rise in environmental consciousness and shifts in attitudes regarding sustainability. However, all of the informants agreed that awareness of sustainability in thrifting remains only at the most superficial level. Two informants agreed that awareness about fast fashion waste has been raised, but they both considered that it has not reached all levels of society. Another informant, who has a background in social media management, stated that the information circulating about waste from fast fashion is presented in such a limited way that there is no real movement to support environmental sustainability. According to this informant, no movement directly addressed the textile industry's growing waste problem.

*"The reality is that thrifting is currently contributing to the waste of new clothes because the second-hand clothing industry in Indonesia is not moving towards sustainability, thus creating a new waste cycle." (Participant 3)*

*"Thrifting can be one solution indeed, especially since most thrifting clothing in Indonesia are meant to fill landfills, so thrifting extends the lifespan of these clothes but thrifting does not solve the overproduction and overconsumption," (Participant 4)*

*"The thrifting phenomenon can be a solution to clothing waste, which is a positive thing. However, the thrifting phenomenon in Indonesia has evolved beyond just selling used clothing. Nowadays, it has turned into a place to sell cheap clothes, some of which come from fast fashion too." (Participant 6)*

*"It's a dilemma. The purchase of second-hand clothes is common, but thrift stores often offer low quality fast fashion items. Clothes that don't sell also end up as an additional waste." (Participant 7)*

Through the interview, the seven informants with different backgrounds, concludes that thrifting has become a trend that is still ongoing among young people. With thrifting becoming a trend, sellers also understand the increasing market demand for second-hand clothes so that the accessibility and reach of second-hand clothes become easier and more popular. This study also draws the conclusion that young people have realized the urgency related to the growing fast fashion waste, so in general, thrifting is considered to be one of the alternatives in tackling the textile waste that has been accumulated through years. However, for the young people, the awareness of the fast fashion waste crisis has not been matched by enough calls for the whole society to actually act on the issue. Broadly speaking,

the seven informants with different backgrounds have similar understanding, awareness and behaviour in dealing with the problem of textile waste from the fast fashion industry.

### *3.2 Reality as a simulation*

This discussion adopts Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality as a theoretical foundation to interpret contemporary shifts in societal mindsets and behaviours surrounding the rise of the thrifting trend. According to Baudrillard (1998), people do not live on the basis of interactions with other people, but with the basis of the object surrounding them. Humans as subjects try as hard as possible to provide definitions and explanations related to the objects around them, but they themselves fail to find the true meaning of the object because objects can only be understood through interactions with other objects (Wolny, 2017). Thus, human beings are compared to being unable to understand the true meaning of the reality they are facing, and as a result of this situation, human beings end up living deceived by their own understanding of reality. This is what Jean Baudrillard calls the hyperreality of the human experience.

As humans seek to understand something that is beyond their ability, objects are then formed based on the laws of exchange and value (Baudrillard, 2016). This perspective steers Baudrillard's thinking towards the reality that everything has a measurable value, including happiness. Happiness, which should be judged as something abstract, translates to human satisfaction in acquiring objects and/or enjoying the bonds contained in these objects. Hence, Baudrillard mentions that humans are now living in a reality that respire as much as a simulation. The true reality is dead because man prefers to consume the pseudo, which is made up of the relation of signs, symbols, and images. Diverging from this theory, Baudrillard believes that a society living in a simulation marks the emergence of the era of postmodernism (Bakti et al., 2019).

### *3.3 Thrifting and postmodern consumerism*

The thrifting trend as a new approach to face the problem against fast fashion waste is then applied to Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality. The industry of second-hand fashion has marketed and promoted an ethical choice of consumption. The concept of sustainable consumer adaptation encompasses a range of principles, including the translation of intentions into tangible actions, the assurance of the sustainability of behaviour patterns, and the capacity to mitigate environmental impacts that have not yet materialised and those that have already occurred (Akbar et al., 2025). The second-hand industry is considered to have practiced the principles of sustainability and circular economy because it supports the use of clothing that can be used for a long time and is durable (Dissanayake & Weerasinghe, 2021). Therefore, thrifting is considered to be able to end the cycle of high consumerism because it is efficient in terms of resources and reuses products that are difficult to decompose.

However, in reality, the role of technology and online media in the postmodern era continues to support more convenient clothing sales. This statement is supported by sources who prefer to shop for clothes online because of its effectiveness. Hence, thrifting in the postmodern era is also increasingly popular due to its ease of access, so the sustainability of the thrifting industry needs to be reexamined.

Second-hand outfits are then presented in postmodern consumerism in which the objects consumed are defined with a sign value rather than its utility to fulfil the primary needs of humans through textile and garments (Kellner, 2019). This standpoint comes from Baudrillard (1998), where the desire for a specific good for purposes of consumption leads to the desire of its own utility. With such a point of view in the society, especially in the youth communities, it will not be uncommon if the term "I consume, therefore I am" dominates the colour of one's identity in the era of postmodern consumerism. As the second hand fashion industry shifted into a trend rather than an approach for circling sustainability in human life, the demands of the people arose along with its productions and new ways to

cooperate with ethical buying. The second-hand fashion industry model relies on consumers as its main players, so consumer awareness and behavior are the primary drivers of consumption patterns in the thrifting industry (Matusovicova, 2020).

One of the direct impacts upon this consumptive behaviour on the thrifting trend leads to another issue which ended up with a hasty solution from the government. Not only the rising consumption affects the never ending fashion waste, but also contributes negatively towards the local industry. In 2023, the government destroyed 82 bales of imported used clothing, resulting in another pointless waste in the fashion industry which is stated in Figure 4.



Fig. 4. Bales of second hand clothes that are confiscated by Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia (Risquallah, 2023)

The thrifting era as a trend is the emergence of a new era in fashion that hides systematic problems such as layers of overproduction, gentrification, and labour exploitation. In this context, the high demand for secondhand clothing has created a new pattern among manufacturers, distributors, and consumers. Manufacturers of new clothing, who still have to compete in the fashion market, must use a new approach, namely by producing types and designs of clothing that follow the style of secondhand clothing from the 2000s (Yang, 2023). In the fast fashion industry, clothes with styles similar to those sold secondhand compete with clothes that are actually sold second-hand. The difference lies in the price of production which has an infinite range. Thrift clothes with more luxurious brands are sold at high prices, removing the essence of the purpose in buying and selling second-hand clothes for their use. This relates back to the essence of fashion as an object that is consumed in its symbolic stage and not as an end in itself.

There is an adaptation made by fashion enthusiasts to incorporate the thrifting trend as well as to gain more profit in this situation, which is the nickname of curated thrift stores. Usually, these stores are associated with social media influencers as a way to share the same style while helping the environment through the purchase of second-hand clothes. The clothes sold have a higher price compared to used clothes sold in markets or stores directly because they are considered to have been selected with the pretext of being as good as possible in accordance with fashion trends that are being favoured by young people. This phenomenon then gives room to a shift in the meaning of thrifting mixed between ethical and sustainable choices in dressing wisely, but also fulfilling the false satisfaction of clothing as an object of consumption.

Stores that sell second-hand clothes through the use of labels that are more curated and selected according to the aesthetics of the current trend then provide a newer and unique experience. In this context, especially, people will spend as much as possible to enjoy the experience of shopping for clothes that are considered more authentic than the kind often found in market outlets. This is especially true of young people (Bernhard & Rosato, 2018).

This creates a paradox within consumerism itself. Thrifting is initially a solution to consumerism, which has many effects, especially on the environment through waste. This has given rise to a paradox in the thrifting industry that can be referred to as "anti-consumerist consumerism." This paradox of anti-consumer consumerism is an extension of the fashion industry that encourages the consumption of new products to replace old ones (Kozlowski et al., 2012). In this sense, thrifting follows the same pattern of consumerism, purchasing used clothes is a way to embody the idea that 'old is the new new'.

The experience provided through buying and selling second-hand clothes, especially in curated clothing stores, presents a novelty and authenticity in obtaining second-hand clothes (Figure 5). With expensive brands and unique clothes that are not offered in regular markets, buyers can justify their purchases because thrifting departs from the ethical choice of consuming clothes as one of the primary needs required by humans. The commodification carried out by these stores then obscures the buyers' understanding that clothes as consumed objects are no longer viewed according to their functionality but on symbols that are considered to have more meaning. From a buyer's perspective, ownership of a piece of clothing becomes the only way to obtain its value (Steward, 2020). The ownership of an item then becomes a continuous accumulation, because it puts individuals in a position of comfort, giving rise to a tendency to consume more clothing in order to create their individuality (Ma et al., 2012).

Meanings and symbols that shift the importance and usefulness of an object, give a false image to an object. Buyers will be immersed in hyperreality with the happiness embedded in the objects they consume. However, this happiness is an illusion that will eventually blur the buyer's perspective on the consumption activities they experience. When buyers prioritize experience, the sense of satisfaction will not be fulfilled permanently, so buyers will continue to consume clothes until they reach satisfaction (Todd, 2012). In this context, the experience of ethical responsibility and the experience of consuming clothes that emphasize individuality and uniqueness create an endless cycle of consumerism

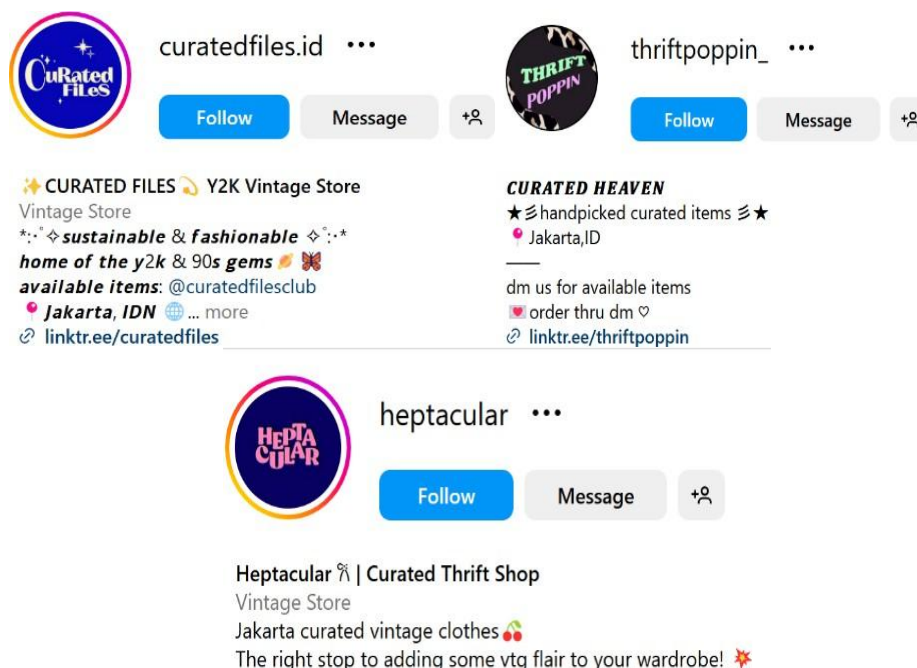


Fig. 5. Curated and handpicked local thrifting stores in instagram

The practice of buying second-hand clothes has an ethical justification that can be traced back to supply and demand issues in the second-hand clothing industry. As a tendency, the rise in purchaser interest in thrifting can also lead to consequences such as workforce exploitation and disrupt underlying problems in the apparel sector. For example, workers at second-hand clothing stores are often paid very low wages for their workload (Palella, 2021;

Schechter et al., 2013). For this reason, the discourse on the second-hand clothing industry still has many problems, especially in the context of economic sustainability, which is promoted as the main factor in the emergence of this industry.

### *3.4 Comparing perspectives on thrifting paradigm across countries*

The informants demonstrated a relatively consistent awareness and understanding of the second-hand clothing industry and the sustainability issues associated with it, which require further promotion within the thrifting sector. The following discussion offers an additional perspective on the thrifting trend among young people by examining two other countries with high turnover rates of second-hand clothing. For comparative purposes, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates are used alongside Indonesia.

#### *3.4.1 Public perceptions of fashion and sustainability in the United Arab Emirates*

The study that is done by Munir in the UAE entitled *Eco-fashion adoption in the UAE: Understanding Consumer Barriers and Motivational Factors* raised considerations and multiple perceptions of the informants regarding the second-hand clothing industry (Munir, 2020). In this study, Munir found that there was a low understanding of the participants regarding the impact of clothing waste on the environment. Only one-third of the participants were aware of the impact of fashion on environmental sustainability. Participants who possess a more profound comprehension and consciousness of the correlation between waste and fashion contend that knowledge and information pertaining to this matter stands as one of the most impactful considerations employed when procuring second-hand and unused attire. Conversely, two-thirds of the participants were not very confident in their ability to choose clothes that are environmentally friendly or contribute to the sustainability of the fashion industry.

In this study, all participants agreed that purchasing clothes through thrifting has one important component that cannot be overlooked, which is the cleanliness and origin of the source from which the used clothes were taken. This is an important consideration because the prices of clothes in the free market in the UAE tend to be cheaper and more affordable to the public, so second-hand clothes on the market have the disadvantage of having the connotation of clothes that have been used and are not new when compared to clothes produced in the fast fashion industry.

A third consideration is the style of the clothing being marketed, which is also important in promoting awareness and understanding of fashion and sustainability in the UAE. According to one participant, it is important to have unique and good styles in second-hand clothes so that people will prefer to buy clothes responsibly because the clothes being sold have a style that is in line with the market and can represent their style of dressing. In practice, this study found that only three out of twenty participants had purchased second-hand clothing while in college or high school. The community's concerns and considerations regarding second-hand clothes sold in the UAE are reflected in their actions. People's awareness of and knowledge about sustainability issues in fashion directly influence their actions and behaviours regarding the issue.

#### *3.4.2 Public perceptions of fashion and sustainability in Pakistan*

Kamran et al. (2024) conducted a study involving participants aged 19 to 23 to examine the thrifting trend among young adults in Pakistani society. All participants in the study argued that the price and quality of used clothing were the most important considerations in thrift shopping. Young people in Pakistan believe that thrifting is more than just buying and selling clothes; it's an experience that sets an individual's clothing consumption apart from others'. This experience has evolved into a more sophisticated medium that can be efficiently and quickly experienced through second-hand clothing stores on social media. The majority of participants agreed that online forms of thrifting are a driving factor in the

paradigm shift in the practice of buying and selling second-hand clothes. This is related to the young people's need for aesthetics that can only be obtained through the type and look of certain clothes. Second-hand clothing stores in online media can provide and fulfil the needs of the community in this context because from the beginning they have used a store identity that emphasizes style curation. The research then concludes that there is no influence and interest in the direction of sustainability in online thrifting stores because these stores maximize and focus more on the profitability of their products than on their ethical responsibility to the environment. Thus, this study concludes that money and cost, from both the buyer's and seller's perspective, play an important role in the thrifting buying and selling process. As an important contributor to thrifting, cost impacts the growth of an industry that departs from the principle of sustainability, raising the issue of waste from fast fashion production.

### *3.5 Damaged sustainability*

Sustainability is an important factor in shaping people's perspectives on the fashion industry. These perspectives, along with producers intentions and the state of the industry as a whole influences the ethical choices of the global community regarding clothing as a primary human necessity (Mandarić et al., 2021). In the fashion industry, sustainability is the principle of balancing human needs with the capacity of the earth's natural resources. Yet, the reality of the fashion industry shows that sustainability is not fully implemented. For example, the informants agreed that despite their awareness of sustainability in fashion consumption, ultimately the secondhand fashion business did not implement the objectives that had been set from the outset.

Thrifting, which is presented as a trend within the spectrum of sustainability, ends up contradicting the very purpose for which it was created. In thrifting activities, sustainability is no longer the most important principle in sustaining the trend but thrifting activities themselves have damaged the definition and meaning of sustainability. The motivations and intentions of consumers and producers are contradictory. The majority of consumers expressed the belief that fashion serves as an expression of their identity. This perspective is further substantiated by the predominance of style as the top consideration within the fashion landscape. Furthermore, among young people who continue to assert their identity and status, the consumption of clothing has emerged as a means of fulfilling this need (Jamil, 2024).

Beside style curation, economics plays a role in the fashion consumerism industry from the perspectives of both consumers and producers. Consumers have the intention to get clothes at a cheaper price, while producers have the intention to continue to rotate the economic market they have created. This difference of intentions forms a clash between agents and actors who play a huge role in the fashion industry so that the principle of sustainability cannot be applied perfectly. The perspectives, expectations, and implementation of the principle of sustainability are understood differently according to the interests of each agent who plays a role according to their respective interests and goals (Argento et al., 2022).

The shifting definitions of sustainability have resulted in the expected impact on the environment being dominated by human interests in economics, costs, and production prices. The economic interests involved in fashion form an attitude that overrides the ethical responsibility of the industry (Theodoro & Leonardos, 2021). The paradox in sustainability comes from the high expectation of striking a balance between environmental protection and economic development (Wirjawan, 2024). Thrifting is the sale of second-hand clothes to fulfil the ethical requirement of sustainability without actually implementing true sustainable practices. Thus, sustainability in thrifting today is merely a self-referential concept.

The notion of sustainability within the context of thrifting is employed as a strategic capitalist justification without genuinely addressing actual environmental developments (Lin et al., 2024). Furthermore, the pseudo-sustainability celebrated in the thrifting industry

constitutes a form of greenwashing, wherein producers attach sustainability labels to clothing while neglecting other critical components that contribute to environmental degradation, such as social aspects, community behavior, and workers' welfare, all of which warrant further discussion (Dahl, 2010). Consequently, the sustainability represented through secondhand clothing constructs a false sense of environmental responsibility.

The curation and marketing of thrifting as a trend has replaced genuine sustainability. The narrative of genuine sustainability is replaced with the narrative of unsustainable sustainability or a damaged sustainability. This establishes a contradictory cycle because sustainability as a symbol is likened to a simulation that conceals humans in the actual reality, which is the meaning of authentic sustainability. In the context of reality and simulation by Baudrillard, this phenomenon translates into the practice of real sustainability as a genuine substance that is dominated by symbolic signs in gestures of false sustainability alone. This statement is contributed by the motivation used by consumers in consuming fashion, namely fashion as an object that can represent their identity and style of individuals and also the financial capabilities possessed by individuals. The blurred distinction between sign and signifier in the value of sustainability in thrifting as a trend can then be interpreted as one of the new greenwashing efforts in the fashion industry today (Panju, 2024).

The value shift and the replacement of the substantial value of sustainability in the thrifting industry then perpetuates the never-ending cycle of consumption. Thrifting as an alternative to minimize the amount of consumption falls into the system of capitalism and consumerism again. The symbolization of used clothing as a representation of the value of sustainability in the fashion industry then justifies consumers in continuing to buy these clothes as products.

Thrifting, which was initially introduced under the premise of sustainability, has subsequently shaped new consumer behaviors and perspectives. However, as the application of sustainability within this industry has become compromised, the resulting awareness and behaviors are shaped by the particular definition of sustainability promoted by the thrifting sector. In this regard, the perceived sustainability value not only obscures consumers' understanding but also generates moral ambiguity within consumerism (Feghali et al., 2025). Interviews conducted for this study reveal that consumers experience confusion, as thrifting is not perceived as genuinely implementing a full sustainability cycle. This perception encourages some consumers to continue purchasing fast fashion. Conversely, consumers who believe that thrifting offers a solution to fast fashion still engage in the consumption of continuously supplied secondhand clothing. Consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward thrifting are thus the product of sustainability claims that are implemented without direct accountability for environmental degradation, particularly since thrifting, in reality, does not provide a sufficiently positive contribution to environmental or public health.

Fashion as an industry then tries to create a new form of consumerism that is anti-consumerism by inviting consumers to continue purchasing clothes ethically by promoting the principle of false sustainability. After all, both thrifting and fast fashion still consume clothing products. The difference lies only in the value of sustainability embedded as a symbol in both industries. However, with growing consumer demand and manufacturers' desire to meet market needs, this has created a sustainability that has failed to be implemented in reality. Not only consumers, but also all agents and drivers of activity in the thrifting industry are back to the simulation stage.

The false sign of sustainability and clothes as a product that represent nothing but a mere sign result to a consuming behaviour that will never be satisfied with their purchases. Thrifting as an alternative to the fast fashion industry and waste contradicts the values and practices of sustainability that should be promoted and implemented for the sake of the environment conditions. This is because it follows trends in clothing styles that are in demand by the public taste, the efficiency of buying and selling clothes, and prices that are competitive with other clothing products. Consequently, the principles and awareness of

sustainability can no longer be regarded as a solution to environmental issues related to textiles and clothing (Paço, 2020).

#### **4. Conclusions**

The practice of thrifting as an alternative to address the environmental problems of the fashion waste in the fast fashion industry has been increasingly recognized and adopted by the society, particularly among young people. Young people's awareness of waste and its negative environmental impact has caused thrifting activities to develop and expand rapidly. The widespread availability of information about thrifting on social media, websites, and in offline stores makes it easier for young people to be engaged and participate. Nonetheless, in actuality, the sustainable worth that is anticipated to be achieved through the practice of thrifting has yet to be completely executed since it does not genuinely uphold the tenets of sustainability that have a tangible effect on the environment as a whole. This is implied in Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, where sustainability is considered a false representation of the true purpose and meaning of an object, namely the used clothing itself. In the context of contemporary youth consumerism in the fashion industry, the secondhand clothing market is experiencing challenges in meeting demand, primarily due to the ongoing trends of overconsumption and overproduction.

Overconsumption and overproduction are two factors that persist around thrifting as a trend in this era. Although thrifting rejects fast fashion, it can only be said to be successful in terms of awareness and understanding. In practice, however, thrifting perpetuates the cycle of consumerism because sustainability is only understood as a symbol and not the ultimate goal of the action. It is important to understand the difficulty of tackling an industrial system that is still intertwined with consumerism. Additionally, there are many other issues, such as labour welfare, that need to be addressed in the fashion industry. The carbon footprint of clothing production, distribution, and management is not yet addressed by solutions offered by second-hand clothing sales. It is imperative that a more substantial follow-up be implemented to address the challenges that arise in the fashion industry and its supply chain. This approach will ensure the genuine and comprehensive implementation of the principle of sustainability, moving beyond its mere symbolism.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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