

Study of Gen Z Customer Behaviour for Online Thrift Stores with Reference to City of Mumbai

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Abstract

In recent years, the fashion industry has been increasingly influenced by concerns related to environmental sustainability, particularly the negative impacts associated with fast fashion such as excessive waste generation, resource depletion, and environmental pollution. These issues have encouraged a shift in consumer behavior toward more sustainable alternatives, with thrift shopping emerging as a notable option. Online thrift platforms enable the resale of pre-owned clothing and accessories at affordable prices, contributing to a circular fashion system by extending product usage and reducing textile waste. The growth of digital technologies and social media has further supported the expansion and visibility of such platforms, making thrift shopping more accessible to a wider audience. This study examines Generation Z consumers in Mumbai, a group characterized by strong digital engagement, exposure to social media trends, and increasing environmental awareness. It aims to explore their motivations, purchasing behavior, and preferences regarding online thrift shopping. The influence of affordability, sustainability consciousness, and digital convenience is also considered. Findings indicate that young consumers are increasingly adopting online thrift platforms due to their cost advantages, distinctive fashion choices, and alignment with environmentally responsible consumption values. The research highlights how digital accessibility combined with ecological awareness is shaping modern fashion purchasing patterns. Overall, this study provides insight into the evolving behavior of urban Gen Z consumers and offers implications for businesses operating in the sustainable and second-hand fashion sector.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability, Generation Z, Thrift stores, Consumer Behaviour.

Introduction

The fashion industry has undergone a significant transformation due to growing concerns about environmental sustainability and ethical consumption. Traditional fast fashion has been widely criticized for promoting excessive consumption, generating textile waste, and contributing to environmental degradation. In response, consumers are increasingly adopting alternative and sustainable forms of fashion consumption, among which thrift shopping has emerged as a popular choice.

Online thrift stores provide digital platforms where pre-owned clothing, accessories, and other fashion products are resold at affordable prices. These platforms extend the life cycle of garments, reduce textile waste, and encourage sustainable consumption. The rapid growth of e-commerce and social media has further increased the popularity of online thrift shopping, particularly among younger consumers.

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a major segment of online shoppers. Having grown up in a digital environment, this generation is strongly influenced by social media, technological advancements, and environmental awareness. Many Gen Z consumers are attracted to online thrift stores because they offer affordable fashion, unique styles, and an opportunity to make socially responsible purchasing decisions.

In metropolitan cities such as Mumbai, where fashion trends evolve rapidly and online shopping is widely accepted, online thrift stores have gained considerable popularity. Understanding the motivations, preferences, and purchasing behaviour of Gen Z consumers in this market is essential for businesses operating in the sustainable fashion sector. This study therefore examines the factors influencing Gen Z consumers' use of online thrift stores in Mumbai, with special emphasis on affordability, social media influence, sustainability awareness, and buying behaviour.

Thrifting refers to the purchase of second-hand products, particularly clothing and accessories, as an alternative to buying new items. It offers several benefits, including affordability, access to unique products, reduced waste generation, and support for sustainable consumption. Online thrift stores enhance these benefits by providing convenience, wider product selection, and easy access through digital platforms.

The concept of thrifting is closely linked to sustainable fashion, which emphasizes environmentally responsible production, ethical labour practices, and long-lasting product use. Sustainable fashion seeks to minimize environmental impact by reducing resource consumption, lowering carbon emissions, and encouraging the reuse and recycling of materials. As the fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to pollution and waste, sustainable practices have become increasingly important for protecting natural resources and promoting social responsibility.

A key aspect of sustainable fashion is the circular fashion economy, which replaces the traditional "take-make-dispose" model with a system based on reuse, repair, recycling, and regeneration. Circular fashion aims to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible, thereby reducing waste and maximizing resource efficiency. Consumer participation plays a crucial role in this system, as responsible purchasing, reuse, and disposal behaviours contribute significantly to achieving sustainability goals. Consequently, online thrift shopping represents an important step toward creating a more sustainable and circular fashion industry.

Need of Study

The growing popularity of online thrift stores has created a need to understand consumer behaviour, particularly among Generation Z, who are major online shoppers and trendsetters. Despite the rise of thrift shopping, limited research has examined the motivations and preferences of Gen Z consumers toward online thrift stores in Mumbai.

Increasing environmental awareness and the demand for sustainable fashion have encouraged consumers to choose second-hand products. Online thrift stores offer affordable, unique, and eco-friendly fashion options while reducing textile waste. Digital platforms and social media have further enhanced their accessibility and popularity among young consumers.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing Gen Z consumers' adoption of online thrift stores and their perceptions of sustainable fashion in Mumbai.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of awareness of online thrift stores among Generation Z consumers in Mumbai.
- To identify the key factors influencing purchasing behaviour in online thrift stores.
- To examine the role of affordability and discounts in shaping thrift shopping decisions.
- To analyze the impact of social media on the adoption of online thrift shopping among Gen Z consumers.
- To evaluate the extent of sustainability awareness among Generation Z consumers.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the online thrift shopping behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Mumbai. It examines the influence of factors such as affordability, sustainability awareness, social media, and purchasing preferences on their buying decisions. The research is based on data collected through a

Google Forms survey and aims to provide insights into the growing acceptance of online thrift stores as a sustainable fashion alternative among young consumers.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to Generation Z consumers in Mumbai and does not include other age groups or geographical regions. The findings are based on responses collected through an online questionnaire, which may be influenced by personal opinions, response bias, and the respondents' understanding of the questions. Therefore, the results may not fully represent the behaviour of all consumers engaged in online thrift shopping.

Profile of the Study Area- Mumbai

Mumbai, the financial capital of India, is a major hub for fashion and consumer culture with a large Generation Z population that is highly active online. Due to a fast-paced lifestyle, high living costs, and strong digital connectivity, young consumers increasingly prefer online shopping, including thrift stores that offer affordable, unique, and sustainable fashion options. Social media and growing environmental awareness have further boosted the popularity of thrift shopping in the city. These factors make Mumbai an important location for studying Gen Z behaviour toward online thrift stores.

Selection of the Problem

The explosive growth of online thrift stores, alongside Generation Z's accelerating interest in sustainable fashion, creates an urgent need to investigate their distinct shopping behaviours. While India's resale market is expanding rapidly, current market research lacks geographic specificity. Consequently, a significant data gap exists regarding Gen Z consumers in Mumbai—a metropolitan hub combining high digital penetration with a trend-setting youth culture. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the consumption patterns, drivers, and barriers of Mumbai's youth within the digital circular economy.

Significance of the Study

- Online thrift businesses understand Gen Z preferences
- Marketers design better pricing and promotional strategies
- Promote awareness of sustainable fashion
- Provide insights for future researchers
- Understand the growth potential of digital thrift markets

Sources of Data

Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire using **Google Forms**. Responses were obtained directly from Gen Z consumers.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from Research journals, Industry reports, Articles on sustainable fashion, Online publications and websites.

Sampling Method

This research used Convenience Sampling, where respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate.

Sample Size

The total sample size of the study was 133 respondents. All the respondents belong to the Generation Z age group and are familiar with online shopping platforms.

Data Collection and Interpretations:

Age Group of the Respondents

Age Group	Values	%
16-18	7	5.26%
19-21	54	40.60%
22-24	9	6.77%
25-27	63	47.37%

Analysis

The majority of respondents belong to the 25-27 age group, indicating that this age group which is working and settled in their incomes are the highest numbers to shop from online thrift sites.

Gender

Gender	Values	%
Male	52	39.10%
Female	80	60.15%
Prefer not to say	1	0.75%

Analysis

The majority of respondents belong to the female(60%), indicating that this category of people are majority of buyers in online thrift stores

Which Online Thrift Stores have you used to buy?

Online Thrift Store used	Values	%
Amazon	1	0.75%
Garage Sale Group	1	0.75%
Thrift Rise	4	3.01%
The Thrift Kart	17	12.78%
Texas Mart	1	0.75%
Society group	1	0.75%
So Delhi	4	3.01%
Rewago india	5	3.76%
Olx, Flipkart, Amazon	1	0.75%
Olx India	18	13.53%
Offline	1	0.75%
Jiomarket	1	0.75%
Knott Store	19	14.29%
Insta Thriftstore	1	0.75%
Mythrift Kart	9	6.77%
Not Bought	49	36.84%

Interpretation

The findings suggest that online thrift shopping is still an emerging trend among Gen Z consumers in Mumbai, with more than one-third yet to engage in thrift purchases. However, the presence of several specialized thrift platforms with noticeable usage indicates growing market potential.

Consumers appear to prefer dedicated thrift brands and curated Instagram stores over general e-commerce platforms, likely due to better product curation, pricing, and fashion relevance.

The data also highlights an opportunity for thrift businesses to increase awareness, improve trust, and attract first-time buyers through marketing and promotional strategies.

What do you majorly buy from Thrift Stores?

Items Bought	Values	%
Accessories	23	17.29%
Books	26	19.55%
Clothes	45	33.83%
Furnitures	1	0.75%
Shoes	6	4.51%
Home decor	15	11.28%
Nothing	16	12.03%
Not used yet	1	0.75%

The findings indicate that online thrift stores are primarily perceived as a source for fashion-related products, especially clothing. This suggests that Gen Z consumers associate thrifting mainly with affordable and trendy apparel rather than heavy or long-term utility products like furniture.

The relatively high purchase of books and accessories highlights that thrift platforms are also valued for budget-friendly lifestyle products. Low furniture purchases may reflect practical challenges such as transportation difficulties and trust issues regarding product condition.

Monthly Spendings

Monthly Spendings (Rs)	Values	%
BELOW 1000	65	48.87%
1000-3000	37	27.82%
3000-5000	19	14.29%
ABOVE 5000	12	9.02%

The findings suggest that most Generation Z consumers prefer budget-friendly shopping options and use online thrift stores primarily for affordable purchases. Since a large portion of respondents are students or early earners, their disposable income is limited, making low-cost fashion highly attractive.

This also indicates that affordability is a key motivating factor for Gen Z consumers, supporting the idea that thrift stores appeal mainly to price-sensitive buyers. Retailers targeting Gen Z customers should therefore focus on maintaining low prices, offering discounts, and providing value-for-money products.

The low spending pattern also shows that thrift shopping is used for occasional purchases rather than luxury buying. It reflects cautious spending habits and practical financial behaviour among young consumers in Mumbai.

How often do you shop from Thrift Stores?

How often	Values	%
Never	29	21.80%
Rarely	56	42.11%
Sometimes	39	29.32%
Very Often	9	6.77%

The findings suggest that online thrift shopping is still developing as a regular purchasing behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Mumbai. Most consumers may prefer thrift shopping occasionally for specific needs such as budget-friendly purchases, unique fashion items, or sustainable choices rather than routine shopping.

The low percentage of frequent shoppers may be due to factors such as concerns about product quality, limited availability of preferred styles, hesitation in buying second-hand products, or lack of trust in online thrift platforms.

I choose Thrift Stores because they are affordable:

Affordability	Values	%
Agree	52	39.10%
Strongly Agree	26	19.55%
Strongly Disagree	4	3.01%
Disagree	7	5.26%
Neutral	44	33.08%

The results indicate that affordability is a major factor influencing Generation Z consumers to shop from online thrift stores. More than half of the respondents clearly believe that thrift stores provide budget-friendly fashion options. This suggests that Gen Z consumers are price-sensitive and actively seek economical alternatives to traditional retail shopping.

I feel Thrift Stores help in reducing fashion waste:

Particulars	Values	%
Agree	65	48.87%
Disagree	10	7.52%
Neutral	30	22.56%
Strongly Agree	26	19.55%
Strongly Disagree	2	1.50%

The results indicate that a majority of Generation Z consumers recognize the role of thrift stores in promoting sustainable fashion and reducing textile waste. This suggests that environmental awareness is an important factor influencing thrift shopping behaviour among young consumers.

However, the presence of a considerable neutral group implies that some consumers may still lack adequate knowledge about how second-hand shopping contributes to sustainability. This highlights an opportunity for thrift businesses to educate consumers through awareness campaigns and sustainability-focused marketing.

Social Media influencers increase my interest in Online Thrift shopping:

Particulars	Values	%
Agree	48	36.09
Disagree	26	19.55
Neutral	36	27.07
Strongly Agree	18	13.53
Strongly Disagree	5	3.76

The findings indicate that social media influencers have a moderate but meaningful impact on Generation Z consumers' interest in online thrift shopping. Nearly half of the respondents agree that influencer promotions and recommendations attract them towards thrift stores. This shows that influencer marketing plays an important role in creating awareness and shaping consumer perceptions.

However, the presence of a considerable neutral group suggests that influencer impact is not universal and other factors such as affordability, product uniqueness, and sustainability awareness may also significantly affect purchasing decisions.

I am more likely to purchase from those brands or stores that support sustainable fashion:

Particulars	Values	%
Agree	58	43.61%
Disagree	8	6.02%
Neutral	22	16.54%
Strongly Agree	41	30.83%
Strongly Disagree	4	3.01%

The findings clearly indicate that sustainability plays a significant role in influencing the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers. A large majority prefer brands that adopt environmentally responsible practices, showing that ethical considerations are becoming important in fashion consumption.

This suggests that Gen Z consumers are not only price-conscious but also environmentally aware and socially responsible. Brands that promote sustainable fashion practices are therefore more likely to attract and retain young consumers.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- **Operational Professionalism:** Implementing rigorous quality inspections, multi-angle imagery, and reliable return policies eliminates consumer hesitation and builds foundational marketplace trust.
- **Strategic Market Penetration:** Utilizing student-centric pricing, campus pop-up marketing, and hyper-local influencer partnerships directly targets the high price sensitivity and trend-driven nature of college consumers.

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- **Technological Infrastructure:** Migrating to fast, mobile-optimized apps with advanced filters and secure UPI payments satisfies Gen Z's demand for seamless digital convenience.
- **Value-Driven Positioning:** Showcasing real-time ecological metrics (like carbon footprint reductions) and verified reviews helps erase the lingering social stigma of secondhand clothing, turning circular fashion into an ethical lifestyle choice.

Conclusion

The online thrift market in Mumbai is transitioning from a niche subculture into a mainstream retail force, heavily driven by Generation Z's demand for affordability, digital convenience, and ecological transparency. A study of 133 Gen Z consumers in Mumbai confirms that budget constraints, targeted social media marketing particularly via Instagram influencers, and growing sustainability awareness are the primary catalysts shaping modern youth purchasing behaviour. However, the sector faces prominent operational bottlenecks, including inconsistent product quality, limited style variety, and a lack of standardized return and refund policies. To fully capture this highly price-sensitive and digitally native market, online thrift businesses must professionalize their operations by implementing strict pre-listing quality inspections, high-resolution multi-angle photography, and flexible return frameworks. By combining these logistical upgrades with student-focused promotional strategies, seamless UPI checkout applications, and data-driven sustainability metrics that quantify environmental benefits, digital resale platforms can erase the cultural stigma of second-hand apparel, optimize customer retention, and drive the expansion of the circular fashion economy in India's fashion capital.

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