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## EXPLORING CONSUMER MOTIVATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN THRIFTING AS A LIFESTYLE CHOICE

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### Abstract

*Thriftling, or buying second-hand fashion items, is becoming increasingly popular among Indonesian Generation Z as a response to sustainability concerns and criticisms of the fast fashion industry. This study explores the motivations and perceptions of Gen Z consumers in adopting thriftling as a sustainable lifestyle. Using a qualitative case study method, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine young urban thriftling consumers. The findings indicate that economic and aesthetic motives are dominant, while environmental awareness emerges later, shaped by digital content and social campaigns. Social stigma and limited environmental education remain barriers. This research provides insight into sustainable consumer behavior and strategic recommendations for fashion industry players and public communication campaigns.*

**Keywords: Thriftling, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability, Gen Z, Perception**

### Abstrak

Thriftling atau pembelian barang fashion bekas semakin populer di kalangan Generasi Z Indonesia sebagai bentuk respons terhadap isu keberlanjutan dan kritik terhadap industri fast fashion. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi motivasi dan persepsi konsumen Gen Z dalam mengadopsi thriftling sebagai gaya hidup berkelanjutan. Melalui metode studi kasus kualitatif, dilakukan wawancara mendalam terhadap sembilan konsumen muda urban yang aktif melakukan thriftling. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motivasi ekonomi dan estetika menjadi dominan, sementara kesadaran lingkungan berkembang kemudian melalui eksposur konten digital dan kampanye sosial. Hambatan yang ditemukan adalah stigma sosial dan minimnya edukasi keberlanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan perilaku konsumsi berkelanjutan dan rekomendasi strategis untuk industri fashion serta kampanye komunikasi publik.

**Kata kunci: Thriftling, Perilaku Konsumen, Keberlanjutan, Generasi Z, Persepsi**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the practice of thrifting purchasing second-hand clothing has become increasingly prevalent among Indonesian Generation Z. This phenomenon reflects not only a shift in consumer lifestyle preferences but also a growing concern over environmental issues, particularly the adverse impacts of the fast fashion industry. Fast fashion contributes significantly to global pollution, including high carbon emissions, textile waste, and water overuse. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), fashion is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions and 20% of wastewater production.

Despite thrifting's sustainable potential, its adoption in Indonesia remains limited and varied. Many consumers are still driven primarily by economic reasons or aesthetic uniqueness rather than conscious environmental awareness. Moreover, second-hand fashion still faces social stigma often perceived as unhygienic or of lesser quality. These perceptions form substantial barriers to broader acceptance of thrifting as a sustainable lifestyle option.

This study addresses these challenges by exploring the motivations and perceptions of Gen Z consumers toward thrifting, especially in urban contexts. By understanding the underlying psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing their choices, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on sustainable consumer behavior in Indonesia. It also fills a theoretical gap by combining consumer behavior analysis with sustainability communication, which remains underexplored in the Indonesian context. The findings are expected to support the development of more effective public awareness campaigns and industry strategies for promoting circular economy practices.

The phenomenon of thrifting in Indonesia is not only seen as an alternative consumption trend but also as a reflection of broader social, cultural, and environmental dynamics. McKinsey & Company (2020) reported that 67% of Southeast Asian consumers consider sustainability an important factor in their purchasing decisions. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (2019) noted that the fashion industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions and 20% of global wastewater. Against this backdrop, thrifting has emerged as a potentially sustainable consumption practice, particularly among Generation Z.

However, the adoption of thrifting in Indonesia faces significant challenges. While many consumers are motivated by economic, aesthetic, and identity-related reasons, sustainability is not yet the primary driver. Social stigma around second-hand goods often perceived as dirty, unhygienic, or socially inappropriate remains a major barrier. Thus, this study is essential to understand how consumer motivations, perceptions, and social norms influence the acceptance of thrifting in urban Indonesian contexts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Consumer Motivation and Thrift Behavior**

Consumer motivation is a key factor influencing second-hand fashion adoption. Kakalia (2022) found that Gen Z often chooses thrifting for affordability and self-expression. Similarly, Villarente (2024) emphasizes that financial constraints, personal style, and environmental values all drive thrift shopping among youth.

### **Social Perception and Stigma**

Fauzia (2021) and Haryanto (2020) highlight how thrifting is often stigmatized in Indonesian society. Second-hand items are perceived as low-quality or “unfit” for daily use, which discourages potential consumers despite growing awareness of sustainability.

### **The Role of Media and Green Narratives**

Ifadah et al. (2023) observed that digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok play a crucial role in shaping sustainable narratives. Gen Z is particularly responsive to online campaigns, tutorials, and “haul” videos that normalize thrifting and promote eco-conscious values.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in two main theories: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the Theory of Consumer Perception. Maslow’s model explains varying consumer motivations, from basic economic needs to self-actualization through environmentally responsible choices. Meanwhile, the Perception Theory by Schiffman & Kanuk (2010) outlines how exposure, attention, and interpretation affect consumer attitudes toward thrifted goods.

Conceptual Framework Diagram (inserted as visual in final document)

[The conceptual diagram illustrates the relationship between motivation types, perception formation, external factors (media, norms), and the decision to adopt sustainable thrifting behavior.]

#### **2.1 State of the Art**

Previous studies demonstrate diverse motivations and perceptions around thrifting. Kakalia (2022) highlighted student motivations in thrift shopping, while Villarente (2024) compared Gen Z and millennial thrift behaviors in the Philippines. Bordoloi & Deori (2024) and Ifadah et al. (2023) emphasized the role of social media in shaping the image of thrifting, whereas Connysson & Landström (2024) explored consumer perceptions of quality and hygiene of second-hand goods.

In general, prior research emphasizes three key points:

1. Economic and aesthetic motivations dominate over environmental ones.
2. Social stigma and hygiene concerns remain barriers to acceptance.
3. Digital media and online communities play a crucial role in normalizing thrifting as a sustainable lifestyle.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two main theories:

- Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: explains how consumer motivations range from basic economic needs to self-actualization through sustainable choices.
- Consumer Perception Theory (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010): explains how exposure, attention, and interpretation shape consumer attitudes toward second-hand goods.

Together, these frameworks demonstrate why consumer motivations in thrifting are layered and how perceptions are shaped by social norms and media exposure.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study applies a qualitative research design using a case study approach to investigate consumer behavior related to thrifting among Generation Z in Indonesia. The interpretive

paradigm guides the methodology, aiming to understand meaning construction from the participants' perspectives within their social and cultural contexts.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with nine purposively selected participants aged 18–26 who actively engage in thrifting in urban areas like Bandung and Jakarta. Participants were selected based on their regular thrifting behavior and exposure to social media thrift content. Interviews were conducted online and offline, focusing on their motivations, perceptions, and experiences.

Secondary data were gathered from academic journals, policy reports, and digital content analyses relevant to sustainability, fashion, and youth culture. These materials provided context for triangulating the interview findings.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) model: data coding, theme identification, and interpretative synthesis. Themes explored include motivation categories (economic, aesthetic, environmental), perception quality, social influence, and media exposure.

To enhance validity, triangulation was applied by comparing interview insights with literature findings and digital observation of social media thrift trends. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant anonymity, were strictly upheld throughout the study.

This research applies an interpretive paradigm using a qualitative case study approach. The study focused on nine Generation Z consumers (aged 18–26) in Bandung and Jakarta who actively practice thrifting, both online (Shopee, Instagram, TikTok Shop) and offline (thrift stores, flea markets).

Data sources:

- Primary: semi-structured interviews with nine informants.
- Secondary: academic literature, research reports, and digital content related to thrifting and sustainability.

Data analysis: conducted using *thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding, theme identification, and interpretive synthesis were applied, yielding four main themes: (1) economic, aesthetic, and environmental motivations; (2) perceptions of quality and hygiene; (3) socio-cultural barriers; and (4) the role of digital media.

Triangulation: interviews were cross-validated with literature findings and digital observation of thrift-related social media content.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals several key findings regarding the motivations and perceptions of Generation Z consumers toward thrifting. Based on in-depth interviews with nine informants aged 18–26 from urban areas in Indonesia, three dominant motivational themes emerged: economic practicality, aesthetic appeal, and environmental consciousness. These findings are consistent with prior research (Kakalia, 2022; Villarente, 2024) that indicates thrifting behavior is initially driven by affordability and style before evolving into a lifestyle rooted in sustainable values.

Economically, most respondents cited price as the primary reason they chose second-hand fashion. The ability to purchase unique or branded items at significantly lower costs was particularly appealing amid rising living expenses. This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy, where basic financial needs motivate behavior. However, aesthetic motivations—such as the search for vintage or rare items—also ranked highly. Thrifting allowed participants to express individuality and distinguish themselves from mainstream fashion consumers, highlighting the hedonic value in consumption (Santoso & Riawan, 2023).

Environmental awareness was identified as a secondary but growing motivation. Many respondents noted they became more conscious of the negative environmental impact of fast fashion after consuming digital content—particularly on Instagram and TikTok. Exposure to “green” influencers and campaigns gradually shifted their perception, validating Schiffman & Kanuk's (2010) theory that perception is shaped through exposure and interpretation. Although most did not begin thrifting due to sustainability concerns, many reported a sense of satisfaction knowing their actions contributed to environmental preservation.

Perceptions of quality and cleanliness were mixed. While some participants expressed high satisfaction with thrift items, others remained cautious, especially regarding hygiene. This duality echoes findings from Connysson & Landström (2024), who noted that consumer trust in thrifted goods often hinges on physical inspection or peer recommendations. In Indonesia, these concerns are amplified by persistent stigma: second-hand items are still perceived by some family or community members as inferior or inappropriate, particularly in formal or high-status contexts.

Social influence played a substantial role. Informants described how online thrift communities, peer encouragement, and viral “thrift haul” videos created a supportive environment for the practice. This aligns with the work of Ifadah et al. (2023), who found that digital ecosystems are instrumental in normalizing sustainable fashion practices. The media did not merely inform, but also validated thrift behavior socially, making it aspirational.

Despite these positives, several barriers persist. Participants pointed out the lack of public education on sustainability and the absence of institutional support (e.g., local policies or fashion regulations promoting circular economy practices). Without broader societal endorsement, thrifting remains a niche movement rather than a dominant consumer norm.

Overall, the discussion illustrates that thrifting among Gen Z in Indonesia is a dynamic behavior shaped by intersecting motivations and evolving perceptions. Economic and aesthetic interests open the door to thrifting, but exposure to sustainability discourse helps deepen and legitimize the practice. The results underscore the potential of combining communication strategies, influencer engagement, and community-building to foster lasting behavioral shifts in sustainable fashion consumption.

The analysis produced the following findings:

1. **Economic and aesthetic motivations are dominant.**  
Consumers were attracted by affordable prices (up to 70–90% cheaper than retail) and the unique, vintage styles available in thrift shops.

2. **Environmental awareness remains secondary.**  
Most respondents initially engaged in thrifting for economic and aesthetic reasons. However, after exposure to social media content on the environmental impacts of fast fashion, they gradually developed pro-sustainability values.
3. **Positive perceptions of quality, but hygiene concerns persist.**  
Imported thrift items were often viewed as higher in quality than local fast fashion. Yet, worries about cleanliness sometimes reinforced by family members or partners remained a source of hesitation.
4. **Socio-cultural barriers remain strong.**  
Thrifting continues to carry stigma in Indonesian society, often associated with lower social classes or financial struggle.
5. **Social media accelerates normalization.**  
Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram play a crucial role in reshaping the image of thrifting. Content such as “thrift hauls” and “eco fashion challenges” positioned thrifting as modern, trendy, and socially desirable.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the motivations and perceptions of Generation Z consumers in Indonesia regarding thrifting as a sustainable lifestyle. It reveals that while economic and aesthetic factors initially drive thrift shopping behavior, exposure to digital content and sustainability campaigns gradually cultivates environmental awareness. The practice of thrifting fulfills multiple layers of consumer needs—from financial savings to social identity and ecological consciousness—demonstrating alignment with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Despite its growth, thrifting in Indonesia still faces cultural barriers and social stigmas, particularly concerning the quality and hygiene of second-hand goods. The findings indicate that the lack of structured education and public campaigns on sustainable fashion limits wider acceptance. Nonetheless, digital media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, reinforcing positive norms, and expanding access to information and community support.

This research contributes to the theoretical discourse on sustainable consumer behavior, particularly in the context of Southeast Asia. It also offers practical recommendations for fashion businesses, policymakers, and environmental advocates seeking to promote circular fashion practices. Future studies are encouraged to explore thrifting trends across different demographics and geographical regions in Indonesia, as well as the long-term behavioral impact of sustainability-based digital campaigns.

This study confirms that thrifting in Indonesia is primarily driven by economic and aesthetic motivations, with sustainability emerging later as consumers become more exposed to information. While perceptions of quality are generally positive, hygiene concerns and social stigma hinder broader adoption.

### Recommendations:

- **For fashion industry players:** adopt resale/thrift-based business models, promote sustainability values, and collaborate with thrift communities.

- **For policymakers:** create regulations supporting circular economy practices, integrate sustainability education into curricula, and provide incentives for thrift businesses.
- **For communities and youth:** frame thrifting as not only economical but also ethical and environmentally responsible.
- **For future researchers:** expand the scope to small towns and rural areas, and conduct longitudinal studies to assess whether thrifting adoption is sustainable or temporary.

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