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Analyzing the rise of the ‘thrifting’ culture amongst female students of FCCU within an inflation-ridden context: what socio-economic factors explain such a trend?

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Abstract

With rising price rates of even the most basic of necessities within the overall inflation-ridden context of Pakistan, changing consumer practices in light of consumer fashion choices and clothing needs are largely becoming more significant, however limited research exists in this domain that is centered around the after-effects of rising prices on consumers' fashion choices, particularly with regards to second-hand clothing, also more commonly referred to as 'thrifed' clothing amongst young adults at a digital level. This study aims to thus discover, analyze and further shed light upon the many socio-economic factors that explain the rise of the need to purchase second-hand clothing amongst young female adults, consisting of a sample size of ten female participants who are students of Forman Christian College. With this sample, ten semi-structured qualitative interviews are conducted for a more in-depth and profound outlook on this research topic, with an effective system of thematic analysis being utilized to dissect the four central themes that have been generated from these interviews. Within these four themes, the results of the analyzed data shed light on the rise of the culture of purchasing second-hand clothing amongst young female adults as being a byproduct of rising inflation within the country thereby denoting a clear link between changing consumer fashion practices and rising inflation, alongside other factors such as the wider acceptance of second-hand clothing in light of its destigmatization by those 'higher up' the social strata of wider Pakistani society at the societal level as well as the growing need of consumers to prioritize personal ease and comfortability for their clothing preferences at an individual level, increasingly being largely provided by digital means of purchasing second-hand clothing. Within the wider academic framework of sociology as such, this study aims to bring to light possible conversations surrounding changing consumer practices within the economic diaspora of Pakistani society, the relevance and influence of social class in determining appropriate

consumer behaviors as well as the destigmatization of second-hand clothing at a wider level as a whole.

Introduction

Modern contemporary societies are consistently experiencing what could be considered a ‘digital surge’ of ever-evolving trends, particular and common to many youth-oriented industries and more significantly, to the ever-evolving notions of the global fashion industry. With the rising commonality of words such as ‘sustainability, ‘fashion consciousness’ as well as ‘ethical clothing consumption’, it comes as no surprise that modern-day fashion enthusiasts ‘have started to be more concerned about the impact their consumption patterns have on the natural environment.’ (Gazzola et. al, 2019). Recognition of the potential harms associated with the widescale erosion of fast fashion outlets is one form of practicing fashion-conscious consumption; ranging from practices such as recycling and thrifting. However, with economic downturns amidst most third-world countries as well as changing consumer practices since the Covid-19 outburst and its consequences, the question of whether ‘sustainability’ is often kept in mind in relation to fashion purchases is one that is largely debatable, particularly within the context of Pakistan. Indeed, with Pakistan’s imports of second-hand clothing ‘exceeding \$180 million in 2021’ and thereby making it the ‘second largest importer of pre-owned clothing in the world’ (Khalid, 2022), it comes as no surprise that the market for second-hand clothing within Pakistan continues to largely grow, particularly within the past two years since the insurgence and plummet of the covid-19 pandemic, coupled with rising inflation allowing for a general increase in the prices of even the most basic of necessities, including clothing. Indeed also, the ease of thrifting brings with it trendy clothing items at often very cheap prices, as well as the rising ease of online thrifting stores making fashion at an affordable price as accessible as ever, with ‘second-hand fashion platforms predicted to grow by 185% by 2029.’ (Smith, 2021). With such a trend gaining momentum in Pakistan within the middle/upper-middle classes, the following study then aims to analyze the extent of thrifting as a

trend amidst rising inflation and expensive western and eastern retail clothing within Pakistan, and thus the many possible social and economic factors that aim to understand the rising need to purchase second-hand clothing amongst young adults.

Significance of the Study

Understanding why this new-age phenomena of thrifting/purchase of second-hand clothing within the economic context of inflation-ridden countries like Pakistan is both necessary as well as inevitably can be beneficial for social communities and institutions. As such, this research aims to be a source of benefit for the following groups:

- 1) **Existing clothing retailers/clothing stores:** From a competitive perspective, it can be argued that most online thrift stores tend to offer either the same price range as physical retailers and/or sometimes, an even lower price. As such, more and more young adults are switching to online thrift stores largely at the expense of physical retailers, who may then experience a steady decline in their sales. A thorough understanding of the potential competition that clothing retailers may be facing from the rise of online thrift stores may encourage them to 'rebrand' themselves about price and quality.

- 2) **Young adults/Students on a budget/fixed income:** Given the current rate of inflation within Pakistan is rising to a steady rate of 17.1% in urban areas (State Bank of Pakistan) as of now in 2023, it comes as no surprise that more and more university students are choosing to work part-time jobs to fund their education. Arguing for the stance that Pakistan is experiencing what in

sociological terms would be seen as a state of proletarianization, it could then be said that social class has little to do with such economic decisions, with more and more middle-class students choosing to resort to such economic means as well. As such, online thrifting can be an effective source of keeping up with the latest clothing trends whilst also being able to stay on a budget for both working as well as middle-class students.

3) Social Organizations/Sustainability-Oriented Organizations: Within the online domain of digital ‘performativity’ in terms of bringing to light those issues that tend to be a source of social concern at a universal level, the central debate surrounding the harms associated with the ‘overconsumption’ of clothing amongst young adults which in turn leads to greater demand to produce clothes continues to be an integral one amongst social groups/organizations that aim to highlight the relevance of purchasing ‘ethically’ and ‘sustainably’ in modern contemporary terms. Second-hand purchases allow for the effective recycling of clothing through the ‘repurchase’ of existing clothing which is both more ethical as well as less wasteful.

4) Future Researchers: Given that little to no research has been done on the rise of the trend of thrifting amongst the young adults of Pakistan, this research is likely to be the first of its sort and thus can be used by future researchers for their respective research on a research question similar to

this one.

- 5) **The Community:** The notion of second-hand goods and their relevance in terms of purchase continues to be a source of stigma and controversy, particularly among the middle and upper-middle classes. Those belonging to such classes wish to not be associated with this practice, even when they are actively involved in it. Within the context of such classes within Pakistan (and the fact that such a trend can be seen within these classes as well), the rise of such a trend would lead to greater levels of acceptance of the purchase of second-hand clothing and its inevitable destigmatization.

Research Questions/Aim of the Study

This paper aims to look into/analyze the following research questions that are relevant to the context of this paper:

- 1) To what extent is this rising trend of greater acceptability of second-hand clothing relevant to the young adults of Pakistan?
- 2) How does thrifting differ from retail in terms of clothing? What benefits does second-hand clothing offer that the usual retail experience does not?
- 3) Within the context of Pakistan, can the current relevance of second-hand clothing be deemed as a short-term trend or a long-term phenomenon that is 'here to stay?'

- 4) What are the benefits of the thrifting experience in light of Pakistan?
- 5) What are the socio-economic factors relevant within the context of Pakistan that explain the current rise in online thrifting for clothing?

Literature Review

1) Defining thrifting in light of ‘sustainability’ within the global fashion industry; its historical context and modern usage

Sustainability in fashion has been defined as the ‘variety of means by which a fashion item or behavior could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices.’ (Mukendi, 2019). In other words, it may be referred to as being ‘environmentally conscious’ about what is produced as well as how it is consumed; the latter of which shall largely be the focal point of discussion in this paper. About modern-day fashion consumption, a significant trend that continues to gain popularity amongst the youth adults (more commonly referred to as ‘Gen Z’), is thrifting. Thrifting refers to the ‘activity of hunting used clothes.’ (Lastari & Asmarani, 2021), and has also been referred to as a ‘term used by business actors who sell used clothes but are still fit for use and from well-known brands.’ (Sariwaty et.al.2021). Largely considered to be a significant part of the rising trend of adopting ‘sustainability’ about fashion and consumption, it should be kept in mind that whilst it is an integral part of such a concept, regular ‘thrifters’ may not always consider sustainability as a focal aim and may instead, choose to purchase second-hand clothing owing to its often regular association with well-

known/high-end brands. As such, a study conducted in Indonesia with the students of UNESA (university) in 2014 resulted in several interesting trends to be established about thrifting amongst young adults, and why they choose to do so. The conclusion that they purchased used clothes because of them being ‘affordable, unique (often being in limited edition) and fashionable’ (Lestari & Asmarani, 2021) are results that have a twofold relationship to this paper as a whole. On the one hand, they seek to establish the notion that thrifting may not always have sustainable intentions associated with it, while on the other hand, this study’s conduction in a rising third-world country like Indonesia allows for its results to be utilized about fellow third-world countries like Pakistan as well; wherein the culture of thrifting continues to gain momentum in a much similar fashion. With regards to the ‘types’ of methods adopted for thrifting; a large part of this paper seeks to examine the relevance of online thrift stores as opposed to long-withstanding flea/thrift markets of the country, owing to the former option being more popular amongst young adults in today’s day and age.

Historical Context

According to Sariwaty et.al, thrifting ‘has been around since the 1760s, at a time when the massproduction of clothing was introduced.’ (2021). Before this period, however, pre-industrial societies saw people aiming to make use of second-hand clothing in several different ways. The French, for example, were deemed as ‘clever and skillful individuals who carefully reused textiles using repairing and mending any tears/holes in the garments.’ (Kotsolovos, 2021). This trend however took a different route with the rise of industrialization, wherein in an alternate argument,

Kotsolovos builds upon the notion of thrifting being associated with beggary/crime, allowing for ‘individuals in England to go around exaggerating their poverty and asking for clothing.’ As such, second-hand clothing became a means of charity, at the cost of allowing individuals to ‘pose’ as beggars to accumulate more clothing.

With the rise of industrialization, however, came several different changes in second-hand clothing and the purchasing patterns surrounding it. Indeed, with such mass production came several consequences, all of which helped in the formation of thrifting as not just a trend but inevitably, a way of life for many. Owing to such mass production for example, ‘buying clothes at cheap prices became easier, and they were seen as disposable items which caused for the accumulation of used clothes even though they were still in good condition and fit to use.’ (Sariwaty et. al, 2021). Such diversity in terms of the historical significance of thrifting/the purchase of second-hand clothing thereupon continues to be relevant for practitioners of such a trend even today, whilst allowing for newer consumption practices to gradually seep into their existing purchase choices as well. One such ‘choice’ is thus the already discussed notion of thrifting being associated with sustainability, which ‘since the 1960s, has allowed for consumers to be more concerned about the impact their consumption patterns have on the natural environment.’ (Gazzola et. al, 2020). Thrifting thus, continues to take several different shapes and forms throughout its recognition as a major consumer practice, with the highlighted literature extensively elaborating on this very concept.

2) Defining inflation in light of its modern context and usage

According to L.V. Schwartz, inflation refers to a ‘rise in the general level of prices of goods and services in an economy over some time’ (2009). It can also be described as a ‘decline in the real value of money – a loss of purchasing power in the medium of exchange.’ (Schwartz, 2009). Purchasing power refers to the ability to purchase goods and services, and in economic terms, there is a visible link between rising inflation and declining consumption of goods and services. As such, in ‘Covid-19 and the Subsequent Change on Buyer Behavior’ (2022), Chloe J. Chadwick highlights the many consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on consumer practices, and the ways that such practices have significantly changed. With a steady rise in inflation, ‘consumers now expect to spend less on discretionary spending and more on essential items such as household supplies.’ (Chadwick, 2022). This very argument can thus, also largely be applied to less consumer spending on clothing and fashion post the pandemic; allowing for consumers to shift to cheaper alternatives such as second-hand clothing.

About the research question, however, careful attention then thus needs to be paid to the rising inflation rate within Pakistan, and how it continues to largely affect consumer behavior and purchase choices. In 2019, the inflation rate in Pakistan was 7.34% (Younis, 2020), which has risen to a staggering 31.5% in 2023 according to the State Bank of Pakistan. An effective link can thus be created between rising inflation and the need to resort to cheaper alternatives to clothing (particularly amongst young adults) within the context of Pakistan.

With such rising rates of inflation thus, an effective link can be created between changing consumer purchase practices and falling consumer incomes within the

context of Pakistan, predominantly about the past two to three years. Proving itself to be the focal point of interest in Zulfiqar et.al's 'Flea Market Economy Influencing Local Industry', a far-reaching link was established between rising inflation within the country and the need to purchase second-hand clothing, with 'data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics confirming that imports of second-hand clothes rose by 90% in terms of quantity, as compared to 2020.' (Zulfiqar et.al, 2022), proving to thus largely be relevant in terms of the focal research question at hand.

1) The rising significance of second-hand clothing within a largely inflated economic realm, and other socio-economic factors explaining this 'rise'

Within the context of Pakistan, inflation continues to be a significant economic concern, as well as one that points to several changes that such a concern continues to bring with it. Here, an effective link will be created between the inevitable economic turmoil brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic and how this led to changes in consumer behavior and purchasing patterns, as well as other social factors that may explain this trend of thrifting, with a fall in the disposable incomes of a sizeable segment of the Pakistani community leading to considerable influence on spending habits about apparel.' (El Khatib, 2020). In 'Why buy used clothing during the Pandemic? Examining the impact of COVID-19 on Consumers' Secondhand Fashion Motivations, Naeun Kim and Terry Kim highlight the ways through which the market for secondhand fashion has gained momentum over the years since the prevalence of the pandemic, despite the notion of the pandemic having finally come to end. Through their quantitative research, they were able to deduce that most 'consumers were engaging in secondhand fashion consumption due to cost-saving

motivations, which is likely to be a result of a pandemic-driven economic recession.’ (Kim & Kim, 2022). This economic recession (taking the form of inflation within the context of Pakistan), has thus led to other monetary factors related to the purchase of secondhand fashion to gain relevance as well. The pandemic may have brought with it a global economic recession of all sorts, but it has also ‘let household savings and consumption to drop, forcing consumers to adopt alternate options e.g. purchasing cheaper items (Sheth, 2020), with thrifting/secondhand fashion being one such alternate option.

Since a large part of this paper aims to highlight the rising importance of the culture of ‘thrifting’ within the context and economic sphere of Pakistan, it should thus be kept in mind that little to no research currently exists on this particular notion. Despite this, the study ‘Pakistani Consumers and Purchasing Second-hand Clothes: A Study of post-Covid-19 in the Digital Era’ is relevant in that it highlights several prominent reasons within the context of Pakistan that aim to explain the rise in the number of people wishing to purchase second-hand clothing, with ‘craving for distinctiveness’ and the need to ‘show off’ one’s ‘fashionable tastes and individuality’ being deemed as relevant factors within the context of this phenomenon. (Fatima, Razzaq, 2022). In ‘Determinants of Secondhand Clothes Repurchase Intention: Indonesian Consumer’s Perspective’, bargain hunting allows consumers to feel a ‘sense of achievement upon gaining a product at a lower price’ and can be measured by ‘economic motivation where people want to pay less for their items.’ (Setiwan, Kusumawardani, 2020), and this very concept thus applies to consumers and their need to purchase secondhand clothing as well,

owing to their low prices and the satisfaction that consumers get from them. Simultaneously, in multiple other quantitative studies as well, price continues to be one of the biggest motivating factors in the purchase of thrifted goods, with the study ‘Consumer Values Towards Secondhand Fashion Consumption’ conducted in Sri Lanka recognizing the significance of the low price point associated with thrifted fashion as being the ‘most concerned attribute of secondhand fashion consumers.’, with the ‘psychological effect of finding quality products for a lower price’ being deemed as a big source of consumer achievement. (Geegamage et.al. 2021). Linked to this very concept is also the idea of ‘price gratification’; a ‘type of satisfaction linked with the ability to manage spending.’ (Xu et.al, 2014). This ‘helps individuals to have a smarter shopping experience, which in turn generates a higher sense of economic value for their money.’ (Xu et. al, 2014). Thrifting thus, allows for the achievement of price gratification from the consumers’ perspective.

Closely relevant to this growing culture of thrifting in Indonesia is the rise of such a culture in other countries within the same continent as well, particularly in India. It has been estimated that ‘in 2014, the size of the used goods market in India was 22,000 crore.’ (Kapoor, 2019). Given that ‘preowned goods are no longer seen as being only for the poor’ (Afaqs, 2015), it comes as no surprise that the low price point of second-hand goods continues to be of relevance to not just the lower classes persistent within India, but continues to be of importance to those higher up the social hierarchy as well. Considering the very obvious economic impacts of the pandemic coupled with the state of inflation within the country as a whole, it then comes as no surprise that within ‘Second-hand Shopping: Understanding Consumer Behavior

Towards Pre-Loved Clothing’, ‘respondents with primarily lower incomes were motivated by the price point of secondhand clothing’ (Shah, Gajjar, 2021), a notion which holds for the economic state of affairs of Pakistan as well. With ‘income being seen as the strongest determinant of individual consumption as of today’ (Al Huban, 2012), it comes as no surprise that falling incomes and the reduced purchasing power of individuals within the context of Pakistan have increasingly allowed for ‘individuals with lower incomes to find alternate forms of consumption to overcome the economic pressure that they are experiencing, which forces them to consume secondhand clothing.’ (Al Huban, 2012).

However, to assume that the market for secondhand clothing in contemporary societies is largely driven by unfavorable economic circumstances at a potentially global scale and thus should be considered a trend that people are commonly ‘coerced’ into, would be largely inaccurate. Indeed, it should be kept in mind that some people choose to willingly purchase secondhand clothing, owing to other factors such as the need to contribute to greater levels of environmental sustainability as well as the discovery of ‘unique’ fashion trends via thrifting, either online or in person.

In ‘Identity, self-concept and young women’s engagement with collaborative and sustainable fashion models’, this very idea of clothing being seen as a reflection of one’s self-identity is largely explored. A primarily qualitative study, its participants preferred visiting thrift stores for the sake of ‘striving for an individual fashion identity’ and a ‘desire to stand out.’ (McNeill, Venter, 2019). Additionally, thrift stores often stand out due to the ‘lack of diversity in mainstream and/or new retailers’,

whilst thrifting continues to offer ‘cooler and unique clothes.’ (McNeill, Venter, 2019). This ‘need for uniqueness’ also takes into account the satisfaction of purchasing a ‘unique product that is not available everywhere, but only through unconventional channels’ (Amaral, 2022), which is thus provided through thrifting, and additionally takes into account women specifically, and their need to ‘purchase vintage clothes with the involvement of fashion and the propensity of nostalgia’ (Cervellion et.al, 2012). As such, thrifting allows for the discovery of unique and largely ‘niche’ pieces of clothing which allows for people to stand out.

Closely linked to people and their willingness to purchase secondhand clothing is the idea of greater awareness about existing environmental concerns, and the collective efforts being made by groups of fashion enthusiasts in all parts of the world to largely reduce the environmental degradation caused by excessive fashion consumption. The notion that the ‘main sustainable fashion strategy has been to produce and purchase products for the past few years’ (Leifhold, Iran, 2018), continues to be largely accurate, particularly from the consumers’ point of view as well. As such, social and environmental ‘consciousness’ is a concept that has been explored via the use of a survey study in ‘Consumer Values towards Secondhand Fashion Consumption’, allowing for its participants to state that they were able to ‘achieve positive environmental consciousness by being responsible for the environment’, recognizing that ‘wearing secondhand clothing means wearing something that is already existing for the sake of the environment, since making even one garment leads to a lot of carbon emissions.’ (Geegamage, 2021). Environmental sustainability and its recognition was also the ‘primary motivation of the purchase of secondhand clothing’

(Shah, Gajjar, 2021) for regular secondhand clothing purchases in a study conducted in India, allowing for 88% of the chosen participants to state that they achieved a ‘feeling of satisfaction at having helped divert waste from landfills and reduce carbon footprints’ through their preference for secondhand clothing. (Shah, Gajjar, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

1) Existing Models of Consumption: A brief discussion of Marxist and Neo-Marxist Perspectives on Consumption

In general terms, consumption refers to the purchase of goods and services to satisfy needs. A need has been described as anything which is ‘necessary for existence’ and that ‘when fulfilled it provides pleasure, otherwise it provides pain.’ (Dolu, 1993). The need to consume is thus intrinsically linked to the need to satisfy one’s wants and needs, which can take the form of economic, social as well as psychological needs. From an economic perspective (the central focus of this paper), Karl Marx has defined consumption as being the ‘final aim of all economic activities’, and Karl Marx’s in-depth study of the relevance of consumption in contributing to pre-existing notions of ‘false consciousness’ in trying to ‘enable people to buy goods and services to exploit them and keep them under control’ (Firat et.al, 2013) is significant in that also classifies goods in two distinct categories; sustenance goods and luxury goods, with excessive consumption of the latter, often attributed as one of the most significant aims of the capitalistic system and its agendas of profit maximization and lack of consumer control over their consumption practices.

Closely linked to this Marxist notion of consistent consumption being utilized as a tool of exploitation at a societal level, is the neo-Marxist concept of Cultural Hegemony; presented by Antonio Gramsci and adopted by a wider Marxist framework. Deemed as a form of dominance of the 'ruling' class at a societal and ideological level over those who do not possess the same resources as them, Gramsci's argument takes into account the 'beliefs, explanations and values' of the ruling class, that become the 'accepted cultural norm.' (Bullock, Trombley, 1999). Since such a form of domination is likely to be macro and all-encompassing in terms of its influence over major socio-economic institutions and practices, Gramsci's theory is also significant in terms of then explaining the erosion of the ruling class into traditional cultural practices and spaces, shaping those spaces as their own and thereby allowing them to be seen as being more relevant and 'socially acceptable', in terms of the power and widespread influence that the ruling/upper classes have with regards to propagating particularistic values that benefit them as a whole, usually at the expense of the masses, proving to be relevant to the context and findings of this study.

1) Conspicuous Consumption

In one of his most celebrated works about the purpose and significance of excessive consumption 'Leisure Class', Thorstein Veblen (1899) describes conspicuous consumption as 'consumers' deliberate and conscious activity to achieve the objective of status enhancement.' In general terms, it refers to the 'consumer

practice of buying and using products of a higher quality or greater quantity than practical.' (Phillips, 2014). This theory essentially takes into account three generations of the development of consumer practices and behavior, starting with the first generation that 'became rich in the industrialization era but continued to live a modest life', while the 'second and third generations start to consume more instead of produce.' (Firat et.al, 2013). At its core, however, the purchase of such consumption is to 'show financial status and power in a society to make others jealous.' (Firat et.al, 2013). As such, Veblen's central focus was then on the extensive amounts of 'splurging' done by those 'higher up' the social hierarchy the most, thus specifically targeting the wealthier classes that have the means to consistently and consciously consume.

To assume, however, that such behavior is only demonstrated by the upper and upper-middle classes would be incorrect. Indeed, conspicuous consumption is also practiced by the 'lowest and poorest classes, since the modern aim of such consumption is to ensure status and increase prestige.' (Cinar and Cubukcu, 2009). It is this very aspect of this theory that allows for it to be effectively linked to this particular research question since the notion of excessively spending on 'luxurious' thrifed goods despite them being second-hand speaks volumes about the sociological notion of wanting to 'stand out' which is largely prominent amongst the lower classes. Referred to as 'pecuniary emulation', this concept takes into account the notion of 'members of lower classes consuming conspicuously so that he/she will be thought of as a member of a higher class,' (Bagwall and Bernheim, 1996), an aim which is largely achieved through the purchase of branded and usually high-

end thrifted goods amongst the middle class. More importantly, it has also been noted that such a practice is ‘especially common in societies in which the conspicuous consumption of goods and services ostentatiously signals that the buyer rose from poverty and has something to prove to society. (Postrel, 2008), which is thus very relevant within the context of the rise of high-end second-hand fashion amongst the emerging middle class of Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

The data for this study was collected through an extensive qualitative framework, centered around the conduction of ten semi-structured interviews, to gain deeper insights into the research topic at hand. For all ten participants, the data process was the same, consisting of the participants being initially handed out a screening questionnaire for them to fill out. This questionnaire consisted of general questions relating to the participant's demographics, including their age and average monthly household income. Additionally to this questionnaire, the participants were also handed out a consent form for them to fill out before the actual interview process itself, to both recognize the participant's permission to participate in the data collection process of this research, as well as to establish a degree of comfortability with the participants before interviewing them.

For the interviewing process, a pre-designed questionnaire consisting of questions relating to the three themes identified in the literature review of this research was utilized, and the questions present in this questionnaire were the central questions that were asked to the participants. The questionnaire was largely open-ended, with the questions being asked through the use of semi-structured interviews, all of which allowed for more in-depth results in addition to also allowing for the process to be conducted in a very informal manner through a two-way process of communication.

Consisting of ten interviews (each one hour long) conducted over one month, the interview process involved the participants being asked the questions that were pre-

existing within the pre-designed questionnaire. However, additional probing during the process was also used within certain questions to help the participants open up more, which proved to be fruitful for this search. As such, additional questions were also added during the interview process about some of the questions asked to the participants to better understand the opinions/insights provided by the participants.

Sampling Design

Opting for a non-probability method of sampling due to the non-representative and non-generalizable nature of my research, snowball sampling was used to not just introduce myself to potentially useful participants about my research question, but to also ensure that they possessed the necessary traits needed for my research e.g. females students from FCCU who regularly thrift for western clothing online. As such, the more participants that I was able to find, the more likely it was that they would introduce me to potential participants possessing the same traits as they do which they did; allowing for an effective sample size to be achieved that is representative of my research population and their required traits.

As per the snowball sampling method for this study, the relevant population was reached via personal contacts and well-known acquaintances, who were further able to introduce me to other potential participants via social media and my cell phone number. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research before them being interviewed and were additionally reassured through the screening questionnaire provided to them before the interviews.

In general, the participants for this research possessed the following traits:

- The participant is a female and falls in the age range of between 19-24.
- The participant is a student of Forman Christian College (FCCU).

- The participant has either purchased second-hand clothing in the past six months or is currently an active purchaser of second-hand clothing.

The interviews were recorded on two electronic devices and were transcribed and evaluated over one month, immediately after they were conducted. This two-step process was carried out between July and September of 2023.

Ethics

For this research, several potential ethical concerns were taken into consideration and accounted for, with this study already having received clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Forman Christian College. The interviews were largely voluntary, and the participants were informed of all rules and regulations of this study enclosed within the consent form that was to be signed by them before them being interviewed. As such, the consent form ensured that the participants had granted their full permission to be interviewed for this study. Additionally, the participants were also informed of every step of the research process that involved them to some degree, thus allowing for greater transparency in the study. The participants were informed of the interviews being recorded and were also told to be vocal about backing out of the study at any given time during the interview process if they felt like it. With regards to this, the screening questionnaire in particular contained a few questions that I believed the participants would be hesitant in terms of answer (e.g. an estimated measure of their monthly household income), and so answering such potentially personal questions was largely voluntary, and the participants were informed of this. To ensure further anonymity for the benefit of the participants, the actual names of the participants have not been used in the analysis of this study.

Data Analysis

Considered to be one of the most significantly relevant methods of analyzing qualitative data, Braun & Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (2006) has been utilized for this study, which has been deemed as being useful in that it 'provides core skills that can be useful for many other kinds of analysis' (Maguire et.al, 2017). Due to its overall flexibility as a qualitative method in terms of its lack of epistemological rigidity, it proved to be of focal relevance for this study, with its six steps consisting of as follows:

- 1) Familiarization of Data
- 2) Generation of Codes
- 3) Generation of Themes
- 4) Reviewing Themes
- 5) Determination of Themes & naming them
- 6) Reporting the Findings

Keeping this process in mind, the themes were generated manually after an in-depth and largely extensive study of the collected data. The data was transcribed and written down digitally, after which a total of four major themes were generated and reported. These four focal themes in turn have a differing number of smaller, sub-themes that have also been dissected in the Findings section of this study, and which largely correspond with the 'themes' that were initially identified and sectioned in the literature review of this study.

Findings

The findings of this research paper are based on a systematic process of thematic analysis, with three potential ‘thematic’ questions being categorized within the literature review and its sub-headings, all of which served to make the process of understanding themes relevant to my research topic even more accessible and convenient. A total of ten female participants from Forman Christian College were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and a screening questionnaire was provided to the participants along with the consent form before them being interviewed. The screening questionnaire provided additional sociodemographic information about the participants and their thrifting frequencies, which have been shown in Table 1. As such, a total of four major themes were recognized, with each theme having its respective subheadings as well:

- 1) Defining ‘thrifting’ for clothing at an individual level
- 2) The link between rising inflation & perceived attitudes towards thrifting for clothing
- 3) Significant socio-economic factors relevant to the rising culture of thrifting for clothing
- 4) Shifting attitudes towards thrifting for clothing: the mediums chosen & what the future holds

Defining ‘thrifting’ for clothing at an individual level (in order of significance and relevancy)

Understanding the notion of ‘Used’ Clothing

For the most part, most participants seemed to hold very similar definitions about how they define thrifting and/or what the concept itself means to them. The questions asked to the participants took the form of simple inquiries such as ‘What does thrifting for clothing mean to you?’ whilst other

times, additional phrases were added to make the participant open up more for a more detailed and overall extensive outlook with regards to defining thrifting.

When asked to define thrifting for clothing, some participants emphasized the utilization of preloved/used/second-hand clothing, with most participants using similar terms to define what thrifting means to them, including terms such as ‘preloved clothing; ‘second-hand clothing’ and ‘used clothing.’ As such, while the words used to define thrifting for clothing at an individual level differed for most participants, the meaning remained the same; clothing that had been utilized and worn already, and was now being passed down and/or sold for further use to a wider audience of people.

“I think it’s getting cheaper stuff and also, it’s usually getting second-hand clothing and/or vintage clothing that you can get at a fair price, obviously because they are used or ‘preloved’ items so that’s what I think thrifting is. “(ZS, 22)

“To me, it means being able to recycle and reuse something which has already been used, it is accessible and also easy to accommodate.” (SR, 21)

“Thrifting for me is finding something good out of clothes that are discarded by other people for no reason but they’re usually very good quality so it’s kind of like finding treasure.” (SD, 19).

The Prioritization of Price about Quality

Closely linked to defining thrifting at the most basic level, were constant associations of thrifted clothing with clothes denoting a higher quality whilst being cheaper and affordable at the same time. Whilst some participants chose to define thrift clothing as being merely ‘used’ clothing,

others more significantly emphasized the nature of the type of clothing the experience of thrifting usually provides, including highlighting benefits such as being cheaper as well whilst not compromising on the quality of the clothing itself. Out of the ten participants, most participants similarly used these phrases, to further define what thrifting means to them at an individual level, thereby creating an effective link between the price and the quality of the clothing.

“Thrifting to me means buying any pieces of clothing that are usually not in stores and are not like, bulk made. They are not extremely expensive, they’re clothes that are not being mass produced and you’re getting them either second-hand or there’s like a minor defect in them or they’re export leftovers, so anything around those lines.” (MS, 21)

The majority of the respondents seemed to acknowledge that thrift clothing tends to be cheaper than first-hand clothing, largely defined amidst Pakistan’s current state of rising inflation and ever-reducing consumer purchasing power, to be elaborated upon in detail in the second half of this segment. Additionally, most respondents perceived the concept of thrifting as a valuable one in terms of saving money whilst still being provided with usually good quality and wearable clothing, despite the clothing having been used before it was resold.

The thing is, because of how expensive things have gotten and it’s not just that things are expensive, the quality has dropped as well. I don’t go to stores like Outfitters and Breakout because I know that they’re all competing to match prices and to survive and I don’t blame them, it’s fine but I just can’t justify spending that much money on any clothing item. If I go online and I can buy a thrifted Zara shirt for 1500-2000 rupees maximum, I can’t justify going and spending double this amount of money on an Outfitters shirt which I know will be very bad quality, it’s not going to last and I know this doesn’t sound too good, but I like

having branded and staple pieces which will last me a long time and for something so expensive, I just can't justify. The economy and the quality of things have gone down. (MS, 21).

The majority of the participants actively acknowledged the quality of the 'thrift' and/or second-hand clothing purchased, with some even choosing to emphasize the quality of second-hand clothing being better than the clothing usually available in mainstream retail stores in Pakistan, which tends to focus more on profit maximization instead of upholding the quality and substance of their clothing, all the while being still more expensive than second-hand clothing which is deemed to be a source of better value for money about both price as well as quality.

"Thrifting for me means being able to buy valuable clothes for a lesser amount of money and getting good quality clothing at a lesser price." (ZA, 22).

"Through thrifting, we are being shown that at cheaper prices, you could get the same products so that also attracted me towards thrifting because I rarely do value for money, but thrifting is a great value for money." (ZF, 21).

Accessibility and the ease of purchase of thrift clothing was also a minor, if not a major, quality of thrift clothing (including the process of thrifting itself) which was highlighted by a minority of the participants.

"That sprawl of easily accessible items thrifted items was my gateway to buying those things which I could otherwise not afford, and even now that I'm earning, I can't justify spending 30-40k on a single piece of clothing." (MA, 22).

The Type of Clothing Available

Some participants acknowledged the availability of preloved high-end/branded clothing about the concept of thrifting as we know it now, however, such a definition was more largely linked to the ease of online thrifting and what it brings with it, which may not necessarily imply that such a notion is linked to the experience of in-person thrifting as well. To be elaborated on later in this segment, it should nonetheless be kept in mind that not all participants admitted to ‘thrifting’ the same way, with some choosing to resort to online thrifting, while others preferred the in-person experience more, despite choosing to still thrift online for clothing, with some also choosing to be critical of the medium that they normally thrift from. Nonetheless, only a small portion of the participants chose to deviate from the most basic way of thrifting and instead chose to incorporate their own experience of thrifting by defining it in their own terms.

Likewise, a few of the participants chose to highlight the types of clothing that the experience of thrifting usually brings with it, further emphasizing the notion of thrifted clothing often bringing it with branded clothing which otherwise would not be available in most retail stores.

“I love the idea of thrifting and I see it as just an easy way to get cheaper, good quality clothing and particularly branded clothes such as those from Zara and Shein at an affordable rate. This shirt that I’m wearing right now is also thrifted actually, and it’s one of my favorites because of how good of a quality it has.” (IR, 21).

Additionally, another participant chose to define thrifting as a means of obtaining and/or purchasing ‘vintage’ clothing that is otherwise not available in retail stores, a notion which was emphasized by other participants within the interview process as well, but which however, was not mentioned about them defining thrifting for themselves at a personal level.

“I think it’s getting cheaper stuff and also, it’s usually getting second-hand clothing and/or vintage clothing that you can get at a fair price, obviously because they are used or ‘preloved’ items so that’s what I think thrifting is. “(ZS, 22).

“I started thrifting when I saw my friends doing it, mostly through Instagram and social media. I found a few good pages which are good. More importantly, these pages have stuff that is usually not available in the market such as Victorian gowns. I’ve always wanted to purchase a corset and so I got mine from an online thrift page, and stockings as well, these are things that you would not normally find in the market.” (ZA, 22).

An effective analysis of the given data thus denotes that whilst thrifting may have been defined in different ways by most participants in terms of the differences in the terminology used to define it, the meaning nonetheless remained the same. For a vast majority of the participants, the notion of thrifting being a source of ‘used’, ‘preloved’, and ‘second-hand’ clothing proved to be the most common way of defining the process of thrifting for clothing, thus making it the most important definition for this research, also classifying it as the ‘primary’ definition of the concept itself. Second to this, about defining thrifting from the perspective of the participants, another primary/major factor included the availability of good quality clothing at cheaper prices, whilst secondary/other minor definitions included the ease of purchase/accessibility of thrifted clothing about online clothing as well as the usual availability of branded/’vintage’ clothing.

Rising Inflation & Perceived Attitudes towards Thrifting for Clothing

Tracing the roots of the rising culture for thrifting amongst young adults: Are rising inflation and reduced consumer incomes to be blamed?

Since a significant portion of the literature review focuses on the existing evidence pointing towards the notion of rising inflation within the context of Pakistan and the many ways in which the existing economic situation of the country can be blamed for such a change about the need to resort to cheaper alternatives for clothing, it thus became imperative to both explore as well as largely dissect this notion, prevalent within most academic works/research articles that have been published in recent times with regards to this area of interest. As such, the primary purpose of this section of the interview process was to determine whether an effective link could be created between rising inflation and the increasing need to ‘thrift’ for clothing, with all ten of the participants being first asked to elaborate on their experiences of thrifting and more importantly, when and why they started feeling the need to thrift for second-hand clothing as well as what could from their perspective, explain such a change amongst most young adults.

Within this section of the interview process, the findings were two-fold, denoting as well as representing two distinct viewpoints regarding the overall preference for second-hand clothing amongst young adults within the context of Pakistan; with an overwhelming majority of the ten participants creating an effective link between rising inflation and the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these two phenomenon went hand in hand, further upholding the belief that falling consumer incomes and the insurgence of the pandemic went hand in hand. For these participants (divided into three and five), online thrifting and the rising costs of purchasing first-hand fashion meant that resorting to online clothing seemed like a much more accessible and cheaper option, all the while they were ‘locked down’ due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

“I started thrifting during the COVID time, so more than three years ago. I remember how everyone was locked in their houses and how everyone was shopping for clothes online and

that's when I came across a lot of online thrift stores so I started shopping from there for jewelry and also for clothes.” (IR, 21).

“I would say around 2020, I started seeing a lot of people get into thrifting and second-hand shopping which was great. And then, the whole online trend of Instagram thrift stores and online shopping became more common. I'm not sure but I that around 2020 when COVID-19 hit, the amount of people going to online thrift stores began to grow. That's when I started seeing the rise.” (AJ, 19)

Closely linked to this idea of rising inflation and the ever-increasing costs of most retail-oriented clothing supplies is thus the notion that Covid-19 pandemic and the rising costs of general goods and services went hand in hand, thereby further encouraging young adults to resort to cheaper alternatives to fulfill their fashion needs, more prominently, thrifting online, as was actively endorsed by three out of the ten participants, who explicitly mentioned that they could see a link between Pakistan's rising rate of inflation and the need to start thrifting amongst young adults. For the remaining half of the participants who endorsed that there is a link between rising inflation & the rising need to thrift for fashion, their personal need to start thrifting stemmed within the past two to three years, further implicitly highlighting the notion of the COVID-19 pandemic & inflation going hand in hand about thrifting for clothing, although this was not expressed in terms of creating a link between the pandemic and inflation within the country itself.

“I started thrifting through online Instagram profiles, about three to four years ago. I was tempted to check them out because they looked good and they were able to advertise their clothes well. At first, I didn't know that there was such a thing as thrifting, but these Instagram profiles were able to advertise their products and were able to show that at

cheaper prices, you could get the same products that attracted me because I rarely do value for money, but thrifting is a great value for money.” (ZF, 22)

It should be kept in mind here however, that staying at home and being subjected to ‘newer’ forms of online shopping in the form of increasing online thrift stores, was elaborated upon by seven out of the ten participants, who further emphasized the insurgence of online thrift stores following the immediate start of the pandemic, approximately three-four years ago. For this large number of the participants, thrifting for clothing was a phenomenon that they discovered through online thrift stores which were increasingly on the rise due to the Covid-19 lockdown measures, ensuring that the owners of such accounts could benefit from the stores in the form of profit maximization whilst also ensuring that people could shop from the comfort of their homes amid the pandemic, for clothing that was both cheap as well as easily accessible.

“Okay, so I am guilty of having given in to these ridiculously expensive online stores whereas it is so different in person. I don’t know how these online stores opened up on Instagram, but I think it was somewhere in the pandemic when people were restricted to their houses and all of a sudden, everybody was consuming a lot especially people like us who were privileged enough to be consuming so much and we then had thrift stores on Instagram and Facebook, at the swipe of a finger.” (MA, 22).

“Honestly, I think I started thrifting around 2 years ago, maybe somewhere between 2-3 years ago, and essentially because it was only the thrift pages on Instagram that had clothes that were like, up to date and up to trend. They were cute and they had a lot of variety and they were affordable clothes, they weren’t you know (switches to Urdu, translated here in

English) for 3k and above that which is what you're now paying in retail for a t-shirt.”

(MS, 21)

With the insurgence of these online thrift stores within the pandemic and amidst the overall rising cost of most general goods and services, came the promise of good quality clothing as well as up-to-date, and usually branded clothing, as has been emphasized earlier in the first half of this section of the paper. In general terms, seven out of the ten participants saw an inevitable link between rising inflation and online thrifting. Out of these ten participants, only a small amount of them saw a direct link between the rise of inflation within the context of Pakistan in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, while the remaining five participants 'discovered' thrifting at a personal level within the past three to four years, within the insurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic, falling incomes and thus the inevitable need to resort to cheaper options for basic utilities such as clothing, which was amplified by the plethora of online thrift stores that opened up within 2020-2022 domain for young adults. On the flip side, the insurgence of these online stores in itself denotes an economic crisis at the individual level, with young adults choosing to operate these online stores for profit maximization in light of rising inflation amidst the Covid-19 lockdown, proving to be a cycle of inflation impacting all spheres of public life.

Perceived Attitudes Towards Thrifting in Light of Personal Experiences: How did the participants start thrifting for clothing?

As previously mentioned, while the majority of the ten participants were introduced to the idea of thrifting for clothing online three years during the insurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic, it should nonetheless be kept in mind that the answers were much different when the participants were questioned about how they started thrifting for clothing and when. As such, more than half

of the participants stated that they had started thrifting for second-hand clothing online during the start of the pandemic, sometime in the middle of 2020. Out of these participants, most of the participants stated having ‘discovered’ online thrift stores on social media platforms such as Instagram, due to their rising significance and introduction during the midst of the pandemic.

“I started thrifting I think when I was in the starting stages of university. I started thrifting because I discovered a store online they were selling clothing that was very good clothing however they had very specifically mentioned in their ‘bio’ that it was second-hand clothing, but I did not consider it as a very big factor at that time because I found the clothing very attractive and good quality, so I chose to purchase there and then from there, I noticed this pattern that I was able to access clothes that I wanted for a lower price and the same quality more or less from online thrift stores instead of big-name branded stores, so that’s how I navigated myself towards thrifting because I was able to find the same things in their original state for you know, lesser prices and they were easier for me to get.” (SR, 21).

“Oh, I see more and more youngsters thrifting now more than ever, open Instagram and you will see hundreds of thrift stores, all of which are, of course, catering to this growing need. You know most of these accounts on Instagram have a huge following and people are following them, people are looking into thrifting and they are finding them to be a good place to shop. I mean, considering the inflation here in Pakistan, people are going for thrifting more now- that’s one of the reasons. And, I also think that the thrifted clothes are of good quality here and people get really good stuff.” (SD, 19)

For all of these participants, the quality of the clothing as well as the easy accessibility of the clothing itself is what encouraged them to start thrifting in the first place, predominantly through online mediums of thrifted clothing. For another participant, second-hand clothing became a source of great interest due to her having been introduced to it through her friends, who encouraged her to look into online thrift stores on social media platforms such as Instagram.

“I started thrifting when I saw my friends doing it, mostly through Instagram and social media. I found a few good pages which are good. More importantly, these pages have stuff which is usually not available in the market such as Victorian gowns and corsets, things that you don’t normally find in the markets.” (ZA, 22)

For the most part, about highlighting their own experiences of thrifting for clothing online, most participants once again emphasized the many benefits that the online thrifting experience has brought for them which have already been discussed in the first half of this paper, including consistent references to the quality of the clothing about the price, the easy accessibility of the clothing from the comfort of one’s home as well as the availability of different types of clothing which are normally not available in most retail stores, usually the promise of ‘vintage’ clothing. These very qualities not only initially encouraged them to start thrifting for clothing, but also allowed them to utilize their experiences in the best possible manner, using ‘spreading the word’ to their friends and peers regarding the many benefits that online thrifting as of recent continues to bring to young adults like themselves, at a point in time when the notion of retail-oriented clothing continues to suffer in light of its high prices and lack of variety.

Despite the overwhelming majority of the participants discovering thrifting through online social media platforms, the remaining less than half of the participants out of the ten participants

emphasized their own experiences of having discovered thrifting for clothing in-person as opposed to online.

“Well I’ve been thrifting for as long as I can remember and for as long as I could independently shop but my parents would also thrift for me so it’s sort of been an important part for a long time for me. There are also all sorts of markets that I’ve thrifted from; the classic ones being Anarkali and then there is the Railway Station side which also has amazing thrift-able items. And then there was a market that was pretty famous before the pandemic hit, right here in Wapda Town and that was a really good one where you could find stuff but then the pandemic hit and then that market just stopped existing. Then there is another one in the Yateem Khana Bazaar, that is also a good ‘lainda.’ So yes, those are the places that I have had experiences visiting.” (FG, 22)

“In Sheikhpura, they have a market in the city that is a huge *land* (flea market), everyone from Sheikhpura goes there. It’s very convenient, you can find everything there from clothes to cooking utensils to jewelry and pretty much everything. The concept of *land* is cheap, second-hand stuff and I’ve been going there with my family and my *phuppo* since I think I was maybe three or four and so I think that concept was introduced to me very early and that’s when I later figured out that it actually is thrifting and not just you know, shopping.” (AJ, 19).

All of these participants admitted to having started thrifting for clothing at an early age, and were exposed to the concept by their families, usually largely emphasizing ‘in person’ thrifting that can take the form of thrift carts (*Thailand*), *lainda bazaars* (thrift markets) and flea markets, all of which have been common to the culture of Pakistan and whose rich history continues to seep

into the metropolitan realm of most Pakistani contemporary societies, including Lahore.

Additionally, popular in-person thrift markets in Lahore such as those prevalent in the regions of Mayo Hospital, Anarkali and the Railway Station, were regularly mentioned by the participants, as being the earliest thrift markets that they had been exposed to.

“I don’t remember exactly when I started but I’m pretty sure I started using second hand clothes ever since I was a kid. I think I’ve only been to the ones here in Lahore, there are a lot of ‘sasta bazaars’ and ‘lainda bazaars’ throughout Lahore. So, my grandmother lives in Gujranwala and they have a Sunday Bazaar every Monday and Thursday so every time we are there during these days, my mother does take us to these bazaars which I call thrift stores but of course, my mother says lainda. We buy clothes from there; we look through them and we will also buy decoration pieces and you can also get vegetables and stuff of that sort from there.” (ZS, 22)

All of these participants admitted to still going to these in person thrift markets as opposed to shopping for thrifted clothing online, which they admitted to doing but not at a regular basis. As such, about the participants’ personal experiences regarding their initial exposure to second-hand clothing and its inevitable acceptance, six out of the ten participants were introduced to and were able to engage in the concept of the purchase of second-hand clothing through the insurgence of online thrift stores for clothing on social media platforms sometime during the start of the pandemic, while the remaining participants admitted to having been subjected to the in-person experience of thrifting since they were children, usually largely through their families who were also actively purchasing second-hand clothing in-person.

Significant socio-economic factors relevant to the rising culture of thrifting for clothing

As part of the third and final segment of the interview process, all ten of the participants were asked to comment on what they thought were the most important socio-economic factors that have contributed to the ever-rising culture of purchasing second-hand clothing amongst young adults within the context of Pakistan as of now, with the participants being asked to rank their answers, based on importance and relevancy. Some participants were also handed out a piece of paper for them to note their reasons and rankings down, however, most of the participants preferred to be interviewed instead. The findings of this segment have been broken down into three distinct categories (or sub-themes), about the overall larger theme of understanding what socio-economic factors are the most important for this research paper, and have also been more extensively utilized in the flow charts attached below, The reasons mentioned here in the form of three different subthemes are based which reasons were explicitly highlighted by the greatest number of participants, as opposed to how they were respectively ranked by the participants themselves. The results from this section of the data collection process have been summarized in the form of a flowchart, Figure 1.

1) The Hunt for ‘Cheaper’ Clothing: Rising Inflation & its many repercussions

Whilst all the participants differed in their respective rankings of the reasons that they mentioned about the purpose of this paper, an overwhelming majority of the participants highlighted the rising state of inflation (and the inevitable

reduced consumer power purchasing as a result), as being one of the biggest socio-economic factors contributing to the increasing culture of thrifting amongst young adults like themselves within the context of their country. Phrases such as thrifting clothing being considerably ‘cheaper’ than first-hand clothing in light of the increasing prices of even the most basic of

necessities within the country, were put forward by most participants, with some participants out of this overwhelming majority even choosing to make a comparison between the prices of first-hand retail clothing, which tends to be less pocket friendly than second-hand clothing. Some participants also admitted to feeling the need to ‘thrift’ for clothing now more than they used to over the past three years. As such, the rising prices of first-hand clothing and thrift clothing being deemed as a significantly relevant and appropriate alternative to such clothing were interlinking factors that were emphasized by the greatest number of participants, confirming my paper’s initial hypothesis of an overriding link between the increasing prices of first-hand modes of clothing in light of Pakistan’s current economic situation, and the consumer-driven need to actively seek out cheaper alternatives for clothing, taking the more prominent form of second-hand clothing.

2) Youth Subcultures & Identity: The need for ‘aesthetic’ curation & Freedom of Fashion

Second to rising prices of most first-hand clothing items being the most widely mentioned socio-economic factor for my research question by the participants, is the notion of the growing need for ‘aesthetic’ participation amongst young adults, particularly those who choose to actively associate themselves with various digitally curated and popularized youth subcultures, particularly if these cater to the individual’s particular taste in fashion/holds aesthetic value for the individual as a means of achieving a sense of personal freedom and a means of identity curation about one’s fashion choices. As such, most participants also saw the availability of ‘vintage’ and other personalized clothing on online thrift stores as being an important factor that has allowed a greater number of young adults to resort to ‘thrifed’ clothing now, due to the widescale availability of

clothing that caters to specific subcultures/youth aesthetics, that cater to a wide variety of digitally inclined young adults. While this will more deeply be elaborated upon in the next section of this paper, it should be kept in mind that some of the participants admitted to finding their own personal styles/aesthetic sense in fashion through the wide variety of thrifted clothing now available on online platforms like Instagram, thus allowing for greater freedom about fashion choices, proving to further be a significant source of personal identity and digital relevancy.

3) Debunking Traditional Taboos: The increasingly greater acceptance of second-hand clothing

Closely associated with the first two factors is the participants' need to emphasize the increasing acceptance of second-hand clothing amongst young adults; a notion which was previously looked down upon. While this will more extensively be elaborated upon in the next segment of this paper, many participants admitted to feeling the need to start 'thrifted' for more clothing owing to the lack of stigma that is now associated with such a practice amongst peers of their age, which has not only encouraged them to start utilizing second-hand clothing now more than ever, but has also allowed for them to further promote and encourage their peers/friends to start thrifting as well. As mentioned in the earlier section of this paper, a few participants admitted to having started thrifting since they saw their social circle doing it as well.

“I think nowadays it has become like a fashion trend, previously it was more of you know, a matter of convenience and utility. Previously, people would shy away from telling you that they had something second-hand, but now I see a lot more pride in that fact. If you ask somebody ‘Oh that’s a nice bag’, they’ll very proudly tell you that ‘Oh I thrifted it!’ for like 300 rupees and previously I think this was a practice that was very common in middle-class

families, but because it's more of a fashion trend now so that is why it has gotten more popularized in elite classes.” (ZS, 22).

Alongside the reduced stigma and shame that has long-since been associated with the concept of thrifting for clothing, is the greater acceptance of second-hand clothing amongst the middle/upper-middle classes, which were previously known for having perpetuated the long-since-held stigma against the practice of purchasing second-hand items. A few participants (particularly those that have drifted both online and in-person for clothing) chose to highlight this particular argument by emphasizing the notion of the practice of thrifting being increasingly adopted by those social classes that are higher ‘up’ the social strata within the context of Pakistan, allowing for a shift in their traditionally-held value system and which has thus encouraged for greater numbers of people from those classes to now widely engage in this practice, while those who have long-since been thrifting for clothing have too then, also further been encouraged in this regard.

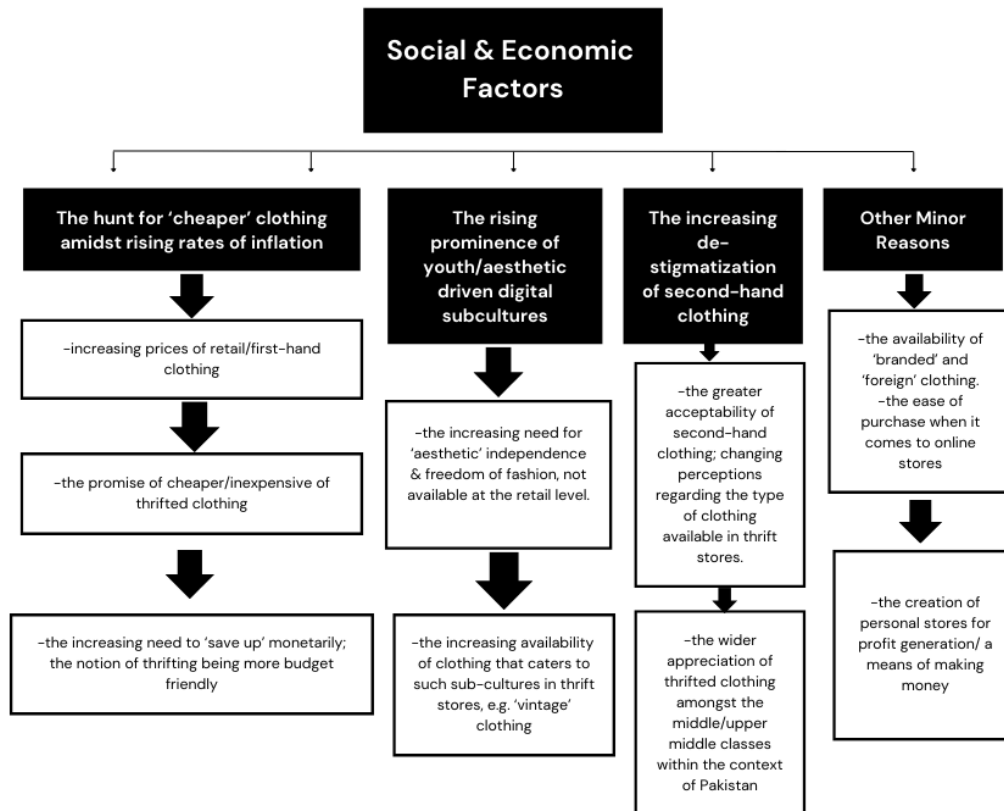
4) Other Minor Reasons

While a vast majority of the participants chose to largely emphasize the three factors that have been mentioned above, since all of the participants provided more than three socio-economic factors from their perspective, other minor reasons that were mentioned by only a handful of the participants included:

- The availability of branded/foreign western clothing
- The ease of accessibility of online thrift stores
- The creation of ‘personal’ online thrift stores as a means of making money/utilizing online thrift stores for profit generation

Figure 1

**The rise of the culture of 'thrifting' for clothing amongst
the young adults of Forman Christian College**



Shifting attitudes towards thrifting for clothing: the mediums chosen & what the future holds

1) Online vs. In-person Thrifting: The medium(s) chosen by the participants

Since modern thrifting within the context of Pakistan particularly can take the shape of either online and/or in-person thrifting, the participants were also asked which mode of thrifting they prefer with regards to the in-person ‘thrift’ stores as well as the digital thrift stores that have largely been both promoted as well as popularized by social media platforms. As such, between the two mediums, the results were both insightful as well as equal parts unexpected in many ways, particularly about my research question as a whole. Far from the notion of online thrifting being a relatively more common medium of thrifting for young adults within the widespread insurgence of digitally popular online stores, a vast majority of the participants admitted to preferring in-person thrifting as opposed to online thrifting, proving to thus be the opposite of what this paper had initially hypothesized. Whilst this will largely be elaborated upon towards the end of this section, it should be kept in mind that only a small minority of the participants stated that they preferred online thrifting and choosing it as their ideal medium for the purchase of second-hand clothing, despite having earlier highlighted the many benefits of online thrifting at a general level.

“In my head, if it isn’t ‘*lainda*’ (thrift carts), then it isn’t thrifting. I will start with what isn’t thrifting first: it isn’t going onto your Instagram accounts and checking out preloved clothing pages and getting a top for 2k rupees and calling it a steal. No, that’s not it. For me, it has to be a whole scavenger hunt and for me, thrifting shouldn’t be convenient. It has to have that layer of inconvenience there for it to be a true experience, right? So, it has to be you going to these in-person thrift sellers and spending hours until you finally say to yourself ‘Ah, I got it!’ It if it’s there and right in front of you, it’s too convenient to be

called thrifting. So, that's what my experience of thrifting has been and that's also been the most fruitful one and that's how I would define it as well." (FG, 22).

"I mean I still shop online, this shirt that I'm wearing is also actually something that I only just recently thrifted but that's also because it's a graphic t-shirt, and so you don't normally find shirts like this in person. But other than that, pretty much everything else is cheaper in person I would say, or so I realized after visiting these in person 'lainda' bazaars. They are catering to a specific class so I guess that is why the prices tend to be low, although you usually have to surf around for what you type or the type of clothing that you are looking for. I started with online thrifting and I still do it often if it means buying something that you know, I wouldn't find in stores but maybe it's because so many people of you know, our age can start their own online thrifting pages online, sometimes the prices can be pretty high because well, the profit motive comes into the picture." (IR, 21)

For the majority of the participants who admitted to preferring in-person thrifting as opposed to online thrifting, an effective comparison was consistently created between the many 'harms' of online thrifting when compared to the many benefits of in-person thrifting, with the general opinion being centered around the increasing exploitation of online mediums of thrifting, a significant aspect about the overall findings of this paper and which shall be elaborated upon towards the end of this section. The smaller minority of participants who preferred online thrifting once again highlighted the ease and convenience that online thrifting brings with it, although this notion was also consistently debunked from their end towards the middle of the interview process.

"Online, definitely online. Mostly Instagram stores, that's the most frequent." (SD, 19)

“I only do online thrifting, on Instagram.” (ZA, 22)

On the other hand, the participants who chose to mention that they prefer online thrifting as opposed to in-person thrifting briefly mentioned this notion within a few sentences as part of the interview process, without getting too much into the details. Interestingly, they also did not seem to make an elaborate comparison between in-person thrifting and online thrifting, while the participants who prefer in-person thrifting were able to effectively justify their choice of medium, further comparing it with the many drawbacks of online thrifting that they were able to highlight at a personal level for themselves, since they admitted to having experimented with both mediums and thus were able to make the conclusion that in-person thrifting holds more relevance for them. As such, the results of this section proved to be of utmost relevance for the central research question of this paper, with an overwhelming majority of the participants being increasingly critical of the newer practice of online thrifting, particularly when this practice is compared to their choice of medium for second-hand clothing, which is in-person thrifting. The small minority of the participants who prefer online thrifting were the same participants who admitted to not having drifted in person ever, whilst also being acutely aware of the ease and sense of comfortability that comes with online thrifting.

2) Shifting Attitudes towards Digitally-Curated Online Thrift Stores: What the future holds

- **The Gentrification of Online Thrifting & The Rising Influence of the Middle/Upper-Middle Classes within the context of fashion choices**

As part of the final aspect of dissecting the overall findings of the semi-structured qualitative interviews, the participants were asked to determine what they believed the future of thrifting for

second-hand clothing would be amongst young adults within the context of Pakistan, particularly about whether they were to deem this rising acceptability and adaptability of the concept as a long-term phenomenon, or a short-term ‘trend’, the latter denoting that the concept would die down with time, with the overarching and ever-changing digital landscape of social media, which is consistently bringing with it new ‘trends’ and ways of living. Before this however, some of the participants chose to extensively elaborate on their personal experiences of online thrifting, and these were the same participants who admitted to preferring the in-person experience of thrifting as opposed to the newer forms of online thrifting. Amongst this shockingly overwhelming majority of the ten participants, some of the participants elaborated on what they believed were some of the biggest disadvantages associated with the process of the online purchase of second-hand clothing, including factors such as the rising prices of online thrifting/profit margin requirements of online thrift stores, the greater adaptability of the once-taboo process of thrifting amongst the upper/upper-middle classes within the context of Pakistan & its many repercussions as well as the hypocrisy of young adults about understanding the actual purpose of thrifting.

“The main thing about online thrifting is the insane amount of gentrification that is happening. Take this with a pinch of salt because I’m saying it, but these people from the higher income classes, go and buy so many clothes from the land and then they sell it online for 5 times the profit. One, you are taking clothes away from a community that needs them. And two, what is the point? What is the point of making that much profit? I would understand it if you needed the money but I know people who don’t need the money, but they’re well off and they’re only doing it because it’s fun. I mean, what is fun about this?”
(AJ, 19).

“Now, the definition has sort of evolved because the reasons for thrifting have sort of shifted into something that we can digest well. This ‘definition’ has garnered better acceptance, from a time when it was simply a you know, very middle-class way of looking at it and this was also the time when it was looked at shamefully. To admit that you’d gotten a certain clothing item, you know by thrifting it and now that we have, I would say, a very well-off section of society who are also participating in it. This is a very big social problem and I’ll delve into it if you want me to. But that acceptance from the upper classes has now sort of made thrifting ‘cooler’ and because they’re doing it, it’s not shameful anymore. You know like, a friend from DHA deciding to wear that crop top that is thrifted is supposed to be ‘cool.’ (FG, 22)

“I have brought a few ridiculously expensive items from these places and these items are usually priced at four times the cost that they were purchased at. In-person thrifting makes clothing more accessible; you get to bargain. And you know what? It’s not just bargaining with the vendors; you form actual bonds with the vendors. The online stores are a scam.” (MA, 22)

For these participants, while the greater acceptability of the purchase of second-hand clothing amongst the once largely isolated middle/upper-middle classes about this argument has allowed for greater acceptability of second-hand clothing at a wider societal level, it has nonetheless allowed for a greater number of problems to emerge as well, particularly the rising idea of using online modes of thrifting as a means of profit maximization at a personal level, with the ease of accessibility of in-person thrift stores making it easier for clothing from those stores to then be purchased by individuals coming from the middle/upper-middle classes, who may then choose to

sell those same items for a much higher price than their actual cost, thereby making online thrifting less accessible and more expensive with time.

“People who have had exposure to in-person thrifting understand that online thrifting, as accessible as it is, is also not the true spirit of thrifting because those kinds of kids who would do it in person, would do it to initially save up money for it. That entire experience of buying stuff from the main street as opposed to the back street of the land, and the vendors are hiding behind the shed and you know that you can get things for 10 times cheaper, considering that cost was always at the forefront for those kids. Again, it’s more inconvenient than the online option which is more accessible, but online is also more expensive.” (FG, 22)

“My problem with Instagram accounts is that they are actively harming the sellers. They’re getting the same shirt from the vendors for 250 rupees and are increasing the prices to like, a 2000 rupee mark, and imagine these types of people buying that top from these vendors and exploiting it to capitalize on the social capital of it all because you know, it’s ‘Wow! Look at me I’m thrifting, I’m sustainable and this is preloved’, they’ll use all these fluffy words to make it seem like this is something very upper-class, and these people are like ‘Oh wow, we’re going to be paying 2000 rupees for this Gucci shirt’ when otherwise it would have been for two thousand dollars.” (FG, 22)

These participants further emphasized the many drawbacks that such a practice has at a societal level, with significant levels of ‘hoarding’ for clothing and the increasing need for profit maximization due to rising inflation within the country, ensuring that the actual essence of thrifting is largely sidelined; which has long-since emphasized on the greater availability of

affordable clothing for the lower middle/working classes. With the greater gentrification of online thrifting and the increasing involvement of those social classes higher 'up' the social strata within the context of Pakistan, it is safe to assume that traditional modes of thrifting (including in-person thrifting) are largely at risk, particularly for those social classes that are already suffering due to the rising rate of inflation within the country.

“I know that I started doing it because getting new clothes was just getting very expensive for me and thrifting was a doable option for me. Now with all these already well-off people of our age buying thrifted clothing and sometimes even opening their stores online, it just makes the spirit of it go away. And this is also why I think online thrifting is so expensive now, people are just using it to make money. I don't want to sound mean, but I do think that a lot of people tend to only shop from thrift stores because they are addicted to the idea of making a big deal out of it online. Like 'Oh look, this is me recycling' and 'Oh look, I'm so into sustainability' when in reality they are just hoarding clothes and are no better, and are also using all the plastic in the world. Online thrift shopping is not the same as it was when you know, I started doing it. And it's only going downhill now because everyone wants to be seen as a 'sustainable shopper' online.” (IR, 22)

“It's a first come first basis, which is why they get away with their exorbitant prices. I understand that these items are curated, but then these stores post stories of people purchasing their items which then creates a sense of panic, because that one piece of clothing has been sold, the 'I need to buy this before it runs out' panic, because the item is curated and you need it. Next, these stores also give in to popular aesthetics; dark academia, cottage-core, fairy-core, and with the pandemic, we also saw people returning to these aesthetics to 'fit in' and then they start buying clothes that fit their particular

aesthetic. You know these stores are selling all these overpriced corsets and Victorian puffy gowns and other vintage items and you don't know if they'll be available again once they are sold out. So, yes that is how they are scamming. They are letting you know that you need to pay a heavy price to fit into your aesthetic.” (MA, 22)

Closely linked to this idea of the rising prices of online clothing is the lack of understanding of what thrifting as a concept means, and what it then largely stands for. A significant component of sustainability about fashion choices, the constant ‘hoarding’ of clothing not only debunks the notion of thrifting being a form of practicing sustainability when it comes to fashion but also ensures that the essence of the concept is largely lost, with a significant focus on digital popularity, as opposed to understanding the actual mission of the idea of sustainability in fashion. While the availability of ‘vintage’ clothing which has increasingly been popularized by online social media platforms has allowed for a significant shift in the fashion choices of a wide majority of young adults, it has also allowed for the curation of a digital moral panic, with the lack of availability of thrifted vintage pieces of clothing creating a sense of immediateness and a further sense of panic amongst regular purchasers of such clothing, who then are willing to pay the higher prices that are associated with these one-off pieces, creating an effective but also largely harmful system of demand of supply, as has been emphasized upon by a significant number of participants within the chosen demographic.

Thrifted Clothing & the Future: What to Expect

Towards the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to determine what they believed the future of thrifting for clothing amongst young adults would be like within the context of the future, with some participants choosing to make a direct contrast with in-person and online

thrifting. These were the same participants who had previously emphasized the notion of thrifting having become more popularized due to the insurgence of online thrifting, and who in this part of the interview process, emphasized the concept of thrifting ‘dying down’ once the online popularity of such a concept dying down as well, thereby deeming thrifting amongst young adults as a mere trend and not a long-term phenomenon.

“Online thrifting, no. People are only doing it because it’s trendy. The poor will keep doing it. When it comes to in-person clothing, the word ‘lainda’ has such a negative connotation to it now, but when it’s done online it becomes trendy. By the way, it is also interesting here to note that fashion did not trickle down from the elite to the working class, it went from the bottom up. Poor people have been thrifting for ages, and I don’t mean Instagram stores, I mean those carts on Anarkali, and poor people have been getting by. Once people get tired of these thrifting stores selling ridiculously overpriced items because more and more people are now finding these items at half the price if not a quarter of the price. These online markets will end, and people will go back to sourcing materials for themselves. It’s like a contradiction to capitalism within itself, these markets will end themselves and you know, there are a lot of dead Instagram thrift accounts, only a few of them are very popular while the rest have managed to take themselves out of existence.”

(MA, 22)

The general idea that was established here was that for these participants, once individuals/regular ‘thrifiers’ of online clothing were to come to terms with how harmful online thrifting can be for the physically present thrift stores, the increasing awareness would lead to the inevitable ‘fall’ of the online thrift market.

“ I think there’s a very huge probability that this is only happening because it’s trendy at the moment so I think that a huge portion of people will stop doing it, mostly because there are entire debates surrounding eco-fashion and all that nowadays, god knows what will happen to those debates a few years from now.” (ZS, 22)

Increasing youth awareness in the form of understanding the need to ‘shop’ sustainably, coming to terms with the many drawbacks of online thrift shopping in the form of high prices as well as the increasingly harmful influence of the upper/upper-middle classes within the traditionally accepted form of in-person thrifting were deemed as some of the most important factors that would lead to the notion of online thrifting being sidelined in the near future, whilst in-person thrifting would continue to be relevant owing to its association with the lower/lower-middle classes within the country. On the flip side, the last factor may also be a source of thrifting as a concept dying down together, with the increasing participation of the most well-off within the gentrification of this concept, leading to further price hikes of second-hand clothing and lesser accessibility in the future.

“I think that it will die down, and for good reasons because the gentrification is going to happen and it already has. People like me who value convenience and can’t always go to these vendors, will give in to this online thing. That’s a lot of loss for these vendors who are already suffering from the pandemic, the local thrift market has been impacted. But I feel like it’s going to die down in a way that the masses will no longer have access to it but a very specific, elitist demographic will be able to monopolize it and something that started for the lower and middle class will become gentrified for the elite so that is going to happen until you know, eventually there is a whole new cycle of thrifting but yes thrifting as we know it now is not going to exist if the online gentrification of it exists.” (FG, 22)

However, for the overwhelming majority of the participants, the overarching benefits of thrifting as an experience may be enough to largely ostracize the many repercussions that are increasingly associated with it.

“If I’m suggesting it in a wider perspective, it’s easy on the pocket and it’s easy to access and navigate in your life. It’s user-friendly in the same that you do not need to spend a lot of time thinking about things I need to purchase so in that respect, I feel like it does make life a lot easier so I do consider it as something that I would practice in the longer period of life. I feel the concept of online purchases in general is just becoming a lot more prominent in this regard. A lot of stores online, even if we put thrift stores aside and talk about general purchases, there are a lot of online stores that sell products for cheaper rates as compared to buying them in person because it takes out a lot of elements such as sales tax and things like that, and concepts of standard GST. Specifically, when COVID-19 came about, I feel like that’s when the concept of online shopping just became the biggest trend ever and I feel like it persists to this day as well and will continue to persist, as people realize the ease that it has brought to their lives.” (SR, 21).

For the majority of these participants, understanding whether thrifting is a rising phenomenon amongst young adults would be a long-term notion or not meant understanding & taking into account its existing benefits, which despite debatable contrasting arguments, still largely include the ease of accessibility of second-hand clothing from one’s home, the low prices when compares to retail clothing as well as the ever-increasing need of young adults to purchase more clothing at the personal level. Nearly all of the participants supported this stance by taking into account their own positive experiences with thrifting, deeming that they too, would continue thrifting for second-hand clothing in the future.

“I don’t see it coming to an end because youngsters always need more clothes, they’re very social and they now have the option of selling their clothes online and just buying new ones, this can also be a business for them. In Pakistan, most forms of earning money are just not valued. I mean, a person from a certain class, our class, for example, can’t just be a waiter at a restaurant, now can he? So, people can just do this, and in my circle, I have cousins and friends who earn good money by selling their designer clothes online and so this benefits you and also the person buying it from you. So no, I don’t see this as just a trend.”
(ZA, 22)

“Will be carried forward for sure. I mean in person thrifting at least, because people have been doing it for ages and it will be here in the future as well. ” (ZF, 22)

Keeping these benefits of online thrifting in mind, coupled with an acutely effective understanding of second-hand clothing with regards to the promotion of a more sustainably relevant culture and environment for practicing fashion & choosing eco-friendly mediums of clothing, would ensure and further inculcating a sense of responsibility at an individual level, and would further minimize the existing harms of online thrifting within the context of Pakistan, as has been endorsed by these participants.

“On the one hand, I do think that it is something that shouldn’t be overconsumed. I don’t support people who are going and buying these hoards of clothes and overconsumption because if you’re going there and buying clothes just for you to store them in your closet and not using them and you’re just building up this inventory that will be wasted, it’s not fair because the clothes that you’re thrifting, someone can only afford them and not like, first-hand clothes. People who are buying these clothes should be utilizing them to their maximum

potential and then donating them, I think that's fair and sustainable and at the end of the day, that is a form of recycling. Those clothes, if not sold at the 'linda' will just be sent to landfills or will be wasted which we don't need more of. People who are buying these clothes should be utilizing them to their maximum potential and then donating them, I think that's fair and sustainable and at the end of the day, that is a form of recycling. Those clothes, if not sold at the 'linda' will just be sent to landfills or will be wasted which we don't need more of." (MS, 21)

Table 1**The Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
19-21	4	40
22-23	6	60
24	0	
Gender (All females)		
Major		
Sociology	3	30
Psychology	5	50
Computer Science	1	10
English Literature	1	10
Monthly Income (Total Household)		
100k-200k	4	40
Greater than 200k	6	60
Year of Study		
Junior	5	50
Senior	1	10
Sophomore	2	20
Masters (in FCCU)	2	20

Discussion

As the findings of this study demonstrate, while several different socio-economic factors may be relevant in explaining the rising trend of the purchase of second-hand clothing amongst young female adults of Forman Christian College, the three most significant factors that were highlighted by the greatest number of participants include the ever-growing rate of inflation

within the context of Pakistan leading to reduced consumer purchasing power patterns and an overall increase in the general prices of most goods and services, including first-hand clothing, which having been highlighted by all ten participants, proved to be the most important factor about this study. Understanding the rising need for resonance and acceptance amongst the ever-evolving digital trends on social media, including personal allegiance to particularistic youth sub-cultures as well as finding one's fashion style/aesthetic proved to be another important factor that was put forward by most participants, due to the wide-scale availability of 'vintage' and aesthetic-oriented clothing in most thrift stores within the domain of the country.

While factors such as the ease of availability of western and (usually) branded clothing as well as the utilization of personal thrift stores for making money/establishing micro businesses were also put forward by a significant number of participants, one of the focal findings of this study proved to be increasing link between social class and the insurgence of the culture of thrifting for clothing amongst young adults, with rising gentrification of the concept of online thrifting proving to a source of significant concern for most participants, when compared to the in-person concept of thrifting, with an effective comparison between the two mediums being put forward by multiple participants. As part of this finding, the general argument that was presented was the rising involvement of the upper middle/middle classes within the once largely working-class dominated culture of purchasing second-hand clothing, through the swift utilization of online social media platforms to make thrifting more accessible to a wider, previously untapped niche of Pakistani society. While this has its benefits of making thrifting for clothing easier for most people, it should also be kept in mind that such a practice is largely profit-driven, as has been put forward by most participants who chose to actively criticize the rising notion of online thrifting for clothing. As such, while the benefits of online thrifting were recognized by a wide variety of

the participants, they were also backed up with concerns for the many ways in which thrifting for clothing at an online scale is increasingly being utilized, which explains why even though the majority of the participants of this study are active online ‘thrifters’ for clothing, they demonstrated significant concerns about the overall future of online thrifting for clothing, particularly with regards to the many ways in which it is now increasingly becoming inaccessible to a wider framework of society owing to rising prices of second-hand clothing, as well as it lacking the possible essence of in-person thrifting, for those participants who stated to having been exposed to in-person thrifting before learning about online mediums of the purchase of second-hand clothing.

Above all however, the findings proved to be focally relevant to the initial hypothesis/central research question of this study itself, which although centrally aimed to highlight the many social and economic factors that may be necessary in explaining the rising culture of thrifting for clothing amongst young, female adults within the context of Pakistan, was able to also highlight several other significant notions that proved to be unexpected about this study. On the one hand, it shed light on the ever-alarming economic situation within Pakistan, with rising prices of even the most general of necessities such as clothing, allowing for the insurgence of newer consumer practices such as thrifting. On the other hand, while an overwhelming majority of the participants admitted to actively purchasing second-hand clothing through online means, these same participants also emphasized the increasing gentrification of online thrifting, with regards to issues surrounding social class, accessibility as well as the rising focus on profit maximization about online modes of thrifting for clothing, casting serious doubts over the overall future of digital thrifting and its benefits. While many factors may then effectively claim to explain this rising culture of thrifting for clothing, it should be kept in mind that such factors may not

necessarily be positive ones, as has largely been emphasized by a vast number of participants in this study.

The link between social class and the rising gentrification of online spaces for thrift clothing proved to be another finding of this study, about its relevance to many of the opinions that were put forward by some participants. As such, the consistent mention of the term ‘social class’ and the excessive involvement of the upper/upper-middle classes of the country by a significant number of the participants proved to be imminent in shaping the theoretical framework of this study, taking a more neo-Marxist approach in the form of significant emphasis on the concept of social-class based cultural hegemony, that supports the findings of this study. By understanding the external economic and ideological ‘dominance’ of the most economically well-off within the context of Pakistani society with regards to the existing ‘manipulation’ of resources and/or institutions that cater to the least economically well-off within society for their economic benefit (Bullock et.al, 1999), the responses of the participants become of utmost relevance to the context of this study, including the rising need to understand the role of the higher economic ‘strata’ within Pakistani society in increasingly trying to occupy and adapt to the spaces that were previously considered to be reserved for those ‘down below’ the strata. As part of this framework, other literature from a theoretical perspective that supports other findings of this study includes Thorstein Veblen’s theory of Conspicuous Consumption, which was solidified for this study due to some participants admitting to purchasing second-hand ‘branded/western’ clothing at cheaper prices, linked more extensively to Bourdieu’s focus on ‘highbrow culture’ (1984).

Limitations

While this study largely aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic of the study at hand, it should be kept in mind that the qualitative nature of the study makes it difficult for the data and information garnered to be generalized at a larger scale, with the lack of usage of standardized tools meaning that the study may potentially lack reliability and/or replicability.

Due to the sample size of the study consisting of only female students of Forman Christian College, the lack of inclusivity about the sample size means that a significant population at both the micro (university) level as well as at the macro (societal level) has not been taken into consideration. At the university level, the lack of male/queer representation in the sample size as well as the interviews being conducted only with students from Lahore/Punjab at the macro level can prove to be a source of hindrance for this study.

Recommendations

The results of this study provide a two-fold agenda about both tackling the growing need to ‘overconsume’ fashion and fashion-related notions amongst young adults, as well as understanding what can be achieved at the governmental level to ensure that the rising need to purchase second-hand clothing amongst the growing middle/upper-middle classes within Pakistan is utilized optimistically, with little to no ethically immoral constraints. At a personal level, the need to initiate and actively partake in the formation of online ‘thrift’ stores as a means of making money, particularly amidst rising inflation in the country is justified to a certain extent, however choosing to understand that the formation of such stores within rising digital spaces is also both directly and indirectly linked to the promotion of potentially more ‘sustainable’ and environmental-friendly fashion choices should more largely be promoted at the

digital level. As such, it is suggested that online thrift stores catering to young adults should not only focus on providing their customers with good quality second-hand clothing at potentially reasonable prices but should also actively partake in discussions surrounding the eco-friendly notion of the purchase of such clothing, pre-dominantly through active social media campaigns on their respective social media handles that aim to promote sustainability when it comes to fashion to their potential audiences, as a means of both educating their audiences as well then participating in a wider discourse surrounding the ever-changing dynamics of the fashion industry at a global scale. With the rise of various online mediums for the promotion and education of a vast number of audiences regarding an even more vast pool of contemporary socio-economic issues, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook continue to be the most predominantly utilized platforms for the purchase of second-hand clothing amongst young female adults within the country, as such their utilization for bringing to light current discourses surrounding the actual purpose of second-hand clothing should be considered, particularly largely by owners/suppliers of second-hand clothing within various digital spaces.

What then also becomes apparent, is the importance of recognizing how local spaces for second-hand clothing can be promoted and highlighted, particularly due to their wide-scale cultural significance in the city of Lahore as well. As was mentioned by a significant number of participants in the study, the wide-scale 'erosion' of online thrift stores has seemingly hurt the local markets for second-hand clothing, which can be deemed as being largely alarming owing to their significance and relevance to the working/lower-middle classes of the city of Lahore. Understanding that these are not just spaces for the purchase of second-hand clothing, but that their historic and cultural value remains intact and relevant today as well is a notion that should be

given more heed, both at a personal as well as at a governmental level. At the societal and governmental level thus, rigorous efforts should be made to both highlight as well as promote these local vendors of second-hand clothing through the utilization of various platforms such as media channels and print and digital media, to ensure that such consistent promotional efforts benefit not just the local vendors, but also potential consumers who may then be further encouraged to resort to local mediums of second-hand clothing for their fashion-related needs. More than anything however, such promotional devices would allow for a healthy balance to be achieved between online spaces for the purchase of thrift clothing and local markets for thrift clothing from the perspective of both eco-sustainability as well as profit maximization, allowing potential and regular consumers more choice when it comes to ‘eco-friendly’ and cheaper clothing-oriented decisions, whilst also generating sufficient income sources for the individuals actively engaged in the selling of second-hand clothing, regardless of the medium they choose to sell it from.

Conclusion

Understanding the many ways in which the widespread digitalization of various modes of ‘traditional’ consumption, including clothing, is essential in terms of its overall contextual effects on not just the individuals choosing to fulfill their clothing needs, but may also be used to recognize how such mediums continue to affect the wider diaspora of ‘traditional’ forms of living. Such a link was unexpectedly created with this study, with significant emphasis on gaining an understanding of the underlying socio-economic factors explaining and highlighting the rise of the culture of thrifting for clothing/the purchase of second-hand clothing amongst young, predominantly female adults, in light of the country’s rising rate of inflation and ever-

increasing prices of necessities such as clothing. Largely confirming this existing notion as the central finding of this study, a further wider emphasis on the various ways in which digital forms of thrifting continue to be utilized for the ease of consumers of such clothing is necessary, whilst also recognizing the potential harms that may be associated with such a practice, including but not limited to profit-driven pricing scales, the possible exploitation of the term ‘sustainability’ about fashion as well as how online thrifting continues to negatively impact the local markets for second-hand clothing, as has been put forward by a vast majority of the participants.

Nonetheless, with rising inflation and increasing prices of retail clothing, it is also important to understand that the purchase of second-hand clothing is deemed as being both necessary and desirable, as has been emphasized by the majority of the participants of this study. Despite being critical of online thrift stores, they actively choose to still purchase from them owing to their wide-spread ease of purchase and lower prices when compared to first-hand clothing, factors which continue to be crucial in light of the unstable economic conditions of the country, and despite the many harms that may be associated with the functioning of these stores themselves. Rising inflation and the need to purchase second-hand clothing through predominately digital means thus go hand in hand, as the findings of this study indicate along with other socio-economic factors. Despite its small-scale structure, this study hopes to bring to light the relevance of changing patterns of consumer behavior within the context of Pakistan’s evolving economic landscape, and its effects on both newer forms of consumption as well as traditional means of purchase.

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Appendix A: The Consent Form

This study aims to analyze the rise of the culture of thrifting/purchasing second-hand clothing amongst young female adults (aged between 19-24 years) at Forman Christian College. You are invited to participate in a series of qualitative interviews conducted to collect the necessary data for this process, and are actively encouraged to partake in it by speaking about your personal experiences about purchasing second-hand clothing, why you chose to adopt such a consumer choice about fashion and what factors you think may be necessary that explain the rise of such a phenomena. As such, it should also be kept in mind that participation in this interview is voluntary and that at any point in time during the data collection process, you are allowed to withdraw at your convenience. Keeping in mind the qualitative nature of the interviews, they will be recorded however you can wish to remain anonymous and/or withdraw whenever and if you like. Any information provided from your side will remain confidential, keeping in mind all the necessary ethical guidelines to be taken into consideration about this research.

- 1) I have read the information sheet and understood all explanations related to the study.
- 2) I understand that all ethical guidelines are being followed; including the data provided from my side being held in complete confidentiality.
- 3) I understand that I can withdraw from the research process at any given point in time, before the transcription process of the interviews.
- 4) I understand that the information which I provide shall be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.
- 5) I agree to take part in this research.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to your participation in the data collection of this

research after having read the information provided above. Sign here:

Appendix B: Screening Questionnaire

Screening Questionnaire

- What age demographic do you fall in within the required age range of this research? (19-24 years).
- What is your total household income?
- Are you currently an active purchaser of second-hand clothing?
- Have you purchased any second-hand clothing within the last six months?

Appendix C: Interview Guide

General Guidelines:

- Ten interviews, to be conducted between 45 minutes- 60 minutes.
- The interviews will begin with an ice-breaking session (approx. 5 minutes), consisting of the following questions and/or other similar conversation starters to make the participants feel more comfortable and at ease.
 1. Hello, how are you?
 2. Introduce yourself briefly. (university major, hobbies and interests).

Additionally, as the interviewer and researcher, I shall spend an additional 5 minutes familiarizing the participants with the purpose of the interviews, alongside introducing myself briefly. The following statements will be significant in this

regard:

- Hello and good morning to you all. My name is Saliha Kamran and I am a seventh-semester student currently majoring in Sociology. The purpose of gathering you here today is to utilize the results of today's interaction to collect data for my thesis, which essentially aims to look into the many social and economic factors that have influenced the rise of 'thrifting' about second-hand clothing amongst people of our age in light of inflation within the context of Pakistan. I am looking forward to hearing from you, and I urge you to participate to the fullest in this regard.
- The participants will also be reminded of the ethical guidelines that they are entitled to about data collection; including being informed of their responses being recorded as well as their right to 'drop out' of the research process at any given point.
- Ensuring that the interviews remain as interactive as possible, the participants will be encouraged to speak about their opinions to the largest degree possible, to gain the best possible insights regarding the questions asked.

Questions (in line with the 3 segmented themes of the literature review)

Section 1

- How often do you shop for clothes?
- Where do you regularly shop from?
- In terms of shopping, do you prefer the in-person retail experience or online shopping?

- Have you ever heard of the term ‘thrifting’ in relation to clothing and fashion?
- If so, how would you define thrifting/purchase of second-hand clothing?
- Have you ever engaged in thrifting/are actively engaged in thrifting for clothing? (probe:if you chose to stop thrifting, why did you do so?)
- What age group do you think chooses to ‘thrift’ for second-hand clothing the most nowadays? (probe: for young adults, how do you think young adults are ‘finding out’about thrifting?)
- What sources do you thrift from? (e.g. online, in-person markets, through relatives)

Section 2

- How has the current state of inflation impacted your purchasing power?
- How has the current inflation impacted your buying behavior in relation to the purchase of clothing? (probe: What new consumer practices have you adopted? What practices have you since abandoned? Do you see these newer practices on your end being adopted for the long run?)
- What new consumer practices in relation to the purchase of clothing have you noticed owing to rising inflation within the country?

Section 3

Since this aspect of my literature review/research process aims to look into the many socio-economic factors (not limited to inflation) that serve as possible explanations for the rise of thrifting of clothing within the context of Pakistan, it only makes sense to ensure that the participants are fully engaged in recognizing what they think the possible factors for such a notion should be. As such:

- The participants will be asked to write down on sheets of paper what they believed were the most important socio-economic factors influencing the rise of the purchase of second-hand clothing at their level. They will be asked to ‘rank’ their answers based on which of their mentioned factors stand at the top of these lists, and vice versa.
- The findings of this third section will be collected and the factors with the highest amount of ‘upper rank’ ratings will be deemed as the most significant factors, and vice versa.
- The findings of this section will be utilized and better explained through the curation of an interactive flow-chart, to be included as part of the final research paper.

Appendix D: IRB Form



FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

IRB Ref: IRB-504/6-2023

Date: 22-06-2023

Project Title: Analyzing the rise of the thrifting culture amongst female students of FCCU within an inflation ridden context: what socio-economic factors explain such a trend?

Principal Investigator: Saliha Kamran

Supervisor: Dr Shumaila Athar

The institutional review board has examined your project in IRB meeting held on 22-06-2023 and has approved the proposed study. If during the conduct of your research any changes occur related to participant risk, study design, confidentiality or consent or any other change then IRB must be notified immediately.

Please be sure to include IRB reference number in all correspondence.

Dr. Sharon Hanook
Convener - IRB
Chairperson, Department of Statistics
Forman Christian College
(A Chartered University)
Lahore

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