



# The Motivation of Generation Z to Adopt Sustainable Fashion Practices, Including the Purchase of Secondhand Items

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## Abstract

Generation Z (Gen-Z) consumers are becoming increasingly aware of climate change and are adjusting their fashion consumption habits towards more sustainable practices, such as thrifting, renting, and swapping. Although these practices are less common in Egypt, recent trends indicate a growing acceptance among Egyptian Gen-Z consumers. This study aims to address the limited research on fashion collaborative consumption in the Egyptian market by exploring factors influencing the adoption of secondhand and rental fashion through in-depth interviews with 20 participants. Findings show that traditional practices like borrowing clothes are prevalent for cultural and economic reasons rather than sustainability alone. Despite interest driven by economic challenges and social media, barriers like inconvenience, high costs, and limited options hinder broader adoption. To facilitate growth, enhanced shopping experiences, improved accessibility, and shifts in social attitudes are necessary, alongside support from the government and brands. This research offers valuable insights for tailoring business strategies to different consumer segments to promote sustainable fashion practices.

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## Keywords

*Consumer behavior; Sustainable fashion practices; Fashion collaborative consumption; Secondhand; Thrifting; Rental*

## 1. Introduction

The fashion industry is the second most environmentally damaging sector globally, contributing to significant social issues like forced labor and gender inequality, as well as severe environmental impacts, including high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and excessive water use (UNDP, 2023). The industry's model promotes overproduction and rapid consumption, leading to massive waste, with consumers discarding an average of 36 kg of clothing per person each year (Falk, 2023). Without adopting sustainable practices, resource shortages could become critical by 2050, with the demand for materials potentially rising by 63% (McCosker, 2023). Collaborative consumption, which includes practices like sharing and renting products, has the potential to reduce waste and environmental harm by extending the lifecycle of products (Virgens et al., 2022). In Egypt, traditional practices like passing down clothing are common, but acceptance of secondhand and rental options has been low until recently (Enterprise, 2022). The rise of Wekalet El Balah, Egypt's largest secondhand market, reflects increasing interest, particularly among Generation Z (Gen-Z) consumers, who show a strong inclination toward sustainable fashion (Selim, 2020; Tabikha, 2023).

According to a McKinsey survey, 80% of Gen-Z, born between 1997 and 2012, are particularly influential and considering sustainable fashion, with 64% of this generation having a positive experience in thrifting and renting pre-owned items, showing enthusiasm for this market due to sustainability and financial factors (Liang and Xu, 2017). Subsequently, the secondhand market is projected to surpass fast fashion, reaching \$350 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2024). Currently, the secondhand apparel market in Egypt constitutes 4.1% of the total market share and is projected to expand to 7.6% by 2027 (Statista, 2024). This growth is largely fueled by this substantial youth demographic, comprising approximately 56 million individuals (Khalil et al., 2021). This trend indicates significant opportunities for businesses and investors interested in this sector and has never been academically addressed in Egypt.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap, contributing to the previous literature on fashion collaborative consumption by exploring the factors that encourage and discourage Egyptian Gen-Z consumers from adopting fashion collaborative consumption through the consumption of secondhand products as a sustainable practice.

### **Research Objectives:**

- a. To understand consumers' level of knowledge and awareness of sustainability and the importance of sustainable practices regarding their evaluation of the fashion industry in terms of ethical and sustainable practices
- b. To analyze consumers' fashion consumption behaviors
- c. To discuss the concept of fashion collaborative consumption and explore consumers' likelihood to adopt it
- d. To classify consumers into different segments to provide recommendations and strategies for different consumption behaviors of each segment to help businesses that run on collaborative consumption models gain a better insight into the market

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Sustainable Fashion**

Sustainable fashion promotes a shift away from the resource-heavy, exploitative practices of traditional fashion toward an industry that reduces environmental impact and ensures fair treatment of workers. It encourages mindful, responsible consumption and production, focusing on creating eco-friendly, ethical clothing that prioritizes long-term well-being for people and the planet, as opposed to the harmful effects of fast fashion. Some of the sustainable fashion practices are listed below.

- a. **Slow Fashion:** promotes the creation of high-quality, timeless garments that are designed to last longer, encouraging consumers to buy less and wear their clothes more.
- b. **Zero Waste:** seeks to minimize fabric waste during the design and production process by using every inch of fabric, often through innovative pattern making.
- c. **Low Impact:** uses natural, biodegradable, or recycled fibers and uses less water, energy, and chemicals, or replaces synthetic dyes with natural ones to have less environmental impacts
- d. **Circular Economy:** focuses on designing products with their entire lifecycle in mind, aiming to keep materials in use for as long as possible through reuse, repair, recycling, and upcycling.
- e. **Collaborative Consumption:** encourages shared use of clothing, such as renting, swapping, or buying secondhand, rather than owning new items.

### **2.2. Fashion Collaborative Consumption**

Collaborative consumption, defined by Felson and Spaeth (1978), is a sustainable system where consumers share goods and services, fostering a circular economy that promotes product reuse and minimizes environmental impact (Papamichael et al., 2024). Recognized by Time magazine in 2011 as a transformative idea (Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018), collaborative consumption is culturally significant in Egypt among family and close friends,

especially in fashion, where practices like sharing, donating, and swapping offer alternatives to fast fashion and extend product's lifecycle. Secondhand fashion provides an eco-friendly and affordable alternative to fast fashion, enabling consumers to engage with style without financial strain or environmental harm (Yang et al., 2024; Machado et al., 2019). Fashion rental services further promote this by emphasizing use over ownership (Jain et al., 2021). As ecological awareness rises, thrift shops and online secondhand platforms have gained popularity, particularly among Gen-Z, with social media playing a key role in promoting sustainable practices (Boyer et al. 2024). Research indicates that influential figures, like Emma Watson, can raise awareness about sustainable fashion, although their impact on actual purchasing behavior may be limited due to the negative face stigma related to hygiene and socioeconomic status (Ronda, 2023; Jain et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024; McKeown & Shearer, 2019).

### **2.2.1. Drivers and Barriers**

Arrigo (2021) conducted a systematic literature review that identified several key factors influencing consumers' willingness to engage in fashion collaborative consumption. These include economic, psychological, cultural, and social dimensions. Economic factors focus on business viability, while psychological aspects examine how attitudes, norms, and perceptions affect adoption. Cultural factors consider values and past experiences with collaborative consumption, and social factors look at demographic influences. The review highlights that the main opportunities for participation stem from utilitarian benefits (cost-effectiveness and product performance), hedonistic pleasures (joy of discovery and social interactions), psychological needs (uniqueness and self-expression), and environmental awareness (guilt-free shopping). Consumers typically favor business-to-consumer models for their trustworthiness, with some preferring online shopping for convenience and others enjoying in-store experiences. Successful adoption requires establishing circularity and sustainability, and key factors influencing purchasing behavior include the TPB constructs such as attitudes, norms, perceived behavior, and intentions, as well as past experiences and cultural values. Barriers to adoption include hygiene concerns, entrenched consumption habits, materialistic values, product quality issues, accessibility challenges, and social stigma.

### **2.2.2. Mediating Factors**

Mediating factors for adopting fashion collaborative consumption include mindfulness, psychological needs, personality traits, and demographics. Mindfulness, as described by Sheth et al. (2011), fosters awareness of consumption's effects, promoting sustainable practices (Mohammad et al., 2020). While it encourages engagement with secondhand fashion through self-conscious emotions like pride and guilt (Zahid et al., 2022), a gap exists when psychological needs conflict with mindful intentions (Ronda, 2023; Khalil et al., 2021; Tabikha, 2023). Personality traits, such as emotional attachment and the desire for uniqueness, influence preferences for sharing or shopping secondhand (McNeill & Venter, 2019; Lang & Armstrong, 2017). Demographic factors also play a role; for instance, higher education correlates with greater awareness of sustainable practices (Papamichael et al., 2024). While Gen-Z shows interest in online resale and rental platforms, trust issues can hinder adoption, particularly among Gen-X, born between 1960-1980, who prefer in-store shopping. Overall, these factors shape consumers' engagement with collaborative consumption in the fashion industry.

## **2.3. Theoretical Background**

Conducted by Ajzen (1991), TPB is a social-psychological theoretical framework that studies human behavior through attitude, norms, and perceived behavior. The theory suggests that these constructs influence intention, which if experienced frequently results in the actual behavior. To summarize, the adoption of fashion collaborative consumption modes is influenced by various psychological and social factors including attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavior, and intention suggesting that choosing to apply this theory to this research will achieve the most insightful findings (Leifhold, 2018) (Lang & Armstrong, 2017) (Koay et al., 2022) (Boyer et al. 2024) (Lee & Chow, 2020).

Attitude: When consumers have a positive evaluation of fashion collaborative consumption modes (more perceived values than risks), they are more likely to adopt the system.

Subjective Norms: When consumers feel that their significant others accept, value, and adapt to fashion collaborative consumption modes, they are more likely to adopt the system.

Perceived Behavior: When consumers feel that fashion collaborative consumption is a convenient and easy practice, they are more likely to adopt it.

Intention: When consumers have positive attitudes towards fashion collaborative consumption, find it socially acceptable among their significant others, and find it easy to adopt, their adoption intention will increase, which will result in the actual adoption of the system.

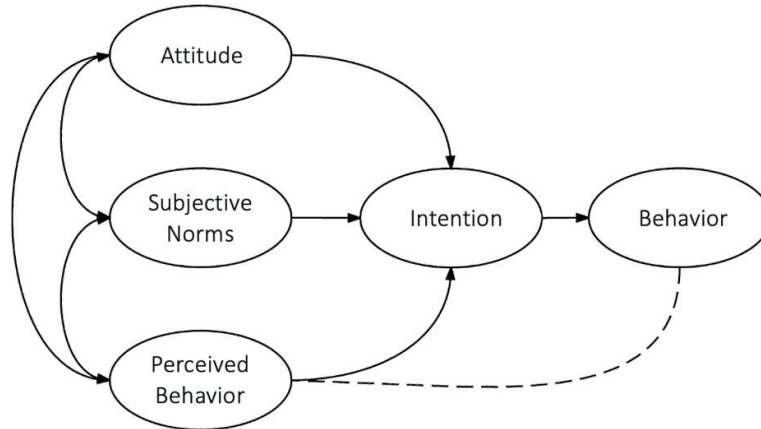


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

## 2.4. Methodology

This study, which focuses on the increasing acceptance of the secondhand fashion market among Egyptian Gen-Z consumers, historically influenced by negative perceptions, will adopt the interpretivism philosophy. This approach is effective for understanding consumer behavior within cultural contexts, enabling the exploration of deeper meanings and motivations behind the acceptance of secondhand fashion in Egypt. While existing literature covers the secondhand fashion market and its adoption behaviors (Arrigo, 2021), it remains relatively unfamiliar to Egyptian consumers. Recognizing the diverse social and cultural experiences that shape perceptions, this study aims to develop new insights specific to Egyptian society through thematic analysis of primary data, utilizing an inductive approach. This flexible method facilitates in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives.

The research employed a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry strategy, conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 participants to gather detailed narratives about their acceptance of secondhand fashion. Gender was not considered as a mediating factor in this research thus 3 male participants were included. Given the study's time constraints and exploratory nature, it used a cross-sectional design with a non-probability yet purposeful sample of 20 participants, recruited from the researcher's circle of family and friends, were selected for their awareness of sustainability and fashion secondhand markets. This simple convenient sampling technique was chosen because it best fits the research's scope and participants were easily accessible and readily available to the researcher.

For this research, which aims to generate new insights from individual experiences (interpretivism philosophy and narrative inquiry) and build a conceptual framework from coded themes (inductive theory approach), thematic analysis was chosen. This method involves fragmenting, reducing, and coding data to identify patterns. While narrative inquiry typically uses narrative analysis to maintain data integrity, this study focused on thematic analysis to identify themes. Interviews were manually transcribed and translated from Arabic before analysis, despite the availability of transcription software.

Ethical considerations in qualitative research are vital for maintaining integrity and respecting participants. The researcher obtained ethics approval, thoroughly briefed participants on the research's nature, objectives, and potential impacts, and ensured participants of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participant

confidentiality and respectful treatment are essential, including valuing their time and ensuring their safety and well-being. During data analysis, the researcher avoided manipulation or selective reporting, ensured accuracy and transparency, and addressed potential biases. These practices uphold the research's accuracy, credibility, and validity.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Sample Description**

Twenty Egyptian participants (17 females and 3 males) belonging to Gen-Z, aged between 20-27 years, and belonging to the upper-middle class holding a Bachelor's (BA) degree were included in this research (table 1, Appendix A). The participants' monthly income ranged between 5-30K Egyptian pounds (LE). Amongst all participants, 7 were not open to the concept and had no experience in secondhand shopping or rentals. To ensure the participants' privacy, only their initials were presented in this research after their approval.

#### **3.2. Findings**

Participants express a strong urgency for sustainable practices to combat climate change, shaped largely by social media exposure from 2015 to 2017. They are aware of the negative impacts and greenwashing in the fashion industry, committing to boycotting brands that engage in deceptive practices. While they enjoy fashion trends, they also practice reuse and recycling to alleviate guilt over overconsumption, favoring donation, resale, and repurposing for disposal. Emotional attachment complicates their willingness to discard items, emphasizing their desire to keep them useful.

In Egypt, traditional practices like passing down clothes reflect cultural and economic factors rather than a deep commitment to sustainability. Although interest in secondhand and rental fashion is growing due to economic pressures and social media influence, actual adoption remains limited due to barriers such as inconvenience, high costs, and quality concerns.

This conceptual framework (Figure 2) uses the TPB to explore how consumers' attitude (overall evaluation of the perceived benefits and risks), perceived behavior (action's ease and convenience), and subjective norms (significant others' perception) influence their adoption intentions of thrifting and renting through connecting the emergent themes. Participants' attitude is reflected in their evaluation of the key benefits of the secondhand and rental markets such as financial, psychological, hedonic, and sustainability benefits while their perceived risk includes poor product attributes and platform's lack of trust. There is a lack of positive perceived behaviour towards thrifting and renting fashion goods and the concept remains unsupported within the demographics of research. This is a resulting factor of the perceived hassle and inconvenience in accessing thrifting and renting services. Social norms are reflected in the impact of changing social perceptions, social media trends, and significant others' acceptance of thrifting and renting fashion goods.

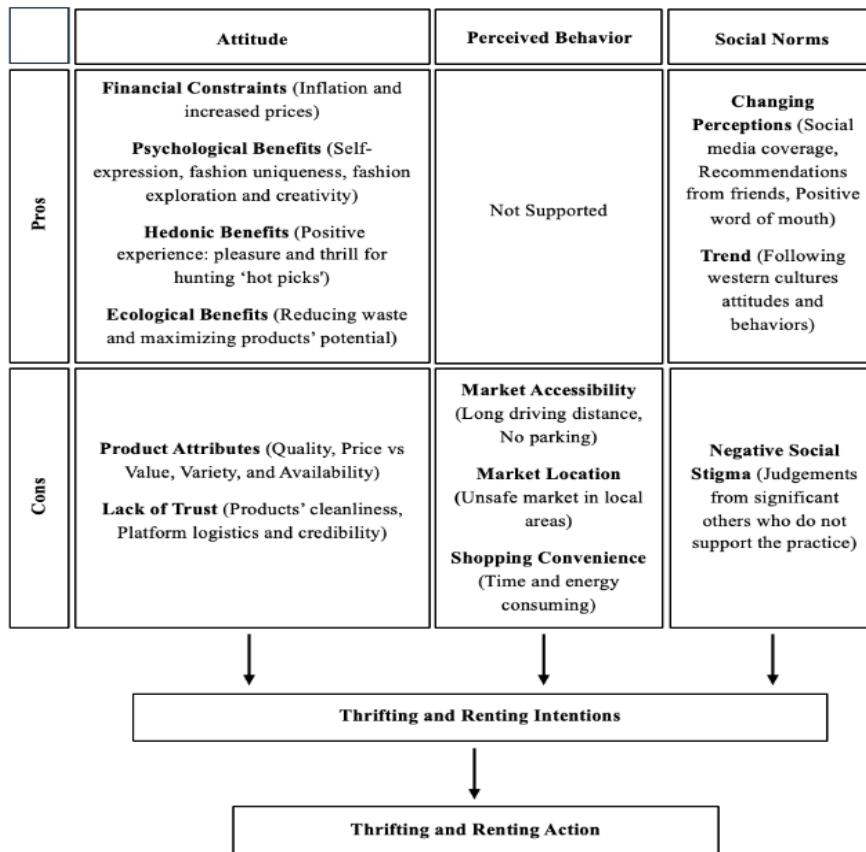


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework(source: by authors)

#### 4. Discussion

The research findings reveal that various factors influence and hinder participants' decisions to engage in fashion collaborative consumption that aligns with many of the previously reviewed literature. Economic challenges drive participants to thrift as a cost-effective alternative, motivated by financial pressures and the search for unique items (Xu et al., 2014; Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018). The flexibility of fashion rental platforms appeals to those wanting variety without long-term commitments. Social media influencers play a crucial role in normalizing secondhand shopping, reducing stigma and enhancing acceptance, particularly among Gen-Z consumers influenced by peers (McNeill & Venter, 2019; Ronda, 2023). Additionally, mindfulness and a desire for sustainability foster secondhand fashion adoption (Khalil et al., 2021; Zahid et al., 2022), though challenges like the attitude-behavior gap and skepticism about sustainability claims can impede progress (Ronda, 2023; Herold & Prokop, 2023). Psychological needs for self-expression through fashion are also significant, but materialism and globalization may detract from authentic sustainable practices (Lang & Armstrong, 2017; Talaat, 2020). Demographic factors, such as age and education, further shape perceptions, with older individuals often rejecting secondhand options due to social status concerns (Jain et al., 2023) and education increasing awareness without significantly enhancing adoption rates (Papamichael et al., 2024). Overall, while interest in sustainable fashion is growing among young Egyptians, various psychological, social, and demographic factors continue to influence engagement in collaborative consumption practices.

#### 5. Conclusions

This research expands the TPB by linking its constructs to emerging themes from participants' attitudes and behaviors regarding thrifting and rental fashion in Egypt. Key factors influencing their intentions include the effects of globalization and social media, perceived market benefits, accessibility, and social norms. While participants engage in sustainable habits like reusing and donating, interest in secondhand and rental fashion is growing, albeit hindered

by costs, availability, and social stigma. Enhanced shopping experiences and changing perceptions are integrating thrifting into mainstream fashion, supported by the need for government and brand initiatives.

Subsequently, the study identified four consumer segments and suggested business strategies accordingly: Budget-Conscious Shoppers, who prioritize affordability but face cost and location barriers; Fashion Enthusiasts and Do It Yourself Creatives, who value unique items and customization; Sustainability Advocates, who are motivated by environmental concerns and demand transparency; and Society-Driven Trend Followers, who are influenced by media but contend with societal perceptions. Tailored strategies for each segment can enhance market appeal and promote the adoption of fashion thrifting and rentals in Egypt.

**Budget-Conscious Shoppers:** Setting up local pop-up thrift shops or rental kiosks in high-traffic areas, such as shopping malls or markets, can make thrifting more accessible and reduce the need for travel. Brands could offer tiered pricing with discounts for long-term rentals or bundles and implement loyalty programs for frequent shoppers. Additionally, providing low-cost or free delivery and pickup services would further ease access for budget-conscious customers.

**Fashion Enthusiasts and DIY Creatives:** Exclusive curated collections of unique, high-quality items can appeal to fashion enthusiasts. Brands can allow customers to personalize or modify rental items, aligning with a DIY ethos. Collaborations with emerging designers or influencers to create limited-edition pieces, alongside workshops on integrating thrifted and rented fashion into personal wardrobes, would engage this group.

**Sustainability Advocates:** Transparent communication of sustainable practices, such as detailing the lifecycle and sourcing of rental items, can build trust with sustainability-conscious consumers. Brands can highlight eco-friendly packaging, sustainable cleaning methods, and third-party certifications, and collaborate with environmental NGOs to strengthen credibility. Educating consumers about the environmental benefits of renting and thrifting would further promote sustainability.

**Society-Driven and Trend Followers:** Collaborations with influencers and celebrities can boost the popularity of rental and thrift services. Brands should regularly update their inventory to reflect current trends and showcase positive reviews and user-generated content, promoting trendy fashion. Hosting fashion challenges and contests where customers display their thrifted or rented outfits would generate excitement and normalize renting and thrifting as a fashionable choice.

This study offers valuable insights specific to the potential immense Egyptian market, extending the literature on consumer behavior and suggesting strategies to facilitate greater adoption of fashion thrifting and renting; however, it is not exempt from limitations. Firstly, conducted over 2.5 months with a small sample, it may not accurately represent the target population; future studies could benefit from larger, longitudinal samples to assess how themes evolve over time amid economic changes and globalization. Moreover, the implementation of a cross-cultural study would enhance the findings' quality, validity, and novelty. Secondly, while this qualitative study focused on understanding the acceptance of fashion thrifting and renting, it did not aim to quantify results; future research could include online surveys to standardize findings and assist businesses in understanding consumer behavior better. Furthermore, the use of simple convenience sampling may introduce bias and affect the accuracy and validity of the findings. As participants were selected based on their easy accessibility rather than through a random or stratified selection process.

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**Ethics approval**

Not applicable.

**Conflict of interest**

The author(s) declare that there is no competing interest.

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**Appendix A**

Table 1: Participants' Demographics						
Initials	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Income	Secondhand/Rental Experience
AD	M	21	Medicine Student	Unemployed	5K	Yes
EA	F	24	BA in Business	2 years in education marketing	20K	Yes
FA	F	25	BA in Fashion Design	3 years in fashion branding	25K	Yes
FK	F	27	BA in Applied Arts	6 years in furniture design	30K	No
LA	F	23	BA in Fashion Design	Fashion design intern	15K	No
LM	F	23	BA in Fashion Design	5 years in fashion design	30K	Yes
MA	F	24	BA in Applied Arts	Fashion design intern	15K	Yes
MM	F	26	BA in Mass Communication	4 years as a fashion content creator	25K	Yes
NB	F	27	BA in Fashion Design	6 years as a fashion content creator	30K	Yes
NE	F	27	BA in Applied Arts	4 years in furniture design	30K	No
NK	F	24	BA in Business	Unemployed	10K	No
NS	F	21	Applied Arts Student	Unemployed	5K	Yes
RS	F	23	BA in Business	Unemployed	10K	No
SE	F	24	BA in Applied Arts	Unemployed	10K	Yes
SH	F	27	BA in Applied Arts	3 years in fashion design	25K	Yes
SS	M	25	BA in Construction Management	2 years in civil construction	20K	No
SM	F	25	BA in Applied Arts	4 years in graphic design	30K	Yes
TM	F	20	Business Student	2 years in fitness coaching	10K	Yes
YE	M	21	Political Science Student	Unemployed	5K	Yes
ZN	F	24	BA in Political Science	2 years in governmental research	25K	No