

DOWN WITH DEPOP?

BY MADISON MARSH

It is impossible to escape the pull of the social media fashion cycle. Time and time again, I have fallen victim to the trends that constantly splash across my screen. And this past summer, I wanted, no I needed, a white tennis skirt, just like the ones that ruled Tik Tok. They seemed so cute and versatile for the summer heat, but I had one major problem: they were sold out everywhere. And, I turned to the only thing I thought could aid in my quest: Depop.

Nowadays, it seems as though everything happens online. With the pandemic

heightening our reliance on remote solutions, the internet has become the top, and sometimes only, platform for many essential tasks. We go to school online. We socialize online. And more than ever, we buy clothes online. Pair this with the fact that there has been a significant increase in interest in secondhand and vintage clothing and it only makes sense that there has been a number of online retailers marketing secondhand clothing that have gotten popular in recent years, such as Rent The Runway and ThredUp. But Gen Z has crowned one platform the elite shopping destination: Depop.



The platform is generally marketed as a place for young people to buy clothes from other young people. Who better to pick out the trendiest clothes than your generational contemporaries, since, according to The New York Times, over 90% of the app's users are under 26? Whether handmade, thrifted, or from their own closet, sellers and users have created a community where the pieces must be either wildly unique or incredibly trendy, requiring meticulous curation. Depop mainly runs on trends. As new pieces, such as white tennis skirts, trend on social media,

they also trend on the app as we scramble not to be left behind by the fashion machine that churns out new trends every month.

The thrifted clothing on Depop typically falls into one of two categories: upcycled pieces, secondhand but altered and updated, and resold pieces, which are typically thrifted and then sold on the app without any alterations. Economical, efficient, and environmentally sustainable, thrifting has many favorable qualities for young shoppers. The vast majority of thrift stores operate on a simple and familiar system. People donate old clothes and goods and the store is able to sell them at a low price, usually no more than ten dollars. These products are given a new life in the hands of a new owner and the Earth is spared the expense of having to be weighed down by one more thing in a landfill. According to the Salvation Army, stores around the world have been making secondhand clothing available to people for centuries.

Historically, and due to more affordable prices, thrift stores served as a resource mainly for lower-income people. But, “thrifting” has now become a pastime for those who have no financial need to do so. Teenagers and twenty-somethings spend weekends scouring racks of secondhand clothing, looking for the perfect pieces to add to their wardrobe. According to Piper Sandler, an investment bank that conducts a semiannual survey of nearly ten thousand American teens, over 46% of teens from upper-class households have purchased clothing secondhand. Some retail analysts pre-



dict that the resale market will become a \$51 billion industry by 2023. Thrifting has become the hottest activity for social media, a way to show off savviness and style. Many want to boast that they found the best pieces or know the best locations, even at the detriment of those who really need it.

However, the nature of shopping secondhand has been changing since the introduction of platforms like Depop. The app is 10 years old and boasts over 21 million users. While the available products are diverse, it is known for one thing: its plethora of direct from the thrift store content. These sellers typically head to their local secondhand shop and pick out the trendiest pieces for their online store, then turn around and sell them at a significant markup with the help of words such as “super rare” and “vintage.” And while standard pieces typically go for around three or four times what the seller paid for them, trendier items go for even more. Once youth culture has determined what the newest must-haves are for the

THRIFTING HAS BECOME THE HOTTEST ACTIVITY...

season, they start popping up all over the app. They usually become more expensive and more elusive, like the white tennis skirt I so fiercely wanted, which was selling for nearly \$100 on the platform during the peak of its popularity.

But does the app make secondhand clothing more accessible and who does it need to be accessible to? Many sellers live in places with lots of thrift stores, but also areas where many people donate items that are already popular or might become trendy soon. Somehow, when my desperately desired skirt became the fashion world's hottest item, some sellers were able to find and list several at once. Meanwhile, multiple thrift trips of my own proved fruitless. By posting their pieces on the platform, it would appear as though the sellers were, at least mildly, helpful, allowing people in areas harder to thrift trendier items an opportunity to still participate in the buying and wearing of secondhand clothing and in the thrills of trendy fashion.

So, these sellers are making this sort of clothing more accessible, right? But, who is it truly accessible to? The steep mark-ups on these items ruin the chance of any increase in accessibility. Currently, the platform is only accessible to those who can afford its sky-high prices, which

often don't even include the additional burden of shipping. Making something logistically available does not necessarily make it financially available. If the clothing from Depop tends to be more expensive, trendy for only one season, and just as bad for the environment due to the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from shipping, why pay a premium for it?

But, shopping second hand is still a worthwhile cause and there are ways to do it responsibly. Of course, local is usually best. Patronizing thrift and vintage stores in the immediate area is incredibly important, especially as many small businesses have taken a hit during the pandemic. But, online secondhand clothing platforms, like Depop, can still be redeemed and serve an important function in the fashion industry. They are easily accessible to sellers who can't and don't desire to start their own full-blown businesses and wish to sell their own clothing, both used and handmade. Young people don't need business degrees or a full eight-hour workday to make money on Depop. But that doesn't negate the fact that the culture of apps like Depop has to change. Much of the app features sellers that exploit thrift stores and take advantage of customers who simply want to be on-trend and without changing that, Depop will continue to limit its own potential.

