

## The Secondhand Shift of Thrifting

Walking into a thrift store is the start of a treasure hunt. You never know what you'll find whether you're searching through the jeans section while listening to the hangers screech across the metal rack or browsing in the homeware aisles viewing vintage ceramic dishware.

Sometimes thrift shopping can feel like stepping into a time capsule, but now, thrift stores have changed with more Gen Z interest and modern fast-fashion clothing on the racks. The rise of thrifting has caused a shift in the consumption of secondhand goods and changed the make-up of thrift stores.

[Thrifting](#), according to Goodwill, is shopping at various places where you can buy items at a discounted price. The products, though they are used, are usually in good condition and ready to be purchased by a new owner.

Thrifting can occur at thrift stores, garage and estate sales, flea markets, and vintage markets. You don't have to be shopping for clothes to go thrifting. You can purchase items like furniture, technology, and kitchenware.

Going thrift shopping has been a popular trend for some time but has increased tremendously throughout the last five years.

According to the [ThredUp Resale Report for 2024](#), the gross merchandise value of resale has increased from \$9 billion in 2020 to \$26 billion in 2024. The value has grown in the past four years, and it's projected to grow to \$44 billion by 2028.

The demand for thrifting and resale has been on a constant incline, and as a result, more thrift stores have emerged nationwide.

As of 2024, there are more than [25,000 thrift stores in the United States](#). In Michigan alone, [there are over 400 thrift stores](#) ranging from independent boutiques to chains like Goodwill or Salvation Army.

Alex Balaya is a graphic design major at Oakland University who will graduate in 2028. He goes thrifting about two to three times a week during the school year and four to six times a week in the summer.

"The key of [thrifting] is being consistent. The more days you go, the more chances you have of finding something that is going to be really cool to you," Balaya said. "And then there are other days where you go in and find nothing. It's kinda by luck and by chance."

Balaya isn't the only student in Michigan who likes to thrift shop. It has become a widespread activity for Generation Z.

According to a [Capital One Research article](#), “83% of Gen Z consumers have either purchased or are interested in secondhand apparel.”

“I found [thrift stores] more busy and more people who are around my age and have similar taste are going to the thrift store nowadays,” Balaya said. “Back when I was going, it was less than that. It’s definitely something I’ve noticed.”

What is it that makes thrifting so attractive to the younger generation? The key selling points for most of Gen Z are the prices, sustainability, and style.

“I feel like I find pieces that are more myself when I’m thrifting than when I shop in a store like Forever 21 or anything like that,” said Kelsey Rife, a senior majoring in Sociology at OU.

Madison Stewart, a senior at Oakland University and editor-in-chief of the school’s fashion magazine club, also said she feels like she can find more unique pieces at the thrift store but also likes the environmental impact.

“[Thifting] is also sustainable. I definitely donate my clothes as well and it’s just a good way to make sure your clothes don’t end up in the landfill.”

For Dajuan Pope, a Clinical Diagnostic Sciences major at OU, the unsustainable aspect of fast fashion was the main contributor to switching to thrift shopping.

“I did a little bit of my research, and I realized like [fast-fashion] isn’t sustainable as well as the quality of [the clothes] just not being as good,” Pope said. “I did a little bit more research and realized that with thrifting you get a combination of affordable clothing as well as whatever you want really.”

[Fast fashion](#) is the rapid production of cheap clothing that resembles items from the latest fashion shows. Companies try to capitalize on the trends as quickly as they can.

The fast fashion industry has contributed to about [ten percent of humanity’s carbon emissions](#) and contributes to water pollution and waste.

Like Pope, many from Gen Z discovered the negative effects of fast fashion on the environment and decided to switch to thrifting.

However, due to fashion trends changing so quickly, outdated pieces are now ending up in thrift stores, sometimes with the original tags still attached.

“I found at first it was kind of exciting when you found like newer items in the thrift store... but now I feel like it’s a lot of fast fashion,” Rife said. “I see a lot of SHIEN at the thrift stores, which is unfortunate, but I guess it doesn’t come as much of a surprise since it cycles through so fast.”

[Alorē Niemi](#) is an adjunct professor at the College of Creative Studies in Detroit, MI. She is passionate about fashion sustainability and works for Pingree Detroit where she upcycles automotive leather into accessories. Niemi grew up thrifting and has been doing it for about 20 years.

“It is interesting that, like, through the fast fashion cycle, it has gotten harder and harder to find real vintage and authentic pieces in thrift stores,” Niemi said. “I think a lot of stuff is getting bought up and then a lot of not-so-nice things have been getting donated.”

With the rise of thrifting, people have been [reselling their clothes](#) on platforms such as Depop or ThredUp rather than donating to thrift stores because they can make money. Sometimes people will purchase items from the thrift store and sell them on resell platforms or create boutique storefronts.

The items people choose to resell are typically high-quality pieces. So instead of going to the thrift store, the clothing goes straight to a new owner’s closet.

“It’s actually crazy that people can run whole businesses and pay their rent off of thrifted goods and just up-charging them,” Niemi said. “But I understand they took the time to go sort through racks, they opened the store, and they curated it for the consumer. So I don’t have to go dig through racks and like we pay the difference in that price.”

Even though resale culture is changing the inventory of thrift stores, Niemi said buying used is the way to go.

“I think [thrifting] definitely is always gonna be a more ethical option than, you know, SHEIN or any of those fast fashion brands even like H&M,” Niemi said. “Buying used is always gonna be better than buying new.”

Thrifting and resale [help the environment](#) by reducing pollution, clothes in landfills, and water waste. Though thrifting and shopping resale are more ethical and sustainable options, it is still important to consume clothing consciously to continue the sustainability effort.

Niemi said it’s important to decide whether you’ll wear the item after purchasing and if the piece would be better suited for someone else who needs it. She said maybe a “little bit of self-discipline should be implemented” when it comes to thrift shopping.