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A Second Life:

Exploring Sustainable Fashion Through Value Creation

Study Of Indian Instagram Thrift Stores

Author: Adyasha Mishra

Supervisor: Michael Bossetta

Examiner: Helena Sandberg

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“You think you’re any different from me, or your friends, or this tree? If you listen hard enough, you can hear every living thing breathing together. You can feel everything growing. We’re all living together, even if most folks don’t act like it. We all have the same roots. We are all branches of the same tree.”

(Avatar, The Last Airbender, 2006)

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the intricacies of sustainable fashion, focussing on value-creation business models within Instagram thrift stores in India. Fundamentally, it argues that sustainable fashion is a dynamic socio-ecological process, mediated by the changing communication and technological landscape. There is much debate about what sustainable fashion ought to be, thus making it a “concept in progress”. Towards a better understanding of sustainable fashion, this study explores the social, ecological, and cultural norms and institutions that shape it and that it shapes. The research interviews eight Indian thrift stores on Instagram that sell curated pieces of secondhand, surplus, and factory-rejected clothing. The qualitative mode of interviewing with open-ended questions ventures into understanding their processes of sourcing, curation, distribution, and consumer engagement. The transcripts are coded and analysed to find evolving social and ecological factors that work together to add value for consumers.

The study has found that well-being is the key goal of thrift stores work towards. Thrift stores in India practice sustainable fashion through social and ecological value creations that are mediated by the formation of communities on Instagram. With changing societies and ecosystems, the idea of the process makes sustainable fashion a fluid concept. It provides opportunities for making it accessible through changes in policies and supporting services such as customer care, business owner care and safe and eco-friendly shipping services. It provides avenues for research to develop business models centred on social and ecological well-being, fostering community-driven and profitable enterprises.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion, Sustainable Fashion Consumption, Value-creation models, Slow Fashion, Thrifting, Digital Media Technology, Social Media, Instagram.

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Adyasha Mishra

Adyasha Mishra

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought about a chaotic upheaval in the fashion industry and the world. The valued industry of USD 2.4 Billion (World Bank, 2019) faced the worst-case economic, logistical, and cultural scenario with production and distribution at a halt. While the fashion industry was not new to environment-friendly business models, the worldwide lockdown put the limelight on the dreaded conditions of garment labourers at the forefront of its issues.

The streets of Ashulia, an industrial region outside Dhaka, Bangladesh, saw protests from garment workers and activists. Taslima Akhter (2020), an activist and fellow at Magnum Foundation, documented the protests that sought livable wages, safe working conditions and dignity for their labour. As COVID-19 hit the manufacturing apparel hub of the world in the small developing nation, workers in the factory were left in vulnerable positions due to continued factory operations and the inability to practice social distancing (Akhter, 2020). The ordeals of Bangladeshi workers garnered frenzy attention on social media platforms questioning and highlighting social issues within the fashion industry. Global fashion brands were called out under the hashtag #PayYourWorkers started by the Clean Clothes Campaign (Byrne, 2020). Similar highlights of garment workers around the world, such as in Vietnam, Indonesia, and India (Cartner-Morley, 2020; Byrne, 2020) resulted in increased consumer awareness and academic discussions around sustainability with its environmental and social aspects. In their research on corporate communication of sustainability, Pelikánová et al (2021) described the “slowing down” of the fashion system during the pandemic. Their paper sought to reinforce the need for policies and strategies to address sustainability at its environmental, economic, and social levels.

The rapid transmission of the virus exacerbated many social and economic issues worldwide. While the pandemic shut multiple industries and triggered financial volatility, there were considerable reductions in air, road, and rail traffic (Maqbool et al, 2023). Nevertheless, the changing socio-ecological climate of the world also opened newer opportunities for innovative practices that could benefit society and the environment. The field of sustainable fashion too saw

a new evolution with the upcoming Instagram thrift stores, in India. Writing for the Times of India, Prasad (2021) highlights the surged sales of second-hand and rejected clothing that came with the Indian youth's increased awareness of the environmental and social horridness of the fashion industry and the economic downturn of the pandemic that pushed them to look for affordable options. With the shutdown of trendy and affordable sites such as SHEIN and ROMWE by the Government of India, (Sengupta, 2020), the country's youth moved to consuming secondhand fashion.

India is not new to the idea of pre-loved clothing, especially knowing it as a hand-me-down in the family for generations (Chaithra et al, 2021). Perhaps even lesser known to Indians, systems of reusing clothes have existed in the country in the form of street shops and markets. However, the formal selling of used clothing in thrift stores was a concept unheard of and unknown, raising many questions about hygiene and quality. Yet, the Indian youth have moved in favour of formalising the thrift industry that has popped up on Instagram as COVID-19 prompted them to find a life within the digital world. A search result of #thritindia showed 845K plus posts tagged underneath on Instagram. Amidst the COVID-19 lockdown, much of life in India moved into the digital world thus, making it a basis for establishing new sustainable fashion models such as the Instagram thrift stores. The aim of my thesis is rooted in the understanding of how the changing media and technologies can be used to drive alternative fashion models, such as these thrift stores.

Thrift stores are small or medium-sized businesses that cater to different consumer segments and clothing styles (designer wear, vintage wear, lingerie, etc) (Chaithra et al, 2021). The thrift store owners follow an everyday drop routine of sourcing garments, curating pictures, sharing price and size details, posting them on their page, answering queries through DMs and emails, and completing the transaction through Indian digital payment platforms such as Google Pay, Phonepe, or bank transfers (Chaithra et al, 2021). Beyond our general understanding of stores as physical entities for buying and selling (Poldner et al, 2022), these thrift stores establish their storefronts as well as operations through an integrated system with Instagram. Moreover, India being one of the world's leading importers of used products and yet another manufacturing hub for global brands (ibid), has allowed Instagram thrift stores to economise waste generated

through used clothing, factory rejects and surplus clothing. An academic study on those, much like my own, can help understand the new business values that are created within specific socio-ecological contexts.

Sustainable ideologies have also introduced the idea of a “Circular Economy”, a system by the European Union, focussing on a closed-loop cycle of reusing and recycling resources, lessening input resources along with minimal waste reduction and greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere (Nautiyal & Goel, 2021). Nevertheless, the edges of the umbrella term, “sustainability” continue to stretch as associated terms of ethics and social responsibilities within the fashion industry continue to be understood. It continues to be a challenge for brands to adhere to strict guidelines of what makes their garments sustainable. The understanding of sustainable fashion remains a ‘work in progress’ (Mukendi et al, 2019).

Eco-conscious clothes are being relentlessly pushed to markets, with brand values that continuously highlight companies’ aims to increase labour rights and negate their carbon footprints; but in doing so, they continue to promote consumption as the norm, ignoring waste management and distribution processes. In the contemporary era of digitisation, characterised by the widespread availability of inexpensive products and clothing, consumerism has emerged as a marker of societal well-being. The ever-widening inequalities based on material and cultural capital have pushed the need to understand social progress within sustainable systems.

The fashion industry alone produces 10% of global carbon emissions and 87% of total fibre inputs end up as waste in landfills (World Bank, 2019). The rising environmental concerns have pushed for more eco-friendly and transparent production processes yet the question of who has access and what kind of clothes become “sustainable” in terms of long-term social and ecological well-being is highly contested. As the sheer scale and size of the industry continue to grow, there is a need to rethink ways to build fashion sustainability around what is good for us, as a world community, and the broader ecology, the planet that we are a part of.

As the subject continues to grab academic attention, researchers such as Fletcher (2010) and Thackara (2015) urge academics to understand sustainable fashion as more than just the

opposite of fast fashion, but a phenomenon of overlapping ideas of conscious production and consumption. Business model studies such as that by Poldner & colleagues (2022) and Tapaninaho & Heikkinen (2022) have further suggested the importance of alternative methods of value creation in emerging circular economies and the multifaceted role of stakeholders beyond just producers. However, the above studies do not pay attention to the social processes within developing economic contexts that stray away from the understanding of sustainability as a lifestyle, and fashion as a social tool, beyond pretty clothes to adorn. It has necessitated the formulation of paradigms of value creation within circular economies to foster a more inclusive, social and ecological, framework within the fashion industry.

With India being a manufacturing and used-clothes industry hub, thrift stores are now part of a global multi-billion dollar fashion industry (Chaithra et al, 2022). My thesis aims to address the aforementioned academic gap and analyse alternative models of value creation by emerging Instagram thrift stores in India, a developing economy, that manages fashion wastefulness and makes clothing more accessible through social media platforms like Instagram. My research begins by highlighting the widened margins in combining the social with the ecological to produce a truly sustainable economy of fashion and explores how Indian Instagram thrift stores can provide a framework using technology to foster values of care and well-being among stakeholders and consumers. This can help standardise the understanding of sustainable fashion within different socio-economic contexts and fashion in itself as a performative tool.

My thesis is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Instagram thrift stores in India promote social and ecological values that shape and reshape the practices of sustainable fashion?
2. What role does Instagram play in the creation of newer and sustainable business models of value creation?

My thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter, Literature Review, systematically reviews previous literature on sustainable fashion by understanding and critiquing gaps within existing studies. It includes an exploration of social and ecological process concepts within sustainability and fashion, understanding consumption through a lens of media and community,

and lastly, it discusses previous literature on thrifting to understand the importance of the socio-cultural, ecological, and technological context in the generation of sustainable values. The second chapter delves into the Methodological backing of the thesis project, situating it within subjective and objective concepts. It further discusses and explores my thesis as a qualitative research project wherein I establish my process of conducting semi-structured production interviews as my choice of method with ethical considerations. The third chapter presents the key findings of my data coding process and situates them within appropriate conceptual frameworks and empirical data findings. My final chapter concludes this thesis by answering the research questions and re-establishing my key arguments along with mentioning possible limitations and areas for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The understanding of sustainable fashion is rather broad and thus, has changed multiple times according to subjective definitions. Mukhendi et al (2019) in their meta-narrative analysis of the literature on sustainable fashion, proposes a “working definition” (p.2877):

“Sustainable Fashion includes the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour 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.”

This chapter reviews previous research on sustainable fashion and the issues within it. I begin by reviewing literature that explores different terminologies associated with sustainable fashion - sustainability, fashion, and the role of stakeholders. The second section dives into the role of media and communication technologies to understand how new technologies can and have driven various consumption processes. Lastly, I establish the importance of value creation within this thesis.

1. Defining Sustainable Fashion

The literature reviewed in this section begins with the argument that sustainable fashion is a socio-ecological “process” with varying cultural and socio-economic nuances. In their article on theory construction, McLeod and Pan (2005) understand process concepts as those that are in the continuous motion of change. Here, sustainable fashion is considered as a process that can be understood as changing with both internal and external stimuli, such as varying cultures, and socio-economic and technological contexts. It is understood as a linear process with multiple intersections of other variable processes such as technology, society, politics, and environment. Each process converges to lead to the institutionalisation of existing norms but diverges yet again with change in external variables. For instance, the external variable of technology, as I claim, can drive sustainable societies, focusing on environment and social well-being to be an institutional norm, just as technology and wealth accumulation has institutionalized capitalistic societies to be the existing norms.

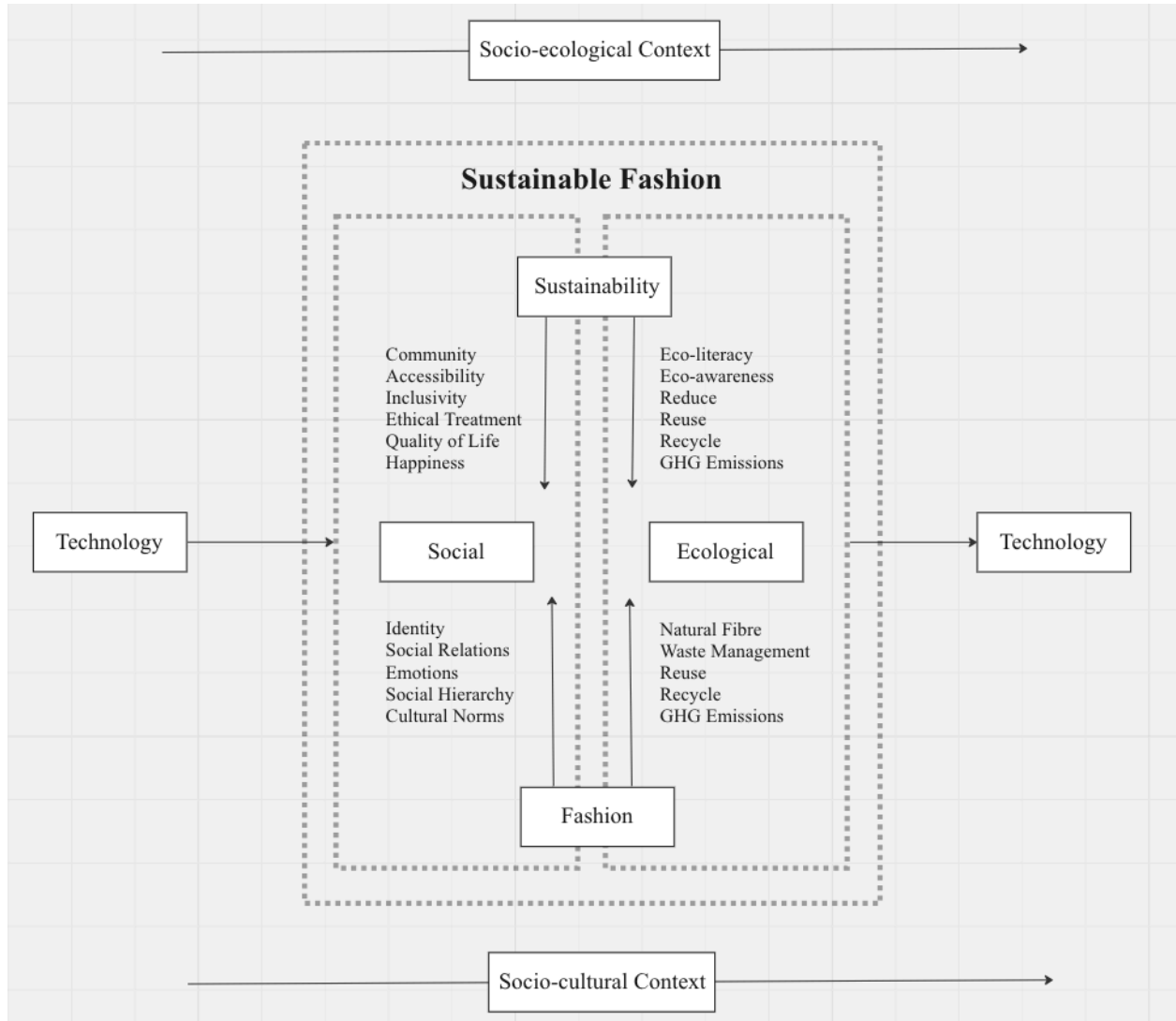


Fig: Socio-ecological Process of Sustainable Fashion (Miro-board)

With varying nomenclatures associated with sustainable fashion, such as eco-fashion, slow fashion, or green fashion, it lacks direct objectives. But these namifications are not just synonyms of sustainable fashion, but different branches of what can make fashion “sustainable”. They come with a subjective understanding of what makes fashion sustainable and in turn, create business models for profit generation and reduced environmental damage. Thus, sustainable fashion can be understood as a “mega-process” or “mega-concept” with intertwining variable processes. The figure above has been developed to show sustainable fashion as a mega-concept with social and ecological factors of both sustainability and fashion concepts. Socio-ecological

factors of both fashion and sustainability interconnect and together drive the process of sustainable fashion, mediated by change in technologies. Furthermore, the diagram also shows how the processes can shape and be shaped by changing socio-cultural and socio-ecological contexts. Each of the figures components will be unpacked in the following sections.

Woodside and Fine (2019) understand sustainable fashion as a movement towards creating a fashion system that is environmentally and socially responsible. Yet, this broad categorisation of “responsibility” becomes malleable to suit the suitor, each approaching it with their own meaning. Epistemologically, sustainable fashion can be separated into two concepts, sustainability and fashion. The connotations associated with both are different - sustainability is often associated with economics and ecology while fashion is understood as a social concept. To define sustainable fashion, we must identify the intertwining connotations that connect both processes.

1.1 Understanding Sustainability

Sustainability has often equated development with economic growth and reassures that economic growth is the path to the well-being of society. This equation of the economy and society propagates that financial capital accumulation promotes knowledge and care for the environment. Economy is only one aspect of society and I argue that social processes of sustainability inherently adhere to ecological processes due to social well-being being intrinsically connected to the broader environment. Here, ‘social process’ refers to the interconnected web of relationships, social institutions, social norms, and social values that shape and construct human interactions and collective well-being within a society over time. It not only leads to individual well-being but also well-being of communities’, present and future. It encompasses the fulfilment of basic needs, the preservation of cultural diversity, the promotion of social justice, and the stewardship of the natural world upon which all life depends. To understand the interactions of social and ecological processes within sustainability, we must review previous research to understand normative views of development and well-being.

The conflicting understanding of the term ‘development’ and its synonymous use with ‘growth’ adds to the ambiguity surrounding ‘sustainability’. The United Nations Brundtland Commission (1987, n.p) defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. With the threat of climate change looming over the world today, sustainability requires an integrated approach that considers environmental concerns along with economic development (ibid). The historic use of the term ‘development’ through the 1900s has focussed on economic growth with its discourses (Barbosa et al, 2014). The developmental-issues debate intensified post-WWII as the United Nations Charter sought to eradicate social inequalities and promote higher quality of life through economic progress (ibid). However, with the creation of organisations, such as the IMF¹, WHO², and GATT³, among others, there was an established discourse recognising wealth accumulation as the indicator for social well-being.

As argued before, the economy is but an aspect of society and thus to drive economic development, the promotion of social sustainability is of utmost importance. Previous researchers such as Rostow (1959) highlight social development as a product of economic progress but also note it to be a process that requires external variables, like economy and technology, to evolve. Rostow’s (1959) perspective conveniently excludes the complexities of social inequalities and power dynamics that are inherent within capitalistic societies. But it presents the social, much like the economy as a process that is in the linear motion of change leading to an ideal society where humans are in a state of fulfilment. Rostow (1959) understands economic growth by categorising and identifying it through technological advancement and industrialisation.

The economy is a process identified with five distinct stages. (Rostow, 1959). Nevertheless, he never fails to acknowledge the social processes such as increased birth rates, income, and nationalism that aided the growth of industries and technologies, which in turn allowed and continues to allow numerous social reforms (ibid). In the final stage of development, as economies ‘mature’ and modern technologies reach peak expansions, developed economies choose the paths of enhancing social policies such as security, welfare and leisure or boosting

¹ International Monetary Fund

² World Health Organisation

³ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

extensive private consumption through mass production of goods and services, or pursue increased influence and global power (ibid). By doing so, economies often forget the environmental processes that are in play to deteriorate our ecological well-being, directly affecting our social existence.

With technological evolutions, our understanding and interaction with ourselves, society and the environment changes and is continuously changing. Social and ecological processes interconnect with each other leading to broader well-being of society, environment and in turn, life. An alternative neo-Marxist view of 'growth' is also solely a quantitative increase in output whereas 'development' encompasses qualitative enhancements of life, well-being, institutions, and production processes (Barbossa et al, 2014). The priorities of capitalistic economies inherently focus on profits and thus, not only disregard much of environmental degradation but also perpetuate socio-economic inequalities. Gørgen and Wendt (2015) understand that sustainability is aimed at the gradual process of human emancipation, its intertwining nature aims at intergenerational justice and preserving the best quality of life for the contemporary world population. Striving for a utopian future for all people inherently includes advocating social sustainability within the realms of ecology (ibid). With a sociological focus on ecology, I second their arguments on connections of social sustainability with society, social change and social justice. Here, the social encompasses the producers, consumers, and those in between who facilitate the movement of the economy, individually and collectively.

As established, to understand sustainable fashion, breaking down sustainability and fashion as separate socio-ecological processes with interlinking social and ecological aspects is essential. Currently, much of fashion is understood as a socio-economic phenomenon. It is crucial to separate it from the act of buying and selling clothes, that subsequently make it an economic phenomenon. It is, thus, important to highlight the social processes within fashion and interlinking ecological processes to understand its interaction with sustainability.

1.2 Fashion: A Social Process?

To establish the concept of fashion, I argue that it is a system of perpetual change and a socio-ecological process in itself. Fashion is an example of the formation of individual and collective identities that are inherently attached to social relations and the social world (Feinberg & Mataro, 1992). But, it is also situated within the natural world which allows its very production, such as material, resource usage and as waste in landfills. Today's fashion particularly focuses on the fast fashion industry, defined as "low-cost fashion textile commodities frequently updated in large retail chains" (Entwistle, 2000). This rapidly growing industry is shadowed with well-documented environmental challenges such as resource depletion, waste generation, and pollution. Yet, fashion is a transdisciplinary system of perpetuated change, identity, expression, social orders, consumption, trade and ranging environmental consequences (Celinda & Cornell, 2020). This understanding stems from the economic value of garments that manifests into fashion, but is not the meaning of fashion itself. The dress intimately connects our individual selves with our bodies and their performance to the outside world (Entwistle, 2000).

The economic role of fashion and its influence on society is important, yet the above understandings reduce fashion to an oversimplified structure that maintains a capitalist society and a system that can be accessed and exploited by those, higher in the socio-economic hierarchy. The need to be confined to fashion ideals stems from the intrinsic strive to climb higher in the social hierarchy and simultaneously achieve the 'ideal self' (McNeil & Venter, 2019). Fashion theorist, Simmel (1957) distinguishes between fashion and clothing, relating elegance as connected to social processes. Thereby, describing the use of fashion to represent social equalisation and differentiates one class from another (ibid). While, Bourdieu (1993) further establishes fashion as a role-play of class wherein the system of fashion allows for the individual internalisation of power structures and identification with hegemonic institutions; thus, perpetuating and performing their socio-economic roles through fashion. However, the hunger for short-lived fulfilment through material capital shadows our understanding of 'well-being'. It institutionalises socio-economic hierarchy as the norm and in turn, harms healthy ecological processes through overproduction, overconsumption, and environmental degradation to maintain that norm.

Exploring fashion as a socio-ecological process requires a venture into its role in building individual and collective identities, and the emotional relationship of individuals with their garments, society and the environment. Modern understanding of fashion is intrinsic in its need for change and novelty to maintain status quo, perpetuating changes in ‘trends’ as well as pressures on the environment. In doing so, fashion can and should be redefined as a socio-ecological process with interdependencies of individual, community, society and the environment. Fashion’s material manifestations such as clothing and accessories, operate as a system that is constantly evolving, reflecting changes in social norms, values, and identities. Trends, symbols, practices, and institutions of fashion contribute significantly to the creation and dissemination of cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986). Central to this is ‘cultural capital’ wherein groups and individual accrue social status through their fashion practices (Bourdieu, 1993). Fashion, thus, becomes a means to adhere to certain social groups while simultaneously performing individuality.

As socio-ecological meanings are produced, reproduced, interpreted, and circulated within society, fashion becomes a fluid process, with social interaction and identity formation within shifting cultural and ecological contexts (McCracken, 1986). Fashion is also defined as “a system of dress” where there are possibilities of socio-ecological mobilities associated with its production, consumption and distribution (Entwistle, 2000, p.11). This can be highlighted through the interaction of the fashion system with the biophysical world as well as the social system. This is further expanded through Celinda & Cornell’s (2020) study that puts limelight on the dynamic interactions between the cultural, social, and the biophysical aspects of fashion, for instance, the essence of what constitutes high quality clothing.

1.3 Stakeholders of Sustainable Fashion

To develop a truly sustainable fashion market, it is necessary to view alternate systems and the role of stakeholders within them. These can include suppliers, small-scale owners, distributors and consumers. The current economy works around the system of supply and demand; there is

no denying that consumers are essential stakeholders within the sustainable fashion system. But, to understand practices around sustainable fashion consumption, a multi-stakeholder approach can help in identifying innovative ways of integrating society and the environment within fashion systems.

The existing literature on ‘social sustainability’ within fashion has predominantly centered around the role of suppliers, including the ethical treatment of workers and labour rights within the apparel industry, with insufficient attention given to the role of other stakeholders such as distributors, consumers and other value creators. Huq et al (2013) have identified the gap in understanding the social sustainability of multi-national apparel firms that have mostly focussed on upstream supply chain partners. This biased research serves as proof of the dyadic relationship between suppliers within the sourcing and supply chain. They conclude that the previous literature on the social aspect of sustainable fashion has been within the context of developed countries with a focus on buyers, MNCs that source clothing globally and are at the top of the supply chain (Huq et al, 2013).

To understand the role of stakeholders, the fashion industry must be thought beyond apparel production and understand its distribution process through small-scale businesses, such as thrift stores that drive consumption through the generation and regeneration of existing fashion commodities. Huq’s (2013) approach is unable to understand the role of consumers, small-scale business owners, distributors and other stakeholders in the spectrum of a sustainable fashion economy. Ciarapica et al (2017) emphasise the crucial importance of customers and suppliers in the sustainable strategisation of apparel industries. Their study shows the integral role that environmental NGOs can play along with financial institutions, revealing the intertwined dimensions of finance and environment in today’s apparel industry (ibid). However, this way of looking at stakeholders presents many variables and continues to view sustainable fashion through hegemonic economic discourses.

1.4 Thrifting - A Bottom-Up Approach

Earlier sections evaluated nomenclatures and branches of sustainable fashion based on subjective understandings of the concept. Slow fashion, for instance, is one such branch that focusses on quality instead of quantity, promotes less frequent purchases and trends, and brands that highlight transparency and ethical aspects of sustainability (Fletcher, 2010). Thrift stores can play a crucial role in the development of slow fashion business models. Jung and Jin (2016) emphasize the role of slow fashion systems, such as thrift stores, in enhancing sustainability and profitability, with a focus on consumer value creation and the need to balance conscious retailing models with traditional aims. Their research suggests the importance of delivering exclusive product value that can act as a catalyst for creating customer value within slow fashion and for it to become a norm, associated business models must be profitable and in accordance with the social, environmental and economic sustainability (ibid). Yet the dwindling aims of slow fashion from sustainability to profitability may cause a rift in focussing on what's important, circling back to our argument of sustainable fashion being looked at through an economic lens.

That's where thrift stores come into play and have the potential to emerge as alternative socio-ecological models. They can play a key role in the slow fashion movement, promoting quality over quantity and establishing eco-friendly systems of the reuse and recycling of clothing. Grundtman (2017) proposes thrift stores to be resource-efficient and waste-reducing sustainable systems and thus, new business models, such as thrifting can decouple development from hegemonic fashion discourses. However, for a business to survive, it must find ways to generate value among its customers through various marketing strategies and practices (ibid). While economic value continues to remain central to the thrift stores (Grundtman, 2017), the concept of social morals, environmental concerns, and good service can drive consumers to thrift. But, existing research on secondhand clothing mostly focuses on developed economies, and/or physical thrift stores.

I approach thrift stores as potential socio-ecological models within the Indian context, a fast-growing developing country. Two-thirds of collected used clothing is exported to developing countries and is presented as a "freely traded commodity" that helps sustain livelihoods and grow markets in the Global South (Norris, 2015, n.p). Yet, researchers argue that often the export of large quantities of used clothing to developing countries hampers the local textile industries and

may result in continued dependence and persisting inequalities between developed and developing nations (Norris, 2015; Baden & Barber, 2005). This perpetuated dependency can exacerbate inequalities between economies, increasing the disparities between the richer and the poorer sections of societies (Baden & Barber, 2005), thus impacting aspects of human well-being.

This calls for a bottom-up approach to understanding modern second-hand clothing markets in developing countries that can transform waste into resources through new ways of value creation. Further, it can generate business opportunities to control resource flow and monitor the social and environmental impacts of the production and consumption of apparel. However, to understand my arguments on sustainable fashion and thrift stores as socio-ecological processes, it is important to look at consumption as a process that has been deeply ingrained within our lives.

2. Sustainable Consumption: Community and Media

As established, consumption is an important aspect of sustainable fashion. In this section, I argue that consumption is a social process, in continuous motion of change, and interlinking with the process of sustainable fashion. This social process is driven, not individually, but through the formation of communities, mediated by changing technologies.

2.1. Consumption and Communities

The socio-ecological processes within sustainable fashion cannot be understood without justifying the consumption processes associated with it, especially when fashion consumption remains closely associated with the concepts of identity and self-expression. Gabriel and Lang (2006) understand contemporary consumers as having many faces, one of which is as identity-seekers. Consumers engage in the continuous process of constructing the ideal self through symbolic meanings within material items (Thompson, 1995), and forming an interplay between personal and social identities, that reflect their past, current, and future selves (Hall, 1996; Oyserman & James, 2008).

Consumption occurs beyond the sole utility of a product, within its associated cultural and symbolic meanings. Niinimäki et al (2010) associate the perceived symbolism of fashion consumption with reaching aesthetic ideals, seeking novelty, or fitting into or disrupting social and cultural norms. Whereas, for some consumers, ethical meanings attached to fashion may remain central, establishing potential ethical values inherent within sustainable consumption (ibid). The individuality of a consumer is reinstated when consumers choose to consume items that can be symbolic of who they are and can mediate their personal values, social standing, and wealth (Gabrial & Lang, 2006). By doing so, consumers associate themselves with certain social groups or communities. An obvious relevant example could be clothes used as symbols for opposing or following historically situated gender norms (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). We can understand this as a desire to belong to a certain social community that aligns closely with one's personal beliefs on gender norms. Similarly, McNeil and Venter (2019) associate consumption fashion practices with their identity construction that is formed by the desire of belonging to a social group as well as experiencing emotional and hedonistic values. The association of these values and meanings within products relates to a consumer's personal as well as social worlds. Solomon's (1983) explains that symbolic consumption is part of one's identity creation as well as defines one's relationships with others in a society. Self-identity associated with objects, however, is not fixed and in fact, is in a motion of change ascribing to consumers' own free will as well as changing socio-cultural norms (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Hall, 1996).

The meanings associated with objects are short lived, socially constructed, and are shared among individuals. When these meanings associated with objects become connected to particular identities, the consumers become part of imagined communities. Imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) are imaginary groups formed due to shared meanings, narratives, and imagined connections among individuals due to merging aspects of identities. In the creation of these communities, consumers can interpret meanings associated with fashion products by themselves in creation of their self-identity and/or share collective meanings through their social environment (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumption is, therefore, explained as a way of collectively making sense of experiences, environments, society, and life (Kozinets, 2001)

2.2. Mediated Consumption

As noted previously, meanings associated with the consumption of fashion commodities are short-lived and are continuously changing just as one's identity. The reason for this change can be better understood with the role of technology that allows free flow of informed knowledge about our lived reality and thus, allows the formation of newer identities. Here, I argue that what people consume and why they consume fashion are dictated and mediated by new markets as they change with developments in technology. Brands and markets thrive on fast creation and consumption of fashion goods that generate exponential profits. They seemingly utilise the idea of consumers believing the imagery perpetuated by material objects, that can bridge the gap between who they are and who they wish to be (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Yet, consuming solely for the purpose of achieving the desired self-identity, especially when identity is continuously changing, the relationship with material goods are weakened (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). This perpetuates the need to raise consumption levels in order to express and attempt to raise social status to achieve the 'ideal' self as dictated by markets (Wang Chengbing, 2011).

If the fashion marketplace is the cultural mediator of needs, wants, and identities then technology acts as the medium through which the mediators can access their audiences. The flow of ideas, images and ideologies is perpetuated by changes in communication technologies that gives access to both fashion marketplace and fashion consumers to interact. Upon understanding the role of fashion and identity, consumers of fashion utilise meanings associated with clothing to interpret their conceptions and experiences of fashion (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Overconsumption of fashion remains a critical issue of the fast-fashion industry, wherein frequent purchases are made on the basis of changing and short lived trends, as perpetuated by media, and the availability of more and cheaper clothing. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) explains consumption a social arrangement through which meaningful ways of life are created through dependency on material goods mediated through markets (Arnould and Thompson, 2005)

Multiple perspectives within CCT understand consumption through socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects. With varied socio-cultural contexts, consumer

culture is not driven by single/common meanings. Rather, CCT explores the heterogeneous distributions of meanings and plurality of intersecting cultural groupings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This plurality is especially applicable in the broader context of globalisation and market capitalism that brings together varying socio-historic and cultural contexts. Kozinets's (2001) explanation of consumption as a collective sense can also be conceptualised using 'consumer culture' as an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that is used by social groups through construction of overlapping and contradicting identity, practices, and meanings.

The market becomes a mediated actor through which the desire of choice, acquisition, and the 'ideal' is perpetuated. Marketing actors play a key role in the creation of market-made commodities and desire inducing marketing symbols. With purchasing ideals being governed and perpetuated by marketing actors, there is no actual 'free-will' within consumer (Zwick et al, 2008). The marketplace and market ideology is socially constructed and has the ability to frame feelings and emotions of conceivable reality. Whether it is radio or modern age social media, communication technologies have played a key in brand communication and product placements.

Changes in technologies can generate opportunities for marketers to ideate and innovate newer ways of communicating with their audience. Marketers and advertisers use symbolic representations and encoded meanings of real life that can communicate the social and individual circumstances, and in process their lifestyle and self-identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers, existing both individually and collectively (Belk, 1988) interpret these symbols as creation of their own and share collective meanings of their social environment (Elliot & Wattanusuwan, 1998). While today's market actors are driven by their goal to generate profits, they have the power to shape wants, needs, and lifestyles within sustainable fashion systems. The accessibility, connectivity, and the creative usage of new media technologies provide opportunities for market actors to drive socially responsible and environment friendly ideologies.

2.2.1. Deep Mediatisation

Technology and its developments have become tools to perceive lived realities as imageries of ideal self, society and the environment. Within his conceptions of imagined communities, Anderson (2006) exemplifies the nurturing of nationalism through the advent of print capitalism. Ideas, images and ideologies form the basic components of imagined communities. Whereas print media, a then new technology, allowed the unification of imagined national communities through reading.

Today's global media has made communication and exchange of information, larger and finer. Ideas and ideologies are virtually expressed and propagated through media technologies in form of cinema, ads, and social media. Much of our reality is shaped by what we see in media (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), an alternate reality where social and ecological merge. Our beliefs and opinions about our physical world is shaped by our simultaneous interaction with media forms. From our knowledge about the environment to our discovery of new fashion trends, media forms have been essential in propagating ideologies within. This phenomenon is best explored through the concept of "mediated construction of reality" where the "social is constructed from and through technologically mediated processes and infrastructures of communication" as derived by Couldry and Hepp (2017, p.9). Modern consumers exist in an era of deep mediatisation (ibid), wherein social life is closely intertwined with media technologies. The omnipresence of media infrastructures such as TV, computers and the internet play a critical role in shaping our social interactions. This has allowed people to communicate, socialise, participate in cultural and economic activities, and acquire knowledge and information. They have led to the merging of boundaries between different sectors of our personal and public life, such as work and life, private and political, online and offline (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). As a result, the modern consumer navigates an increasingly fluid and interconnected media landscapes where distinctions between the real and the virtual are blurred.

The explanation of our lived reality as mediated through technologies can also be applied to fashion consumption, wherein technology has allowed the flow of idealistic goals within fashion to influence consumers' lifestyle, perceptions, and aspirations. This has furthered need-based consumption to achieve mediated forms of ideal-selves as the norm. However, media technologies, I argue, have also furthered ideas related to ethics, inequalities and power relations

that are involved in the processes of sustainable consumption. They can become a driving force for moving away from need-based consumption in the fashion industry. Media is the cornerstone of public opinion and promoting public awareness (Kaul, 2017). It has provided platforms for discussions on environmental effects of human consumption and a space for liberals, progressives and environmentalists to align. Thus, media portrayals of sustainable fashion play a crucial role in shaping policy, politics, and public perceptions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (Kaul, 2017).

The concept of imagined communities is better understood in the age of social media that allows for the convergence of digital and social, referring to the integration of digital technologies in everyday social interactions and communications.

2.2.2. Age of Social Media

With the advent of social media, information and communication have become more accessible with the proliferation of internet-connected devices and platforms. This allows individuals to directly interact with information, social norms, and broader ideologies. Social media is, as I argue, a cultural and social space that connects broader socio-ecological processes in the consumption of sustainable fashion. As explained by Kaul (2017), media is indispensable and its power lays on its widespread connectivity and ability to shape and wield public opinions. Social media, in this case, allows the formation of online forums and communities that directly shape the discourses on society and the environment.

While media is heavily scrutinised for being market-oriented, it is important to understand that social media, in its current stage, functions as a reflection of underlying normative processes of need-based consumption. Yet, it is also a platform that allows free flow of information that sensitises audiences regarding environmental degradation and influences public perceptions of their choices (Kaul, 2017). Fashion marketers, as established before, are provided with the technological tools of social media to dictate and propagate consumption narratives that are best suited to achieve their goal within market capitalism. Social media, as explained by Tierney (2013) serves as a platform wherein individuals can readily share speech and images while observing others' participation, forming a semi-visible public space of cultural

and social exchanges. This is often utilised by marketers to establish and re-establish existing norms associated with need-based consumption of fashion, through previously mentioned ways of mediating meanings associated with their products.

Nevertheless, social media can also act as a public sphere and an organised tool to inform and drive groups towards social and environmental causes. This can be elaborated through the platform affordances of social media channels that allow its users to be producers of narratives; anyone with an access to the internet can freely pen opinions and upload images (Tierney, 2013). Yet the inherent democratization of social media allows for the proliferation of parallel discourses, termed counterpublics (ibid). Counterpublic platforms can insight internet activism by establishing online communities and mobilising action. The accessibility of these platforms to debate issues, form communities and disseminate information on fashion, sustainability, and over-consumption allow, and thus form alternate models of sustainable fashion consumption. Social media provides agency to individuals to use social media as a “public space” (p.8) to form imagined communities (Tierney, 2013). Affordances such as speed, ease of access, transmission and distribution of news, text and videos, allow social media to be a space where alternative models of consumption can be established by combining the digital and the social.

Furthermore, the affordances of these platforms such as connectivity also allows for economic spaces within social media. Moreover, the access to third-party apps for economic transactions can be a roadmap to creating alternative models that utilise online community to create business models within social media. In the first section of literature review, my argument has already established economy as an aspect within broader socio-ecological contexts and can thus be utilised to understand alternate business models of sustainable fashion that highlight both social and ecological aspects.

Through the aforementioned sections, I have argued on how the community (social) and technology (media) shape consumption. I have established sustainable fashion as a megaconcept wherein interlinking processes of sustainability and fashion give rise to common themes of the social and ecological. We also uncover the linear yet converging and diverging process of consumption that is facilitated by technology. Today’s consumer culture is deeply penetrated by

social media and with it the influx of transnational capital. Its dense network of global connections and extensions through which socio-ecological contexts are increasingly interconnected (Appadurai, 1990). Social media, the mediated technology thus becomes a tool to contextualise the socio-ecological processes of sustainable fashion and garner a larger community attention to its underlying issues and promote newer fashion consumption practices.

The consumer culture along with the market ideology perpetuated by social media, could frame feelings, thoughts, and conceivable actions (Arnould & thompson, 2005). Thus, alternate systems of consumption, based on the values of care and well-being of fashion can be propagated through community and media spaces. Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012) also establish that consumers who practice sustainable fashion consumption are motivated to maintain their behavior due to their surrounding social networks of groups with similar eco-conscious values. To understand these alternate systems of consumption, we need to understand how value is created to drive sustainable fashion consumption.

3. Sustainable Value Creation Models

This section follows the previous argument that sustainable fashion is a community driven socio-ecological process and for the process to occur, value creation is necessary. The prior section has established at length about the pitfalls of need-based consumption systems. Thus, for alternate processes of consumption to exist, these values must be created with social care and community upliftment in mind rather than need-based ideals.

Value, as I understand it, is a human-made factor that is added to an object or service that can drive its consumption. Amit and Zott (2001, p.496) define ‘source of value ‘ as “any factor that enhances the total value created by a business”. Their definition is certainly apt in the context of commercial transactions. Nevertheless, economic value can be considered intrinsic to a business while responsibilities and commitments to value creation can range across a spectrum of stakeholders, from owners, suppliers, and consumers to society and environment (Mathur & Kenyon, 1997). Thus, within the context of sustainable fashion, value must be understood and

created with broader impact on societal and environmental well-being in mind rather than momentary fulfillment, as promoted by existing consumption systems.

3.1. Online Thrift Stores

Emerging thrift stores on Instagram in India are examples of alternate value creation systems that do not follow the traditional need-based consumption model. Yet, existing research on thrift stores often focuses on physical thrift stores. Prior research on thrift stores lacks an understanding of the digital component of thrift and overlooks possible business models that can drive sustainable fashion consumption, and ignores the potential connections of the digital, social and ecological processes together. Studies such as that done by Poldner & colleagues (2022) and Pal (2015) discuss value creation models within physical thrift stores but can be utilised to understand patterns followed by online thrift stores. Since our social world is deeply intertwined with the digital, new value creation models can pave the way to standardising sustainable fashion consumption in our deeply mediatised world. My study of online thrift stores and their value creation models based on care, trust, community, and well-being can reiterate our understanding of sustainable fashion as a socio-ecological process.

Thrift stores are closely associated with second-hand clothing, promoting reuse and maintaining fashion waste. Persson & Hinton (2023) highlight the characteristics of secondhand clothing consumption that can support necessary reduction of resource use and waste generation by increasing life cycles of garments. Exploration of thrift stores can bring out values within its system of slow fashion. ‘Collaborative consumption’ is yet another facet within slow fashion, as noted by McNeil and Venter (2019). It can be understood as the utilisation of existing assets that can be reused to benefit all, commonly expressed by renting, purchasing of second-hand clothing, sharing or swapping (McNeil & venter, 2019). Thrift stores become exemplary in explaining collaborative consumption wherein business models are used to include various stakeholders including owners, distributors, consumers, society and the environment to generate value.

Pal (2015) notes several steps of value creation of a commercial chain of thrift stores through reverse logistics system. The reverse logistic system consists of a collection of strategies and recovery processes such as sorting, cleaning, and mending that re-introduces a product as a commodity with exchange value (ibid). Interactions of brands and clothing with consumers' personal and social identity and fashion ideologies also indulge in adding consumer value to the clothes. Through these interactions, businesses can create interactive services and experiences of fashion that can add consumer value. In their study of value creation with physical thrift stores, Polder et al (2022) assess key strategies of value creation as 'Fashion as a service', 'place-based value innovation', and 'community as co-creator'. Even within their study, physical thrift stores were often noted to use digital means, such as Instagram, to drive their consumers and market their brand values of their physical stores. Moreover, consumers are motivated to shop second-hand as it is similar to "treasure hunting" for unique and quality pieces (Polder et al, 2022, p.5). This not only motivates but provides opportunities for consumers to want to express their self-identity.

Services such as those used in previous studies of physical stores can foreshadow the relation between consumption and the expression of self-identity. Here, 'service' refers to the holistic experience provided by thrift stores encompassing not only tangible fashion commodities, but also intangible benefits such personalisation, environmental consciousness, and exclusivity. Vargo and Lusch (2008) understand service beyond their intangible outputs to include the process of providing value and benefits in conjunction with their customers. Thrift stores, inherent in their drive for ecological benefits, add unique and sustainable values to fashion that make consumers want to go back to them. Moreover, their services can be reflective of a deeper engagement and relationship with their consumers.

3.1.1. Fashion as a service

I argue that the rendering of fashion as a service by online thrift stores in the form of style consumption and aesthetic representations of socio-ecological values can drive sustainable fashion consumption. 'Service' encompasses the interactivity, relativity, exclusivity, and consciousness that thrift stores cultivate within fashion systems and their customers. Within their study, Poldner et al (2022) explain the importance of curation of pre-owned clothing, its aesthetic

styling and representation as critical to the service of fashion. The products chosen to be sold must have strong visual connections and emphasise the holistic association with the society and environment to attract consumers.

We have already established how social media affordances offer spaces of public connections and interactions. In my study of Instagram thrift stores, their choice of social media platform plays a key role in understanding how they operate to add value. Instagram as explored by Hurley (2019, n.p) offers “multimodal affordances” with “functional linguistics and social semiotics”, such as text, images, writing, or illustrations, as resources of meaning-making. The technological resources of Instagram such as posts, stories, reels, sound, and captions allow the creation of social meanings and change over time to constitute and reflect society (Graham et al, 2011 as cited in Hurley, 2019). These affordances allow thrift stores online to create visual stories and textual narratives with aesthetic values and environmental ideologies within their fashion products to drive socio-ecological processes of sustainable fashion.

The art of dressing or styles are not just an expression of self-identity but also a way to reflection of socio-cultural norms and beliefs. With their experimentation with the physical thrift store, KLEER, Poldner et al (2022) observe that offering styling tips, modelling with their outfits, and community engagement through the art of dressing drove the business to profit. Their study underpins that aesthetic values within fashion garments can generate value through consumer interaction. This attribute prompts styles as value product of consumption rather than clothes themselves. Eun Jung Kang (2018) further understands the aesthetics of fashion in relation as not just revealing of its time but also exemplifying social relations with the aesthetic taste of times. He emphasizes that fashion is representative of the most personal and intimate aesthetic choice yet it illustrates our subjective ideas within the objective reality of what we wear and styles we like (ibid).

In the context of sustainable fashion, aesthetic values can be generated to reflect the choices of ideas, our inner thoughts and how they change over time. Aesthetic representations of curated clothing can thus, drive brand value within the Instagram thrift community as well as establish the ideologies of socio-ecological processes in sustainable fashion.

3.1.2. Place-value Proposition and Community as Co-creator

Values are not just limited to the curation and representation of clothing but also the experiential service that it provides. The ‘experience’ here refers to the space of the store that can provide sensory benefits to its customers. At the core of KLEER, Poldner et al (2022) emphasise the importance of the choice of place that could provide a clear and attractive service. The raw decor and aesthetics of the space worked to offer a welcoming and fitting atmosphere, adhering to its brand values.

Unlike physical thrift stores, Instagram thrift stores dwell within the online face that their Instagram feed provides. The affordances of connectivity offered by Instagram allows thrift stores to utilise the platform space to generate place-value through their customer community itself.

As established before, Instagram affordances allow the placement of aesthetic values, however, the broader spectrum of these affordances allows online thrift store owners to establish their page as the face and place of the brand. The transparency offered by Instagram feed, visual communication as within posts, stories, and reels, and brand interaction using Instagram chats can add to the place value of the brand. Garcia et al (2020) highlight the importance of instant connectivity through online shopping that has removed time and space barriers to allow anytime and anywhere shopping. This allows more consumers from diverse backgrounds to access Instagram thrift stores without knowledge of their physical locations. There are intermingling values that are created within Instagram as a place as well as a community establishment. When people are made to feel like they belong, they are more likely to be involved within the community activities and eventually support its cause (Poldner et al, 2022). Instagram can not only provide a space for thrift owners to share their thoughts and ideas, but also for customers to engage and take part in them. Through the values that thrift owners create on Instagram, customers can be made to feel part of the social change through their purchases and engagement with the store and thus, also part of the thrift community.

3.3 Contextualising Indian Thrift Stores

The place and space of Instagram are closely tied to the socio-cultural and socio-ecological norms of the community it serves. Thus, the local socio-ecological and socio-cultural contexts are important to identify to understand sustainable fashion as a socio-ecological process. These contexts shape the fundamental functioning of Instagram thrift stores but also are shaped by the values they generate. Previous studies on thrift stores, such as Poldner et al (2022) or Pal (2015) suggest value creation systems in the context of Western modernity. Thus, with limited studies on thrifting culture in developing economies, we need an understanding of how to adapt business models and practices that can benefit society and the environment within their changing geographical contexts.

The majority of the world's apparel-producing factories are centred in developing countries due to outsourcing through cheaper labour, weaker labour policies and immense resource availability (Russell, 2020). While the majority of it reaches their countries of destination in the West at lower prices, many 'defective' pieces are discarded by suppliers. These discarded items are perhaps sold back in Global South markets at cheaper rates or end up in landfills. Furthermore, the second-hand clothing industry too has seen much of an influx from the West to developing countries in form of charity. Kapoor and Khare (2019) share that while in the West, second-hand clothing sector makes up a niche segment of interest, it is an important clothing source in developing countries with its access to cheaper clothing. Platforms like Alibaba and eBay have long existed in developing countries where consumers can buy a wide array of used goods through auctions or fixed-price arrangements. With online platforms such as the latter, consumers have access to designer or unique items that would have otherwise been not accessible in their city (Parker & Webera, 2013).

India is not new to the concept of thrifting; generations have been introduced to the concept through hand-me-downs from their parents and multiple fashion street markets run by street vendors and hawkers (Chaithra et al, 2021). OEC World report (2022) notes that Indian import of used clothing was valued at \$797M, making it the second highest importer of used clothing. But, there is no such official data to recount the market value of factory rejects and surplus that are produced in India. Yet, the formal selling of these used fashion goods online as on thrift stores can often see pushback with regard to hygiene (Parker & Webera, 2013) or

cultural sentiments that associate used clothing with the poor (Kapoor & Khare, 2019). Even with several questions raised against the system, Instagram thrift stores continue to thrive in India. As exemplified by a thrift store in Meghalaya, Kapoor and Khare (2019) note that the store was able to generate value through the sale of affordable and unique fashionable garments that were carefully curated, disinfected and sold.

Instagram thrift stores in India set themselves apart from normative understanding of thrift stores by second-hand garment as well as factory rejects and surplus. With the sale of curated pieces of garments that are limited in quantity, they encompass a broader system of sustainable fashion than just the sale of used fashion. Moreover, the socio-ecological context within which these thrift stores operate shapes their value systems and business practices, highlighting the need for localized approaches in sustainable fashion initiatives. The example of Instagram thrift stores in India provides an interesting case study to understand the creation of values of care, trust, and community within fashion, perpetuated by their digital presence and community formation within Instagram. This development in sustainable fashion systems can highlight alternate ways to approach the understanding of sustainable fashion and treat it from its grassroots level. By studying these alternate models of value creation, policies and governance can be formed that drive the future of the fashion market. Case studies of online thrift stores in India can exemplify fashion models that show a bottom-up approach to developing business models with the growth of the local society and ecology in mind (Harding, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This chapter delves into the methodological positioning of this thesis by providing a qualitative and case-focussed approach to understanding sustainable fashion as a socio-ecological process, where the social and the ecological are mutually inclusive. As Bazeley (2013, p.5) notes qualitative thinking is fundamentally case oriented. Instagram thrift stores in India present a unique case away from the traditional and Western meaning of thrift stores as physical stores that provide used clothing. In the literature reviewed earlier, I contextualised economic and ecological dynamics within the Indian used-clothing industry. Coupled with the prevalence of factory-rejected and surplus garments, India provides a fertile ground for Instagram thrift stores to create alternative value systems. The digital norms within Instagram further emerge as a potent medium through which these enterprises craft novel social paradigms surrounding fashion consumption. This aligns with Flybjerg's (2001, p.4) understanding of social sciences as "phronetic research". The study uses a concrete case to explore the duality of the social and ecological values, norms, and notions to tackle fashion sustainability issues. Flybjerg (2001, p.4) understands the aim of this research to "clarify problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies".

In the evolving epistemologies of sustainability and fashion, it is necessary to take the standpoint of the least benefited from the current fashion production and consumption (Harding, 2008). In the case of developing economies such as India which forms one of the world's largest industries for import of used clothing and garment production hubs, it is essential to adopt a 'research from below' perspective in its socio-ecological context. The standpoint theory (Harding, 2008) addresses the needs of the stakeholders further down the supply chain to include small-scale business owners, their suppliers, and customers.

The following sections proceed with presenting the study through a qualitative research design and the use of semi-structured interviews to collect empirical data. Additionally, it uncovers the process of analysis and its implementation along with ethical considerations during the study.

For this study, I take a neo-Marxist or a Critical Theory approach towards creating an ideal future where fashion is used for societal and ecological betterment (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012). I approach this study keeping in mind the fundamental human desire for happiness (ibid). The critical theory approach can be defined as a “non-dogmatic” Marxist view (Held, 1980, as cited in Inglis & Thorpe, 2012, p.69) where the research study focuses on underlying power relations, and ideological repressions, and takes in viewpoints of those least studied within existing fashion systems. The lens of Critical Theory allows me to understand pertaining values and negative realities of fashion within the current society and find ways to proclaim that the way it functions can and should be changed. This is done through the considerations of cultural, economic and ecological factors that persist within Indian societies while turning the cultural influence of social media within a capitalistic society, against it. Through this approach, I study the existing and hegemonic discourses of sustainable fashion and establish how thrift stores are shaped and shape them.

Reflexivity is the core of Critical Theory wherein the researcher’s subjective biases are stated to establish transparency within the research process (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012). My positionality stems from the aim to make fashion more holistic and in turn, drive society towards a sustainable future. This research is driven by my own background as an Indian, a Fashion Communication student as well as a fashion enthusiast. My relationship with Instagram thrift stores in India goes back to the year 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown when I discovered them through sheer boredom. Intrigued by their style, communication, and affordability, I became a regular thrifter. My journey with fashion and its emotional reflection on my own life were the major factors that drove my passion to search for its greater purpose in society.

1. Methods

As established before, this research takes a qualitative approach to studying Indian thrift stores from a sociological perspective. This perspective allows me, as a researcher, to peer and analyse social processes and relations that are established within the thrift stores including (but not limited to) socio-cultural contexts, community building, emotional attachments, and identity formation. A sociological perspective ‘never focuses on individual’ rather on human behaviors in

association with their broader social context (Berger, 1963). As Bryman (2016) posits, qualitative research design gives an in-depth understanding of human actions and involved processes that shape behaviour.

Humanising thrift stores through the eyes of those who generate the processes within them can give a holistic understanding of their role in society and the natural world it's part of. The study seeks to position fashion as a social and ecological process that can drive a more sustainable worldview. Such is the nature of qualitative research that is not only interested in understanding human experiences but rather situates them within scientific theories and conceptualisations, with an explicit purpose of achieving social justice (Hammersley, 2013). It allows the researcher to inquire about subjective experiences, but more importantly, explore possibilities of other ideal realities. These realities, in my study, could push towards the creation of alternate values that can drive social and ecological sustainability within fashion for more holistic futures.

1.1 Sampling

The thesis employs purposive sampling, wherein informants are chosen according to a known characteristic. The participants self-identify as thrift store owners from India on Instagram which ensures that they provided insights 'relevant' to the study (Bryne, 2012). My choice of sampling further helps keep my study flexible and adapt it to study thrift stores that are within the social and ecological contexts of India (Seale, 2013). Furthermore, snowball sampling is used to reach out to more stores through other thrift store owners. This allows me to avoid influencing my subjectivity based on my customer relationship with them, lessening the disadvantage of purposive sampling which is prone to researchers' biases. Snowball sampling, on the other hand, allows me to reach a more varied population with target characteristics (Naderifar et al, 2017).

This study reaches out to exclusive and expert informants who can relay the comprehensive functioning of these thrift stores, from the production to the consumption of the values they generate. To assess the creation of value, Instagram thrift stores were contacted via their store handle rather than opting for owners' private Instagram accounts. This allowed me to

connect directly with the owners whose subjectivity and positioning are integral to the enterprise. The thrift stores are regarded as a collective entity through which values stem from the owners' motivations. This also helps maintain the anonymity of my participants' identities.

A total of eight thrift stores⁴ are sampled for the study. Thrift stores are identified based on their Instagram handle and their profile bios that focus on 'thrift' or 'preloved' clothing. However, this gives space for thrift stores to identify their distinct ways of value creation through sourcing, aesthetics, and relationships with their customers. To establish the validity of my research, only stores with a follower count exceeding 5000 are chosen. This criterion ensures that the stores possess substantial reach and engagement with their consumers, thus bolstering the credibility of the sampling. As can be seen in Appendix 1, the participants share a commonality in terms of their follower count being above 5000, the sale of factory reject or secondhand clothing, their establishment as a store on Instagram from 2019-2021 and their delivery service pan-India. However, the selected participants also differ in terms of the products they offered whether it was clothes or a mix of clothes, shoes and accessories, their sourcing areas and sometimes even the audience they sought. The commonalities and differences shared among the participants allowed me to look into varied avenues of value creation within small thrift stores that share the same digital and ecological context.

The first set of thrift stores are identified by looking through my own Instagram follow list and contacted through personalised messages. Furthermore, an invite in the form of a poster⁵ and a personalised message⁶ was shared on Instagram and Reddit to encourage participation from interested thrift stores. Although, Reddit bore no fruits, a few on Instagram showed their interest in participating. One participant store, LuuLiu, connected me to several others who could be potential participants. Thus, the participation of eight thrift stores was finalised based on their interest, timely reply and engagement with my research subject. The initial four interviewees were finalised upon their reply to my personal message on Instagram while two were snowballed upon contact with the store, LuuLiu. The the last three interviewees were listed upon their interest and reply to the poster that was shared by my friends and families in India.

⁴ Appendix 1 shows the overview of the participants, owners' names have been changed for anonymity.

⁵ See Appendix 2

⁶ See Appendix 3

1.2 Data Collection

In this study, one-to-one semi-structured interviews are used as the main method of data collection. According to Jensen (2012), qualitative research concentrates on ‘meanings’ that are formed through the multiple and distinct ways of communication between the researcher and the subjects. Interviews can, thus, act as ways to produce ‘meaning’ through interpretations of discourses by the interviewees. Qualitative interviewing is aimed at asking open-ended questions to delve into an individual’s thoughts and opinions (Byrne, 2012). Moreover, this method provides the opportunity for participants to go in-depth about the subject, and express their thoughts and feelings in their own words (ibid).

For this study, eight production interviews were conducted to gain exclusive insight into the production of media texts, or in this case, the value of Instagram (Bruun, 2016). These informants are considered to be irreplaceable in the study of media production with their exclusive knowledge within organisations (ibid). In my case, thrift stores on Instagram are small businesses, predominantly run by their owners who carry exclusive and sole knowledge, from sourcing to distribution of fashion within their stores.

Eight interviews, including one pilot, were conducted over Zoom for this thesis, with each interview lasting 1 to 1.5 hours. Zoom acted as a bridge in making my respondents accessible while being located in different parts of India, and allowed them to be more comfortable in talking to a stranger from their personal space. The interviews were conducted in English, a common language between us and were recorded using the built-in feature of Zoom. The recordings were done with permitted consent by the participants and later manually transcribed (Byrne, 2012). Consent forms⁷ were shared prior to the interview to help maintain the confidentiality of personal data. An interview guide⁸ was created to maintain uniformity and can be understood as a way of controlling the interviews to ensure their validity (May, 2011). Nevertheless, the open-ended format based on loose themes that my research aims to uncover allows participants to dive deeper into their own thought processes to give information beyond

⁷ Appendix 4

⁸ See Appendix 5

what the researcher expects. Furthermore, the semi-structured format of the guide also allows flexibility in which probes are used to explore the responses and the topic in detail. The guide broadly covers three themes, environment awareness of the store and sourcing, customer relationship and engagement, and the use of Instagram and store aesthetics.

The Pilot interview allowed me to refine the interview guide and direct more specific questions. Such as the questions pertaining to their sustainability were redirected towards asking about their eco-friendliness to get a more nuanced understanding of their motivations. New questions were also added with emerging themes on waste management and limitations they face beyond Instagram. However, the guide only plays the role of providing direction to the interviewers rather than actual questions read out verbatim (May, 2011). The number of interviews is ideal for having a saturation in forming interesting themes while still being able to observe distinctive experiences and the value-creation processes of each thrift store.

1.3 Data Analysis

Upon construction of the qualitative data from transcripts, the analysis delves into a transparent and thorough assembling of data into comprehensible accounts (Noble & Smith, 2014). The study uses thematic coding as a means to analyse data. Codes or themes become easier to understand along their developmental process and descriptions in the study illustrating the quality of collected data and the reliability of the findings (Seale, 2012).

The pilot was coded first to explore emerging codes. The coding followed a simple processes of manually highlighting⁹ quotes that related to my subject of research and then, comments¹⁰ were added alongside the quotes in a Google Document file, to determine analytical themes emerging from it. The codes with examples were transferred to an Excel sheet to make the grouping of the codes fit larger themes of motivations, norms, business values, community, well-being, and limitations This helped in making necessary changes to the interview guide and further driving the themes to match the research specifics. The process of data collection helped “build a contextualised and holistic understanding” of the data before coding (Bazeley, 2013).

⁹ Appendix 6.1

¹⁰ Appendix 6.2

Thus, I assumed an Abductive Coding (Vila Henninger et al, 2022) approach to perceive bigger themes arising from my participants' reflections. Combining bigger codes functionalised complex phenomena within increasingly complex research questions (Vila Henninger et al, 2022)

The coding process is divided into three steps. The first step of each interview begins with the open-coding of transcripts¹¹ to identify and label codes (Bazeley, 2013). Commonly understood as descriptive coding, this step involves highlighting core events, thoughts, and experiences and noting their repetitions. These codes are divided and grouped into more interpretative analytical categories or codes (Bazeley, 2013). The analytical codes are formed in an attempt to form clusters of data into broader meanings. Finally, the analytical codes are assembled into larger themes or thematic codes. The broader codes namely, 'Personal Values', 'Norm', 'Business Values', 'Community', 'Well-being', and 'Limitations' are identified keeping the goals of the research questions in mind. The findings analysed in my next chapter are built upon the larger thematic codes¹² and their analytical categories to deepen our exploration of situations and processes to explain the research questions (Bazeley, 2013).

Two codebooks¹³ were also formed to maintain a hierarchically organised catalogue - a pilot codebook emerging from the pilot interview and a final codebook at the end of the coding process. The thematic codes, analytical codes, and subcodes are defined in order to identify underlying patterns of relationships within the codes and bring conceptual clarity to the researcher (Bazeley, 2013, p.179-183).

2. Ethical Considerations

Many considerations were kept in mind while dealing with the personal data of the participants. Ethical considerations such as these must form an integral part of the research process (Mauthner et al, 2012). Not only do they ensure the confidentiality of the participants' data but also help

¹¹ See Appendix 6

¹² See Appendix 7 for pilot codes and Appendix 8 for final codes

¹³ See Appendix 9

build trust between the researcher and the interviewee. First and foremost, while I did send personal messages to invite thrift stores to participate in my research, there was no form of forced participation or coercion. Every participation was voluntary and was allowed withdrawal if desired. The interviewees were well-informed about the study and its aims. Moreover, they were ensured that the interview recordings and related data would be used for this thesis only. Zoom recordings were promptly deleted after transcribing to ensure further anonymity of the participants. As is the nature of this study, only the store details were collected and thus, have been referred to as such instead of the participants' names in the analysis.

ANALYSIS OF INSTAGRAM THRIFT STORES IN INDIA

This chapter presents the findings of the study through empirical evidence brought forth by data coding and explores it through conceptual frameworks discussed in the Literature review. I aim to explore the social and ecological concept processes that occur in the creation of value by thrift stores to explain the mega concept of Sustainable Fashion. The first section contextualises the thrift stores within their socio-cultural, economic, ecological and digital contexts. It discusses how the integration of different contexts allows the formation of thrift stores in their geophysical locations that can develop unique values around their products. The subsequent sections delve into the operations of the thrift stores including sourcing and curating the products. Through them, we explore the social and ecological factors that drive their selling of fashion as sustainable. The last section discusses the socio-ecological values of fashion that are created and distributed. Here, we explore the values of fashion derived from the thrift store owners' personal views and beliefs, which in turn drive them to create business systems that promote the social and ecological well-being of the community.

1. Norms and Context of the Case

To study thrift stores, we must first lay the groundwork of the norms they are situated within that causes them to function the way they do. Upon conducting the interviews, I realised that the norms form the fundamentals of the ideologies and aims of the thrift stores. Under the larger thematic code of norms, my analysis narrowed down the empirical evidence to analytical codes, namely: stereotypes, trends, cultural context and digital norms. Norms can be social in the form of stereotypes around used clothing or narrowed down to economic norms of trends around fashion. The norms can be digital in the way Instagram allows the thrift stores to connect with potential customers or be heavily situated within the socio-cultural and socio-economic context of families and the clothing industry in India.

Yet the meaning of 'norms' itself centres around its associations with the social aspects of life - economy, digitalisation and culture. Bierstedt (1963) defines norms as a 'social expectation' wherein there are set standards by which humans are expected to perform in society. Need-based consumption is an institutionalised economic norm that is believed to drive modern

society. Most interviewees shared their views of consumption as something deeply integral to making sustainable fashion choices. “*If I am selling anything, it should be sellable*” (Meg¹⁴, Owner, OldLoveStudio¹⁵) as dictated consumption norms. Consumption has become an integral communication to sustaining meanings within the social fabric of relations, identities and perceptions (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). However, today’s need-based consumption is driven by an obsession with owning material commodities. “*Everybody has become very like individual goal-focused and we’ve lost that sense of community*” notes Shre (Owner, GonVintage), but that is also what drives consumers to shop from their thrift stores in search of fashion that is unique.

Short-lived trends are the characteristic feature of fashion consumption, as perpetuated by media. They are central to the context of fashion through which the desires of market-made commodities and their acquisition are perpetuated through the creation of an “ideal self” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). For thrift store owners too, these trends are central to the curation of their products and guide them to pick and choose the aesthetics they determine their consumers would like. Marketed towards a younger audience who form the social core of digital platforms, owners such as Meg, understand their audience to be those who strive for a luxurious lifestyle. This need is an intrinsic strive to climb the social ladder to achieve the ideal self, especially during the heightened periods of identity development in youth (McNeil & Venter, 2019). This urges them to search for premium clothing at an affordable price in contrast to those at the top of the social hierarchy who are inclined towards luxury. The modern understanding of consumption and trends in today’s world allows the formation of alternate systems of fashion such as thrift stores where consumers can satiate their desire for luxury and exclusive items.

However, a norm is a mere expectation, not a rule, allowing individuals to decide whether to conform (Gibbs, 1965). A norm can be a statement made by a group of individuals, not all, underlying differences in varied socio-cultural and socio-ecological contexts (ibid). The study's Instagram thrift stores are rooted in their social and ecological contexts within India. As Chaithra et al (2021) mention, the concept of used clothing as a market has been present in India in the form of street markets and hawkers, such as the Sarojini Market in Delhi or the thrift markets of

¹⁴ The names of thrift store owners have been changed to maintain their anonymity and privacy.

¹⁵ The association of owner names with their store will be mentioned only the first time they appear in the text, the owners' pseudonyms will be used then onwards.

northeast India. Many thrift store owners such as Lu (Owner, LuuLiu) note their roots in Sarojini Market, “*When we started, we did start from Sarojini, that was our go-to.*” As recalled by the interviewees these markets are where the owners found potential vendors to source from as they receive used clothing, factory rejects and surplus clothing in bulk from import companies and ports across India. “*They bring a lot of these clothes through Panipat. Many of those are imports...say 90% imports and then 10% factory seconds.*” (Dodo, Owner, DodoFinds). As per the OEC Report (2022), most of these used clothing are imported from China, Korea, Japan, and the US. Ann (Owner, RevivalOfThrifs) who focuses exclusively on selling factory-reject clothes further recalls her knowledge about brand rejects that land in India through a port in Gujarat, where only some are recycled, and most of them end up in landfills. This establishes the existing ecological and economic contextual norms of fashion in India that allow thrift stores to churn out exclusive values out of otherwise unwanted garments.

The concept of thrifting is perhaps ingrained in the Indian way of living, with hand-me-downs from siblings or passing of clothes as legacies, highlighting norms within the socio-cultural context of India. Recalling their account, Shre shares “*it's a very like, Indian tradition where we pass on clothes to our younger siblings. So, for me, I think a major issue with wearing second-hand right there was resolved.*” The motivation to spread the concept of thrifting even stems from the owners, like Dodo’s or Lu’s cultural background where reuse and recycling of clothes is a norm of everyday life, such as in the northeastern states of India. This can be understood with McCracken’s (1986) idea of fashion as a dynamic system of complex cultural meanings. These manifestations of fashion are symbolic and are constantly changing and evolving (ibid). The owner’s socio-cultural or socio-economic norms and contexts allow and motivate the curation of garments in thrift stores.

However, that may not be the case for many of their consumers; many interviewees noted their interactions and reassurances to customers who often weren’t convinced to buy used clothing. Even with the age-old markets for used garments, stereotypes regarding thrifting exist in many. As understood by scholars, the pushback against thrift stores can come from concerns about hygiene (Parker & Webera, 2013) or their association with poorer strata (Kapoor & Khare, 2019). Although one is comfortable with their family’s hand-me-downs, “*they believe in the idea*

of energy, they fear the energy they invite in with a stranger's clothes." noted Dia (Owner, TheJunkStore). India is a deeply spiritual land, and stereotypes like this continue to exist within many families. For Ann, they have been able to create ways out of these stereotypes and provide new fashion commodities in the form of factory rejects; the high brand recognition and their affordability allow her customers to ignore minute defects of the clothes. Stores selling used clothing, carefully and thoroughly clean and re-fix their clothes upon sourcing, As emphasized by Dodo, *"quality checks are the most important"*. Whereas stores such as Meg's or Apa's (Owner, TheFineFinds) believe in persuading potential customers or that the unique aesthetics of their curation are enough to drive interested customers.

Lastly, the digital norms allow thrift stores to function the way they do, from keeping in touch with their vendors through video calls to distributing their products on Instagram. Digital technologies, such as social media, hold their audience close, allowing communication and engagement through sharing knowledge (Tierney, 2013). The multimodal affordances of Instagram such as its accessibility, transmission, and distribution help thrift stores redirect audience traffic into transactions (Hurley, 2019). As the interviewees unanimously agreed, Instagram offered them access to their desired audience and visual tools to communicate with potential customers. As Apa understands, unlike other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram is very *"approachable"* and with *"an algorithm that prefers consistency"*. Furthermore, a survey by Statista (2024) revealed over 350 million daily active users on Instagram, primarily dominated by Generations Y and Z, making it the go-to platform for thrift stores in India. The eco-consciousness among the young generations is perpetuated by social media, including those of thrift store owners. As Dodo remembers, *"I also understood sustainable fashion through Instagram content"*. This is in line with the understanding of the mediatisation of environmental views that have and can shape attitudes and behaviours (Kaul, 2017).

Summarising the above, we deduce the importance of the socio-ecological context and norms within which Indian thrift stores function. The norms formulate and allow thrift store owners to create unique values keeping different social and environmental factors in mind. Their very context sets differences in grounds for Indian thrift stores as compared to our general understanding of Western thrift stores. With the deep mediatisation of today's society (Couldry &

Hepp, 2017), thrift stores have managed to curate their values using digital technologies available to them. Their curation is not only a reflection of their socio-ecological context but also becomes the basis for the norms they are hoping to change.

To understand the business operations within, the analysis of the data found ‘Environment’, ‘Exclusivity’, ‘Aesthetics’, ‘Style Service’, ‘Waste Management’ and ‘Digital’ to be the emerging analytical codes within the larger theme of ‘Business Value’. Moreover, the study also found emerging codes of ‘Emotional Motivation’ and ‘Eco-consciousness’ to be fundamental to the owners’ drive to establish a thrift store on Instagram. The upcoming sections establish and explain business value creation and their motivations within the operations and functioning of thrift stores.

2. Socially Eco-friendly Sourcing

“I’m not feeding into that thing where I’m making someone manufacture more to sustain my business.”

(Ann, Owner, RevivalOfThrifs)

Sourcing clothes is the first and most crucial step of the thrift business that adheres to both ecological and social values. Production of limited quantities is fundamental to any slow fashion business (Jung & Jin, 2016), and for that, the products need to be unique and one-of-a-kind. Environmental practices form the very core of thrift stores through which they generate business values. At BangaloreThrift, Owner Maha believes in getting classic pieces that can remain in the fashion cycle, *“I don’t get like those micro trends”*. These stores thus form systems that are resource-efficient and waste-reducing at their core (Grundtman, 2017). Selection and curation of clothes through sourcing is an essential aspect of this system. Each of the thrift store owners has close relationships with their vendors and a predecided price per batch, that allows them to be in touch when a consignment of clothes arrives. Here, vendors are understood as suppliers who deal with imported used clothing or manufacturing suppliers who may have bulk in brand rejects.

A sourcing day for the owners is often spent “*scanning through hundreds of clothes*” (Ann), checking for visible as well as fixable defects, and selecting sellable clothes. As Apa points out, for a garment to be sellable, it needs to be something they can wear and if it isn’t then it won’t be in the store. Through this, they bring in limited pieces of clothing and practice conscious consumption. As Meg aptly puts it, “*If you have limited pieces, you’ll have a limited approach towards buying choices. And as soon as you reduce the buying choice, you’ll have only limited customers.*”

Slow fashion systems at thrift stores operate with an understanding of the importance of limited, quality, and exclusive products (Jung & Jin, 2016). By doing so, they generate values, especially ecological values that are superior to fast fashion. As the interviewees emphasize in their process of sourcing, durability and hence, the quality of the garment is a priority when hunting for clothes. By quality, they not only mean the likes of natural fibres like cotton but also synthetic fabrics like polyester. The existence of polyester in the fashion cycle may be debatable by many scholars. The manufacturing process of polyester fibre for clothing is unsustainable in many aspects, including resource depletion and the generation of polluting agents (Palacios-Mateo et al, 2021). While many reinforce the usage of sustainable fibres such as cotton, polyester garments continue to float as waste in import markets and landfills. Dodo recounts that “*at least 70% of the clothes that come are made out of polyester*”, and doesn’t leave her much much control to choose specific materials. With her background as a fashion designer, Meg further addresses the need to include polyester in the fashion cycle. Its non-biodegradable quality also adds to its durability and affordability and allows its continual reuse and recycling, generating an ecological value.

On the other hand, while trying to add ecological values to their store, vendors and their close relationships with thrift owners play an important aspect. As recounted by all the interviewees, they shared a relationship of trust and understanding with their vendors. Talking about their encounter with vendors receive brand-rejected pieces, Ann emphasized the importance of her relationship with vendors; after all, “*vendors are knowledgeable about the clothes they receive, they know the brand values*”. However, relationships based on trust and care are formed over time; “*it is an eventual process*” (Dia, TheJunkStore). This social relationship

highlights the dyadic relation within the supply chain, where stakeholders involved are not just on top of the supply chain (Huq et al, 2013). A multi-stakeholder relationship connects the thrift owner, vendors, and customers, permeating a social process of strategisation to ensure their businesses are socially and ecologically sustainable. The vendor-client relationship goes a step beyond ‘professional’ unlike big MNCs, where the partnership with a vendor is based on growth and well-wishes for the other. As Ann often reiterated, their vendors are often encouraging about the success of their stores, “*he really encourages us, it’s like he really wants us to succeed*” or as Dodo kindly addressed, “*those bhaiyas¹⁶ know everyone’s taste*”. Moreover, the technological availabilities such as mobile phones installed with WhatsApp and video calls allow them further mediums to maintain and practice these social relations.

3. Sourcing to Curation

“Instagram is the first representation...it’s the point of entry for anybody who’s coming to shop.”
(Shre, Owner, GonVintage)

Instagram thrift stores ride on the exclusive value of their products, like any other slow fashion brand (Jung & Jin, 2016). Thus, picking up the right garments and their on-screen representation is important to make them ‘sellable’. Curation is the second step of their operations process and a crucial one too. The chosen aesthetics of the clothes and how they are represented on Instagram deliver differentiation to customers, allowing them to attain uniqueness in their fashion and identity through exclusive items (Jung & Jin, 2016). Exclusivity, here, is obtained through the unique social and ecological values that thrift owners keep in mind while curating their product and Instagram feed. After all, their Instagram feed is the only visual communication of their store, unlike a physical store.

The affordances and architecture of Instagram allow thrift owners to design the face of their store however they like and want to be perceived. Instagram’s multi-modal affordances consist of ‘modes’ such as images, writing, illustrations, clothing, or digital screens that can communicate meaning (Hurley, 2019). Just as Dia entails in her approach to communication, “*I*

¹⁶ *Bhaiya* is a colloquial Hindi word, meaning, Brother

usually put the details of the drops ahead of time on my stories... only post BTS (behind-the-scenes) stuff on reels to let the customers know the importance of every step.” The architecture of the platform such as posts, reels, stories, highlights, and captions allows a smooth operation of thrift stores that serve as a virtual bank of clothing aesthetics. Thrift owners have learnt to work with the tools to channel their ideologies of fashion through their creative curation of clothes and the look of their Instagram feed. It further makes it easy for them since Instagram has a “*clear way of communication*” and “*its a visual platform and everybody is majorly swiping there*” (Meg, OldLoveStudios). It is up to the owners like Meg to make use of the tools provided, according to their knowledge. Meg suggests “*if you are posting a product that is attractive with relevant hashtags and concise captions, Instagram can drive the exact audience you want*”. As Hurley (2019) reinstates the social semiotic resources of Instagram allow it to be a medium that can shape and reshape communications of the thrift owners with their customers. Thus, these tools are central to the business communication of the stores around which they can strategise.

However, the curation process starts even before it is digitally communicated; it starts with sourcing. As mentioned in the previous section, the first aspect of curation happens when thrift owners source clothes keeping in mind their aesthetics, relevance, and quality. The aesthetics of the clothes they source and the feeds they curate, together form an integral part of their business aesthetics. In the analysis of the data, aesthetics emerged as a crucial code to the larger theme of business value, and they were further understood as ecologically and socially motivated aesthetics.

The ecological and social aesthetics are interdependent and allow value creation within their thrifting spaces. The study found that each thrift owner is motivated by their eco-consciousness and eco-literacy. This is very clearly instated in Meg’s motivation to establish their store, “*a way to somehow save your earth from the waste the fashion industry is creating.*” or Lu’s motto, “*Being-ecofriendly is about recycling products, recycling the fabrics, recycling the clothes. I think that is one very, I mean, that is what we stand for.*” As understood in their socio-ecological context, their awareness and care of the environment drive their motivation for the business. This awareness is further reinforced and communicated in the form of aesthetics of the clothes and Instagram feeds alike.

Hemmati (2016) believes aesthetics aid in knowledge and awareness of environmental sustainability as well as affect human consciousness and emotions. Aesthetics is a subjective concept and is relative to human perception, yet can be shaped and reshaped to bring out ideas (ibid). Environmental care and ecological values are central to the functioning of thrift stores and they make sure that is communicated through their ecological aesthetics choices, whether it is in the trends of clothes they bring in or their Instagram feed. For instance, Dodo loves to curate clothes that are comfortable, basic, and often fit into the cottage-core aesthetic¹⁷. The choice of their aesthetic roots from the calming elements of nature and aspects of slow living that they wish to promote. Whereas, Lu makes sure their packaging is made out of recycled papers and a handmade card stating their motto “*thrifting is a lifestyle*”. Thrift owners further amplify ecological awareness through the usage of natural lighting when posting pictures of their clothes (Ann), using earthy tones and colours, such as browns and greens as the backdrop to highlight the eco-friendliness of the store (Meg), or making educational posts about sustainable fashion practices, such as thrifting, eco-tags, fair trading (Apa).

Apart from their eco-consciousness, this study also found that the thrift owners were often driven by their emotional connection to fashion and that translated into the choice of their business aesthetics. Apa’s idea for starting a thrift store stems from their passion for finding unique things while thrifting, and they translate it onto their feed, “*My store is just really an extension of me*”. Their love for experimenting with different styles of clothing allows them to curate a variety of products such as blouses, crochet clothing, ties, and gloves, while keeping each of their uniqueness in mind. Shre’s emotional motivation can be seen through their profession as a stylist and their experience with Italian vintage clothing markets during their postgraduate studies, “*I think I feel very rooted in the Italian lifestyle*”. Shre’s connections with vendors in Italy inculcated a love and fascination for collectables, as they note, “*It is the process of finding these pieces and sourcing that I enjoy the most. It is actually so much fun and the thrill of just finding these pieces one by one is unmatched.*” Shre being as a stylist further motivates

¹⁷ A clothing trend emerging in 2020 that celebrated simple silhouettes, calm and earthy colours and comfortable clothing. It promotes and celebrates a simple and slow living, an aspect of eco-conscious mindset (Dolan, 2020). Just in 2020 itself, there were 71 million views on TikTok and 140K posts under #cottagecore on Instagram.

them to study trends and fashion forecasting, allowing them to pick and choose which vintage piece can be curated to fit a modern landscape. Multiple psychological and social factors can impact the human perception of beauty and aesthetics (Hemmati, 2016). One such factor is the emotional motivations of the thrift owners themselves that pursue them to curate their ideas of beauty within fashion.

Nevertheless, aesthetics can also be used to influence other ideas of beauty and in turn change our relation with the object of beauty, clothes in the case of thrift stores (Hemmati, 2016). Beauty can be understood to be a play on other senses that can charm one's intellectual and moral faculties (ibid). These social aesthetics are strategically played out by thrift store owners to engage and appeal to their audience, hence, potential customers. By providing a variety of clothing, Apa tries to bring in different aesthetics and keeps it "*fresh*", allowing customers to choose from a plethora of different clothing. The choice of close-up shots and embroidery details is also Ann's way of communicating their love for little details in fashion garments and gives a holistic idea of a garment being purchased, down to their smallest detailing. On the other hand, Maha loves using reels on Instagram to fast-track the attention of their audience using high-paced music that can appeal to her audience. Lu's usage of trends based on pop-cultural references, such as Barbenheimer¹⁸, helped personalise their aesthetics to suit current social phenomena while allowing them to curate vintage clothes according to tones, colours, silhouettes and music that could allure sensory engagement from the audience.

The personalised experiences through the usage of reels, stories, highlights, and posts create an intensive social space for the thrift owners and the customers. This phenomenon helps understand the role of aesthetics within a fashion that can portray subjective ideas within the objective reality of what we wear (Eun Jung Kang, 2018). These subjective ideas can reflect our most personal as well as social relationships with the world around us (ibid). As we can aptly understand from Dia's statement, "*Maybe the idea of another human being behind the digital screen and not a no-face big company, help personalise the experience for someone by adding*

¹⁸ The release of simultaneous release of Barbie and Oppenheimer in the summer of 2023 was monumental phenomenon on social media. Barbie collected USD 1.44 Billion at the box office worldwide while Oppenheimer made USD 956 million. The phenomenal performance of the movies and the marketing surrounding it pushed social media content on fashion towards creating trends and outfits relating to the pop-culture moment that Cillian Murphy in a BBC interview terms as a "wonderful moment for cinema". (McIntosh, 2024)

that human touch.” The curation of the clothing and the Instagram feed is directly driven by keeping the ecological and social aspects of fashion in mind, and hence, promotes a socio-ecological process of sustainable fashion practice.

4. Fashion - A Sustainable Service

“I just want the experience to be good with me more than anything.”

(Apa, Owner, TheFineFinds)

As mentioned in the previous section, thrift stores thrive on generating exclusivity as a value to drive their sales. This exclusivity stems from the clothes they curate and their engagement with their customers. Aesthetics form the visual getaway to allure customers but it is the social meanings that are promoted and the social relations that thrift stores build with their audience that drive value creation. More than anything, thrift stores do not present fashion as the buying and selling of clothes but as a service in the form of an experience. Their emotional connection with fashion is the motivator to create values of service within their businesses.

Along with the visual experience of the Instagram feed and the clothes, the clothes are curated with care and community in mind. Just as Delaunay and Gadrey (1992) understand society to be the “exchange of services”, the strategies of aesthetics that thrift stores establish, not their success in terms of profit, but the relationship they establish through it. Thus, here, we explore how thrift stores establish a fashion service as an experience, stemming from values of social and emotional validation. The ecological values through sourcing and curation can only be generated if the customers engage with it. Data analysis determined ‘community’ to be central to the engagement with thrift stores and is further understood as the underlying analytical codes, ‘inclusivity’, ‘accessibility’, and ‘thrift community’. ‘Vendor partnerships’ was also a crucial analytical code emerging within the ideas of community formation. Vendor relationships can be understood as part of the broader imaginary thrift community along with consumer relationships and partnerships with other thrift owners. These codes or values together give us an understanding of their service as a socio-ecological process and how it is communicated through the affordances of Instagram.

4.1 Style Service

“The true unique factor for each store or each curator is just the personal style.”

(Shre, Owner, GonVintage)

Promoting fashion as a service is key to the business values generated by thrift stores. The current norm around fashion promotes it as a system of micro-trends and consumption driven by its materialistic commodities. However, looking at fashion as a service allows the focus to shift to holistic shaping and reshaping of understanding fashion as one of experience, belonging and identity formation. In line with McCracken’s (1986) exploration of fashion as a “fluid concept”, it becomes a dyadic system of stories, emotions, history, aesthetics and values. Its association with shifting cultural meanings and social interactions (ibid) can help understand fashion’s associations with the past, present and future, and meanings communicated by a shared understanding across time, whether it is cultural, social, or political. In short, what literature is to writers, fashion is to thrift store owners. It serves as a playground for thrift owners to weave new narrations and values of trends and styles.

Thrift owners promote the value of fashion through style consumption, such as curation of outfits, styling tips and stylistic aesthetics. The concept of style consumption forms a unique mode of tailoring experiences (Hasanspahic, 2016). Meanings of styles are rooted in given time periods and their evolvment with them, thus making it capable of being timeless (ibid). For instance, Meg loves to curate pieces with embroidery and animal prints as they perceive these pieces to be *“classic and timeless...they will be in trend in some way or the other.”* It is not only designs that evolves but the creation of style to express individuality. In their effort to bring back used clothes into the fashion cycle, they curate their own style and aesthetics from clothes to outfits, terming it as *“modern vintage”*. Cho et al (2015) understand style creations as a reflection of personal taste, interests, and characteristics; thus the value of styling can add an emotional attachment to the garment. Moreover, the aspects of durability and multiple-usage of clothes can be communicated through styling, just as Shre posts multiple ways of styling a particular piece of clothing.

The thrift owners too can take creative liberties and consider Instagram their feed and curated clothing as a creative playground. Lu was often excited to talk about her collection inspired by Barbie or her next plan to introduce a Vivien Westwood style. We can establish styling as “*a form of art*” (Dia) wherein each outfit can convey emotions, moods, and feelings. Inspirations from pop culture, trends, and forecasting can help thrift owners generate value-based fashion services through relativity. Instagram being a visual platform perfectly aligns its architecture and affordances to communicate the style created by thrift owners. When curating classic pieces, Meg posts Instagram stories on how celebrities have worn similar outfits, or reels on how they would wear the clothes they thrifted. Reels are often posted with a mix of fast-paced motion visuals and music that can give a sensory experience to the customer to associate an outfit with an emotion. In creating styles according to ideas and trends that are going around, the creative liberties allow owners to explore options that can break taboos or standards within fashion to promote belonging (as discussed ahead) within their consumer base.

4.2 Belonging

“I kind of shifted into trying to be like a place where you could get whatever you want...I want people to like, think that, okay, if I want to buy this, I can just thrift it.”

(Apa, Owner, TheFineFinds)

The prior sections highlight exclusive and personalised service as making thrift stores radically different from fast fashion brands. Each aspect of the service provided is established through building a community with their customers, a relationship that can go beyond that of buyers and sellers. Describing their social aesthetics, Ann commented, “*I sometimes post tidbits about my life on Insta stories life...my customers also get worried if I don't and some have full-fledged conversations, sometimes even sharing a little too much.*” Like Ann notes “*it's a personal connection*” where the owners and customers establish a valuable bond. The thrift stores have strived to be a place where customers could feel ‘belonged’. The motivation to form social connections comes from the inherent need to feel accepted (Collisson, 2013) and can drive fashion consumption through emotional values (McNeil & Venter, 2019). Meg reasons their interaction with their customers as “*a means to get to know them, to know what they are buying, and why they look to buy them*”. Meg notes that interaction and bond allow them to cater to

broader needs of their customers to feel at ease with their fashion. Upon data analysis, the analytical theme of “belonging” could be further classified into business aspects that practised inclusivity through accessibility within their business model. Thrift owners strive to make their store a space where people from different backgrounds can feel ‘belonging’ through their common love for fashion and thrifting.

Instagram further propagates the ideologies of the thrift community through its ability to connect to a larger audience. With the help of hashtags, and captions, thrift owners can curate their feed to appeal to customers from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The multiplicity of visual and textual communication along with personalised messaging on Instagram allows the thrift owners and their customers to deepen understanding between them. Instant connectivity offered by Instagram allows thrift stores to be community spaces and create social values where people are made to feel belonging, thus interacting with community activities and eventually supporting their environmental cause (Poldner et al, 2022).

4.2.1 Accessibility

Thrift store owners are quite straightforward with their aims towards fashion and environment. However, they understand the integral role that customers play in establishing the very essence of the stores and what they stand for. Power relations and social hierarchy are an integral part of society, providing service that can traverse lines of class differences is critical in establishing socially sustainable values. The market and society that thrift stores cater to are highly segregated and disparity is often observed about one’s accessibility through economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, belonging when understood in terms of accessibility, highlights thrift stores create values by providing access to capital such as affordability or access to markets of used goods.

As unanimously agreed by thrift owners, each of them tries to keep a decent price point in mind. Ann has a fixed price range, INR¹⁹ 999 to INR 1500. Keeping the price range at a low end for premium brands with defects seems like a good deal for Ann to attract buyers. Whereas,

¹⁹ USD 10 to USD 17

Dia has also highlighted their comfort in letting their customers pay the full price of their garments upon delivery. We can understand this by what Apa cites as their perceived “*approachability*” that allows them to be empathetic with her customers and listen to their problems. Being open to listening to their causes and stress allows thrift store owners to work around personalising their service to make their clothes widely accessible. Moreover, accessibility value also entails an introduction to markets and brands that customers might not have heard of, giving stores an exclusive aesthetic value. Shre often sources vintage collectables from their travels and they are of the staunch belief to share the value of her clothes and essence of her vacations with those, her customers, who cannot otherwise afford to do so. Customers, on the other hand, have the opportunity to explore and experiment with unique clothing without being pressured to climb higher in the socio-economic hierarchy to be able to express themselves.

4.2.2 Inclusivity

As mentioned above, thrift stores enact inclusivity of their store by providing accessibility. The lines between understanding inclusive values with accessibility values are blurred and inter-related. Here, accessibility focuses on economic or material capital whereas inclusivity focuses on social and cultural capital such as beauty standards or gendered views of clothes. As established time and again, the material aspect of fashion often interplays with its social aspect when individuals purchase fashion products to enact their identities and social relationships. Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) understanding of consumption highlights the broader reason to consume with the desire for acquisitions and meeting a perpetuated “ideal” norm. The inability to achieve that causes a consumer to repeat the process until they have reached the ideal.

As a slow fashion brand, thrift stores strive to persuade consumers that they are their ideal selves. At RevivalOfThriffs, Ann ensures that she has a range of sizes available. Catering to a more mature audience amidst most thrift stores that cater to a young audience, Ann notes, “*I definitely try to be as size inclusive as possible.*” Driven by their motivation to bring brand rejects back into the fashion cycle, Ann can generate value within their store with the inclusion of size-inclusive clothes. Moreover, they also hint at the cultural context that is uncomfortable

with plus-size women wearing strapless dresses. Ann emphasizes that even though they may not be immediate consumers of strappy or short dresses, they include them in their curation to persuade someone to buy them because of their beauty. Whereas Maha emphasizes that “*fashion has no gender*” which is reflected in their curation of unisex clothing that brings about comfort and inclusivity to wear clothes that people like rather than what societal norms believe they should be wearing.

Thrift owners’ active way of fostering a sense of validation creates values based on going against dominant social norms and standards. This gives way to the formation of a community where customers feel heard, seen and central to the thrifting process, making them come back to the stores again and again.

4.2.3 Thrift Community

“To me, right from the get-go, it's been about building a community of people that appreciate vintage clothing and see the luminance.”

(Shre, Owner, GonVintage)

Community is central to the functioning and value creation of thrift stores. It’s a symbiotic relationship wherein both customers and thrift owners function as the creators and receivers of values. Remembering the initial days of the establishment of their store, Maha explains that their Instagram feed got immense traction due to the sharing of their reels by their customers and friends. Moreover, Lu and Dodo showed their satisfaction in catering to the loyal base of customers they have rather than focussing on garnering more followers. They believe that the better the personal relationship, the more loyal the customers, and it is the existing community of customers who attract more to the cause. Thrift owners promote consumer participation in co-creating values, such as when their virtual community creates value through the construction of Instagram, thrift usage, impression management, and participation (Schau et al, 2009).

Lu’s curation of wedding dresses upon the suggestions of their customers turned it into a niche aesthetic value of their store, becoming “*one of the pioneer thrift stores to source affordable wedding dresses*”. Thus, consumers’ helpful behaviours, suggestions, rapport and

knowledge contribution are the purpose of the values created (Schau et al, 2009). This further evolves to adding eco-conscious values within and around the community of consumers. Yet another interesting finding of the study leads us to understand how the customers participate in the ecological motivations of the store. Noted by Apa, Lu and Shre, their introduction of second-hand clothing inspired many customers to sell their clothing rather than dispose of it. Their eagerness to help sell customers' clothing establishes the ecological value of fashion formed out of community formation and dependency.

“We are very transparent.” (Ann)

Thrift owners including Ann believe that the intended creation of value within their brand happens through trust and transparency within the community. Each owner is driven by their goal to fulfil their duties to environmental good and share their love for fashion. This goal and passion help them be accepting of new players in the field rather than take a competitive front. As Ann puts it, *“There is enough space for all of us to thrive together”*. Community formation occurs also with friendly and helpful relationships with other thrift owners. Maha credits her knowledge of sourcing and recommendations for starting a thrift store that began with conversations with other thrift store owners. Many like Dodo often spoke about their shopping escapades with other thrift owners, this seems to create space for multiple aesthetics to merge together and create a holistic space for growth and learning. The relationship with consumers and other thrift owners allows the study's interviewees to understand themselves as part of an imagined thrift community (Anderson, 2016). The merging aspects of their identities are the core part of these imagined communities and drive each to function as a key in creating ecological values within fashion consumption. They share collective meanings and understanding of fashion within its social and ecological aspects.

5. Well-being

“Don't buy them just because they are trending, buy what you will wear, what makes you comfortable, otherwise you will obviously throw them.”

(Dia, Owner, TheJunkStore)

The final finding of the analysis leads to the value creation of sustainable fashion in terms of well-being and quality of life. The inherent goal of sustainability is to make progress towards the benefit of people and their biophysical being, the environment. While Rostow's (1959) theories of sustainability revolve around economic progress to drive a better quality of life in the early stages, it becomes less important in the later stages (De Neve & Sachs, 2020). The norm of consumption driven by individualistic freedom and frugality rides on the need to reach a stage of 'fulfilment'. Epistemologically, 'fulfilment' assumes a rather need-based perception, where humans continuously try to reach a state of success.

Thrift stores perform their idea of sustainability in fashion by promoting well-being rather than fulfilment, in line with De Neve and Sachs's (2020) understanding of sustainability as striving to achieve human well-being. It includes one's emotional attachment, value of care within the product consumed, and sense of belonging within social hierarchies while being attached to holistic and intuitive care for the planet. As seen in the quote at the start of this section, thrift owners understand the value of their curations in terms of the emotional values they inculcate and their direct relationship with whether it is of any ecological value. In the exploration of well-being, the emerging themes of the data are divided into the ideologies (or codes) of social and ecological well-being, yet they are not mutually exclusive and have the power to influence one another, directly or indirectly.

Recounting their experiences with customers' disappointment when are unable to buy a product, Dodo consoles them and understands, "*At the end of the day, it's just clothes, you're going to get better clothes that fit you or, you know, you're going to get something that you like more than this piece.*" Their beliefs are driven by the understanding that material commodities are short-term fulfilments; they are important but do not add to long-term happiness. Here, we can see individuals' interdependencies on each other, within their community and with others in the social hierarchy. A socially sustainable system, such as a thrift store, tries to holistically build those relationships so there can be a collective benefit to the cause, that is the environment. Thrift shops infer their understanding of well-being as the "*pursuit of happiness*" (Dia) of ours and our future generations. While the understanding of happiness may be subjective, well-being

encompasses a broader range of social and psychological benefits, such as care, trust, comfort, and belonging.

While describing what they enjoy posting on their feed, Shre shared the emotional connection that they want their store to have with the customers. *“I want them to be like, this place means so much to me. I brought this garment from their store and it means so much to me”* (Shre). For Shre, their ideas of well-being stem from love, connection, and sharing a sense of nostalgia with their customers. Thrift owners, including Shre, believe in the ideologies that their store can help build around a system of emotions, trust, and transparency. It comes with the consciousness that the customers have the right to know what they are consuming and the role that consumption has to play in their well-being.

The sense of well-being is further extended to reinforce the relationship that humans share with nature through their biophysical existence. Little acts of sending a card with marigold seeds that Lu does with her deliveries can highlight the emotions of care and appreciation that she shares with her customers but also remind them to do their bit for the environment. It is an act that validates, *“we are together in this”* (Lu). Meg is further driven by their motivation for everyone to *“own something unique in their closet”* and this motivation also translates into their ideas to promote limited buying, because *“when you buy a lot of things together, you never wear them, they remain in the closet”*. Thus, by providing one-of-a-kind, rare, and unique finds, they create emotional values within products, with the customers and thus, encourage them to buy clothes that give them long-term emotional and social validation, rather than a momentary one. Thrift owners understand that eco-consciousness only comes when it is inculcated within communities not forced. In layman's terms, it is the concept of ‘doing by seeing’.

Beyond her business of selling garments, Apa stands by their duty to the environment by helping people sell their clothes when they do not have a scheduled drop. They understand the process to be cyclical, since the idea of thrifting stems from the broader donation and usage of clothing, they provide a passage for their customers to do their bit for the environment. Thrift owners' ideas for ecological well-being are rooted in their patience and trust in innate human nature to care, however, existing social norms can become hurdles in their ability to carry it out.

Yet another aspect of ecological well-being is the physiological connection that thrift stores establish with their customers. This is rooted in the practice of ‘wearing it is feeling it’ which understands the interactions of our biophysical bodies with the natural world around us. The quality of clothing thus plays an essential role in highlighting that relationship. This carries a similar essence to wearing warm clothes in winter and breezy clothes in the summer. Ann and Dia emphasize their process of curation based on their quality, highlighting that *“if it doesn’t feel good on the skin, it will not be on my store”* (Dia). Much of Ann’s customer base also resides in the coastal part of the country allowing them to curate breezy dresses that would suit the hot and humid weather of where the customers reside. One of the key processes of promoting ecological well-being is also through the values of waste management. While most curated clothing sell out, there is always a chance of surplus inventory in thrift businesses. Each thrift owner is careful to try and resale them as closet clearances. Yet, throwing the rest would mean breaking the ecological fundamentals of their slow businesses. Lu reckons that each time there is a surplus, they simply donate it to a group of women who work in their home, who can use or further sell it. The process of adding value to the products does not end until it finds a home rather than ending up in landfills.

From sourcing to distribution of the clothes, each value is added with the goal of long-term human and environmental well-being in mind. Whether it is sourcing second-hand and rejected clothes by saving from going to landfills or promoting limited consumption through curation of rare value products, thrift stores promote well-being at large by creating a space of patience, care, trust, and transparency. The digital tools provided by Instagram become an important mode of communication and interaction through which they can promote these goals. Something as small as DMs on Instagram can allow stores like Maha’s to patiently explain and persuade those who are keen to do something about the environment but do not know where to start. Transparency about their working process becomes a key in establishing and honing relations and getting customers to be open to adapting to newer ways of holistic living. Fashion’s equation with well-being provides opportunities to enhance eudaimonia, of having a life with a soulful purpose towards the development of thrift owners’ personal and societal potential, towards a healthy environmental.

At the start of the chapter, this thesis aimed at finding aspects of social and ecological processes that establish sustainable fashion as an socio-ecological process. By analysing the data, thrift stores were found to be shaped by the social and ecological norms around them, such as stereotypes, trends, cultural context and digital norms and within their operations they shape the norms too. The sourcing and curation of their clothing is rooted in the ecological aspects of eco-consciousness, eco-awareness and waste management whereas social aspects such as identity formation came out in their style services and exclusivity. Together, these socio-ecological processes create values within their business models and are exercised through the use of social and ecological aesthetics, communicated through digital aspects of Instagram. Moreover, community serves as core of their social processes that allow the transmissability of their ecological processes of curation. In conclusion, we can understand that creation of each value is focussed on interlinked social and ecological aspects; together they flow as processes to provide social and ecological well-being to their customers.

CONCLUSION

“It’s my love for fashion and the relationships I have built here in the past few years, my store is just me, personified.”

(Dia, Owner, TheJunkStore)

The strong underlying emotions that Dia shared, at the end of the interview caught me off guard. Through this thesis, I embarked on explorations of interconnected pathways of social and ecological processes to forge a genuinely sustainable fashion economy. By delving into Instagram thrift stores in India, my study illuminated how these enterprises leveraged the technological and communication tools of Instagram, to cultivate values of care, community, and eco-consciousness. Much like the rest of the thrift owners, Dia held a deep emotional connection with their identities, social relations, and the broader environment. These emotions have shaped and reshaped their business values within the operations of their store.

Central to this thesis was the argument that sustainable fashion is inherently a socio-ecological process, with the processes merging and evolving with each other. The literature reviewed key gaps identified within the existing research on relations between fashion, sustainability, consumption, and their mediated processes through technologies. It established that to understand process concepts, we must understand them as continuously changing with varying sociocultural, ecological, economic, and digital contexts (McLeod & Pan, 2005). As this change occurs through changing stimuli, they not only help give rise to newer value-creation models but can be changed by them too. Each social and ecological process enacted in terms of adding values to the business leads to ideologies of the larger well-being of society and ecology. Indian Instagram thrift stores serve as a compelling case of this concept, exemplifying how values for broader human well-being can be created through a community-driven and environmentally conscious approach on Instagram.

In this chapter, I present my conclusions based on my findings and summarise them to answer my research questions. Through my empirical evidence, I present a Critical Theory approach to viewing sustainable fashion as a concept within which the goals of environmental

benefits must be understood along with its connections and interactions with human beings and society. Talking about the growth of their store and profits, Meg confirms, “*It is a slow growth, but it is positive.*” Through this, we understand sustainable fashion as a slow and eventual process that hints at a ‘state of continuity’ with the evolution of human beings and technology. While the growth of thrift stores can be understood as an increase in output or profit, the development of the business and its operations is a qualitative output that incorporates enhancements of life, norms, institutions, environment and society (Barbossa et al, 2014). When striving for a sustainable future where humans are happy and healthy within themselves, their community, and their ecology, the process inherently involves focusing on social sustainability within the realms of ecological sustainability.

RQ1: How do Instagram thrift stores in India shape and reshape sustainable fashion through social and ecological values?

A simple answer to this question that was posed at the beginning of this thesis is ‘well-being’. Human well-being is the core and the end goal of what Instagram thrift stores in India strive to achieve through their businesses. By inculcating values of care, trust, and transparency, they understand the value that each stakeholder, business owners, vendors who supply them, and their customers add to the process of sustainable fashion. These values become essential in promoting the well-being of their social communities as well as the well-being of the broader ecology that they inhabit. Previous research on fashion has highlighted its social aspects and its importance in nurturing identities and social relations. Research on sustainability, meanwhile, has been central to highlighting fashion’s environmental aspects, the need and urgency of awareness of ecological damage, and generating eco-consciousness for the future of mankind. My study on Instagram thrift stores further sheds light on their interconnection in bringing out the ecological aspects of production, distribution, and consumption of fashion, and social aspects of sustainability such as accessibility, belonging, and quality of life. Together, sustainable fashion becomes an intricate process of both concepts, fashion and sustainability, that promotes ecological and social well-being.

The emotional connection and identity formation of thrift owners with fashion clothing, trends, history, and culture have played a pivotal role in their aspirations to make it a holistic system. This sentiment has fuelled their eco-consciousness to make fashion a socially sustainable process. On the other hand, their eco-consciousness and environmental awareness perpetuated by social media or their socio-cultural context have inculcated a desire to make their love for fashion an ecologically sustainable process. As the interviewees established multiple times, their shop was an extension of them and thus, added values that were socially and ecologically motivated. Environmental benefit was the key strategy of each of the thrift businesses. The environmental aspects of their businesses dealt with the socio-ecological contexts of India within which they functioned. Whether it was reintroducing brand-rejected clothes or reusing imported secondhand clothing that came to the country in bulk, the businesses were driven by the ideologies of reintroducing clothes to the fashion cycle and preventing them from going to landfills. In their inherent business ethics, lies the strategy of waste management that allowed them to help their customers sell their old garments, or donate their surplus pieces to those in need. In doing so, they added unique ecological values to their products for environmental well-being.

In light of a developing country such as India, where large differences in accessibility exist, thrift stores bring in values that make fashion accessible through inclusivity and affordability of clothes. The existing socio-cultural and socio-ecological norms within the Indian context allow thrift stores to bring exclusive values to unwanted clothes and promote fashion in a way that is sellable. Furthermore, these norms are bent and twisted slowly and eventually, to let new norms take their place in the socio-ecological process. For instance, thrift owners use the existing concept of ‘fashion trends’ to predict or curate styles that can fit into the trends of today while also bringing in new styles. As most thrift owners believe, they have, slowly and eventually, been able to break stereotypes that exist around thrifting based on hygiene or traditional beliefs when customers are satisfied with what they receive.

To be able to deliver exclusive and hand-picked products, their relationship with their vendors is of utmost importance. This highlights how the inclusion of stakeholders within a fashion cycle can prove to be beneficial for the larger well-being of mankind. An emotional and

personal connection of stakeholders, including small-scale distributors, vendors of used clothing, factory manufacturers and small business owners is essential in building trust and sourcing quality products. The well-being of stakeholders within the process of sustainable fashion is critical in their participation in the larger cause.

Through evolving media technologies, new businesses can communicate, interact, and share their ideas through the art of visual communication. Visual aesthetics are central to the ideation of business strategies and value creations. The aesthetics within the digital store become a getaway to what the stores stand for and their larger goal. Aesthetics are the core to defining the exclusive and unique service that a business forges. Sensory music, interactive videos, relatable themes of their collection, and creativity within visual communication of thrift stores bring out exclusivity as well as the social value within their products. Their unique service of fashion not as clothes but as styles and outfits also works to create personalised spaces for consumers.

However, combined with aesthetics such as natural lighting, earthy tones, and eye-soothing palettes works towards bringing the consumer close to nature. Each aesthetic choice is created to add to the emotional as well as awarding feelings within the consumers towards themselves, their clothes, thrift owners, others in the thrift community, and the environment. To achieve true well-being, the causes, consequences, and dynamics of interdependent forms of well-being must be emphasized (Kjell, 2011). Through the study, I have realised that social well-being as a phenomenon is often overshadowed by the superficial practices of ecological well-being. One of the main aims was to bring the values of social well-being to the forefront, placing both social and ecological on the same pedestal. My study has, thus, concluded the interdependent and non-differential nature of social and ecological processes of value creation of well-being.

RQ2: What role does Instagram play in the creation of newer and sustainable business models of value creation?

Mediatisation of the modern world was central to the context of this study. Social media technologies such as Instagram provide the norms and context within which thrift stores can function as online stores. In their value creations around well-being, Instagram plays a critical role in establishing and shaping the role of a community. As explained time and again by the thrift owners, they held their relationships with their customers close, as if they were part of a community. New ways of business communication and consumption practices are formed when new technologies come up in which knowledge of fashion and sustainability can be inculcated and mediated.

Consumer culture theory (CCT) helped understand the business possibilities and markets on Instagram that are socially constructed by thrift owners (Arnould & Thompson, 2006). As aesthetics and representations are curated around social and ecological well-being, Instagram acts as a medium wherein encoded meanings within these representations are communicated socially (Arnould & Thompson, 2006). The existing virtual community of Instagram becomes the socio-digital context within which the thrift stores function. Tierney's (2013) understanding of Instagram as a democratic space allows the emotions and ideologies of the thrift owners to traverse their customers. Furthermore, as established in the prior chapters, the affordances of Instagram allow thrift owners to create values through visual communication, through posts, reels, stories, and highlights. The hashtags and captions act as tools for connectivity on Instagram that connect thrift owners to their customers and potential customers. Thus, Instagram becomes a virtual space of sociocultural exchanges and the formation of imagined communities.

Answering the second research question, Instagram aids in creating newer models of value creation through the formation of communities. However, Instagram only serves as a medium while thrift owners use it to create them. The values of well-being function to contribute towards the formation of a community where both business owners and customers share a passion for the same cause, fashion and the environment. The communities are formed through the feeling of belonging, through making thrifted apparel accessible to a wider audience and making the products inclusive of customers' socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. Thrift owners consider their customers central to the functioning of their business and, thus, have created spaces where their customers can feel comfortable and welcomed. The price points and

weather differences are kept in mind to make clothes accessible to those who might not have otherwise considered thrifting.

Moreover, thrift owners bring in size and gender-inclusive clothes to adhere to their customers' identity needs. As they perform their inclusivity through accessibility, they generate a social value that drives their customers towards their environmental cause. After all, this is driven by the very motivation of thrift owners to make fashion accessible to all despite their differences in backgrounds. Within this community, consumers who then practice sustainable fashion consumption are motivated to maintain their behaviour due to their surrounding social networks of groups with similar eco-conscious values (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). In this creation of community, Instagram has also led thrift owners to find validation and assurance amidst other thrift owners on the platform. Yet again, the connectivity of Instagram allows a thrift store to find communities standing up for the same cause. This connectivity can work as a validation to someone new in business to not give up hope, not compete but grow as sustainable businesses together.

As elucidated by this research, Instagram serves as more than just a medium; it acts as a catalyst for thrift store owners to connect, engage, and foster meaningful relationships with their customers, ultimately driving forward the ethos of social and ecological well-being in fashion consumption.

1. Limitations and Future Research

Investigating the distributed and broad nature of sustainable fashion is a complex endeavour with a multiplicity of various intertwined social and ecological aspects. A thesis of this length can only cover certain aspects, allowing further discussions and explorations into the subject. My thesis was situated within the socio-ecological contexts of India and thus included an inclusive understanding of interconnectedness within society and the ecology of the country. While one of the limits may be its specificity within the Indian context, the included perspectives and concepts can provide innovative ways to adapt to distinct socio-ecological, socio-cultural, and socio-digital contexts. The core of the research suggests the larger goal of sustainable fashion as well-being and the role of the community in changing the norm of need-based consumption.

Instagram's role in mediating unique and new values leads to further research into understanding and innovating business values within the evolving spectrum of media and communication technologies. While a qualitative approach is essential to bring out social values within the study, the small size of the sample may face certain limits of being purposive. Yet, the research is conducted through the views and beliefs of the very producers of values. Snowballing my participants ensured a certain flexibility and validity of experiences of thrift owners, reaching a stage of saturation of themes. The choice of sampling is necessary as thrift owners are the 'experts' of knowledge in my research interest of Indian Instagram thrift stores.

It ushers ways into future research within the holistic areas of sustainable fashion to include the perspectives of customers of thrift stores and vendors to identify ways to enhance the value creation system. A consumer perspective of thrift stores can shed light on the transferability and versatility of the social and ecological values created within thrift stores. Moreover, a study from the standpoint of vendors and suppliers of used clothing can help understand ways of formalising the system, ensuring well-being the business owners and customers, who depend on the suppliers. Furthermore, this research found multiple challenges within thrift stores' sociocultural context that become barriers to their value-creation process. Future research can highlight sustainable ways in which these issues can be addressed, holistically. For instance, thrift stores are currently dependent on the Indian postal system or private delivery services, further studies can address ways in which various institutions can formalise the sourcing and shipping methods.

To conclude, sustainable fashion remains a broad and fluid concept, only because it is a process and thus, in a continuous movement of change. By shaping and reshaping social and ecological processes, one can make fashion a truly sustainable system. For fashion to be sustainable, it needs to be caring, accessible, and inclusive of the people who wear them and the environment that creates them. Humans are inherently connected to each other and to the nature around them, thus, new business systems must be made keeping the larger community and its well-being in mind.

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APPENDIX

This section contains tables and pictorial details of sample selection, thrift store examples, and the data analysis process. It also includes extra details of the schallenges faced by the thrift stores that were found in the analysis.

1. Participant Details

(*Names of the owners have been changed)

Store Name	Owner*	Year of Establishment	Follower Count	Products	Sourcing Area
Dodo Finds	Dodo	2020	13.5K	Secondhand Clothes, Bags & Shoes	Delhi (North India), North-East India
Gon Vintage	Shre	2020	6.3K	Vintage & Secondhand Clothes, Shoes	Around the World, Gujarat (West India)
Luu Liu	Lu	2020	56.4K	Vintage & Secondhand Clothes, Lingerie	Delhi (North India), North-East India
Bangalore Thrifts	Maha	2021	19K	Secondhand Clothes & Factory Surplus	Bangalore (South India), Delhi (North India)
Old love Studios	Meg	2021	9.2K	Vintage, Secondhand & Factory Surplus Clothes	Around the world, Mumbai (West India)
The Fine Finds	Apa	2019	13.8K	Secondhand Clothes & Accessories	Bangalore (South India)
Revival of Thrifts	Ann	2021	32.4K	Factory Reject Clothes	Gujarat (West India)
The Junk Store	Dia	2020	11K	Secondhand Clothes & Factory Surplus	Mumbai (West India), North-East India

2. Instagram Invite

A creative poster was designed and shared across Instagram as a call for interviewees.



3. Instagram Invite - Personalised Message

Hey love! I am Adyasha, a master's student at Lund University. Currently, I am writing my master's thesis titled, "Defining Sustainable Fashion: A Value Creation Study of Online Thrift Stores in India".

I am looking to interview 8-10 thrift store owners to understand alternate sustainable fashion models that are non-western, creative, and socially and ecologically viable. I will be interviewing over Zoom and it will take not more than 45 mins.

The interview will be divided into 3 parts:

1. Your personal understanding of sustainable fashion
2. Understanding your thrift store as a brand and its marketing
3. Community engagement of your store

Your anonymity and comfort is of utmost important to me, in case of any discomfort in answering a question, you can voice it out. Once you confirm, I will share a consent form for the same!

Hit me up on Instagram [@just.sasha.things](#) or reach me on WhatsApp @ [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Let's talk all things thrift ❤️

Lots of love

Sasha

4. Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

You are warmly invited to take part in a qualitative research interview, conducted for my master's thesis titled, "*Defining Sustainable Fashion: A Value Creation Study of Instagram Thrift Stores in India*". My thesis discusses alternate value-creation models of sustainable/slow fashion that can propagate and establish sustainable fashion as a socially and ecologically viable process.

The interview will follow a conversational tone with semi-structured and open questions. It will be divided into three parts:

1. The social and environmental aspects of your store
2. Community engagement of your store
3. Aesthetic choices of your store

Who are you?

The owner of an Instagram thrift store in India, that promotes sustainable fashion in the form of secondhand clothing and/or factory surplus and rejects.

Followers count: > 5k

Confidentiality

During the course of the conversation, you are allowed to interrupt, ask questions, and withdraw at any time upon any discomfort. Your personal identity shall remain anonymous and any reference to your statements from the interview would be made from the perspective of your store.

Participant Permission and Approval

I voluntarily agree to participate in this thesis study, approved by Lund's Universitet in Sweden, and I know of no reason to not participate. I have approved the recording of my statements and their transcription to be used for academic purposes **ONLY**. I hereby acknowledge the above and grant consent for participation in this project. I understand my right to withdraw at any time in case of disregard for the rules of confidentiality.

(Signature)

(Store Name)

(Date)

5. Interview Guide

Sustainability

1. What is your understanding of eco-friendly fashion?
 - what makes something sustainable?
2. About the store
 - Why and how did you start it?
 - How does your store promote slow and environment-friendly fashion?
 - How does having limited pieces add to slow fashion?
3. What makes your store unique?
4. Where do you get your products from?
 - Describe your process of sourcing
 - Describe the process of how you choose the clothes to sell

5. What do you do with clothes that don't sell?

Consumer

6. How do you engage your customers?
 - Could you describe some of your interactions with your customers?
(Like sharing your sustainable visions)
 - Why is it important?
 - What makes them come back to you?
 - How do you get new customers?
7. How do you connect with your customers when you don't have a drop scheduled?
8. How do you deal with complaints and related concerns?

Value

9. Why did you choose Instagram?
 - How does Instagram help you sell your products?
10. Describe your store's aesthetics.
 - What kind of aesthetics do you choose for your clothes? Why?
 - Can you explain your choice of aesthetics for your Instagram feed?
 - Any aesthetic choices you want to try in the future

Limitations

12. What challenges do you face while running your store?
 - Limitations of Instagram

6. Interview Transcript & Open Coding

6.1. Interview: The Fine Finds (56 mins)

I: Okay, so basically, first I want to know what is your understanding of eco-friendly fashion?

FF: Okay, it's a very, very broad term, I think. So I don't think any brand can be completely entirely eco-friendly. I think that's just a really large feat. But in my opinion, any brand that's doing something to make the process somewhat sustainable counts as eco-friendly, making that product eco-friendly. With secondhand stuff, it's like you're kind of demotivating the whole production of new clothes and all of the unsustainable practices that come with that. And if you're another kind of sustainable business, you might focus on fabrics that maybe use less water or just better for the environment, or you might be eco-friendly in your pattern making, and have less wastage in that. So in the different stages of production, if you are focusing on making it more sustainable or just better for the environment, I think that counts. And it's really hard to take all the boxes there of like sustainable fabric and using all your waste and just making on their packaging materials sustainable.

And I think the whole thing is very difficult to achieve. But I think any brand that has a motive to make it somewhat better for the environment is what I'm counting as sustainable eco-friendly fashion.

I: And what makes something sustainable for you as a person?

FF: So sustainable in the sense that it's sustainable for the environment, something that's not very polluting, something that's not adding as much harm to the environment would be my idea of sustainable.

Yeah, just and that could again, it's a very, very broad thing. I think the most sustainable thing to do is to not shop at all. So there's only different ways to be sustainable. But yeah, I think making the best use out of existing resources and trying to use as little of what remains is my idea of sustainable.

I: Got it. And now I want to like, you know, know a little bit about your store and as in why and how did you start it?

FF: Okay, so why was honestly that I was thrifting from myself mostly and I enjoyed it. But there's a lot of things I wasn't thrifting because obviously, I didn't want to be wasteful and get a whole bunch of things that I was not going to wear or that did not fit me.

But I just love the process of curating these things. And I had so many people from I was in college back then, I had so many people ask me where I got these things from. And so I figured, can I tick all the boxes of kind of getting people onto that thrifting thing, which I felt like was kind of taboo when I first started off like, why would I wear somebody else's clothes?

But people saw me wearing these things didn't really even know that it was the case. So it was very motivating to know that I could get people onto this and I can I'm clearly making it look exciting. So maybe I have the ability to push this forward and also satisfy my love for thrifting and not leave all these goodies behind, you know, helping them find homes and getting people like yourself onto the whole thrifting scene. So that was kind of my motivation. And obviously, I was still in college, so I thought I'll start this off as a hobby, make a couple bucks while I'm still in college.

Little did I know the lockdown happened. And I would just focus on this business more than you know, it, yeah, it just kind of grew with me in a way.

I: How first of all, I have two questions. So how did you like, when did you start the business? If like, because usually a lot of the store that I've spoken to tell now they started during COVID, but you seem like you've started it before. So first I want to know that.

FF: Yeah, so I actually thought about this in December 2019, it was just a spur of the moment thing. And it was one of those things that if I didn't go through with it, then I think I never would have it was a very like, let's just do it sort of thing. December 2019 is when I started curating my first bit, like my first drop to sell.

It was just like five or seven pieces, I think. Jan 2020 is when I started, no idea COVID was going to happen. I was just sort of doing this on the weekends. And then I was making it more of an everyday thing during the like closer due to the lockdown.

But then when they completely shut down the lockdown, I just thought that, okay, I can't go sourcing, I can't get anything. So then I kind of shifted focus for those like two, three months into helping other people sell their stuff. So I was also getting like pictures from people and kind of using my platform to help people sell stuff. So that was the thing I was doing briefly. And then once the lockdown sort of lifted, I was by then I was already like very much in this. So then I just started doing it full time. That was the kind of...yeah.

I: because you mentioned you have been drifting for a while. And how did you end up starting that? Like, how did you know about it? And where did you where did you trip from?

FF: So I knew about these vendors from early on. I'm not sure. I think my mom put me on to like a couple vendors. And I would go to them really often. So they would just let me shop from them. They mostly deal in bulk. But because I'd visited them a few times, they were just like, okay, with me, staking a couple pieces and trying the whole thing out.

So I did build my relationships with my vendors over time. There weren't exactly physical locations, they were like these large go downs with all of these clothes. So I would have to just go through like hundreds and hundreds of pieces of clothing to, you know, find things that I felt like were really nice to wear and good condition and good quality and all of that.

So that's how I started. But even then my mom was like, Are you sure you want to do this? I mean, you don't even know who's wanted before. And all of that, I think that was to be expected. But yeah, I mean, now she wears thrifted things too. So things have changed.

I: That's really cool. I mean, it's a hard time to convince my moms and my mom just lets me do whatever I want. But I kid you not, I mean, once I bought from you, and I think the second time again, I bought from you. And then it just, I think for four years, I just, three years, I didn't really

buy anything from any other store, I would just keep thrifting. And I would find such amazing pieces.

FF: Yeah, I've stopped shopping firsthand, like since 2020. I mean, unless I have to buy like shoes, unfortunately, I can't really find the right market here for that in Bangalore. But I think there are markets in other parts of India, which I'm very keen to visit. But yeah, I mostly just, it's all secondhand at this point, it's just the lifestyle.

I: That's really cool. And how does your store particularly promote slow, environmentally friendly fashion?

FF: So in the beginning, I wanted to sell like only like really quirky, unique, interesting things that I felt like were more my aesthetic. And in a lot of ways, I have stayed true to that.

But then when I realized I was getting so many people onto it, I wanted, I kind of shifted into trying to be like a place where you could get whatever you want. So it was obviously some quirky cool things, but it was also basics. And it was also like, stuff to keep you warm in the winter. And it was just everything because I was like, I want people to like, think that, okay, if I want to buy this, I can just thrift it. And I think when I had first started there, I think two other thrift pages, two, three other thrift pages, they're the ones who actually got me into it.

I saw that I was like, could I do that? But anyway, I, they were selling like a lot of really cool, one of the kind things and I'm like, yeah, thrifting really is great for that. But because I got so used to thrifting everything, I was like, what if I can get people onto this thrifting in general. So then I started catering to like, as many different aesthetics and categories and things that I could, you know, get people on board. So that was just me trying to get everybody on board. I think that did work to a large extent.

I: Yeah, definitely. You have so many. I saw you have recently posted a lot of ties.

FF: Yeah, I'm always finding new things.

I: Yeah. And in your head, just briefly, how does having like limited pieces add to the whole slow fashion process?

FF: I'm not really sure. So I think there was a period in the middle, I'm not really sure now, but I think when thrifting suddenly became a huge deal. Then there was a lot of hype around it. So I feel like people are just hoarding things, which was again, very unsustainable, because it's just going to sit in your cupboard.

I saw a lot of that happening, and you know, like, who's going to comment first, who's going to get this first? I feel like that isn't as much of a thing now as it was when thrifting was first. I think it's because there's so many pages now, there's so much to choose from that nobody has to go with that gaga anymore.

But I think I was just trying to post very often so that that whole thing just did not exist. So that people know that, okay, I can still get what I want. I don't have to grab the first thing that I see here. So again, that was me just trying to take away the whole, okay, I need to get this right now.

I don't know why, but I need to get this thing that was happening to everybody. I'm not really sure how smaller batches play into that. But for me, I kind of took the opposite of approach of like, making it a shop that you know is going to have what you need. So you can just chill. And yeah, so that's that's the approach I took. But that's really nice.

I: That's amazing. And I think even having limited pieces for the fact that you have unique pieces, me personally, I think that you know, when you go to a fast fashion, you have like the same things and so many, you know, you see just too many clothes at once. So you want to buy different different pieces. But with thrift, I guess you kind of go through and see what suits you and your vibe, because of course, it's created from someone else's aesthetic. And within that, you have to find your own aesthetics. So yeah, and I mean, at least none of them are really going to waste, none of them are going to the landfill, someone or the other will buy it.

FF: That is true. And I think it's really, it's a great way to experiment also, because it's a little easier on your pocket. So I think thrifting has obviously brought in so many new like fashion trends and so many things have come back because when a lot of people are wearing vintage, it just becomes trendy, right? So I feel like so many styles have made a comeback. And it's just so much easier to experiment.

You know, it's not going to be too harsh on your pocket. And I think that's really opened a lot of doors. Like, honestly, I was just in Bombay recently, and I looked at on there, I was like, wow, people, people are dressing really nicely. Like I could just tell what's thrifted like and what isn't because I'm just doing this for too long. And really, really nice to see like so many like interesting experimental things happening that I just know a thrift culture had like some part to play in. So that's really interesting.

I: And what makes your story unique, according to you?

FF: Honestly, I don't even know. I don't even know. I think I always, I think I always keep it fresh. I think I'm always trying to find different kind of things to sell and new aesthetics. And I, because for me, personally, I don't have like a singular aesthetic.

It really depends on the day. Like sometimes I just like I'm a little bit all over the place. I love experimenting myself.

So I think my store is really just an extension of me. So if I'm really into ties, then you're going to see a lot of ties. If I'm really into lots of skirts, you're going to see a lot of skirts.

And I think that way, I think I've kept it very fresh. I don't just want to be like, okay, if you want like a trendy piece of something, you're going to get it. Like I think for the time, corsets were pretty trendy and they just became known for that.

I didn't want to be particularly known for like one thing because trends, they just come and go. I just wanted to have like some things and just keep it exciting. And even if you didn't want to buy something, I just wanted it to be a space where you're like, oh, that's pretty cool. Maybe, maybe I want to try that out, you know, because that is how I feel about some other stores around me as well.

So even if I don't shop, I just like to see their posts and see their things and get inspired. So that's kind of the space I'm trying to create. So I think that in my opinion, that kind of sets me apart. That kind of makes me a little bit different. I'm not very trend based. It's still very, whatever I find cool.

I: So that's really nice. I always find really interesting things in your store. So now I just like, I know I can't shop for anything right now. So sometimes I just keep going through stores and seeing their posts and I like to see pretty things. I just like think pretty things. Yeah, me too.

FF: Yeah, I do it every day. Yeah.

I: And so where do you get your products from? Like, can you maybe describe your process of sourcing?

FF: Yeah, so like I mentioned, I have these vendors and I have these relationships with them now. So if they like get a new consignment, like there's really, really large consignments that they get, I'll visit them. It's like a whole day's ordeal sometimes to just go through everything and pick out the pieces that I really like. And then I have like a per piece rate that I've set with them in different categories. So that's unless like, you know, sometimes prices go up if it's hard for them to get a consignment. And so prices might change that way.

But we try to set a price for like, okay, this is, this is what it's going to be. And yeah, then I bring it home and then I clean it, I fix anything. If there's fixing that needs to be done, my iron it and

then I photograph it, I post it, and then I pack it and ship it. So that's, that's the whole chain of things and that keeps that keeps going.

I: And what do you do with the clothes that you don't sell?

FF: I keep them right here. I actually, most of them end up finding homes eventually. I do obviously run sales at like the end of the year, sometimes in the middle of the year, I try not to do it too often. But yeah, I, it things eventually move. If I have had something for a little while, I either try I either keep it and repurpose it, or I actually just donate it.

I: So, do you mean all the stock just gets used somewhere?

FF: Yeah, yeah. And most of the things do go off in the sales, but if something doesn't, then I end up just donating it. So it kind of works out like that.

I: And what about like, like the process of how you choose the clothes to sell? Like, what are the things that you kind of make sure that the clothes have?

FF: I honestly don't have like a, like a strict rubric in my mind when I go into it, because you never know what you're going to find. And I think that's been like the most exciting thing about this job that I never, ever know what I'm going to find. And it's always something different.

So it's a very satisfying experience. Obviously, quality, like it has to the fabric has to feel good. It has to look good. I mean, secondhand things have their own like secondhand look to them most times, but I make sure it doesn't look unwearable. So that's a really big thing for me. Even if something is like a slightly different aesthetic from mine, I won't, I won't like bring it to my shop if I wouldn't wear it. Like that's a huge thing for me. I just have this thing in my head that like, if I am not true to myself in that way, like, I don't know, the universe is going to bite me in the ass or something.

I don't know. It's a huge factor for me. If I am not going to wear that, if I can't see myself wearing that, I'm not, it's not going to be on the shop. It's an extension of me. And I just feel like that's what's worked. So I just, I don't want to take that away.

So that's a really big thing. And obviously, I'll see what trends are coming back to an extent. Like, but I won't completely mimic it. Like if the seventies is coming back, if there's something I like about the seventies, like if I like fringe about the seventies, or if I like colors about the seventies, and that is what's coming back, I kind of mix what's in with what I think is really cool genuinely. And that's kind of what gets out there as well.

So everybody wins. There are some things that I find ridiculous. And even if it's trendy, I'm like, it's not for me. I don't want to put it to head.

I don't know. There's, there's some, there's some sort of like really ugly things that I have seen that I'm like, I think people said there might be an audience for this. I'm sure there's an audience for this.

Like there's these dresses that are like really, really, really tiny and they have all these cutouts and stuff. I don't really know how to to explain it. It was very Y2K basically. There's a lot of Y2K stuff that I feel like, no, there's, I mean, not a fan of the baby tea, not a fan of those kind of dresses with the buckles everywhere. And the low waist belt moment.

I'm fine with low waist jeans. I've come around to that to an extent, but some capris are just ugly. There are things that I think there are places where I choose to draw the line and that's purely based on preference. So I, I try to make it a mishmash between what the people want and what I want. So that's the typical sourcing process because I have a fashion design background. I'm also able to fix things in certain ways. So if I see something that has potential, I will still fix it up if I can, or I, even if I don't do it myself, I know how to get that done. That really, really helps. And because I've been stain-treating clothes for so long, I've really figured out how to get the craziest stains off of things.

So again, I kind of have to wait and see, like, is the stain a doable thing and work from there. So I kind of have to keep a lot of these things in mind. And obviously, I also try to keep size range in mind. It's not easy when you thrift because again, you have no control over what you're going to get. But I really, really consciously try to get as much of a size range as I can because yeah, it feels good to have a diverse range for people to shop from. So, because again, I want everyone to be happy in this space. So that's, that's a big one too. Yeah. That's really nice.

I: And like, how do you, you know, how do you engage your customers?

FF: I'll be honest, I used to do it a lot more before. So the fine finds was something I started as a hobby and it turned into a my full-time job. And after two, three years, I kind of realized that I do not know how to do business.

Like, no, I don't have formal anything. I've honestly just been playing it by the year. I've been figuring things out as I go. But I, I felt like there was this gap between what it should be and like what it was because of my lack of understanding of business and marketing and things, which are skills that you do pick up in this field. But again, not as much as maybe an educate, like a proper education would help me with. So I've actually pushed it back to being my side hustle slash hobby because I started to feel like it was kind of like the joy of the whole process was

getting away with the whole monetary aspect of things that was entering and, you know, like the whole Instagram algorithm stuff and everything. So when I was really trying to understand things a lot more, I was, I think engaging a lot more. And I was one thing I do want to start out doing again is making all these, I used to make these posts.

I have a couple posts about like, like just random educational bits about like crochet, like what that is, how that works, how manufacturer works there, what a Walmart tag is, like just random things about clothing that I felt like people should know about, which is something I really like doing. And I think it was, it was really nice for people. I think it was very well received. And I think that is definitely something I want to start that again. I did have a proper burnout phase, which is why I stopped, but I think I'm ready to get back out there and do that again. And I was making a lot of content as well. But I didn't want to go to like through like those conventional, real format. So it was mostly just content about like, thrifting and, you know, outfits that I like to wear that are thrifted and stuff like that. And I think that was also a really nice way to engage with people, engage with people through stories, a lot of Q &A stuff.

That was also really nice to understand like what people are liking right now, what people want to thrift right now, or maybe what their favorite thrifted pieces. So it was really nice to engage with them because obviously engaging with people is fun because this is a purely online business. I don't really get to do a lot of that face to face.

But also just to understand what people are looking for these days, because I have a vague understanding from what works in my shop, but it's nice to hear from people. So these are like the typical ways I've been engaging and obviously I try to do the occasional pop up. And that's also really, really amazing, because I meet people who say they've been following me for a really long time. And that's a really special experience for me to meet them. So yeah, that's one of my favorite things about pop ups is meeting people.

I: That's really cool. And maybe could you describe some of your interactions with that you have had or with your customers over DMs or like, you know, that where you share what thrifting is or what you do or any kind of interaction that you find wholesome or something.

FF: I actually have a lot of friendly conversations on DMs, especially when I have the time for it, I do have some people I've become very friendly with. There are people who share pictures if they have gifted something to somebody and they enjoyed it. Or previously I was sending my orders in these tote bags, not doing that anymore, but I was doing that and people if people painted on them, they would share those pictures with me. Stuff like that.

Sometimes people would approach me and be like, oh, I bought this thing from you was really cool. And you want to lean into this a little more, can you get a little bit more of that in the shop.

So that's also really good way for me to understand what people are looking for. So we've had interactions like that. Sometimes somebody would just send one of my posts to me and be like, I really like this, but I have no idea how to wear it.

Do you have any suggestions on how I could do this? So that would be a conversation as well. Yeah, some people are, I guess, I guess, I don't know. I guess some people like oversharing with strangers.

I mean, I'm one of those people. Sometimes somebody will share a post with me and be like, could you please bring this again? I bought this from you last time, but I gifted it to an ex-boyfriend and he totally didn't deserve it.

And I want something like this for myself. And yes, I have some interactions like that as well with people who are just very candid and honest about stuff. That's really interesting.

I: That's a cool moment. That's really odd, but that's really awesome at the same time.

FF: Yeah, it makes me feel nice that I seem approachable. It feels nice. And I'm glad I've been able to make the time to have these kind of conversations with people because it's just really fun. It's very unexpected. Yeah, just and I actually bump into a lot of people at restaurants and cafes who are like, oh, I shopped from your store. And that's also quite an experience, quite a really cool fun experience too. Because it's so out of the blue. Like, I mean, I can expect them in my DMs, but not at a restaurant. Yeah.

I: Why do you think these kind of interactions are engaged when why do you think it is important?

FF: I mean, I think obviously there's so many benefits to like thrifting and shopping from smaller businesses like mine. But I think it also I think definitely to an extent it's nice for people to know that there's a face behind this and there's that approachability of like, this is not some gigantic corporation and you know, all of that. I think it really helps that I'm there. And I think because I've also engaged with people on stories and on deals and stuff, I think I've just somehow I've come across as like, approachable enough, I think surely surely that has done something. And I think it's just a nice feeling to know that like, you like, I would like to think that I display my passion for this.

I don't know how effectively I do it and if I can do it better. But I try to show people how passionate I am about this, because I am. And I guess people kind of like that feeling of like, okay, I'm buying something really cool and I'm supporting someone who's doing something that they really passionate about.

And I think because I know I feel like when I shop from other like businesses, like I try to shop a lot from small businesses as well, like not just clothes, but jewelry, whatever I can get my hands on. So there's always an added satisfaction of knowing that, you know, somebody is like, satisfying themselves and you're like supporting that passion and everybody wins and all of that good stuff. So I think that's super important.

I: Yeah, yeah, for sure. And what do you think like, what makes your customer usually come back to you?

FF: A lot of them do actually. I think like a big part of it is the like I mentioned the quality aspect. There are honestly a lot of pieces that I reject only because they don't feel good.

Like they will look good and they will be trendy and I know they would sell like that's not a problem. But I think I always focus on like, does it feel good on the skin? Does it look good?

Is the quality good? And I think another thing is I'm very transparent about defects, if any. I think it's a lot of like trust establishing things.

Like I've had a lot of people tell me that they, like what they got is exactly what they were expecting. And I think that's a big, such a big part of it because honestly, I see a lot of businesses where they like post maybe one picture. I try to like get some close up shots of the fabric. I try to get some close up shots of like some of the details and all of those things. And I think that gives you a much more holistic idea of like what you're going to be purchasing. And so when what you actually buy is very much like that, I think you're like, okay, yeah, I got exactly what I wanted here.

I think I can shop from them again and it's going to be satisfying. So I think that definitely helps. So even with my pictures, obviously there are times I take pictures with my phone, nothing fancy. So there are times when the lighting isn't great and my shades of green might not look the same. And so I do try to spend some time in editing these things because I really want it. I don't want anyone to be like shocked by what they receive. I really don't want. So that's something I put a lot of effort into. I think that helps. Yeah.

I: And how do you how do you get new customers?

FF: Um, so when I first started, I had used ads, but I will say that it wasn't very effective, maybe because I didn't know how to do it. Maybe because the ads themselves are not effective, but that was in 2020 and I don't know if the algorithm is better, things are better now.

But I did feel like the retention was quite low because firstly, thrifting was a really new concept. So if I put an ad on a piece of clothing and people followed me, they were expecting that they could buy that exact thing when it was just like a one-off piece. So, and this was in a time like I said, when thrifting was not really a known concept, it had to be explained to people. So I think now it's a little more obvious, but back then I think a lot of the retention was very low because people just came and went and when people realized that it's not very easy to get their hands on something because once it sold, it sold. I think some people just didn't find that experience very great, which I mean, I can understand, especially when you're used to shopping retail, I think you're just used to getting what you see. And so there were a lot of reasons why the ads are not working for me. So I just decided to stick to just organic, mostly word of mouth. Later on, I tried to use reels.

I think they did work to an extent. But a lot of it was coming from people who are just sharing their stuff on their stories or just tagging me in their posts when they wore something. Clearly, that was what was happening and that's, that is still date, the reason why I have followers. That being said, since I did slow down and turn this into a hobby and get another full time job. I have lost quite a bit of followers because there was a period in the middle where I was not posting at all.

Because I was in that transition phase in my life. But right now as it stands, I can just tell the followers I'm getting are exactly the people who I'm looking at as my target audience. So I'm not really here for like the numbers and like the crazy growth is just, I just glad I can do what I want to do.

And it's still the same purpose as it's still solving the same purpose that always did for me. I just wanted these fun clothes to find good homes and I'm satisfied by that.

I: That's amazing. That's really good. And how do you like when you know you have already answered this number one and how do you deal with like complaints or like concerns that people have?

FF: Okay, so yeah, second hand clothes. Sometimes I'm dealing in really large numbers and I might miss a defect. And in those situations, I try to compensate them to get it fixed. Like I do have a fair idea of what it's going to cost them and I just top that up a little bit and I'm like, I'm so sorry.

I must have missed that. Yeah, here's a partial refund. Because truth to be told, I can't take that piece back. Like it's too difficult the whole reselling process the back and forth and it's inconvenient to the other person. So, I mean, obviously the defects won't be so terrible that it's

unwearable because I would have never sent it out that way or might be a smaller thing like a small card or like a small zipper issue.

So those are the kind of things that people who generally get fixed up. If that doesn't work, I try to repost it on my story to see if people would like to buy it off of the other person. So that's something I'd try. There are some rare moments where the their local post office might not have dealt with the package properly.

So in those situations, they might be like rat bites. And even though it really sucks and it's not my fault, I do partially compensate for that as well. Because I just want the experience to be good with me more than anything. So I'm just like, really sorry that I happened because these things are genuinely out of my control and they're very, very rare. Mind you. So I'm just like, you know what, it's fine. Your experiences was more important to me. So those things have happened before. I've only had surprisingly one really, really, really bad thing, really, really bad customer experience in like almost four years of doing this.

Yeah, that was a nightmare. But I think everybody else has been pretty reasonable. Like I think it really helps that I take accountability because when I shop from other businesses and I see that there's a defect that wasn't spotted. It's usually met with a lot of like skepticism. Like maybe are you sure that like you didn't wear it out and that happened or they're like, oh, you know, you need an unboxing picture or video for me to know that this happened before you started wearing it. And I mean, who opens a package and takes a video as they do that for the first time?

How do you do that? So I think people put you in these like sort of impossible situations where it's like, oh, okay, like that sucks. I mean, I think at this point everyone can expect that if it's secondhand, there's a chance that it might not be perfect, but doesn't mean the other person shouldn't kind of help. But that's, I don't want that experience for other people.

So I do chat with them. I do try to come to a reasonable place of like, okay, I think this is what it's going to be. Is this compensation fair for you?

Does that work for you? And make sure that they are satisfied with that experience. And it clearly does work. Like, however, I am communicating this because people do come back after that. Like even if there was a defect and I have compensated them for it, they still do shop from me again.

So that is good. But there was one person who was not happy with the compensation. And I could not compensate for that.

I already stretched myself quite a bit. And then she took to the internet and tried to cancel me, which was really scary. I mean, I honestly did not feel like I would get cancelled because I've been doing this for too long.

And I know, I know who I am, but this person really tried to like drag me through the mud. But yeah, it was really scary. It was the nightmare when it happened. I mean, I could look back at it and laugh, but it was so scary when it happened.

I: And sometimes I see on Reddit, I mean, people slander like there is no tomorrow or one bad experience.

FF: It's so easy to do that, right? Like especially when you don't know somebody personally or they're not in your circles, just so easy to just be so rude. And I mean, I totally understood. I was like, oh, I'm so sorry.

I didn't see this. And I went to the exact route that I've gone with people before and she just was not having it and made it seem like I was not taking accountability. And oh my God, it was just, it was a lot. She did give up, but it was very unnecessary to do that. Luckily, only one such experience. So yeah, but apart from that, I think things have been dealt with pretty well and obviously I really take the whole quality checking thing very seriously.

So any defects that I cannot fix and mention up front, there are pictures in my post of maybe a slight discoloration or a slight something. So I make sure people are aware before they make purchase. So that settles most of it.

I: That's very nice. I mean, I have seen it. I have seen the close ups and everything. And I feel like if it was, why would you scam anybody? You are literally putting all the defects out there. If you were really trying to, you wouldn't have put it in the first place. Exactly.

FF: And I honestly, a lot of, I've seen a lot of businesses that don't. They might just have a disclaimer that these are second hand. So please keep in mind that the quality might not be great.

Like there are a lot of ways that people try to put it across, but nobody's blatantly putting the defect right there in people's faces. That is something that you've chosen to do. But I prefer it this way. I don't want anyone coming back to me with an unhappy experience. So defects are there for people to see.

I: And why did you start with Instagram? Why did you choose Instagram out of all the platforms?

FF: Kind of like I mentioned, the other two or three businesses that had started this before me, I saw that they were on Instagram. It just felt like a very approachable place to begin.

And especially back then there were no reels. So the algorithm was very in favor of simply consistency, good quality content that is consistent. So I knew what I had to do. And so I was playing around with different formats, I was playing around with different timings. So it was very fixed. It was like, okay, if you post at like Friday evenings, that'll have better engagement. That was just the way the algorithm was.

It was very easy to read. So it felt like, yeah, I could honestly, in this landscape, I would be too scared to start a business like that I did before. Way too scared, especially with my lack of know-how.

But then it was like, yeah. No, yeah, like currently it's, I mean, you'd have to post a lot of reels, you'd have to do a lot of things. And personally, I'm not somebody who wants to make a million reels.

I want to make a video when I have something to say, I don't want to do it otherwise. That's just me. That's my personal presence. So I don't think it would work out for me to start off right now, honestly. But back then it just felt like a really approachable, easy place. And I had all these people that I looked up to and I saw what was working for them, obviously. So it just felt like I had somewhat of a blueprint going into this. So I just like, okay, I have people who follow me here. So I mean, I first announced it on my personal Instagram. I was like, hey guys, I'm doing this.

And so it was easier to get the word out. And it felt very low stakes because I wasn't aiming to start a business. I just put five things up and I'm like, if they don't sell, I'll keep them. Like it was really so simple for me. And then when those things did sell, I just got more things and I got more things and that's really all that it was. So it was kind of unintentional in a lot of ways.

I: And like what are these features of Instagram that you think that currently help you sell your products?

FF: I like that it's interactive. I like that I have an avenue to speak to people to understand like what they like, what they don't like. I think that's really great. Obviously people use Instagram like a million times a day. So my products get a lot more visibility here than say on a website. I have seen a lot of people on a lot of thrift store owners like try to start websites and then like it's not exactly working out because people are like too lazy to even get on your profile and click on the link in your bio.

I feel like even that extra click is just something that people don't do. So yeah, I just I think Instagram always felt like an easy place for me to interact. I could go live there. I could make posts there. I could like it was just it was just easy and I was so familiar. So it just it just felt like.

I: And how did the payment factor come into play like did Instagram easier payment methods or the fact that you know what like how do you economize it?

FF: It that is probably one of the only cons to doing this on Instagram is that your payments are still like a very manual process. The whole purchasing of things is still a very manual process. And you know, if multiple people want the same thing, you have to go check like who asked for it first and you know, make this as fair as possible, which is obviously be a lot easier if you have your own website. So it that is one of the more challenging aspects of Instagram.

I don't think Instagram is making it a whole lot easier. I think if you do have a website though, you could still link those items like the post. I think there's a way I'm not familiar with exactly how that works, but you could kind of tap on it and there's a price and it I think takes you to the product.

I'm not sure how it works. I've seen retail companies do that. I haven't seen like that both for like a trip format. So I don't really know how they make that work.

But I think that there's probably the only format would work seamlessly for payments on Instagram like, because the way I'm doing it right now like because I've slowed things down and I'm, I've slowed down my drops and I, I'm focusing on smaller batches now it's easier for me to take orders and make all of that happen but when I was in the thick of things, it was honestly quite a challenge to collect addresses and collect those details and make sure they were in a safe place where I could like look at them and try to take down so those are some Instagram challenges. They didn't make it any easier. The help.

I: Well, the UPI has been very helpful and generous in this case. Definitely. If you were stuck in like card payments and stuff then just know.

FF: Oh no, yeah, that's definitely one of the things that has helped. Yeah, can't do without UPI for sure.

I: And can you like describe your stores aesthetic like overall aesthetics.

FF: Overall, it's, it does not have one. I know this because I have I, if you go through my video you'll see there's like a lot of different ways that I take pictures of things. It kind of like, I haven't found like a one size fits all because I don't have a one size fits all. So sometimes I feel like

there's one format that might showcase the drop that I have a little better. And so I might go ahead and do that like at one point and I was posting ties I was putting them in like mugs to like pull them up like I try a lot of things. And because I'm just experimental in general, like I just, I keep changing the ways that I showcase a product.

Sometimes I'm wearing it sometimes on a hanger sometimes it's on something. It's a little over the place. So the aesthetic is not. It's not just one. It's not one thing. But with me as well like with my because this is such an extension of me when I'm like dressing up for like work or just life in general there's no aesthetic there.

But only thing I want to leave a person thinking is oh, that's a nice outfit. And that's, that's it like it's interesting. That's, that's nice. That's, that's all. So I think I kind of carry that objective into my page of like, if you scroll through it might look like a whole mesh mash of things but it's going to be interesting.

You know, that's, that's really what it is. What is this about. Not predictable. Not at all predictable. That's another thing that I haven't come with my story. It's just me but in an Instagram profile really.

I: And like what would you have to say about the kind of colors you choose for the background, the lighting or like.

FF: Right, so I'm a very earth tones person and brown is my favorite color so there will definitely be a lot of that. Any chance I get there will be a lot of earth tones and stuff. I did cottage core and grandma core before it was cool.

So it's just, it's just like the core of who I am sometimes I might jump out and do a little, might mix a little Y2K with my grandma core but it's just it's essentially just very browns like even my room is just like, Yeah, I can see that. Yeah. Yeah.

So that is that that is a big thing for me. In terms of like pictures I obviously like I mentioned I try to keep the colors through to what is actually that which is sometimes easy to achieve sometimes it is not sometimes I have to take a close up picture and mention that the original color is in the last slide like there are some little juggarty bits that I have to do every now and then some greens are really hard to capture and blacks always look gray. They just never look black people. A lot of people like is this faded and I'm like I promise you it is not. I like tend to do that like I have clicked so many pictures of just me if you take a close up of an outfit then it just immediately changes the color.

Yeah, it's a little frustrating and I try to find different workarounds but it. Yeah, it has its own challenges. Sometimes I don't I try to stick to like side lighting. I just think it looks nicer with my pictures. Some formats obviously I don't do that like if I'm taking pictures on the floor and stuff then it's harder for me to do that in some places because I do this in my house and there isn't a whole lot of room I don't have like a studio space for this so it's a lot of just figuring out what works and obviously Bangalore's weather keeps changing so before it gets cloudy in the next two hours I have to like figure out how to keep the lighting the same so there's all these like fun little challenges that come with my very simple way of doing this thing. Yeah, I try to stick to side lighting as much as I can. I try to take pictures during the day I try to take them all before 2pm, because I feel like after that Bangalore just loses it shit sometimes so I just try to keep it there like where the light is there. Sometimes I have to stop in the middle if it gets cloudy and just randomly starts raining I just have to stop.

And that kind of sucks because if I've scheduled a drop for a certain time it kind of I kind of have to stretch myself a little bit to meet those deadlines so there are times when that gets a little tricky. But yeah, yeah, so warm color palettes, side lighting as true to color as possible and lots of closer pictures because I really, I really want to mimic the experience of actually having that thing with you and like analyzing it. And I also like there are so many things that I especially with vintage clothes there's so many really nice details that a simple pictures just not going to capture. Like maybe there's a really nice button or a great nice little stitch detail and I'm not sure if people care about that stuff but I really care about that stuff. I find it exciting.

It's the reason I buy things. So I kind of just emphasize on that a little bit to find the buttons really cool I'll emphasize the buttons. Be like oh look at these buttons I'll even put it in my caption like look at these buttons. I'm not very serious about like my captions also. I just I try to make that bit conversational as well it's I tried again I try to make it like you've come to my shop. This is what it is please look at it. Do you like it.

I: So, yeah, yeah, that's a really fun experience I enjoy it. I like the little I like to look a little detail.

FF: Yeah, it's great. Then I I mean, yeah I mean sometimes I don't reveal all the details or someone gets like oh my God this have this I'm like yes.

I: I don't remember I bought a top from you and it's such a hit. I've actually bought two three if I remember but that one particular I need to show that to you because I'm so I love to see that. Yes, please. Thank you. Thank you. Do you remember selling this?

FF: I remember everything I've ever sold yes I do remember one of

I: its my favorite favorite pieces I loved it so much and it has got so much love everywhere I have won it especially after I've come to Sweden. It really helps because the I don't really have a very color palette for myself.

I just like wearing whatever I want, whatever I want, but I like wearing neutral colors and like calm colors and especially in a place like Sweden where they love neutrals. It's literally on the road where did you get that from. I'm so proud of that piece it's like one of my best buys.

FF: Oh, I really made my day. I love that I mean I can't believe actually somehow I'm able to remember every single thing that I have sold. If somebody comes up to me at a restaurant they're like oh my God this jacket from your store I'm like I remember that piece and that might sound ridiculous to them but I genuinely do remember every single thing I have sold like I recognize that I know that.

I: Yeah, I was so I was actually like waiting I'm like how about I wear it and give the interview today. I can't do that because I actually voted to class like not class. I voted to university today and I changed it and I'm like should I just have won it and it would have been really cool.

FF: I was also like really sick and like I just literally changed my job because I look like I'm mess.

I: So yeah I mean I feel. Okay, so like we're actually at the end of it. I just want to like the last question like are there any aesthetic choices that you would want to try in the coming future.

FF: Hmm. I'm definitely experimenting with stuff right now as we speak. I think you must have heard like this. There's this new office siren thing happening like there is new trend of like button down shirts which I've been selling for a while but like now it's like a real it's like a real trend of like fitted button down like collared shirts that people like typically wear to work but it's like slightly sexy so it's like office siren and like straight like pants. I have been leaning. I don't think I could qualify this as about to try because I'm kind of in the process of already trying it but I've really been leaning into like slightly like formally casual things like pleated pants I would I would maybe to take away the formal aspect of it maybe where like two sizes up so it's a little bit baggy around me and then where with the crop top instead of like or like just a fitted cuter top instead of like a formal shirt that it might be traditionally go with just I'm really liking those like slightly formal sort of details like cute little color cute little cuff or like a little pleated my pants to kind of mix into my daily so I work as a product designer right now as well and luckily I work in like a studio space so it's not like a very formal setting so it's really given me the opportunity to try a bunch of things so that's apparently what I'm leaning into I'm not really all about this whole like office siren thing completely more sick as it does it's too hot in Bangalore to wear like full sleeve shirts and also I don't think it'll work for me it's not my aesthetic but I do like the

whole the cute color is bringing making a little more casual making the formal pant a little more casual maybe wearing it with my working stocks instead of like formal like shoes so that's sort of what I'm leaning into a little more right now I'm leaning into a lot of linen as well a lot of basics I'm trying to stock up on a lot of basics and kind of mix and match with that. I did have like a whole print era which I mean I'm obviously into an extent but I'm also trying to move into like more of a silhouette place where instead of the typical like wear a fitted top and baggy pants it's more of like why not wear like a looser top and looser pants and wear something a little more flowy and fun so I'm like kind of that's something that I'm also trying to break into a little bit and see what works my body type because that's obviously such a huge thing in all of this right like something that's not meant for your body type like looks great on Pinterest looks great on people but doesn't really work for you always so yeah I'm in the process of figuring out that sweet spot between my body type and the things that I want to cool for me just doesn't work I look stunted I look like a little puberty hit for me.

I look like really frumpy I can't do it I applaud people who can my sister can I see it happen every day but I'm not one of those people like

I: I want like comfort I somehow end up leaning a little more towards like a little formal a little I don't even know how to describe it like these days it's been very I don't know if dark academia or like maybe a little bit of soft academic is that even a thing but like it is

FF: you want it to be a thing

I: it's yeah like something like that I like to I go towards that but when I'm at home I look horrible because that is

FF: not yeah I mean that's what makes the whole dressing up thing of fun I mean if I was dressing up at home then what's what's where's the excitement

I: and people know that all the satin pajamas and stuff

FF: I just come on it's not me and I don't think it's practical I mean at least in this weather

I: not at all not in my mind I can't do it we have come to the end of the interview actually I had a last question which was like limitations but you have already kind of put a lot of light on that

FF: yeah yeah yeah

I: I'm just gonna stop the recording, thank you so much for joining me for the interview today.

FF: My pleasure, I had a lot of fun.

6.2. Open-coding Stage(2) - (TheFineFinds)

them. They mostly deal in bulk. But because I'd visited them a few times, they were just like, okay, with me, staking a couple pieces and trying the whole thing out.

So I did build my relationships with my vendors over time. There weren't exactly physical locations, they were like these large go downs with all of these clothes. So I would have to just go through like hundreds and hundreds of pieces of clothing to, you know, find things that I felt like were really nice to wear and good condition and good quality and all of that.

So that's how I started. But even then my mom was like, Are you sure you want to do this? I mean, you don't even know who's wanted before. And all of that, I think that was to be expected. But yeah, I mean, now she wears thrifted things too. So things have changed.

I: That's really cool. I mean, it's a hard time to convince my moms and my mom just lets me do whatever I want. But I kid you not, I mean, once I bought from you, and I think the second time again, I bought from you. And then it just, I think for four years, I just, three years, I didn't really buy anything from any other store, I would just keep thrifting. And I would find such amazing pieces.

FF: Yeah, I've stopped shopping firsthand, like since 2020. I mean, unless I have to buy like shoes, unfortunately, I can't really find the right market here for that in Bangalore. But I think there are markets in other parts of India, which I'm very keen to visit. But yeah, I mostly just, it's all secondhand at this point, it's just the lifestyle.

I: That's really cool. And how does your store particularly promote slow, environmentally friendly fashion?

FF: So in the beginning, I wanted to sell like only like really quirky, unique, interesting things that I felt like were more my aesthetic. And in a lot of ways, I have stayed true to that.

But then when I realized I was getting so many people onto it, I wanted, I kind of shifted into trying to be like a place where you could get whatever you want. So it was obviously some quirky cool things, but it was also basics. And it was also like, stuff to keep you warm in the winter. And it was just everything because I was like, I want people to like, think that, okay, if I want to buy this, I can just thrift it. And I think when I had first started there, I think two other

can I tick all the boxes of kind of getting people onto that thrifting thing, which I felt like was kind of taboo when I first started off like, why would I wear somebody else's clothes?

But people saw me wearing these things didn't really even know that it was the case. So it was very motivating to know that I could get people onto this and I can I'm clearly making it look exciting. So maybe I have the ability to push this forward and also satisfy my love for thrifting and not leave all these goodies behind, you know, helping them find homes and getting people like yourself onto the whole thrifting scene. So that was kind of my motivation. And obviously, I was still in college, so I thought I'll start this off as a hobby, make a couple bucks while I'm still in college.

Little did I know the lockdown happened. And I would just focus on this business more than you know, it, yeah, it just kind of grew with me in a way.

I: How first of all, I have two questions. So how did you like, when did you start the business? If like, because usually a lot of the store that I've spoken to tell now they started during COVID, but you seem like you've started it before. So first I want to know that.

FF: Yeah, so I actually thought about this in December 2019, it was just a spur of the moment thing. And it was one of those things that if I didn't go through with it, then I think I never would have it was a very like, let's just do it sort of thing. December 2019 is when I started curating my first bit, like my first drop to sell.

It was just like five or seven pieces, I think. Jan 2020 is when I started, no idea COVID was going to happen. I was just sort of doing this on the weekends. And then I was making it more of an everyday thing during the like closer due to the lockdown.

But then when they completely shut down the lockdown, I just thought that, okay, I can't go sourcing, I can't get anything. So then I kind of shifted focus for those like two, three months into helping other people sell their stuff. So I was also getting like pictures from people and kind of using my platform to help people sell stuff. So that was the thing I was doing briefly. And then once the lockdown sort of lifted, I was by then I was already like very much in this. So then I just started doing it full time. That was the kind of...yeah.

A Adyasha Mishra
2:55 PM Apr 24

vendor partnerships

A Adyasha Mishra
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vendor partnership

A Adyasha Mishra
3:03 PM Apr 24

business - environment

A Adyasha Mishra
3:03 PM Apr 24

stereotype

A Adyasha Mishra
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norm - trend

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cultural context

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emotional motivation

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emotional motivation

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cultural context

7. Pilot Codes

Main category	Personal Values	Norms	Business Value	Community	Well-being	Limitations														
Description of main category	Personal beliefs and attitudes about society, politics, economy and ecology	Beliefs or ideas that can be embedded in the society that the thrift store relies on or tries to go against	Practices and strategies that the store follows to ensure that its ideologies are communicated	Messages that the store is cultivating or is building for the society to be a community	Practices and messages of the store based on the emotions, care, trust and transparency for the holistic development of the society	Challenges that the store faces due to its socio-cultural context or its digital space														
Categories	Emotional Motivation	Eco-consciousness	Stereotype	Trend	Digital	Cultural Context	Environment	Style Service	Waste Management	Aesthetics	Exclusivity	Digital	Religiosity	Vendor Partnership	Thrift Community	Social	Environment	Digital	Socio-cultural Context	
Subcategories																				
Example	I think that you have to be mindful about consumption, like everything from what you wear to what you wear.	I did not know that you could get such pretty clothes from thrift stores.	I have always loved more than I would select. And I would like and then they would send it to me.	or a short while I used to buy it online, like they would send me photos and I would select. And I would like and then they would send it to me.	during lockdown, I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes.	If you do not get the polyester stuff, at least 70% of the clothes that come in are polyester. So these are eventually going to end up in a landfill.	Polyester does that a long time. So I think that the piece I'll send them links as well.	I'll send them inspiration from Pinterest as well if they're not sure how to style it but they really like the piece I'll send them links as well.	So what they do is they buy in bulk from China, Europe and like Korea as well. And usually that's why you get to see a lot of different brands that you're never heard of before.	A lot of people want to see uh how it looks on the body as well. I used to put in a description of the fabric is all of the subjects of what I know how much stuff it has and stuff like that.	I think I focused on size. I've seen that a lot of people buy cheaply from them, but they know everyone's taste.	Whenever there's a new batch of clothes coming in, which are good, like your bday's there, they really know your taste like a lot of people buy cheaply from them, but they know everyone's taste.	I used to follow people who follow thrift pages, like, there were a very few pages when I started, there were like five that were really good. So I used to follow that and I would follow me. I would follow me. I would follow me.	I usually explain materials as much as I can. I usually explain materials as much as I can. I usually explain materials as much as I can.	don't think that I've written a lot of reviews. I don't think that I've written a lot of reviews. I don't think that I've written a lot of reviews.	most of the times the complaints that I get are regarding shipping, because like you cannot really control shipping if a package gets lost on the way like you get blamed somehow like you become a scam store.				

8. Final Codes

Main category	Personal Values	Norms	Business Value	Community	Well-being	Limitations														
Description of main category	Personal beliefs and attitudes about society, politics, economy and ecology	Beliefs or ideas that can be embedded in the society that the thrift store relies on or tries to go against	Practices and strategies that the store follows to ensure that its ideologies are communicated	Messages that the store is cultivating or is building for the society to be a community	Practices and messages of the store based on the emotions, care, trust and transparency for the holistic development of the society	Challenges that the store faces due to its socio-cultural context or its digital space														
Categories	Emotional Motivation	Eco-consciousness	Stereotype	Trend	Digital	Cultural Context	Environment	Style Service	Waste Management	Aesthetics	Exclusivity	Digital	Religiosity	Vendor Partnership	Thrift Community	Social	Environment	Digital	Socio-cultural Context	
Subcategories																				
Example	I think that you have to be mindful about consumption, like everything from what you wear to what you wear.	I did not know that you could get such pretty clothes from thrift stores.	I have always loved more than I would select. And I would like and then they would send it to me.	or a short while I used to buy it online, like they would send me photos and I would select. And I would like and then they would send it to me.	during lockdown, I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes. I bought a lot of clothes.	If you do not get the polyester stuff, at least 70% of the clothes that come in are polyester. So these are eventually going to end up in a landfill.	Polyester does that a long time. So I think that the piece I'll send them links as well.	I'll send them inspiration from Pinterest as well if they're not sure how to style it but they really like the piece I'll send them links as well.	So what they do is they buy in bulk from China, Europe and like Korea as well. And usually that's why you get to see a lot of different brands that you're never heard of before.	A lot of people want to see uh how it looks on the body as well. I used to put in a description of the fabric is all of the subjects of what I know how much stuff it has and stuff like that.	I think I focused on size. I've seen that a lot of people buy cheaply from them, but they know everyone's taste.	Whenever there's a new batch of clothes coming in, which are good, like your bday's there, they really know your taste like a lot of people buy cheaply from them, but they know everyone's taste.	I used to follow people who follow thrift pages, like, there were a very few pages when I started, there were like five that were really good. So I used to follow that and I would follow me. I would follow me. I would follow me.	I usually explain materials as much as I can. I usually explain materials as much as I can. I usually explain materials as much as I can.	don't think that I've written a lot of reviews. I don't think that I've written a lot of reviews. I don't think that I've written a lot of reviews.	most of the times the complaints that I get are regarding shipping, because like you cannot really control shipping if a package gets lost on the way like you get blamed somehow like you become a scam store.				

9. Codebooks

Personal Values	Personal beliefs and worldviews about society, politics, economy and ecology.
Norm	Ideology or idea that is/can be embedded in the society that the thrift store rides on or tries to go against
Stereotype	The prejudice against thrifting or secondhand clothes that exists in society.
Trend	An ongoing change that is developing or has been accepted in the society.
Digital	The interaction of digital world with the social world that exists in the world now
Cultural Context	The cultural and social importance of the place where the thrift store is located or it caters to.
Eco-Consciousness	The literacy about the environment that exists within the thrift store owner or it tries to promote.
Business Values	Practices and strategies that the store follows to ensure that its ideologies are communicated
Environment	Business ideologies or practices that stem from the need to cater to the environment.
Style Service	Service provided by the thrift store that focuses on styling, outfits, and suggestions.
Waste Management	Practices followed by the store to manage waste generated from the them or the fashion industry.
Digital	Online tools and strategies that are used by the store
Aesthetics	Creative choices and strategies used by the store to market itself.
Social	Creative choices or strategies that focus on the attracting the masses on the basis of trends, styles, or social life in general.
Ecological	Creative choices or strategies that focus on bringing out the eco-friendliness and environment aspect of the business.
Community	Ideologies that the store is cultivating or is building for the society to be a community
Inclusivity	Ideologies that focus on fostering a sense of belonging within customers.
Vendor Partnership	Relationship between store and its vendors.
Thrift Community	Ideologies that promote together-ness or build a community around thrifting.
Well-Being	Practices and ideologies of the store based on the emotions care, trust and transparency for the holistic development of the society.
Social	Holistic practices of care and trust that is fostered between the store and its customers.
Ecological	Holistic practices of care that the store fosters towards the environment.
Limitations	Challenges that the store faces due to its socio-cultural context or its digital space.
Digital	Challenges that the store faces in its online space.
Social	Challenges of an online space that hampers the customer care offered by the store.
Ecological	Challenges of an online space that indirectly affects ecology or the environment.
Socio-Cultural Context	Challenges that the store can space due to social and cultural norms of the place it operates in

Fig 1: Pilot Codebook

Personal Values	Personal beliefs and worldviews about society, politics, economy and ecology.
Emotional Motivation	Emotional attachment or passion that drives the motivates the thrift store owner.
Eco-consciousness	Environmental awareness of the thrift store owner that drives their motivation
Norm	Ideology or idea that is/can be embedded in the society that the thrift store rides on or tries to go against
Stereotype	The prejudice against thrifting or secondhand clothes that exists in society.
Trend	An ongoing change that is developing or has been accepted in the society.
Digital	The interaction of digital world with the social world that exists in the world now
Cultural Context	The cultural and social importance of the place where the thrift store is located or it caters to.
Business Values	Practices and strategies that the store follows to ensure that its ideologies are communicated
Environment	Business ideologies or practices that stem from the need to cater to the environment.
Style Service	Service provided by the thrift store that focuses on styling, outfits, and suggestions.
Waste Management	Practices followed by the store to manage waste generated from the them or the fashion industry.
Digital	Online tools and strategies that are used by the store
Aesthetics	Creative choices and strategies used by the store to market itself.
Social	Creative choices or strategies that focus on the attracting the masses on the basis of trends, styles, or social life in general.
Ecological	Creative choices or strategies that focus on bringing out the eco-friendliness and environment aspect of the business.
Exclusivity	Practices that provide something unique/niche to its customers.
Community	Ideologies that the store is cultivating or is building for the society to be a community
Belonging	Ideologies that focus on fostering a sense of belonging within customers.
Inclusivity	Practices and ideologies focus on providing equal resources to its all its customers. Eg. body positivity, gender, niche markets
Accessibility	Ideologies and practices that focus on giving equal access to all its customers Eg. price range, luxury clothing.
Vendor Partnership	Relationship between store and its vendors.
Thrift Community	Ideologies that promote together-ness or build a community around thrifting.
Well-Being	Practices and ideologies of the store based on the emotions care, trust and transparency for the holistic development of the society.
Social	Holistic practices of care and trust that is fostered between the store and its customers.
Ecological	Holistic practices of care that the store fosters towards the environment.
Limitations	Challenges that the store faces due to its socio-cultural context or its digital space.
Online Space	Challenges that the store faces in its online space. Ex. due to Instagram or online services
Socio-Cultural Context	Challenges that the store can space due to social and cultural norms of the place it operates in

Fig 2: Final Codebook